

**THE ORIGINS AND SPREAD OF BAHAI FAITH IN KENYA  
WITH REFERENCE TO BAHAI COMMUNITIES IN  
NAIROBI AND VIHIGA (1950 – 1999)**

By

Mwangi Paul Nganga

THIS THESIS HAS BEEN ACCEPTED FOR  
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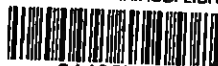
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Department Religious Studies

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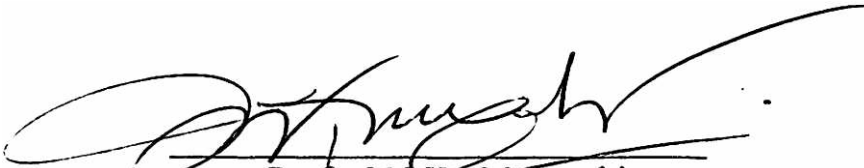
**DECLARATION**

This is to certify that this Thesis is my original work and has not been presented in any other University.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
MWANGI PAUL NGANGA

DATE 3/8/2000

This Thesis has been submitted for examination with our approval as University supervisors.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Prof. J.N.K. Mugambi

DATE 04-08-2000

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. P.M. Mumo

DATE 03/08/2000

**DEDICATION**

**TO**

**My dear Parents**

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

I wish to acknowledge my two supervisors Professor J.N K. Mugambi and Dr. P.M. Mumo, their positive criticisms and challenges are highly appreciated. They helped in stretching my imagination.

I am grateful to the Board of Post Graduate Studies, University of Nairobi for giving me a full time scholarship which enabled me to accomplish this study without disruption.

The insight from Professor Mugambi's lectures on phenomenology of religion coupled with the social reconstruction paradigm and transformation roles of religion gave me an impetus in wanting to study the central issue in regard to the enhancement of life in Bahai Faith and how this affects the growth of the religion.

Thanks also to the Bahai Community whom I interacted with, for being so cooperative especially the secretary to the National Spiritual Assembly Charles Mugonye for allowing me to use most of the historical documents of the Kenyan Bahai Community.

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## **ABSTRACT**

Bahai faith was introduced in Kenya in the early 1950s. However, it is hardly known by many of how it came to Kenya, for what reasons and the basic tenets of its teachings. This study examines the content of the Bahai Faith, and the factors that facilitated its introduction to Kenya – both internal and external. The study is an attempt to answer the question why the Faith is accepted in Kenya. The study also cares about the implication of the Faith to the adherents and its meaning to the wider society, in other words, the changes that resulted if any after the Faith took root in Kenya. A model is developed to help analyze the origin and the spread of the Bahai Faith in Kenya. The model is called the market model, which is composed of the elements that the research analyzes. The elements are: Messenger, Message, people accepting the message, the system of interaction, and the environment. The elements contribute to the nature of Bahai Faith in Kenya.

The study involves both library and field research. The field research was done among the Nairobi Bahai Community supplemented by Bahai Communities in Vihiga district and some insights from Bahai teaching activities in the outskirts of Nairobi.

The historical background of the Bahai Faith, its founders and the Bahai narrative gives the study a point of reference. As the narrative came to Kenya, Bahai's history began and hence the study attempts the spread and consolidation of the Faith in Kenya. The kind of social transformations that the narrative encourages and stands for are also a key point in establishing the status of the Faith in Kenya.

In a wider perspective, the study discusses how religious growth and development both qualitatively and quantitatively is affected by the experiential

element, which figuratively acts as the fulcrum of a religion while the social transformation aspect as the effort, and the progress is considered as the load.

