The Baha'is of the United States

Source: Bahá'í Library Online (bahai-library.com), curated by Jonah Winters. Used by permission of the curator. Original citation: Robert Stockman, The Baha'is of the United States, bahai-library.com.
â”€â
”€â”

The Bahá'ís of the United States

Robert Stockman
published in Introduction to New and Alternative Religions in AmericaVolume 4, pp. 185-214

2006

1. Version published in Introduction to New and Alternative Religions in America, Volumes 1–5 (2006)
see whole book online at vedicilluminations.com/downloads/

Download: stockman_bahais_united_states.pdf.

2. Similar version (draft?), for New Religions (2010 ?)

INTRODUCTION

The Bahá'í Faith was first publicly mentioned in the United States in 1893 when a Presbyterian missionary spoke about its founder, Husayn-`Alí of Núr, titled Bahá'u'lláh (1817-92), in a talk at the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago (*1). Bahá'u'lláh was born in northern Iran to an aristocratic Shiite Muslim family. A religious prisoner and exile for forty years, he wrote extensively. In 1863 he stated his claim to be God's latest Manifestation (messenger). His extensive writings—15,000 texts are extant—defined his religion's teachings and form the core of its scripture. At the time of his death the religion had been established in a number of places in the Middle East, Russia, India, and Burma.

His son and successor, `Abbás Effendi, titled `Abdu'l-Bahá (1844-1921), oversaw the expansion of the Bahá'í Faith, especially in western Europe and North America, where—freed from imprisonment in Palestine—he traveled between 1911 and 1913. He began to develop the religion's organization, its communal activities, and its international spiritual and administrative center. His writings and authenticated talks—some 16,000 are extant—interpreting and elaborating on his father's teachings, are also part of the sacred scriptures of the Faith.

In his Will and Testament `Abdu'l-Bahá appointed Shoghi Effendi Rabbani (1897-1957), his Oxford-educated grandson, to be his successor and Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith. Shoghi Effendi oversaw the establishment of the Bahá'í

system of organization worldwide. His 36,000 letters and essays are part of the Bahá'í authoritative text, but are not considered scripture.

After Shoghi Effendi's unexpected passing in November 1957 twenty-seven Hands of the Cause of God, consultants and advisors whom he had appointed and termed "chief stewards" of the Faith, temporarily headed the Bahá'í Faith. In 1963 the Hands oversaw the election of the Universal House of Justice, the nine-member international governing body called for by Bahá'u'lláh.

The Bahá'í Faith teaches the unity of God and the unity of God's Manifestations. It sees all of the major world religions as divinely founded and part of the progressively developing religion of God. The imperative in this day, it teaches, is the recognition that humankind is one and must forge a global civilization. The principle of the oneness of humanity stresses equality of all peoples, equal rights and opportunities for women, and the need for everyone to be educated. The Bahá'í concept of the spiritual development of human beings emphasizes acceptance of God's Manifestation, living by his teachings, daily prayer, development of one's virtues, creation of strong marriages and families, service to humanity, and continued progress of the soul in the next world after death. Bahá'í communities are organized by elected nine-member councils; the Faith has no clergy and virtually no communal ritual. Teachings related to the establishment of global unity include the need for a world governing system that can end war, preserve and develop the earth's resources for the benefit of everyone, and an economic system that assures justice and the eradication of the extremes of wealth and poverty.

A Bahá'í community began in the United States in 1894 when a Bahá'í immigrant of Lebanese Christian background began to convert Americans to the Faith. `Abdu'l-Bahá traveled across the United States and Canada for nine months in 1912 to establish the religion firmly and to proclaim its teachings. Inspired by him, American Bahá'ís were in the forefront of spreading their new-found religion to western Europe, southern Africa, Latin America, Hawaii, Japan, China, and Australia, a process that accelerated under the guidance of Shoghi Effendi. Using North America as the principal laboratory for developing nine-member local Spiritual Assemblies and a nine-member national Spiritual Assembly, Shoghi Effendi also focused attention on the construction of a Bahá'í temple outside Chicago, the first in the western world. Authorized by `Abdu'l-Bahá in 1903, the temple was completed in 1953.

Americans have played a leading role in the expansion and development of the Bahá'í Faith since its early days. The American Bahá'í community, with 155,000 members in 2006, is one of the larger communities in a worldwide religion numbering more than five million. A major center of Bahá'í publishing, it remains a center of innovation.

HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT

The Báb and the Bábí Movement. The Bahá'í Faith arose out of the Bábí Faith founded by `Alí-Muhammad (1819-50), a merchant from the city of Shiraz in southern Iran. In 1844 he announced to his first follower that he was "the

Báb" ("the Gate"). A distinctive aspect of his claim was his assertion of divine revelation, which was hinted at in his earliest writings and proclaimed boldly in his later works. For the next six years, hundreds of works, from letters and prayers to mystical commentaries on verses of the Qur'an and theological treatises, poured from his pen. His young followers boldly proclaimed His teachings and claims, and in consequence the Báb soon became the locus of a highly controversial movement. Its main teachings were messianic:

• The Báb was a divine Manifestation succeeding the prophet Muhammad.

• God's day of reckoning had come, but the apocalyptic last judgment was understood symbolically rather than literally.

• An even greater Manifestation was coming in nine or nineteen years.

• The Muslim shariah law was abrogated and replaced by a new law that, among other things, rejected the traditional status of women.1 This point was driven home by Tahirih, the Báb's most prominent female disciple, who appeared unveiled at a gathering of Bábí leaders and recited millennial verses from the Qur'án.

The Báb quickly attracted a following from among many students studying for the Shiite clergy, the urban merchant and artisan classes, and certain urban and rural minority groups. Iran's growing exposure to European ideas and its integration into a global economy caused social tensions that may have enhanced receptivity to the Faith.

While a few clergy accepted the Báb, many opposed him strongly and persecuted the Bábís. The Bábí neighborhoods in the cities of Nayríz and Zanján were assaulted by mobs and militias, valiantly defended, and eventually destroyed, resulting in the deaths of hundreds or thousands of Bábís. The Iranian government imprisoned the Báb, had him tried by the clergy for blasphemy, and executed him by firing squad on July 9, 1850.2 Many Bábís were publicly tortured and executed.3

Bahá'u'lláh (Husayn-`Alí of Núr). An early convert to the religion of the Báb was Husayn-`Alí of Núr. His father had been a provincial governor and prominent official in the Shah's court. When Bahá'u'lláh became a Bábí in 1844 he was 26, happily married, a new father, a highly respected citizen, and devoted to helping Tehran's poor. He soon became a prominent Bábí. He sheltered some leading Bábís and used his influence with the court to ameliorate their persecution. In 1848 Husayn-`Alí took the title of Bahá'u'lláh, the "Glory of God."

In August 1852 three Bábís unsuccessfully attempted to assassinate the Shah, triggering a wave of persecution. Bahá'u'lláh was thrown into the Black Pit, a former underground water cistern that had been converted into a vermin-infested prison for 150 men. Confined four months in semidarkness amid the waste of the prisoners, a heavy chain around his neck, his feet in stocks, Bahá'u'lláh experienced the first revelations in his ministry:

During the days I lay in the prison of Tihran, though the galling weight of the chains and the stench-filled air allowed Me but little sleep, still in those infrequent moments of slumber I felt as if something flowed from the crown of My head over My breast, even as a mighty torrent that precipitateth itself upon the earth from the summit of a lofty mountain. Every limb of My body would, as a result, be set afire. At such moments My tongue recited what no man could bear to hear.4

Bahá'u'lláh was released from the Black Pit once it was clear that he had no involvement in the assassination plot, but all of his property was confiscated and he was exiled for life from Iran. He settled in Baghdad in April 1853. The disunity of the demoralized Bábí community caused him to leave for the mountains of Kurdistan for two years.

Early Writings and Teachings. Returning to Baghdad, Bahá'u'lláh composed the first of his important works: the Hidden Words, a short collection of ethical and mystical aphorisms; the Seven Valleys, a description of the seven stages of the journey of the soul that followed the literary structure of Attar's Conference of the Birds; the Four Valleys, a description of the spiritual quest of four different personality types; the Gems of Divine Mysteries, a longer work about the journey of the soul; and the Book of Certitude, a two hundred-fifty page treatise.5 The latter work, a response to a series of questions posed by an uncle of the Báb, was dictated in forty-eight hours.6 Collectively, the works defined the nucleus of Bahá'u'lláh's theology:

• God is an all-powerful, all-knowing, all-just, but unknowable essence.

• God's qualities are manifested in all created things, which reflect divine attributes, and through the Manifestations, rare, perfect human beings who serve as the mouthpiece of revelation.

• Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, and the Báb were previous Manifestations.7

• The religions of the world were established on divine revelations fitted for each time and place, but human interpretations have confused some of their core teachings and obscured their ultimate unity.

Bahá'u'lláh's Claim to Prophethood and His Further Exile. In 1863 Iran's Shah asked the Turkish government to move Bahá'u'lláh farther from Iran in order to lessen his revitalization of the Bábí movement. The Sultan ordered Bahá'u'lláh to Istanbul. On the eve of his departure from Baghdad, in late April 1863, Bahá'u'lláh declared to his followers that he was the promised Manifestation the Báb had announced, the messiah figure prophesied by all the world's religions. He named twelve days of rejoicing—April 21 to May 2—the Ridván Festival, which became the new religion's first annual holy period.8

Bahá'u'lláh, his family, and some followers, about seventy altogether, remained in Istanbul four months, then were abruptly exiled to Edirne in European Turkey, where they resided four and half years. From Edirne,

Bahá'u'lláh sent numerous tablets, as his writings are often called, to the Bábís in Iran, announcing his claim to be a divine messenger. Bábís came to Edirne to meet him and returned to Iran as Bahá'ís; by 1870 the vast majority of Bábís had accepted him. Apologetic, even polemical, works defended his claims against the dissent of a few Bábís. Bahá'u'lláh also wrote some of his most beautiful prayers during this period. Several tablets spoke of the spiritual capacities and potential of his eldest son, `Abbás (1844-1921).9

Bahá'u'lláh utilized diplomatic contacts made in Istanbul to dispatch tablets to Queen Victoria, Napoleon III, Kaiser Wilhelm, Pope Pius IX, Emperor Francis Joseph of Austria, Tsar Alexander II, the Shah of Iran, the Turkish Sultan, and various Ottoman officials. The tablets stated his messianic claim; he told the Pope that he was the return of Jesus Christ. He prophesied the end of many of their reigns, called on them to observe justice, admonished them to care for the poor and weak, urged them to reduce their armaments, and exhorted them to establish a collective security system. Copies of the tablets circulated widely among the Bahá'ís.10

The rapid conversion of the Bábí community was viewed with increasing alarm and jealousy by Mírzá Yahyá, Bahá'u'lláh's half brother and the titular head of the Bábí movement. He had accompanied Bahá'u'lláh to Edirne. He plotted against Bahá'u'lláh, precipitating a split of the community. The Ottoman government grew increasingly suspicious and distrustful. Finally, in mid-1868, it exiled Bahá'u'lláh and most of his followers to the prison city of Akka, in northern Palestine, while Mírzá Yahyá and most of his much smaller following were sent to Famagusta, Cyprus.

Imprisonment and Exile in Akka. For two years Bahá'u'lláh, his family, and close followers, numbering sixty-seven, were confined in a group of cells under primitive conditions. Many became ill, two died of dysentery, heat, and malnutrition, and Bahá'u'lláh's younger son, Mírzá Mihdí, died in an accident. Subsequently the Bahá'ís were allowed to rent houses within the walls of the prison city. Bahá'u'lláh's confinement gradually eased and he moved to a series of houses just outside Akka. He also was able to receive Bahá'í pilgrims from Iran.

During Bahá'u'lláh's twenty-four years in Akka (1868-92) he wrote some of his most important works. The first five years saw a continuation of the themes of the Edirne period, including a second tablet to Napoleon III. In 1873 Bahá'u'lláh composed the Most Holy Book (Kitábu'l-Aqdas in Arabic) which defined his religion's practices of obligatory prayer and fasting; enumerated most of its holy days; established its laws of inheritance, marriage, divorce, and eventual civil penalties for arson, theft, and murder; banned such practices as slavery, asceticism, and mendicancy; abolished the priesthood and priestly ritual; forbade gambling, the use of opium, and the consumption of alcohol; obligated Bahá'ís to engage in a profession, exalting it to the rank of worship; and enjoined strict obedience to government.11 The book defined the houses of justice, councils of trustees that would organize the Bahá'í community; the mashriqu'l-adhkár or house of worship; and the

huqúqu’lláh or “right of God,” a nineteen percent tithe Bahá'ís pay on their surplus assets after essentials such as housing, food, clothing, and other necessities are accounted for. It foreshadowed appointment of Hands of the Cause of God, individuals Bahá'u'lláh selected as advisors and consultants but who had no authority to enforce or require actions. Bahá'u'lláh stated that after his death the Bahá'ís were to follow his son, `Abbás, as his successor, and he foreshadowed the later institution of the Guardianship. Finally, the book addressed various kings and rulers, both individually and collectively, including the “rulers of America and the Presidents of the Republics therein.”12 It called on them to choose a single universal auxiliary language. The provisions of the Most Holy Book were gradually introduced to the Bahá'í community over the next decade.13

In a series of tablets Bahá'u'lláh later expanded on the themes of the Most Holy Book. Bahá'u'lláh stated the principle of the oneness and wholeness of humanity: “the earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens.”14 He called for the convening of a summit of the world’s kings and rulers to end war and reduce armaments. He praised a constitutional republican form of government such as Britain’s. He established consultation—a system of practices of collective truth seeking and decision making—as a fundamental principle of his faith. He warned against materialism and libertinism. He emphasized the importance of religion in creating a peaceful and just society.15

Three works stand out in Bahá'u'lláh’s last years. His Book of the Covenant stated that his eldest son, `Abbás, was his successor, the interpreter of his teachings, and must be obeyed. The Tablet of Carmel mystically addressed Mount Carmel (near Akka, in what is today northern Israel) and prophesied its future greatness as a sacred center of the Bahá'í Faith. Finally, the Epistle to the Son of the Wolf addressed one of the most fiendish persecutors of Iran’s Bahá'ís, condemned his crimes, and called on him to repent. Bahá'u'lláh used the epistle as an opportunity to compile some of his most distinctive passages and teachings.16

Bahá'u'lláh’s corpus includes over fifteen thousand extant works. The genres include poetry, prayers, the epistle, the scriptural commentary, and the theological treatise. Most were short tablets to individuals, in Arabic, Persian, or in a distinctive mix of the two. Nearly all were dictated in the presence of a secretary, who recorded them; then Bahá'u'lláh proofread and corrected them before a messenger carried them to Iran. The majority are addressed to individuals, often in response to their questions, and deal with nearly every imaginable subject. All of Bahá'u'lláh’s writings are regarded by Bahá'ís as divine revelation and therefore as scripture.

Bahá'u'lláh dispatched teachers to consolidate existing Bahá'í communities or open new territories to the Faith. The vast majority of the early Bahá'ís had been Bábís of Iranian Shiite background. Under Bahá'u'lláh’s encouragement Bahá'ís settled in many Ottoman cities, where Sunnis began to convert. Iranian Bahá'ís fleeing persecution established communities in

Russian Central Asia and the Caucasus. Iranian Bahá'í merchants took the Faith to India, where Muslims and Zoroastrians became Bahá'ís, and possibly as far east as China. Two traveling Bahá'í teachers established the Bahá'í Faith in Burma in the late 1870s—possibly converting the first Buddhists to the religion—and took it as far east as Jakarta and Sulawesi in the early 1880s. In Iran, Jews and Zoroastrians entered the Faith; it is estimated that as many as ten percent of Iran's Jews became Bahá'ís by the early twentieth century. Notably less successful were efforts to reach Christians. Scholars have estimated that by 1892 there were as many as one hundred thousand Bahá'ís, the vast majority of whom resided in Iran.17

European travelers also encountered Bahá'ís; Professor Edward G. Browne of Cambridge University even interviewed Bahá'u'lláh. He published books and articles on the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths, lectured about the religion in England, and translated Bahá'í scripture into English, starting in the 1880s. His translations of Bahá'í terms such as Manifestation and his system of transliteration set standards that later Bahá'í communities in the west largely followed.18

The Ministry of `Abdu'l-Bahá (`Abbás Effendi). Bahá'u'lláh died peacefully in his home outside Akka on May 29, 1892, aged 74. His eldest son, `Abbás, then 48, succeeded him as head of the Faith and took the title of `Abdu'l-Bahá, "Servant of Bahá." Because of the clarity of Bahá'u'lláh's writings about succession, `Abdu'l-Bahá's leadership was immediately accepted by all Bahá'ís. But his half-brother Muhammad-`Alí, described by Bahá'u'lláh as next in the line of succession, soon claimed `Abdu'l-Bahá was not qualified to be Bahá'u'lláh's successor. Only a handful of Bahá'ís accepted his arguments, but Muhammad-`Alí was able to instill suspicion in the Ottoman government, which ordered `Abdu'l-Bahá back inside Akka.

An early priority for `Abdu'l-Bahá was further development of the Faith's organization. In 1896 `Abdu'l-Bahá told the four Hands of the Cause of God whom Bahá'u'lláh had appointed, all of whom resided in Tehran, to select a group of distinguished Bahá'í men in the capital to serve as electors to choose the members of a Bahá'í governing body. Thus was born the Central Spiritual Assembly, which served simultaneously as the organizing body of the Bahá'ís of Tehran and of all of Iran. Throughout `Abdu'l-Bahá's ministry its responsibilities grew and it appointed numerous committees. An early responsibility was the Tarbiyat School, a Bahá'í school in Tehran to educate boys.

During the first few years of `Abdu'l-Bahá's ministry the Bahá'í community in Ashgabat in modern Turkistan printed both Bahá'í scriptures and a periodical. The community began to build the world's first Bahá'í house of worship in the fall of 1902. Cairo also became a strong Bahá'í community.

Introduction of the Bahá'í Faith to North America. The Bahá'í Faith spread to the United States when a Bahá'í of Lebanese Christian background, Ibrahim

Kheiralla (1849-1929), arrived in New York in December 1892 to pursue economic opportunities. He had converted in Cairo in 1888 and knew little about Bahá'u'lláh's teachings. Kheiralla was interested in magic and Middle Eastern folk religion; in the United States he read popular books about the Bible and learned about Theosophy and reincarnation. He encountered Browne's Bahá'í publications, but used them sparingly.19

In 1894 Kheiralla moved to Chicago, where he established a healing practice using the laying on of hands and the smoking of water pipes. His contacts, however, soon were more interested in his religion. They were either middle-class professionals and white-collar workers of Anglo-Saxon background or first-generation German or Scandinavian immigrants, often blue-collar workers. Some heard of Kheiralla through the Oriental Order of the Magi, an esoteric Masonic group. Others were students of alternative religions and philosophies, interests stimulated by the recent Parliament of the World's Religions. Unlike American sympathizers of Buddhism and Hinduism, the Chicago Bahá'ís did not come primarily from the upper classes.

By mid-1894 at least five people became "Behaists." Their circle of friends became attracted and in 1895 the "First Assembly of Beha'ists in America" purchased a seal. In 1896 Kheiralla organized his teachings into two public lectures and thirteen private lessons covering the purpose of existence, metaphorical interpretation of the Bible and its prophecies, and the unity of the world's religions. The last three lessons noted that the Millerites, who expected Christ's return in 1844, were correct; that was the year the Báb began his mission. The lessons described Bahá'u'lláh as the biblical return of the Father and `Abdu'l-Bahá as the return of Christ.20

In the summer of 1897, Kheiralla gave his lessons to an audience of Swiss-German immigrants interested in vegetarianism, Populism, Socialism, and Christian Science in the small central Kansas village of Enterprise. In the fall blue-collar workers of Scandinavian and German background in Kenosha, Wisconsin, an industrial city seventy miles from Chicago, invited Kheiralla to give the lessons there. Chicago Bahá'ís who had moved to New York and New Jersey had Kheiralla give the lessons in New York City starting in January 1898. The result was a community of two hundred Bahá'ís, mostly white-collar professionals of Anglo-Saxon background and Episcopal leanings. Other Chicagoans returned home to Philadelphia and Ithaca and taught their relatives. Expansion continued in 1898 to Racine, Wisconsin; the San Francisco area; Boston; Washington, D.C; and in 1899, to Cincinnati. By the fall of 1899 an incomplete list of Bahá'ís included 1467 names in 60 localities in 25 states, the District of Columbia, Ontario, England, and France.