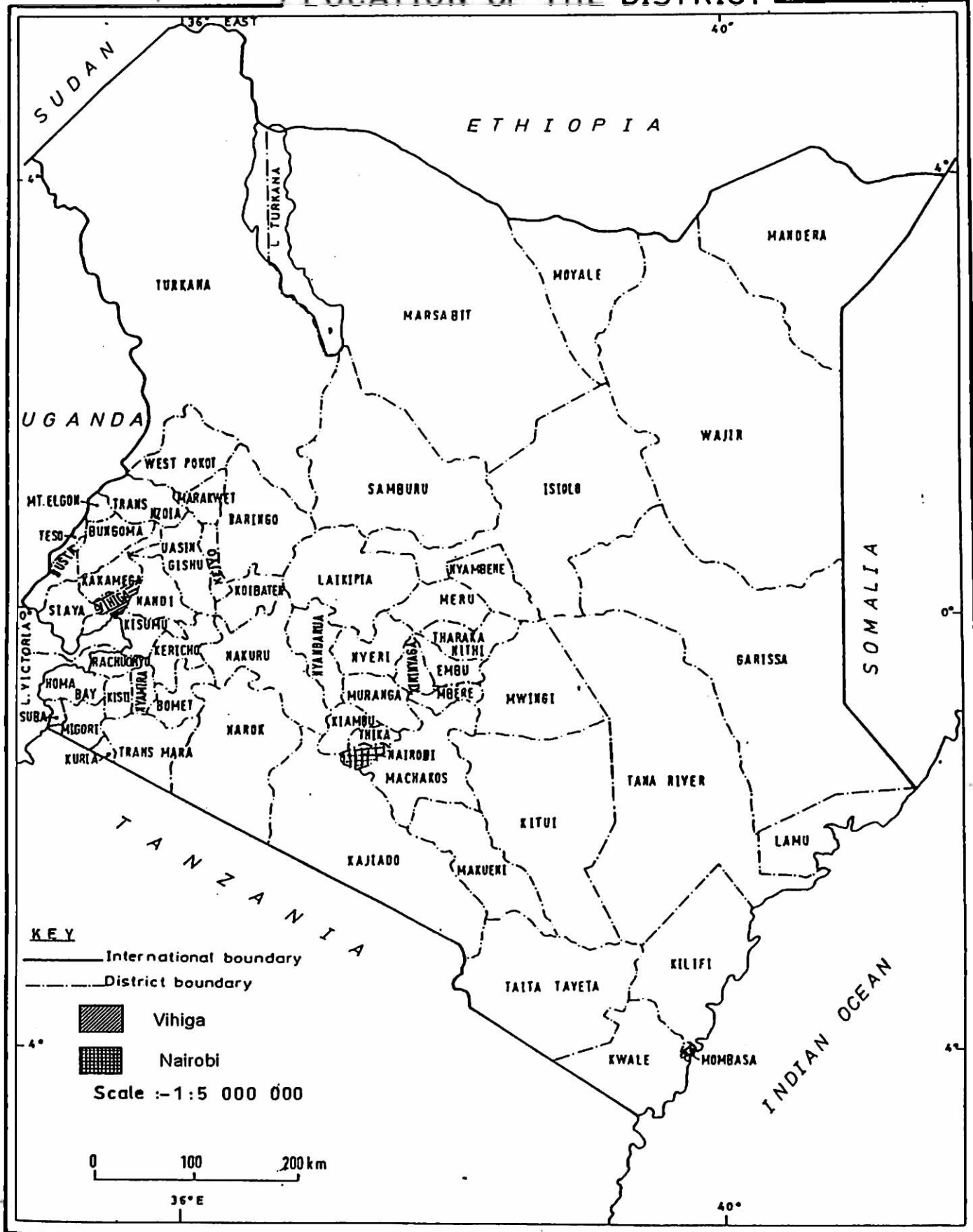
The study established that the (fulcrum) experiential dimension of religion, though negated by the Bahais of Kenya, has a prominent place in the growth and spread of the Faith and the realization of the Bahai vision in the world. The experiential dimension also affects the social transformation and the process of consolidation. The research asserts that if the Bahai Faith is to have a tangible future, the experiential dimension must be given a place to the effect that people will appropriate the religious truth freely and in their best intuitions. Otherwise, the Bahais do have their brand of religious experience and expression whatever the magnitude and a justification of whatever they do. The research postulates that there is room for improvement so that the intended influence and goal can be manifested more widely in Kenya.

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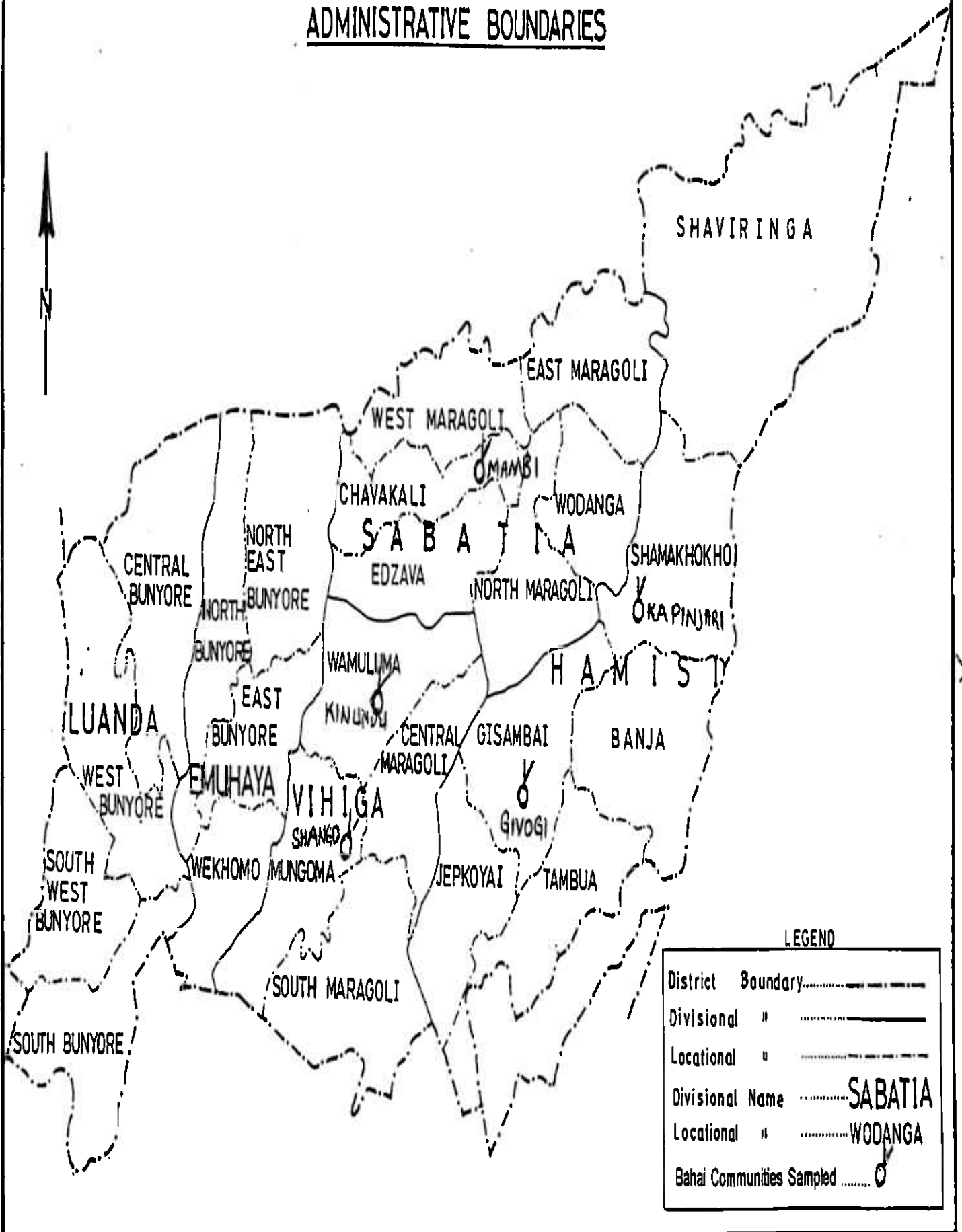
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# LOCATION OF THE DISTRICT



# VIHIGA DISTRICT

## ADMINISTRATIVE BOUNDARIES



### LEGEND

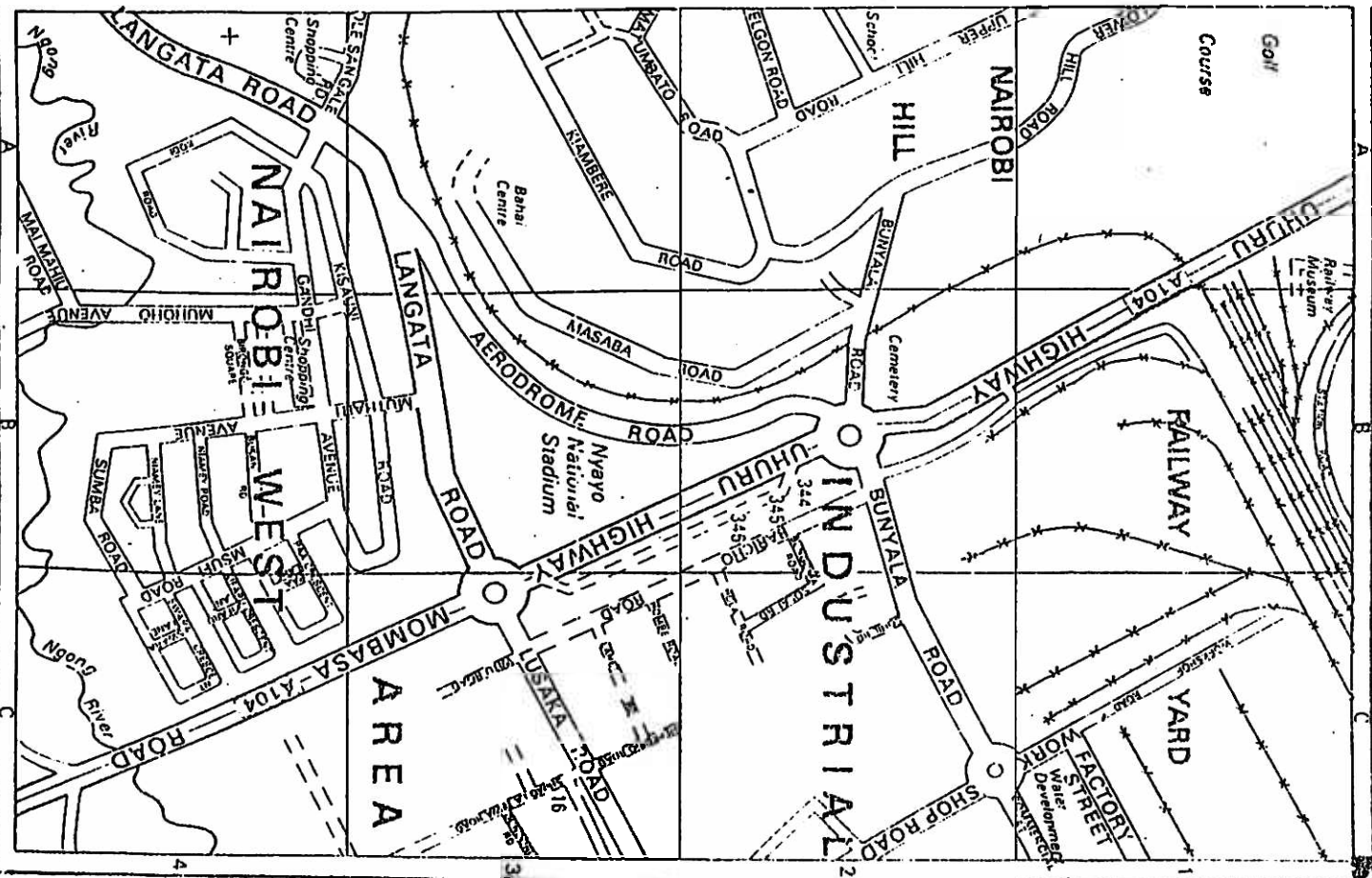
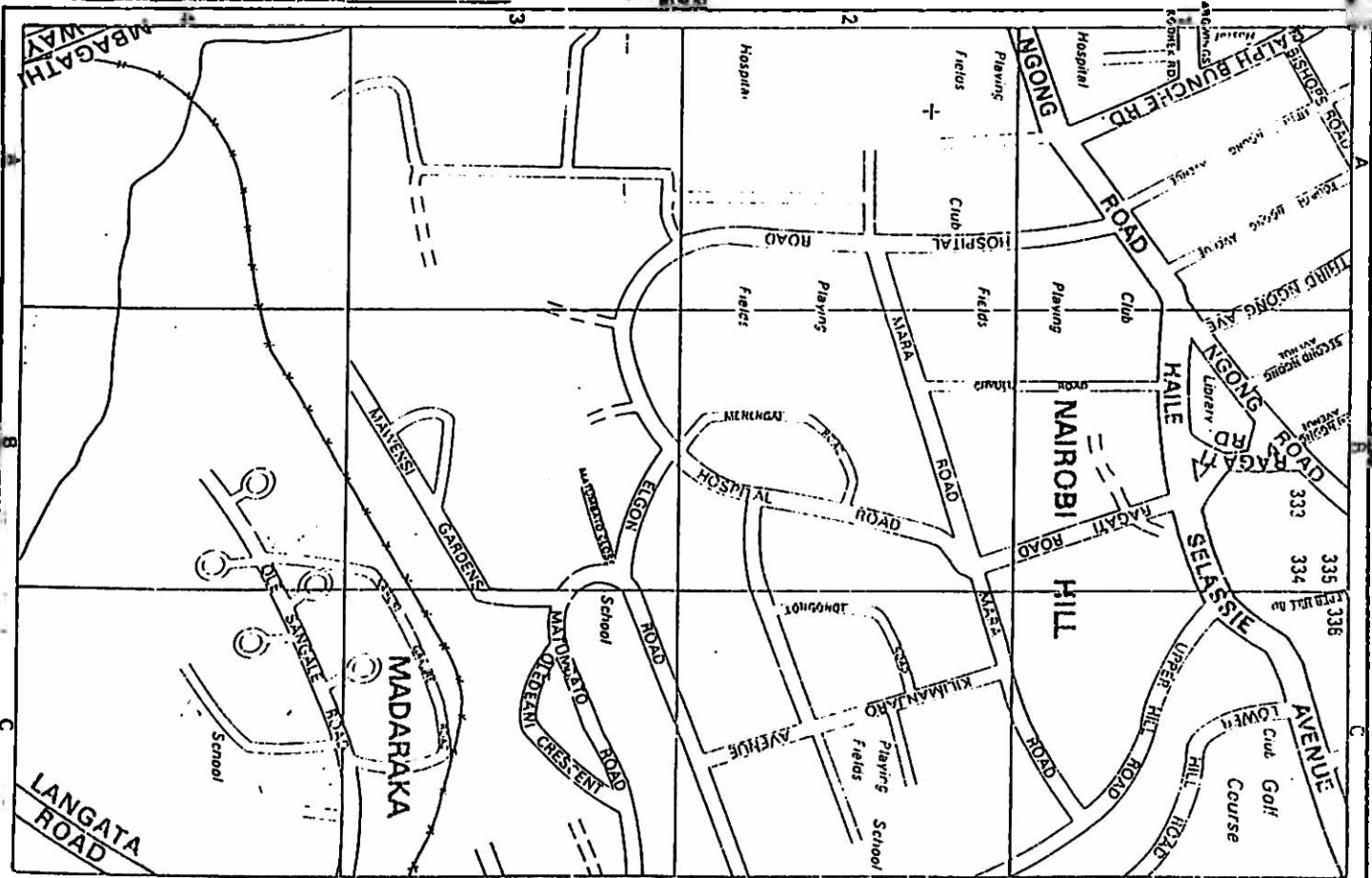
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Divisional Name	..... SABATIA
Locational	" ..... WODANGA
Bahai Communities Sampled	..... O

Prepared by DRSRS

LOCATION OF THE BAHAI CENTRE IN NAIROBI

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## Chapter one

### INTRODUCTION

#### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

As the 20<sup>th</sup> century draws to a close and the 21<sup>st</sup> century begins, scientific and technological advancements are changing mankind's way of viewing others, the universe and even the individual self. Information technology, computers and jets among others facilitate one's knowledge that gears oneself towards change. In this regard, people's developments and innovations are to be seen in every sphere of life. Religion being the aspect of life that gives people a worldview is not isolated from innovations.