Kheiralla responded to the growth by converting his lessons into a book, Behá'U'llah. As it neared completion, Phoebe Hearst, mother of William Randolph Hearst, became a Bahá'í and decided to visit `Abdu'l-Bahá, and she was willing to pay Kheiralla's travel expenses. The party left the United States in September. Most visited `Abdu'l-Bahá for only three days, but Ibrahim Kheiralla and two American Bahá'ís, Edward and Lua Getsinger,

arranged to stay in the household for six months.

The Akka Bahá'ís were shocked by Kheiralla's mix of Bahá'í, Theosophical, and evangelical Protestant ideas, coupled with false Arabic etymologies, bizarre interpretations of history, and two prayers allegedly by Bahá'u'lláh that Kheiralla had, in fact, written himself. Their efforts to reform his views made little headway. Kheiralla tried to prevent the Getsingers from discovering his modifications of the Bahá'í teachings, but an English-speaking Persian Bahá'í arrived and Lua Getsinger began to learn Persian.

When Kheiralla returned to the United States in May 1899 he offered moving descriptions of `Abdu'l-Bahá's wisdom and spirituality. But he warned that the Getsingers poorly understood the Bahá'í Faith. They arrived a month later, turned the other cheek, praised Kheiralla for his service to the Bahá'í Faith, and concentrated on describing `Abdu'l-Bahá and his teachings, an effort brought alive by a photo of him and wax cylinder recordings of his voice. Edward was aware of Bahá'u'lláh's teaching about the formation of Houses of Justice and in the fall of 1899 helped the northern New Jersey Bahá'ís establish a "Board of Counsel." Such action undermined Kheiralla's de facto authority and exacerbated the situation.

Kheiralla accused Edward of seeking to be the head of the Bahá'í movement in America. Concerned about Kheiralla's ambitions, Phoebe Hearst sent an Arab Bahá'í, Anton Haddad, to seek `Abdu'l-Bahá's advice. When Haddad returned in late December 1899 he reported that `Abdu'l-Bahá said there were to be "no chiefs" in America and emphasized the humility of teachers. Haddad also apparently spoke about Houses of Justice, for in March 1900 the Chicago Bahá'ís elected their first governing body, of ten men.

His hopes for a leadership position dashed, Kheiralla supported Muhammad-`Alí's accusations and began to question `Abdu'l-Bahá's spiritual station. The American Bahá'í community split into three groups. Perhaps a quarter remained loyal to `Abdu'l-Bahá, including most prominent teachers and elected community officers. A smaller number followed Kheiralla, especially in Kenosha where the community secretary supported him. About half the Bahá'ís, who were either too geographically isolated to know much about the crisis or were repulsed by the conflict, remained uninvolved. Some abandoned the religion altogether; others were integrated back into the Bahá'í community later.

Recovery and Consolidation, 1900-1912. In 1900-01 `Abdu'l-Bahá sent four Persian teachers to the United States to bring Kheiralla back into the fold and rebuild the Bahá'í community. They were accompanied by young Persian Bahá'ís who knew some English. Negotiations with Kheiralla were unsuccessful and he was declared a covenant breaker, someone who violated Bahá'u'lláh's covenant with the Bahá'ís, which included the obligation to obey `Abdu'l-Bahá. He established his own Bahá'í group, which splintered, dwindled to a few dozen members, and eventually disappeared.

Membership in the American Bahá'í community, which had been about 1500 in

1899 and plunged to a few hundred in 1900, rebounded to 1200 by 1906.21 The quick recovery in membership was precipitated by several factors:

• The Persian teachers gave talks (later published) that clarified Bahá'í beliefs.

• Two young Persians remained in the United States and collaborated with Americans to translate some of Bahá'u'lláh's most important works.

• A steady flow of American pilgrims visited Akka and returned full of devotion for `Abdu'l-Bahá and the Bahá'í Faith. They published their memories as pilgrim's notes. One work, Some Answered Questions—a series of eighty-four answers `Abdu'l-Bahá gave over lunch to questions by an American Bahá'í and her French husband—was edited and approved by `Abdu'l-Bahá and became a part of Bahá'í scripture. As a result, texts rejecting astrology and reincarnation, qualifying the Bahá'í view of evolution, forbidding involvement in strikes, interpreting various biblical verses and Christian doctrines, and explaining the station of certain Manifestations of God were added to Bahá'í doctrine.

• `Abdu'l-Bahá corresponded extensively with individual American Bahá'ís, reinforcing their devotion and answering their personal questions. As many as half of his 16,000 extant tablets were penned to westerners.

• Americans developed their own cultural expressions of the Bahá'í Faith. They often worshipped on Sunday mornings in rented halls and sang hymns to piano accompaniment. The first Bahá'í hymn book, published in 1903, consisted of Protestant hymns such as Nearer My God to Thee that had no references to Christ or to such doctrines as original sin, the crucifixion, or atonement. But in 1904 a thirty-four-page book of original Bahá'í hymns, often consisting of Bahá'í scriptural passages set to music, was published in Chicago.22

• `Abdu'l-Bahá encouraged the American Bahá'ís to perform the daily obligatory prayer. The medium obligatory prayer was first translated into English in 1899; the short obligatory prayer, 1905; the long obligatory prayer became available a decade later. Each believer is free to choose which prayer to say. It is performed in private.

• American Bahá'ís began to observe the Bahá'í Fast (no food or drink from sunrise to sunset, March 2-20) as early as 1901. A description of fasting practices was circulated by the Chicago Bahá'ís in early 1903.

• Bahá'í Holy Days were observed in the United States as early as 1900. By 1909 the Gregorian dates of eight of the nine had been determined.

• American Bahá'ís began using the Bahá'í calendar, with its nineteen months of nineteen days, as early as 1901, when the Chicago Bahá'í women's auxiliary began to hold a regular "Nineteen-Day Tea."23

• In 1905 `Abdu'l-Bahá told pilgrims gathered in Akka to observe the Feast as a gathering for worship and socializing on the first day of every Bahá'í month. One pilgrim made it a personal crusade to travel across the United

States, establishing the Feast in every community.24

• `Abdu'l-Bahá filled the leadership vacuum left by Kheiralla's disaffection by encouraging the election of local councils. The Chicago Bahá'ís elected a House of Justice in May 1901. `Abdu'l-Bahá asked them to change the body's name to Spiritual Assembly, however, so that its purpose would not be misconstrued by non-Bahá'ís.

Organizing the American Bahá'ís proved to be difficult because many had consciously abandoned organized religion. Electing a council became a contentious issue in Washington, D.C., and San Francisco; hence `Abdu'l-Bahá began to stress that unity was more important than organization. No new local Bahá'í councils were formed between 1910 and 1918.

The introduction of so many changes—one could say an entirely new religion, compared to what Kheiralla taught—in a mere six years strained the existing community, in which some adopted most of the new teachings and practices while others adopted few or none. Bahá'ís from evangelical church backgrounds were usually more willing to adopt the Faith's distinctive teachings and practices based on adherence to its scriptures, while Bahá'ís coming from Theosophy, Christian Science, and the metaphysical milieu more often emphasized voluntary acceptance of them, a stance that has been called epistemological individualism.25 The latter groups argued the Faith was a reform movement meant to permeate and leaven the churches, opposed segregating Bahá'ís into their own Sunday worship meetings, and rejected organization. The fracture was not resolved until the 1920s.

In spite of the conflicts, however, the community soon had resources for new tasks. The Chicago Bahá'ís petitioned `Abdu'l-Bahá for permission to build a Bahá'í House of Worship (or temple) in 1903 and he made it a national project, but little was done until 1907, when a search for land began. A site was purchased in the suburb of Wilmette and in 1909 a convention of delegates from across North America elected the nine-member Bahai Temple Unity Executive Board to oversee construction. The temple project consumed much of the American Bahá'ís' energy and money until it was completed in 1953. The annual convention and the Board became proving grounds for the establishment of Bahá'í organization.26

The American community soon produced capable teachers. In 1904, `Abdu'l-Bahá directed an American on pilgrimage to travel to India and Burma with a group of Persians, lecturing and demonstrating their religion's teaching of the unity of the races. Two Americans traveled to Iran in 1908; one remained and became headmaster of the Tarbiyat Bahá'í School for Boys. Iran's need for women physicians prompted Dr. Susan Moody, a Chicago Bahá'í, to settle in Tehran in 1909. She was followed by another woman physician and two nurses in 1911. The American Bahá'í women were a constant reminder to the Iranians that the Bahá'í principle of equality of men and women was understood very differently in the west. In 1910 a picture of a group of unveiled Iranian Bahá'í women was published in an American magazine Baha'i News, which had a significant

circulation in Iran. American Bahá'ís incorporated the Persian-American Educational Society that year to funnel western textbooks, scholarships, and ideas to Iran. The Tarbiyat School for Girls was established in 1911.27

`Abdu'l-Bahá's Visits to Europe and North America. In 1908 a revolution overthrew the Ottoman government and freed all political prisoners, including `Abdu'l-Bahá. Even though he was old, in poor health, knew no western languages, had never spoken to a public audience, and had little familiarity with occidental customs, he resolved to travel. He first visited Egypt in 1910, then went west to Paris and London in 1911, then sailed to North America in 1912. In eight months he went from New York to Los Angeles and was greeted everywhere by crowds and largely favorable newspaper publicity. In Chicago, he laid the cornerstone of the Bahá'í temple. He gave at least 185 talks to a combined audience of perhaps forty thousand people; his venues included six universities (Columbia, Howard, New York University, Northwestern, Stanford, and Worcester Polytechnic), the NAACP annual convention, Hull House in Chicago, the Bowery Mission in New York, twelve Unitarian churches, twelve mainline Protestant (mostly Congregational and Episcopal) churches, eleven Theosophical or metaphysical groups, and three synagogues.28 Scores of meetings were in Bahá'ís' homes. He offered innumerable personal meetings with hundreds of people and was the subject of hundreds of newspaper articles. In his public talks he proclaimed Bahá'í principles attractive to a western audience such as the unity of God, unity of the religions, oneness of humanity, equality of the sexes, harmony of science and religion, individual independent investigation of truth, world peace, and economic justice. He rarely emphasized Bahá'í distinctives such obligatory prayer and fasting. Unlike Swami Vivekanada and Dharmapala, who had lectured on Hinduism and Buddhism respectively some fifteen years earlier, he rarely criticized others. He did not stir controversy except in his insistence that all his meetings be open to all races. He personally encouraged Louis Gregory, an African-American lawyer, and Louisa Matthews, an Englishwoman, to marry, resulting in the first Bahá'í interracial marriage.