Science and technology equip one with the knowledge of oneself, others and even the universe. This knowledge fosters doubts to whatever idea that seems not to work. People therefore ask questions and demand answers consistent with their contextual knowledge and environment. In this situation people may be said to be skeptical and pragmatic thereby challenging the cherished traditions and foundations that seem not to offer fulfillment. It may be noted that skepticism and pragmatism make one to be dissatisfied with religious systems and institutions that do not offer satisfaction according to the requirements and needs of the time. There is therefore a search for the places where satisfaction can be found. This quest for satisfaction brings the searchers together in an attempt to get what they need. In this respect, new religious orientations emerge to replace old ones which do not offer fulfillment to the dissatisfied. But why do people drop their old religious orientations to embrace others new or old? What sort of satisfaction is offered by the embraced orientations? Do the

new orientations appeal to everybody? What is the implication of the embraced orientations to the believers who choose them?

### **1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Bahai faith is a new religious development which Ninian Smart terms as a new religion from within Islam.<sup>1</sup> He asserts that the Bahai movement has become a worldwide religion which can be seen as a radically modernizing movement from within the ambit of Shia Islam.<sup>2</sup>

The Bahais trace their origins in 1844 in Persia (Modern Iran), its founder being Mirza Hussayn Ali Nuri (1817-1892) also known as the Glory of God or Bahauallah. As a worldwide religion, it is expected to be in big cities of the world as they are microcosms of the world. The Faith came to Kenya in 1952 through an order from Shoghi Effendi Rabbani (1897-1957) to the National Spiritual Assembly of British Isles to take the Faith to the then British colonies.<sup>3</sup>

Through this order, the first Bahai pioneers to Kenya were Ted Cardel and Aziz Yazidi who started their work in Nairobi where they resided. They later concentrated their activities in Nyanza and Western provinces of Kenya. The relocation away from Nairobi was exacerbated by the Mau Mau war in the central parts of Kenya. In other words, security reasons made the pioneers move their activities out of Nairobi, though a modicum of teaching activities continued in Nairobi. After the situation normalized in the late 50s, the Faith expanded to other areas in Kenya. For this purpose, more pioneers joined the initial ones.

From the time of inception to date (1999), Bahai Faith has continued to grow both qualitatively and quantitatively. From a close observation, the Faith appeals to

the educated and wealthy, making it elitist. It may also be noted that, many Persians-Iranians (religious others) dominate the Faith in Nairobi unlike in the rural areas where there are few foreigners if any. From the 1998 official statistics (Table 3) it is observable that the Faith attracts more men than women.

The study of the Bahai Faith in Kenya explains the factors that make it appealing to the adherents who remain an integral part of the wider society. The study also highlights the nature of the Faith, its uniqueness and the changes that result after accepting the Faith. It is thus worthwhile to have a systematic study on the origins and spread of Bahai Faith in Kenya with special reference to Bahai communities in Nairobi and Vihiga. This kind of study will help to paint a picture of the current status of the Faith in Kenya. On another plane, the question of change and renewal in religion is dealt with, the concern being why people discard their old religious tradition to accommodate other religious orientations.

When defining religion, Ninian Smart<sup>4</sup> enumerates six dimensions of religion. These include: the mythological, the doctrinal, the social, the ritual, the ethical and the experiential dimensions. The mythical dimension entails religious stories which seek to explain a society's sense of being and give meaning to existence. In the doctrinal dimension, every religion has its own teachings about itself and the environment. Any religion will manifest itself in society hence the social dimension. The ritual dimension of religion enshrines ceremonial activities like worship, meditation, pilgrimage, baptism and marriage. Using the ethical dimension, a religion affirms its established norms of conduct. The experiential dimension centres on the role of the individual in the religious community. With the assumption that the experiential

dimension of religion is the core of a religion, dialectical phenomenology (The relationship between different dimensions of religion) will bring out the relationship between the experiential dimension and the doctrinal dimension. This relationship is then put against the growth of the Bahai Faith in order to understand how the experiential dimension is reflected in the growth of the Faith. It is worth noting that no systematic study on the origins and the spread of the Bahai faith has been done in Kenya. Thus the study puts Bahai Faith on the map of comparative studies of religion in Kenya on the basis of New Religious Movements.

## **1.2 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The study intends to achieve the following:

- a) Understand the origin and spread of Bahai Faith in Kenya with particular reference to Nairobi and Vihiga Bahai communities.
- b) To bring out the content of the Bahai Faith.
- c) To bring out the organisation and administration structure of Bahai Faith in Kenya and the world.
- d) To evaluate the impact of Bahai Faith on its followers.

## **1.3 RATIONALE OF THE STUDY**

Comparative study of religions entails the study of the relationships of the various religious traditions and the way in which religious themes and ideas are diffused in these traditions.<sup>5</sup> To understand the relationships, each tradition needs to be studied fully so that the tradition can be entered into the map of comparative study of religions. There is no such kind of comparative study on the Bahai Faith in Kenya. Several scholars have tackled the phenomenon of new religious innovations especially



in phenomenological and comparative studies of religion. Ninian Smart in his book The World's Religions (1989), gives a phenomenological study of the world's religions. As he treats religious traditions, Bahai Faith comes as a sub-tradition within a sub-tradition, that is, a religious orientation within the Shia sub-tradition of Islam. The current study treats Bahai Faith as an independent religion. Bahai Faith has its own scriptures, teachings, practices and founders together with an administrative structure. The Faith thus qualifies to be analyzed independently.

In the book, A Comparative Study of Religions (1993), edited by J.N.K. Mugambi, the major religious traditions in the world are analyzed together with their sub-traditions. Bahai Faith is not accorded any area as other religions are treated geographically. The said studies are however very useful, and such should be extended to Bahai Faith. However, the scholars do have room for new religious movements as they talk on the future of religion and the challenge of the contemporary world.

In his inaugural lecture, Religion and Social Construction of Reality delivered before the University of Nairobi on 26<sup>th</sup> September 1996, J.N.K. Mugambi talks of religion at its best as a facilitator of social engineering or enhancement of life. Mugambi asserts that in all cultures, the majority of people are searching for lighthouses in the troubled ocean of life. In regard to this, those who accept to become converts are those who tolerate the religions in which they have been brought up, all adhere to their faith with the conviction that these faiths are the lighthouses.<sup>6</sup> In connection to this, the Bahais consider their faith as the panacea to the contemporary

crises ridden world. The numerical growth of the Bahai Faith and the sustenance of the Faith is connected to this motif of social transformation.

The study analyses this endeavour among the Bahais, showing how social transformations affect the growth of the Faith. The Faith was chosen as a new religious movement that aggressively seeks to bring about a New World Order on the basis of its teachings and the administrative machinery that places a lot of emphasis on consultation. Thus, the political philosophy of the Bahais in relation to the global village is an aspect worthy of study especially at a time when the world over is moving towards globalization. A critical study will make explicit the philosophy behind the Bahai Faith, the blending and synchronization at the core of the Faith in making the world anew as the Bahais believe. The study offers a reflection on the future of religion given the forces of secularization and other agents of change that affects man and his religious orientations.

#### 1.4 LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature that is relevant to the study can be divided into two parts; general literature on religion and the specific literature written by Bahais for the purpose of devotion and edification. The literature contains vital information for the research to build on. The literature that directly deals with Bahai Faith is scanty. Ninian Smart in the book The World's Religions (1989), phenomenologically assesses the different worldviews in the world be they religious or secular. Within the dominant traditions (worldviews), Smart is not hesitant to mention the sub-traditions which do exist and function under the cloud of the traditions. It is in this connection that Smart describes the Bahai movement. He treats the movement as a new religion from the ambit of Shia

Islam, thus the Faith is not given the status it claims for itself – ‘an independent world religion’ with the status of other world religions. However Smart accepts the growth of the movement towards being a world religion though he does not venture into details. Nevertheless he admits its growth in Europe, North America, Asia and Africa. Smart offers a systematic study on the Bahai narrative. The current study traces the process of transplanting the Faith in Kenya (outside the land of origin – Iran).

Alessandro Bausani has written an article on Bahais in The Encyclopedia of Religion Vol. 2 (1987). Basically he has written on the core of the Faith, which the current research identifies as the narrative dimension of the Bahai Faith. The narrative focuses on the initial stages of the Faith.

In the book History of Religions (1965), George Moore analyses the historical development of the Bahai Faith. The subtitle in which he places the Bahai Faith is ‘extravagant sects and derivative religions from Islamic Faith’. In the same category is D.L. Carmody in the book Ways to the Centre (1980).

In the book A Comparative Study of Religions (1990), edited by J.N.K. Mugambi, various articles on major religions of the world are entered with reference to space and time. From the book, one can deduce that the Bahai Faith is not treated as a major world religion. However, in the chapter on ‘the present state of religion in the contemporary world’, Mugambi identifies the issues that affect religion in the contemporary world, namely: evolution, empiricism, relativism, secularism and ecumenism. On the issue of ecumenism, Bahai Faith is mentioned as a movement which claim to provide neutral meeting points for people of all religions, while at the same time denying that they are a new religion. The study challenges the idea of

neutrality advocated by Mugambi as the study treats Bahai Faith as a religion that seeks to increase its count.

Reflecting on global religion, Smart points out that the interaction between traditions has spurred the growth of new religious traditions which incorporate elements from different worldviews. Again, the neutrality of the Bahai Faith is challenged. In this case, the meeting point, which was to be neutral, fosters a new religious movement akin to a blending of many traditions. The blending is a result of the religious pluralistic environment that the Bahai Faith responds to. The Bahais however highlight this blending arguing that every religion in the world is reflected in the Bahai Faith. This blended tradition is then taken to other areas around the globe and new adherents can be identified. To a large extent, this is the case for the Bahai Faith in Kenya. The current study analyses the particular religious experience and expression that result from this blending.