While many children of Bahá'ís came to regard 1912 as the year they became members, only a handful of new people entered the Bahá'í community. Because `Abdu'l-Bahá often presented the Bahá'í Faith as the culmination of the highest ideals, Bahá'ís who did not see the Bahá'í Faith as an independent religion continued their view. But `Abdu'l-Bahá had the Chicago and New York Bahá'í governing councils reelected and He attended the annual Bahai Temple Unity convention, which affirmed the importance of organization. He expounded on the Bahá'í covenant and expelled two persons from the Bahá'í community as covenant breakers for continuing to associate with Kheiralla's dwindling band. Thus he ultimately strengthened the hand of those who understood the Bahá'í Faith as an independent religion. His visit also made hundreds of contacts and friends for the Faith that proved valuable in subsequent years.

1913-1921. `Abdu'l-Bahá left the United States for Europe in December 1912. Not long after he returned to Palestine in December 1913, World War I cut off

most of his communications until 1918. The American Bahá'ís had to handle their problems on their own. Chicago went through a period of disunity when a metaphysically oriented group of Bahá'ís opened a “Reading Room” downtown, rejected the authority of Chicago’s elected Bahá'í council, and sent their own delegates to the 1917 annual convention of the Bahai Temple Unity, which refused to recognize them. In 1918 the Bahai Temple Unity appointed a committee to investigate the Reading Room group. It found them in violation of many Bahá'í teachings and disloyal to `Abdu'l-Bahá. Because of disloyalty, the chief members were declared covenant breakers, a decision `Abdu'l-Bahá later endorsed.29

Reestablishment of communications with `Abdu'l-Bahá permitted him to guide the community anew. A series of fourteen tablets he penned to the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada, the Tablets of the Divine Plan, became the focus of the 1919 convention. Their urgent call to the American Bahá'ís to take their religion to the entire earth—the tablets listed hundreds of nations, territories, and significant islands to open to the Faith—stimulated an outpouring of activity reminiscent of many Protestant missionary enterprises.30 Those who saw the Bahá'í Faith as a distinct religion were the ones inspired to act. Martha Root left the convention and went to South America, becoming the first Bahá'í teacher to cross that continent. She continued traveling for the Faith for twenty years. Hyde and Clara Dunn moved to Australia and established the Bahá'í Faith there. The Bahai Temple Unity appointed four regional committees to coordinate the dissemination of the Faith across the United States. Fazel Mazandarani, an erudite Persian Bahá'í, became the first Iranian to travel the United States and Canada to teach the Faith since 1904.

The new emphasis on organization stimulated Chicago to reorganize its governing board and Cleveland to elect one, the first new local Bahá'í council formed in a decade. In conformity with `Abdu'l-Bahá’s request, the Bahai Temple Unity appointed a committee to review Bahá'í publications in order to stem the flow of inaccuracies promulgated by Bahá'ís. The 1920 national convention selected a design for the Wilmette temple.

The Passing of `Abdu'l-Bahá and the Beginning of the Guardianship. On November 26, 1921, `Abdu'l-Bahá passed away at age 77, plunging the Bahá'í world into mourning. But he composed a Will and Testament in which he made provisions for the future.31 He appointed his grandson, 24-year-old Shoghi Effendi Rabbani,(*2) his successor and Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith. He stated that Shoghi Effendi was infallibly guided to interpret the Bahá'í teachings and protect the unity of the Bahá'í community and thus had to be obeyed. The Guardian was authorized to appoint Hands of the Cause of God, who were to “diffuse the Divine Fragrances, to edify the souls of men” and “to promote learning.”32 He was to choose the next Guardian from among the male descendants of Bahá'u'lláh, and his choice was to be ratified by a body of nine appointed by the Hands of the Cause.

`Abdu'l-Bahá also stated (in his Will and in other tablets) that national communities were to hold conventions of locally elected delegates who were to

elect their national House of Justice, and all the members of the national Houses of Justice were to serve as electors of the Universal House of Justice. The Guardian was to be a lifelong member and chairman of the Universal House of Justice. The Universal House of Justice's sphere of authority included legislating on matters about which the writings of Bahá'u'lláh were silent; as such it complemented the sphere of authority of the Guardian, who interpreted the meaning of those writings.

Shoghi Effendi thus had a complete plan for Bahá'í organization. He focused the first fifteen years of his Guardianship (1922-37) on the construction of what he called the Bahá'í Administrative Order. He wrote dozens of epistles explaining the nature and purpose of Bahá'í administration; emphasizing the spiritual nature of Bahá'í elections, which proceed to the voting after a round of prayers without any nominations, campaigning, or mention of names; and defining the practical day-to-day policies of operation.33

One of Shoghi Effendi's first letters to the Bahá'ís of America called on the Bahá'ís to elect nine-member Spiritual Assemblies in any locality where nine or more adult Bahá'ís resided. With a clear mandate from the head of the Faith, American Bahá'ís obeyed, electing forty-two local spiritual assemblies in the next four years.34 The Bahai Temple Unity immediately reorganized itself as the national Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada, but Shoghi Effendi did not consider the reorganization complete until 1925. He recognized the formation of other national Spiritual Assemblies as well: the British Isles (1923), India and Burma (1923), Germany and Austria (1923), Egypt and the Sudan (1924), the Caucasus (1925), Turkistan (1925), Iraq (1931), Iran (1934), Australia and New Zealand (1934).35

The creation of Bahá'í Spiritual Assemblies further diminished the epistemological individualism in the American Bahá'í community, but not without conflict. Reality magazine, established in 1919 to promote "liberal" approaches to the Bahá'í Faith, wrote scathingly against Bahá'í organization starting in 1923, then ceased writing about the Faith in 1926 because of market pressures.36 One American Bahá'í, Ruth White, was so shocked by the establishment of organization that she sought evidence `Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and Testament was a forgery, despite the fact that hundreds of Persian Bahá'ís were intimately familiar with his handwriting and accepted its authenticity. Ultimately she was declared a covenant breaker. Ahmad Sohrab, a prominent Persian Bahá'í living in the New York, came into increasing conflict with the city's local Spiritual Assembly and with the national Spiritual Assembly, refused to obey them, and was declared a covenant breaker. Archival records suggest that while these events disturbed many Bahá'ís, very few resigned their membership over them.37

One reason was the advantages of organization. Elections required voting lists, created a definition of community membership, and fostered Bahá'í identity. Establishing new local Spiritual Assemblies became a goal for committees and traveling teachers. The number of American Bahá'ís, which had hovered at about 1,500 for two decades, doubled by 1936.38 Recruitment was also stimulated

by the Great Depression, which apparently increased receptivity to the Bahá'í teachings among middle-class whites.

Strengthening the community was a richer Bahá'í literature. John Esslemont, a British Bahá'í, published Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era in 1923. It gave the Bahá'í world a common introductory textbook. New translations of Bahá'u'lláh's writings by Shoghi Effendi—whose English, honed by an Oxford education, was excellent—provided the Bahá'ís with a far clearer understanding of their scriptures. A series of letters and essays by Shoghi Effendi published as Bahá'í Administration, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, The Advent of Divine Justice, and The Promised Day is Come clarified and interpreted important teachings.39 Dozens of collections of Shoghi Effendi's letters—his corpus eventually reached 36,000—were published. His consistent insistence on the Bahá'í principle of racial equality and unity stimulated a series of race amity conferences in the U.S. and teaching efforts appealing to African Americans.40

The enlarged American Bahá'í community began construction of the superstructure of the Bahá'í temple in 1930. The community's growing strength throughout the 1930s coincided with the destruction or weakening of three other communities. Nazi Germany banned the Bahá'í Faith in 1937 and imprisoned some Bahá'ís. Stalin abolished all Spiritual Assemblies in the Soviet Union, confiscated the Bahá'í temple in Ashgabat, deported about a thousand Bahá'ís back to Iran, and shipped most of the rest to prisons and gulags, where hundreds perished. Survivors were scattered across Siberia, where a few were found as late as the 1990s. In the 1930s Iran's government placed many new restrictions on the Bahá'ís there, including closing all Bahá'í schools (which by then numbered several dozen) and banning the printing of Bahá'í literature. Many Iranian Bahá'ís were arrested.

The First and Second Seven Year Plans, 1937-53. In 1937 Shoghi Effendi gave the North American Bahá'ís a Seven Year Plan, the first systematic implementation of the Tablets of the Divine Plan in the Bahá'í world. It had three goals: the completion of the superstructure of the Bahá'í temple, the election of at least one local Spiritual Assembly in every state of the United States and every province of Canada, and the introduction of the Bahá'í Faith to every country in Latin America and the Caribbean. In spite of the grave hardships caused by World War II, all three goals were achieved, and 4,900 North American Bahá'ís greeted 1944—the centennial of the Báb's declaration—with a sense of victory.41 The Seven Year Plan inspired the other existing national Spiritual Assemblies to adopt plans of their own.

Shoghi Effendi gave the American Bahá'ís a two-year rest. In 1945 the American national Spiritual Assembly sent two observers to the United Nations founding conference in San Francisco; subsequently the Assembly was recognized by the U.N. Department of Public Information as a nongovernmental organization qualified to be represented by an observer.