D.L. Edwards in the book Religion and change (1969) considers the challenges of religion in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For Edwards, the changes encountered through the century have made it the secular century and many people draw the conclusion that religion which survives is doomed to disappear. It is with this in mind that Edwards argues that religion must adapt the changes of its time for it to continue serving its adherents. As the century closes, human beings are seen to be of age, in terms of social and spiritual fulfillment. However, Edwards is pessimistic of this coming of age given the responsibilities of adulthood. This idea of coming of age is in line with the Bahai notions of progressive revelation and the notion of The Day we are living in.<sup>7</sup> Edwards observes that in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, -dialogue between religions is slowly

beginning and the fundamental causes of this new flexibility has been the common exposure of religions to the challenges of secularization. Science and technology are seen to be ushering man into a unified world or single stream of history into which the peoples of the world are being drawn into a single stream of questions and not answers, and what unites people is their common experience that their own societies are breaking up. After things have fallen apart, the energy of what remains of the 20<sup>th</sup> century will be absorbed by the relationship of the religions to each other and to the pressure of the emerging future – spiritual and social.<sup>8</sup> Edward's book centres on Christianity and how it should respond to the changes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This research on the Bahai Faith stretches the ideas of D.L. Edwards. Have the old religious traditions failed so that new ones must replace them? In other words, what is the justification of the claim of newness in the Bahai Faith?

The Encyclopedia of Religion (1987), contains various articles on 'New Religious Movements'. Areas covered include Europe, Japan and America. Generally, the articles highlight on what is new in the movements, classifications, and the long-term significance of the movements to the society. For instance, Robert S. Ellwood has written on 'New Religious Movements in Japan', while Eileen Barker focuses on Europe. This illustrates the point of Ninian Smart that, studying others' faith is a voyage into the neighbourhood in a context of religiously pluralistic society. Thus, such studies can and should be extended to Bahai Faith in Kenya in order to understand the Bahai religious experience and expression.

G. Tawnshed introduces the book God Passes By (1944), by saying that:

here is a history of our times written on an unfamiliar theme – a history filled with love and happiness and division and strength, telling of triumphs gained and wider triumphs yet to come.<sup>9</sup>

In the book, Shoghi Effendi takes the initiative on behalf of the Bahais to reflect on a period of a hundred years during which the Bahai Faith had been operative, in so doing, he accounts for the achievements and dream of the Faith. In a very strong and poetic tone coupled with rhetoric, the author narrates the growth of the Bahai Faith from the time of the Bab<sup>10</sup> (1844) until 1944. The author asserts that he shall content himself with a review of the salient features of its (Bahai Faith) birth, rise as well as the initial stages in the establishment of its administrative institutions. This analysis is on a global scale given the celebrations that the Bahais worldwide were looking forward to in 1944. The book is figuratively a balance sheet showing the success of the Faith and the future challenges.

In the book Bahauallah and the New Era (1974), J.E Esslemont surveys the essence of Bahai Faith and its consolidation in the world. The book can be treated as an introduction to the Faith, centering on the narrative dimension and its principles. Most of the material covered is to be found in the book God Passes By, earlier mentioned.

The author of the book, The Earth is but One Country (1980), John Huddleston attempts the question of social transformation as propounded by Bahai Faith. The book shows how the Bahai Faith meets the needs of humanity, and how the Faith is building up what is believed will be a new worldwide civilization in which all people of the world will leave together in justice, harmony and peace. The book is thus a kind of commentary on the tenets of the Faith and their application. How is social

transformation carried out in specific parts of the world? How relevant is the endeavour of transformation to the spread and growth of the Faith?

By and large, it is notable that most of the Bahai literature that is available is mostly edifying and devotional, centering on the narrative and doctrinal side of the Faith. In this category, the above mentioned books plus other Bahai books bare the twist of edification and devotional materials. Other materials include pamphlets, magazines and articles on Bahai Faith written by Bahais for Bahais. To add to the list are the following: The New Garden (1996) by Hushmmand Fatheazam; 'Bahai Holy Writings for a new kind of People', compiled by the Continental Board of Counselors of Bahai Faith in Africa (1989); Some Answered Questions by Abdul-Baha collected and translated from Persian by Laura Clifford Berney (1964); 'The Bahais', a publication of the office of public information of the Bahai International Community (1994).

### 1.5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The research is based on phenomenological approach to the Bahai Faith. This is the attempt through informed empathy to present others' experience and beliefs from their point of view, and involving the suspension of person's values.<sup>11</sup> This kind of approach means that it is not judgemental but rather a representation of the facts as they are. The suspension of value judgement prevents distortion of facts since superiority of any idea is not entertained. Ninian Smart observes that, a phenomenological approach aids one in what to reflect or theorize upon. In the book, Dimensions of the Sacred (1996), Smart has propounded on this approach where he centres on the dimensions of religion which are: mythological, doctrinal, ritual, social,

ethical and experiential. He uses various religions and their brands to strengthen his case. The study borrows heavily from Smart to prepare the ground for reflection and theorizing. It is also certain that a phenomenological approach to religion attempts to discover the intention of religious phenomena and to locate the structures of religious life in symbols, rites and doctrines.<sup>12</sup> In this regard, the approach is instrumental in an attempt to understand the Bahai Faith.