In 1946 Shoghi Effendi launched a second Seven Year Plan. Its goals included

the completion of the interior of the Bahá'í temple and its dedication to public worship; election of a separate national Spiritual Assembly for Canada and of two regional Spiritual Assemblies for South America and Central America respectively; and further growth on the home front. The political and cultural conditions of post-war Europe made it possible to establish or reestablish the Bahá'í Faith in ten western European nations, an effort aided by an outpouring of American and Persian pioneers (volunteer Bahá'í teachers who move to another place to help establish a Bahá'í community). In 1948 the Bahá'í International Community was recognized as a nongovernmental organization by the United Nations and represented by an American Bahá'í. At the end of the plan, the United States joined with other national Spiritual Assemblies to spread the Bahá'í Faith in Africa. All the goals were achieved. A national Spiritual Assembly was reestablished for Germany and Austria and a new one was elected for Italy and Switzerland, raising the total number worldwide to twelve.42

In January 1951 Shoghi Effendi announced the appointment of the International Bahá'í Council, the forerunner of the Universal House of Justice, and assigned it responsibilities related to Bahá'í matters in Israel. A year later he appointed nineteen Hands of the Cause of God, including six Americans. He gave the Hands "deputies, assistants, and advisers" when he authorized them to appoint Auxiliary Board members in 1954.43 The Auxiliary Board members served as consultants to local and regional Bahá'í communities, briefed Bahá'ís about the goals of the plans, encouraged them to set local goals, reported to the Hands about local developments, and carried out special assignments requiring someone with experience and tact.

The Ten Year Crusade, 1953-63. In April 1953 Shoghi Effendi launched an ambitious Ten Year Crusade. He gave goals to all twelve national Spiritual Assemblies to introduce the Bahá'í Faith to several hundred additional nations, territories, and significant islands—almost all the places mentioned in the Tablets of the Divine Plan. More Bahá'í pioneers than ever before were needed. In 1953 five of the nine members of the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States moved overseas, inspiring perhaps five percent of the American Bahá'ís to follow their example.

Cultural conditions strengthened Bahá'í efforts to teach their Faith. In the United States membership grew about five percent per year, from 7,000 in 1953 to 11,000 in 1963. In India, Bolivia, Uganda, and the Mentawei Islands of Indonesia, illiterate rural people were readily attracted to the Faith and enrolled by the thousands, though consolidating the resulting communities proved difficult. Overall, the decade saw the number of localities in the world where Bahá'ís resided triple to 11,000.

While none of the goals behind the Iron Curtain could be achieved, fifty-six of the fifty-seven anticipated national Spiritual Assemblies were elected. Virtually every country in western Europe and Latin America acquired an assembly. Regional Assemblies covered Africa, the South Pacific, and much of Asia. Alaska elected its own national Spiritual Assembly in 1957.44

Shoghi Effendi’s Passing. In October 1957 Shoghi Effendi raised the number of the Hands of the Cause of God to twenty-seven, further described their station and responsibilities, and referred to them as “Chief Stewards of Bahá'u'lláh's embryonic World Commonwealth.”45 The message proved prescient. On November 4, 1957, his heart stopped, plunging a shocked Bahá'í world into sudden grief and deep perplexity. `Abdu'l-Bahá’s Will and Testament said that every Guardian had to appoint a successor from among the male descendants of Bahá'u'lláh. But there were no male descendants of Bahá'u'lláh who were Bahá'ís, posing for Shoghi Effendi a situation not covered by Bahá'u'lláh’s texts and therefore requiring legislation by the as-yet nonexistent Universal House of Justice. He left no will or instructions.

After the funeral, twenty-five of the Hands of the Cause assembled in their first conclave.46 They shared no common language; only two were able to translate between English and Persian. They decided that as “chief stewards” it was their responsibility to complete Shoghi Effendi’s Ten Year Crusade, which still had five and a half years to go. They had no authority to interpret the Bahá'í texts or legislate, so they declined to answer questions involving those powers. Because Shoghi Effendi had been establishing national Spiritual Assemblies so that they could elect the Universal House of Justice, and because he had hinted that 1963 would be an auspicious year to form that institution, they called for its election at the end of the Ten Year Crusade. They also disqualified themselves for election to that body.47

Initially all Bahá'ís worldwide accepted their authority. But in 1960, an 85-year-old American Hand of the Cause, Charles Mason Remey, suddenly announced that he had been appointed to succeed Shoghi Effendi as the second Guardian. Since Remey’s declaration had no basis in the Bahá'í authoritative writings, he was immediately rejected by the Hands of the Cause. He was eventually declared a covenant breaker. The majority of the members of one national Spiritual Assembly—France—accepted him, but the other national Assemblies reasserted their loyalty to the Hands of the Cause. He acquired one hundred followers in the United States, some dozens in Pakistan, and a score in Europe. While the Bahá'í community was disturbed by his claims, soon few people thought much about him.

Remey’s Orthodox Bahá'í Faith split on his death in 1974 when two individuals produced letters from Remey appointing them the third Guardian.48 Another group separated under the leadership of Leland Jensen and formed the Bahá'ís Under the Provision of the Covenant, based in Missoula, Montana. Their frequent retreats into atomic bomb shelters became the focus of research by University of Montana sociologists interested in cognitive dissonance. The Remey movement continues to this day as two or three groups that maintain little contact with each other, are active on the World Wide Web, and probably comprise a few hundred members collectively.49

Election of the Universal House of Justice and the Nine Year Plan, 1963-73. In April 1963 delegates representing fifty-six national Spiritual Assemblies gathered in Haifa to elect the nine-member Universal House of Justice. The

House of Justice ruled that it was not possible to appoint future Guardians or Hands of the Cause. It spent its first year developing a Nine Year Plan (1964-73) to systematize the next phase of growth.50 At the end of that year, in April 1964, Hawaii elected its own national Spiritual Assembly.

The American Bahá'í community was given a major role in the international goals, which included more than doubling the number of national Spiritual Assemblies to 113. Within the United States, the number of local Spiritual Assemblies was to increase from 331 to 596, with at least two existing in each state; 866 were achieved.51 Bahá'í marriage ceremonies were to be legalized in every state. Efforts to teach the Faith to African Americans, American Indians, and Spanish-speaking people were to be increased.52

All the goals were achieved in a period in which the American Bahá'í community saw its fastest growth in history. From 12,000 in 1964, membership increased to 23,000 by 1970, an annual increase of over ten percent. Then teaching the Faith on college campuses increased even more, the popular musical group Seals and Crofts provided free Bahá'í meetings after each concert, and Bahá'ís began to go door-to-door to teach the Bahá'í Faith to rural African Americans in the South. By 1971 the number of Bahá'ís nearly doubled to 40,000; by 1972 it increased to 59,000. Door-to-door or “mass” teaching accounted for about half of the expansion. But the huge membership increases proved unsustainable, many of the new Bahá'ís drifted away, and the net growth rate dropped to an annual average of 4% for the rest of the 1970s.

The international situation mirrored developments in the United States. In Western Europe, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand thousands of youth became Bahá'ís; Latin America, Africa, and India saw the influx of large rural populations. The Bahá'í world went from 400,000 in 1963 to three million in 1979.

Development of the Institution of the Counselors. In 1968 the Universal House of Justice established a new institution, the Continental Boards of Counselors, to continue the functions of the Hands of the Cause for the protection and propagation of the Bahá'í Faith. To coordinate the Counselors and extend the work of the Hands residing at the Bahá'í World Center, in 1973 the Universal House of Justice established the International Teaching Centre, whose members consisted of certain Counselors and all living Hands of the Cause.53 On the advice of the International Teaching Centre, the Counselors appointed and oversaw the work of the Auxiliary Board members, who in October 1973 were authorized to appoint assistants. In 1979 the Universal House of Justice set the term of appointment of Counselors at five years.

Additional Plans, 1973-2006. After a one-year respite, the Universal House of Justice launched the Five Year Plan (1974-79) beginning on the first day of the Ridván Festival (April 21). It was followed by a Seven Year Plan (1979-86), a Six Year Plan (1986-92), a Holy Year commemorating the centenary of the passing of Bahá'u'lláh (1992-93), a Three Year Plan (1993-96), a Four Year Plan (1996-2000), a Twelve Month Plan (2000-2001), a Five Year Plan (2001-2006), and

a Five Year Plan (2006-11).

The new plans focused more on development of the Bahá'í community than its expansion to new places because the dissemination of the Faith to every part of the world, based on the Tablets of the Divine Plan, was largely accomplished. (The exception was to the countries in the former Soviet Empire; they acquired Bahá'í communities in the early 1990s.) The major institutions of the Bahá'í administrative system had been established; hence improving their functioning became a focus. Local Spiritual Assemblies were called on to establish such efforts as adult and child educational programs, youth groups, community dawn prayers, women's activities, and outreach projects; national Spiritual Assemblies were asked to develop their public relations and external affairs efforts and in 1986 were given responsibility to develop their own goals within the frameworks set by the plans. The Bahá'í world, tremendously excited and gratified by the expansion it had seen, also strove to solve the problems caused by rapid expansion.

Managing Growth. In the United States, the Bahá'í membership grew from 59,000 in 1972 to 82,000 in 1980 (4 % annual growth), 114,000 in 1990 (3 % annual growth), 141,000 in 2000 (2.4 % annual growth), and 155,000 in 2006 (1.5 % annual growth).54 The number of Bahá'ís with accurate street addresses—necessary to maintain voting lists—grew more slowly, partly because the addresses of mass-taught Bahá'ís often could not be updated. The number of local Spiritual Assemblies peaked at 1,785 in 1986 and declined to 1,150 by 2006. Three reasons for the decline can be identified: there was a decreased emphasis on setting goals to form assemblies and on encouraging Bahá'ís to move to establish them; a decreased emphasis on visiting rural Bahá'ís taught via door-to-door teaching to help them elect local Spiritual Assemblies; and the Universal House of Justice said all local Assemblies had to be elected on the first day of Ridván rather than any time during the twelve-day festival.

Door-to-door teaching efforts, common in the 1970s, became fewer in the 1980s and rare in the 1990s because it was difficult to deepen the new believers' understanding of the Faith systematically. In order to reach the thousands of new Bahá'ís in rural South Carolina, the Louis G. Gregory Bahá'í Institute was founded; it established a radio station, WLGI, in 1982. The Native American Bahá'í Institute was founded on the Navajo Reservation to strengthen the new Bahá'í communities there. Public meetings and "firesides"—informal meetings to teach the Bahá'í Faith usually sponsored by individuals in their homes—attracted fewer inquirers in the more conservative 1980s and 1990s. The percentage of American Bahá'ís who were youth declined, and more and more of the youth were children of Bahá'ís rather than new converts. The median age of the Bahá'í community rose from the 20s to the 40s. The international situation was similar: the number of Bahá'ís worldwide grew from three million in 1979 to five million in 2006; the number of local Spiritual Assemblies went from 17,000 in 1973 to 33,000 in 1986 and then to 12,000 in 2005.55

The Universal House of Justice initiated a series of changes starting in 1996 to strengthen Bahá'í community life, individual initiative, and Bahá'í institutions. It became apparent that some form of organization above the level of the local Spiritual Assembly but below the national Spiritual Assembly was needed. First, after various experiments, in the late 1990s the Universal House of Justice authorized some national Assemblies to divide their country into regions, where Regional Bahá'í Councils would be elected annually by the members of all local Spiritual Assemblies. The United States was divided into the four regions mentioned in the Tablets of the Divine Plan (northeast, central, south, and west) in 1997. In 2005 the west was split into northwestern and southwestern regions and the number of regional Councils increased from four to five.

Second, National Spiritual Assemblies were asked in 2001 to divide their country into clusters based on demographic and natural geographic factors.56 The average Bahá'í community in the United States has fifteen to thirty members and is limited in the services it can provide, but clusters could have hundreds of Bahá'ís and thus are better able to handle expansion and consolidation activities such as child education, media relations, and adult Bahá'í education. Clusters can have their own coordination teams and host periodic reflection meetings to which all Bahá'ís are invited to consult about local activities. In some cases cluster-wide responsibilities are rotated among the local Spiritual Assemblies in the cluster.

Finally, the House of Justice authorized dividing large cities (like Los Angeles, with over 2,000 Bahá'ís) into sectors. The city still elects one local Spiritual Assembly, but activities at the neighborhood level have become common.

The creation of additional administrative levels was also accompanied by an increased emphasis on decentralization. In 2001 the new Five Year Plan emphasized the development of three core activities in every cluster worldwide: devotional programs, children’s classes, and study circles. While a few Bahá'í communities had been holding regular devotionals for years, the new goal was to establish not just community devotionals, but to give Bahá'ís the skills to host personal devotionals in their homes and invite their friends and neighbors. Children’s Bahá'í classes, similarly, had been organized by Bahá'í communities for over a century, but now Bahá'ís were to supplement them with individually initiated neighborhood classes. To acquire the skills and confidence to create these activities, a series of seven books called the Ruhi Curriculum was developed in Colombia, and soon became the standard curriculum for study circles worldwide. While firesides and deepenings (informal classes to study a Bahá'í text or subject) continued, the emphasis shifted to inviting inquirers to attend study circles, participate in systematic study of the Bahá'í Faith, and acquire skills to initiate more core activities. Clusters were rated as D, C, B, and A based on the expansion of the core activities; the American Bahá'ís set the goal of having fifty A clusters (out of 970) by Ridván 2006. Once a cluster reaches “A” status,

it can initiate short-term plans intended to attract new inquirers to existing activities, thereby increasing the number of activities and people with the skills necessary for yet another cycle of expansion.

Enriching Bahá'í Studies and Bahá'í Literature. Perhaps one new Bahá'í book appeared in the United States per year in the mid-1960s. But because of the expansion in the 1960s and 1970s, there were many more Bahá'ís to buy books and magazines, causing the volume to increase. A quarterly magazine, World Order, began publication in 1966, and book publishing increased to a dozen titles per year by 1980. The Universal House of Justice began a major effort to translate more Bahá'í scripture into English. By the beginning of the new millennium a push to produce books for the trade market in the United States increased the number available in bookstores.

The establishment of the Association for Bahá'í Studies in Canada in 1977 (its jurisdiction expanded to include the United States in 1980) provided an organization in the Bahá'í community to stimulate study of the Faith. It founded the Journal of Bahá'í Studies and began to publish scholarly books, especially on applied topics (such as the relationship of Bahá'í principles to racial equality). A number of baby boomers obtained doctorates in religious studies, history, and Middle Eastern studies in the 1980s and began to apply academic methodologies to the study of Bahá'í scripture and history, enriching Bahá'í literature and sometimes advocating new ways of thinking about the Faith.

The Bahá'í Faith increasingly was studied at universities. A course on the Bahá'í Faith was taught in 1973 at Yale University; by the new millennium a university course on the Faith was taught somewhere in the United States every two or three years. The national Spiritual Assembly established the Wilmette Institute in 1995 to offer noncredit university-level courses on Bahá'í subjects, and in 1998 it began to deliver courses over the World Wide Web.

Increasingly in the 1990s, religious studies textbooks included short sections or chapters on the Bahá'í religion. A few articles by sociologists also appeared.

Involvement in the Life of Society. Bahá'u'lláh calls on Bahá'ís to be “anxiously concerned” about the needs of the society around them.57 In Iran and Ashgabat, institutions that benefited wider society flourished, such as schools, clinics, and hospitals. But in the West, other than small projects—like classes in Kenosha to teach women and girls useful work skills about 1905—the Bahá'ís organized few social improvement efforts before the 1960s, when many young Bahá'ís got involved in nonviolent, legal efforts to support the civil rights movement. Starting in the 1940s and accelerating in the 1970s, in developing regions such as India, Africa, and Latin America, Bahá'í communities began to found schools, programs to educate women, and institutes for rural development. In 1983 a message by the Universal House of Justice encouraged Bahá'ís to undertake social and economic development projects.58 Local Bahá'í communities in the United States began to support

soup kitchens, contribute to food drives, organize literacy classes, and participate in other efforts, depending on their resources. In some areas large long-term projects were started, such as an effort in the San Francisco Bay area to provide free voice-mail services to homeless people, enabling them to apply for jobs and apartments.59

Artistic Developments. The considerable increase in the size of the American Bahá'í community in the late 1960s resulted in a corresponding increase and broadening of the forms of its cultural expression. Bahá'í hymnody, which had largely disappeared when Sunday worship meetings died out in the 1920s, underwent a modest revival. Some Bahá'í rock and classical music appeared. The Second Bahá'í World Congress in New York City in 1992 was a cultural watershed because significant resources were devoted to creating an artistically rich program for the 27,000 Bahá'ís who attended. An Oratorio for Bahá'u'lláh was composed by rewriting several popular musical pieces for professional voice and orchestra. But the most important development was the debut of professional-quality Bahá'í gospel music, which has continued to grow in popularity. In 2006 a Bahá'í piece won a national gospel music award in the United States.

Public Relations and External Affairs. Bahá'ís have long used the media to proclaim Bahá'í principles, but the 1970s saw a quantitative increase in effectiveness in the United States. Bahá'í intercommunity media committees coordinated the use of television, radio, print, and billboard media in many large metropolitan areas and created campaign materials, complete with slogans such as “One Planet – One People - Please.” In the 1970s and 1980s, several series of taped radio and television programs were produced for use on locally rented media outlets. In the 1990s a national toll-free information number was set up and coordinated with purchase of cable television time for special Bahá'í advertisements. The informational ads were designed with the input of focus groups to ensure they were conveying the information and impressions that were intended. Informational Web sites were developed.

The 1970s saw Bahá'í relations with the federal government develop as the American national Spiritual Assembly established an Office of External Affairs. The Office has put much of its energy into human rights work, such as the ratification of the United Nations Convention on Torture and CEDAW (Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women), but it has also focused on sustainable development and joined several national interfaith organizations. The Office’s expansion was strongly stimulated by the need to combat the persecution of the Iranian Bahá'í community. As early as 1901 American Bahá'ís were informing government diplomatic channels about particularly serious incidents, but the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran brought persecution of a systematic and enduring sort not seen since the mid-nineteenth century. Entire Spiritual Assemblies across Iran were arrested and their members executed, sometime after trials for apostasy, sometimes after torture. Three successive national Spiritual Assemblies were arrested and martyred. Bahá'í organization in Iran was legally banned in 1983. The Bahá'í hospital

in Tehran was confiscated. Thousands of Persian Bahá'ís were imprisoned and over 200 executed for their beliefs; all suffered severe discrimination. Official (though secret) government policy called for extinction of the Iranian Bahá'í community through suffocation and attacks on its institutions and prestige outside Iran. Bahá'ís were not allowed to leave the country so that they would not strengthen the religion elsewhere.60

About a tenth of Iran's 300,000 Bahá'ís managed to flee the country anyway, sometimes via dangerous routes, and about 12,000 settled in the United States. They were mostly educated and articulate professionals who escaped with some of their savings. Everywhere they settled, they assimilated into the economy and culture fairly well and reasonably quickly. In the United States they became pillars of the American Bahá'í community, often intermarrying with European-American or African-American Bahá'ís. Their stories, told to the media and in Congressional hearings into the persecution, served to publicize the plight of the Bahá'ís remaining in Iran. The United States Congress passed seven resolutions condemning the persecution.61

CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

The Bahá'í Faith regards unity in diversity as its most important principle. Unity is not a perfect state the Bahá'í community can attain as much as an ongoing process that starts with prayer, consultation—that is, democratic principles involving active listening, seeking wide input, and judging ideas on their merits rather than on the person originating them—and collaboration on tasks that advance the Bahá'í community or humanity as a whole. Informing the unity process is the extensive guidance in the Bahá'í sacred and authoritative texts—67,000 documents by Bahá'u'lláh, `Abdu'l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi and the ongoing authoritative determinations of the Universal House of Justice—and the accumulated experience of national and local Spiritual Assemblies and the institution of the Counselors. To protect the unity of his followers Bahá'u'lláh established a covenant with them that requires them to follow and obey `Abdu'l-Bahá and subsequent heads of the Faith. The covenant was renewed by `Abdu'l-Bahá in his Will and Testament, which made Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice his successors and requires Bahá'ís to obey them.

Because of the Faith's clear lines of authority, many potential controversies are avoided entirely; after initial discussion or debate between individuals, matters have often been referred to the head of the Faith, who either resolves the question or says Bahá'ís are free to believe as they wish. 62 When Bahá'ís feel confusion, even anguish about some aspect of the Faith they may write to the Universal House of Justice to express their concern and receive replies that encourage them and help explain the principle or problem. They can also meet with a Counselor or Auxiliary Board member.

Historically, there have been two sources of tensions in the Bahá'í community. The first is the nature of authority in the community, a matter that was raised particularly when one head of the Faith succeeded another. As a

result of clearly written instructions about succession, individuals who sought leadership—such as `Abdu'l-Bahá's brother Muhammad-`Alí, Ibrahim Kheiralla, Ahmad Sohrab, and Mason Remey--could not successfully legitimize their claim using Bahá'í scripture. Consequently, they were able to attract relatively small numbers of followers: dozens, scores, sometimes a few hundred. Recruitment of new followers required rejection of all or part of the succession texts, a subject of little interest to non-Bahá'ís, and the prohibition on Bahá'ís having social contact with covenant breakers cut off the potential supply of converts from the Bahá'í community.

The result is a sharp contrast to other religions: Christianity has twenty thousand sects and the Roman Catholic Church can claim the allegiance of about two thirds of all Christians; the Mormon movement has a dozen sects, and the largest one, the Church of Jesus Christ of Later Day Saints, embraces ninety percent of all Mormons; but of the approximately five million people who consider themselves Bahá'ís, there are only two or three groups, with a total membership of several hundred, who are separate from the mainstream, and these groups have tended to dwindle rather than grow over time.

The second historical source of tension arises when the Bahá'í teachings are at variance with cultural norms. For example, when the Bahá'í Faith arrived in the United States a century ago, its practices of obligatory prayer and fasting appeared foreign or Muslim to some. In the Middle East, Africa, and elsewhere, its teachings about equality of men and women shocked some, and its democratic organization appeared western. Changes in cultural norms can alleviate tensions, as has happened as American attitudes have moved closer to the Bahá'í principle of racial equality and unity, or can exacerbate them, as has happened with attitudes toward homosexual activity (which is not permitted to Bahá'ís).

In the American Bahá'í community, the conversion of social activists and intellectuals in the 1960s and 1970s inevitably brought to the fore a wide range of issues, some of which have been the subject of argumentation in the years since: for example, the Bahá'í teachings on avoidance of partisan politics (which some saw as limiting Bahá'í involvement in short-term social change); obedience to government (which prevents Bahá'í involvement in nonviolent civil disobedience); exclusion of women from service on the Universal House of Justice, although they serve equally in all other institutional capacities (which some saw as a departure from the principle of equality of the sexes and questioned on exegetical grounds) 63; and the continued but temporary requirement that all manuscripts written by Bahá'ís on the Bahá'í Faith be reviewed for accuracy before publication (on the grounds that it limits freedom of expression). The discussion, framed by a few dozen Bahá'ís as "liberalism," represented a revival of the epistemological individualism of the early twentieth century, although many of the issues were different. In the late 1980s a short-lived periodical, dialogue, championed their discussion.

Beginning in the early 1990s the advent of the Internet and Listservs allowed

Bahá'ís to advocate and oppose such matters actively in cyberspace. Ultimately a half-dozen American Bahá'ís resigned their membership and one was deprived temporarily of membership privileges. The Universal House of Justice chose to remove three from the Bahá'í membership rolls. One ex-Bahá'í wrote unflatteringly about the Bahá'í community in academic venues.64 It should be noted that, like similar controversies in the Catholic and Mormon churches, the vast majority of members are only dimly aware of overt controversy around these issues. Bahá'ís generally may openly raise questions about issues of any kind that concern them, but they regard adversarial approaches as counterproductive ways to resolve disagreements or to advance understanding.

THE FUTURE

The Bahá'í Faith is 162 years old and has been present in the United States for 111 years. The depth of its roots in American culture can be measured in several ways:

• There are now fifth generation adult American Bahá'ís. Unlike most American Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, and Sikhs, only a small percentage of American Bahá'ís were born outside the U.S.

• The American Bahá'í community is ethnically diverse, indicating that it has multiple avenues of attraction.

• The Faith has already had a small but significant impact on American culture through such Bahá'ís as Alain Locke, the dean of the Harlem Renaissance; Mark Tobey, a renowned abstract painter; Robert Hayden, the poet; Dizzy Gillespie, the famous jazz trumpeter; and Robert Abbott, publisher of the Chicago Defender. Significantly, four of the five were African Americans.

The American Bahá'í community has experienced rapid growth in times of social crisis (such as the Great Depression and the 1960s) and slower growth at other times. There is no reason to assume it has yet reached a limit in its size.

CONCLUSION

The Bahá'í Faith offers various windows into the study of the phenomenon of religion. Like Mormonism, it is an older example of a new religious movement. It can also be viewed as a faith that has moved into that elusive category of a "world religion" in terms of its roots in multiple global cultures (according to the World Christian Encyclopedia, the Bahá'í Faith is present in more countries and significant territories than Islam—218 versus 204—and only Christianity, in 238, is more widespread).65 Its trajectory from a "heterodox and seemingly negligible offshoot of . . . Shí'ah Islam" 66 to a world religion has been little studied. The role of Bahá'ís of western Christian background in asking questions of the head of the Faith and thereby eliciting responses in dialogue with western and Christian concerns has received little attention; even less research has been done on the indigenization of the Faith among the native communities in Latin America and Africa or the rural population of India, or the role of the Bahá'í teachings

in fostering economic development in Third World countries. Within the United States, the attraction of African Americans, especially in rural South Carolina, and American Indians on reservations has been the subject of scant literature.67

Heretofore most research has been done by Bahá'ís, who are more interested in understanding their community than in considering it as a case study of universal religious phenomena. Hence opportunities abound for researchers interested in learning what the Bahá'í Faith has to tell us about religion, scripture, and religious community.

Notes

*1. Note about terminology and spelling. The word bahá is Arabic for glory or splendor; the superlative form is abhá, most glorious or most splendid. From this root is formed Bahá'u'lláh, “the glory of God,” the title taken by the founder of the Faith, and from it comes Bahá'í, a word used as a noun to refer to a follower of Bahá'u'lláh and as an adjective to refer to things pertaining to the Bahá'í Faith. Grammatically, the word “Bahá'í” functions identically to the word “Christian.” While some academics have used the term “Bahaism,” it is not used at all in Bahá'í authoritative texts or literature in English and most Bahá'ís find it offensive. The standard term is “Bahá'í Faith” (with a capital F, indicating it is part of a proper name).

A standard transliteration system for Arabic and Persian words was adopted by the Bahá'í Faith worldwide in 1923. Academics and dictionaries have transliterated Bahá'í terms according to various systems or dropped transliteration altogether. This article will adopt the Bahá'í system, which has far more currency than any alternative.

*2. Shoghi is his first name and is how he signed most communications to Bahá'ís; Effendi is an honorific title similar to “Sir” or “esquire” and is used by Bahá'ís which talking about him; Rabbani was his family name and was rarely used.

1 The ministry of the Báb has been described by Hasan Balyuzi in The Báb: The Herald of the Day of Days (Oxford: George Ronald, 1973), and by Abbas Amanat in Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement in Iran, 1844-1850 (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1989).

2 First-hand accounts of the persecution of the Bábís were collected and converted into a narrative by a contemporary chronicler, Nabíl-i-Zarandí and have been published in The Dawn-Breakers: Nabíl’s Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahá'í Revelation, ed. trans. Shoghi Effendi (New York: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1932).

3 Many of the European accounts of the martyrdom of Bábís have been compiled and edited by Moojan Momen in The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions, 1844-1944: Some Contemporary Western Accounts (Oxford: George Ronald, 1981)

4 Bahá'u'lláh, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, trans. Shoghi Effendi, rev. ed. (Wilmette,Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1953), 22.

5Bahá'u'lláh, The Hidden Words, trans. Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1939); Bahá'u'lláh, The Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys, trans Marzieh Gail and Ali-Kuli Khan, 3d ed. (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1973); Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Íqán: The Book of Certitude, trans. Shoghi Effendi, 2d ed. (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1950).

6 Original correspondence describing the revelation of the Kitáb-i-Íqán has been published in Ahang Rabbani, "The Conversion of the Great-Uncle of the Báb," World Order, vol. 30, no. 3 (spring 1999), 19-38.

7 To this list `Abdu'l-Bahá added Buddha and Shoghi Effendi added Krishna and the founder of the Sabean religion. Elsewhere Bahá'u'lláh appears to refer to Zoroaster as a Manifestation. He also suggests the qur'ánic prophets Sálih and Húd may have been Manifestations.

8 The best summary of Bahá'u'lláh's declaration in the garden of Ridván and its implications may be found in Nader Saiedi, Logos and Civilization: Spirit, History, and Order in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh (Bethesda, Md.: University Press of Maryland, 2000), 242-54.

9 Bahá'u'lláh's life is ably summarized in Hasan M. Balyuzi, Bahá'u'lláh: The King of Glory (Oxford, George Ronald, 1980).

10 Extracts from Bahá'u'lláh's tablets to the kings are published in Bahá'u'lláh, The Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh, trans. Shoghi Effendi (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1972) and in Bahá'u'lláh, The Summons of the Lord of Hosts: Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, comp. trans. Bahá'í World Centre (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 2002).

11 This summary of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas is based on Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1944), 213-16.

12 Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book, trans. Bahá'í World Centre (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992), par. 88.

13 The revelation of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas and its subsequent reception are described in Adib Taherzadeh, The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, Vol.3: Akka: The Early Years, 1868-77 (Oxford: George Ronald, 1983), 275-399.

14 Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, trans. Habib Taherzadeh (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1978), 167.

15 Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, 165, 93, 168, 113, 93, 63.

16 Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, 219-23, 3-5.

17 Peter Smith, "A Note on Babi and Baha'i Numbers in Iran," Iranian

Studies,17 (1984), 295-301.

18 Many references to Bahá'u'lláh and the Bahá'í Faith by European contemporaries can be found in Moojan Momen's The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions, 1844-1944: Some Contemporary Western Accounts.

19 A summary of Kheiralla's life and teachings may be found in Robert H. Stockman, The Bahá'í Faith in America,Origins, 1892-1900, Vol. 1 (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1985), chs. 2-7.

20 `Abdu'l-Bahá later made it repeatedly clear that he was not the return of Christ.

21 Growth of the American Bahá'í community in the first decade of the twentieth century is summarized in Robert H. Stockman, The Bahá'í Faith in America, Early Expansion, 1900-1912, Vol.2 (Oxford: George Ronald, 1995).

22 Bahá'í Sunday worship and hymn singing declined in the teens and twenties and soon became a rarity; see R. Jackson Armstrong-Ingram, Music, Devotions, and Mashriqu'l-Adhkár (Los Angles: Kalimat Press, 1987), 3-117.

23 The Bahá'í calendar of nineteen months of nineteen days, with a four-day intercalary period, was established by the Báb and modified only slightly by Bahá'u'lláh.

24 A summary of American Bahá'í adoption of the obligatory prayers, the Fast, Bahá'í Holy Days, and the Feast is given in Stockman, The Bahá'í Faith in America: Early Expansion, Vol. 2, 27-28, 108-09, 244-56.

25 Peter Smith applies the term "epistemological individualism" in Peter Smith, "Reality Magazine: Editorship and Ownership of an American Bahá'í Periodical," in Juan Cole and Moojan Momen, eds., From Iran East and West: Studies in Bábí and Bahá'í History, Volume Two (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1984), 145.

26 Construction of the temple is summarized in Bruce W. Whitmore, The Dawning Place: The Building of a Temple, the Forging of the North American Bahá'í Community (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1984).

27 The involvement of American Bahá'í women in the Iranian Bahá'í community is summarized in R. Jackson Armstrong-Ingram, "American Bahá'í Women and the Education of Girls in Tehran, 1909-1934," in Peter Smith, ed., In Iran: Studies in Bábí and Bahá'í History, Volume Three (Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1986), 180-210.

28 The audience is the author's estimate based on the known size of crowds at certain venues. `Abdu'l-Bahá's visit to North America has been chronicled in Allan L. Ward, Two Hundred Thirty-Nine Days: `Abdu'l-Bahá's Journey in America (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1979).

29 The Reading Room affair is summarized in Peter Smith "The American Bahá'í Community, 1894—1917: A Preliminary Survey," in Moojan Momen, ed., Studies in Bábí and Bahá'í History, Volume One (Los Angeles: Kalimát

Press, 1982).

30 `Abdu'l-Bahá, Tablets of the Divine Plan, trans. Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1977).

31 `Abdu'l-Bahá, Will and Testament of `Abdu'l-Bahá, trans. Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1944).

32 `Abdu'l-Bahá, Will and Testament of `Abdu'l-Bahá (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1944),13.

33 Shoghi Effendi's principal early messages about administration were published in Shoghi Effendi, Bahá'í Administration: Selected Messages, 1922—1932, 7th ed. (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974).

34 The Bahá'í Yearbook: Volume One—April, 1925-April, 1926 (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980), 102.

35 Eunice Braun, From Strength to Strength: The First Half Century of the Formative Age of the Bahá'í Era (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1978), 7.

36 Reality has been studied in Peter Smith, "Reality Magazine: Editorship and Ownership of an American Bahá'í Periodical," in Juan Cole and Moojan Momen, eds., From Iran East and West: Studies in Bábí and Bahá'í History, Volume Two (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1984).

37 The Ruth White and Ahmad Sohrab episodes are recounted in Adib Taherzadeh, The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh (Oxford: George Ronald,), 347-49, 343-47.

38 Determining the numbers of Bahá'ís in the period 1894 to 1936 is complicated by the lack of a definition of membership. The United States government census conducted religious censuses in 1906, 1916, 1926, and 1936 via surveys sent to local congregations; the Bahá'í numbers reported were 1280, 2884, 1247, and 2584. The large 1916 figure, however, included sympathizers who were not members per se, as demonstrated by membership lists drawn up for internal purposes in 1920 and 1922, with 1234 and 1368 Bahá'ís respectively. The 1926 and 1936 statistics used a narrower definition of membership based on adults on voting lists (which did not exist in 1906 or 1916). For details, see Robert H. Stockman, The Bahá'í Faith and American Protestantism, Th.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1990, 26-34.

39 Shoghi Effendi, The Advent of Divine Justice, 3d ed. (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1971); Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters by Shoghi Effendi, 2d rev. ed. (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974).

40 For a survey of race unity efforts in the United States, see Gayle Morrison, To Move the World: Louis G. Gregory and the Advancement of Racial Unity in America (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982).

41 All membership data in this paper comes from Robert Stockman, "United States Bahá'í Membership and Enrollment Statistics, 1894-2003," unpublished

paper. Some membership data came from the Bahá'í National Teaching Committee, which combed records from the 1970s through the 1990s; some was provided by the National Bahá'í Archives; and some was gleaned from the pages of Bahá'í News or the annual reports of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States.

42 The first and second Seven Year Plans are summarized in Eunice Braun's From Strength to Strength, 25-27, 33-42.

43 Shoghi Effendi, Messages to the Bahá'í World, 1950-57 (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1971), 7-8, 18-21, 59.

44 From Strength to Strength, 45-52.

45 Shoghi Effendi, Messages to the Bahá'í World, 127. One of the new Hands was an American, and an American had been appointed as a Hand when another one had died a few years earlier, hence eight of the twenty-seven Hands were Americans.

46 Two of the twenty-seven were too old and infirm to attend, but they signed all official concave documents.

47 The messages of the Hands of the Cause of God issued during the "Interregnum" (1957-63) have been collected together in Ruhiyyih Khanum, The Ministry of the Custodians (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992).

48 The history of Remey's Orthodox Bahá'í Faith and its split on Remey's death is described in Vernon Elwin Johnson, An Historical Analysis of Critical Transformations in the Evolution of the Bahá'í World Faith, Ph.D. dissertation, Baylor University, 1974, 342-75.

49 A study of the development of the Bahá'ís Under the Provision of the Covenant was published as Robert W. Balch, John Domitrovich, Barbara Lynn Mahnke, and Vanessa Morrison, "Fifteen Years of Failed Prophecy: Coping with Cognitive Dissonance in a Bahá'í Sect," in Thomas Robbins and Susan J. Palmer, eds., Millennium, Messiahs, and Mayhem: Contemporary Apocalyptic Movements (New York: Routledge, 1997), 73-90.

50 Universal House of Justice, Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 1963-1985: The Third Epoch of the Formative Age, comp. Geoffry W. Marks (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1996), 14, 44, 31-34.

51 Universal House of Justice, Nine Year Plan, 1964-1973, Statistical Report, Ridván 1973 (Haifa, Bahá'í World Centre,1974), 42.

52 Universal House of Justice, Analysis of the Nine Year International Teaching Plan, 1964-1973 (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1964), 14, 16, 17, 32.

53 Messages from the Universal House of Justice,1963-1986, 130-34, 246-48.

54 These statistics are based on data in Robert Stockman, "United States Bahá'í Membership and Enrollment Statistics, 1894-2003," unpublished paper.

55 One reason for the sharp drop was because Spiritual Assemblies should be formed according to existing civic boundaries; in the developing world this was often difficult and each village in a district formed its own assembly; later redistricting according to civic boundaries often combined several Bahá'í communities into one.

56 International Teaching Centre, Building Momentum: A Coherent Approach to Growth, in Ocean, a free software system available at http://www.bahaieducation.org.

57 Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings, 213.

58 Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 601-04.

59 A recent summary of social and economic projects sponsored by the American Bahá'í community can be found in National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, In Service to the Common Good: The American Bahá'í Community's Commitment to Social Change (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2004).

60 The latest summary of the persecution of Iran's Bahá'ís in Bahá'í International Community, Closed Doors (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 2005).

61 Resolutions condemning the persecution were also passed by various United Nations organs, the European Parliament, and some national legislatures.

62 From the point of view of many Bahá'ís, even the term "controversial issues" is a misnomer; they would regard such subjects as "challenging issues" worthy of discussion, exploration, scholarly study, and elaboration.

63 The Bahá'í authoritative texts give no explanation for why women cannot serve on the Universal House of Justice. `Abdu'l-Bahá said it was because of "wisdom of the Lord God's, which will ere long be made manifest as clearly as the sun at high noon" (`Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá, comp. Research Department of the Universal House of Justice [Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1978], 80).

64 Juan R. I. Cole, "Race, Immorality and Money in the American Baha'i Community: Impeaching the Los Angeles Spiritual Assembly," Religion (2000) 30, 109-125, with responses to Cole by Robert H. Stockman and Mike McMullen in Ibid, 133-139 and 141-47 respectively.

65 David B. Barrett and Todd Johnson, World Christian Encyclopedia: A Comparative Survey of Churches and Religions in the Modern World, 2d ed., 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2001), vol. 1, 4.

66 Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, xii.

67 Some notable exceptions: William Garlington, "Bahá'í Conversions in Malwa, Central India," in Moojan Momen, ed., From Iran East and West: Studies in Bábí and Bahá'í History, Volume Two (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1984; Joseph O. Weixelman, "The Traditional Navajo Religion and the Bahá'í Faith," in World Order, 20.1 (Fall, 1985): 31-51; Sandra Santolucito Kahn,

Encounter of Two Myths: Bahá'í and Christian in the Rural American South -A Study in Transmythicization, Ph.D. dissertation, University of California at Santa Barbara, 1977.

METADATA

Views13112 views since posted 2010-09-16; last edit 2025-01-20 05:56 UTC;

previous at archive.org.../stockman_bahais_united_states
Language
English
Permission
author
Share

Shortlink: bahai-library.com/3287
Citation: ris/3287

select Collection:
Archives
Articles
Articles-unpublished
Audio
Bibliographies
BIC
Biographies
Books
Chronologies
Compilations
Compilations-NSA
Compilations-personal
Documents
East-asia
Encyclopedia
Essays
Etc
Excerpts
Fiction
Glossaries
Guardian
Histories
Introductory
Letters
Maps
Music
Newspapers
NSA-documents
NSA-letters
Personal