The study though descriptive requires a frame of reference. The research adopts the secularization thesis propounded by Stark and Bainbridge and extensively analyzed by Thomas Robbins<sup>13</sup> when analyzing the explanations to the surge of new religious orientations in Europe and America. Secularization is the process through which various sectors of a society are increasingly freed from domination and control of religious authority and tradition.<sup>14</sup> The process fosters religious revival on one hand and religious innovation on the other. Thomas Robbins quoting Stark and Bainbridge asserts that new religions constantly appear in societies replacing the enfeebled older faiths.<sup>15</sup> Religious revival entails the schismatic formation of new sects, which emerge from decaying religious traditions which have become tame and worldly.<sup>16</sup> Religious revival occurs and stays within a certain old religious orientation that is accorded new strength. Religious innovation on the other hand depicts a new form of religious orientation. The new form is distinct from the original faith in terms of practices and institutions. Bahai Faith can be viewed as a religious innovation at some point and as a revivalist group at another point. Viewed as a revivalist group, Bahai Faith is treated under the ambit of Shia Islam. The aspect of innovation becomes evident as the Faith grows and moves away from its original land of Iran.



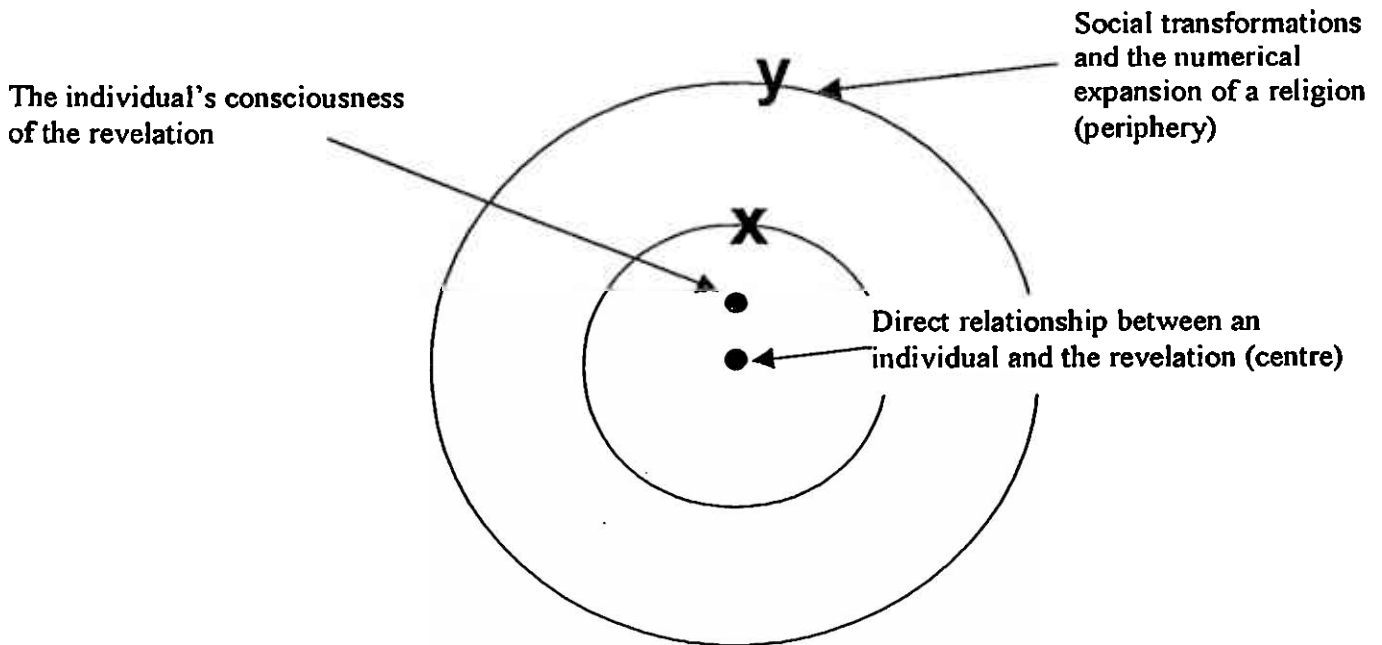
Religious revival and innovation are a response either to dislocation, alienation or deprivation. Secularization thesis becomes a crisis theory in that, people out of necessity search for new structures of meaning after the old structures are questioned and challenged. The response to the environment is a natural instinct in human beings. Therefore, the Bahais of Iranian origin were responding to their social-cultural environment by embracing the Bahai Faith. Social injustices under the garb of Islam influenced the Bab to talk on the time when God will usher in a new era. In the new dispensation, God will make manifest the promised of all religions. The Bab was reviving the Shia tradition of Islam, yet the call for revival brought innovation as the Babis separated themselves and started to grow. The growth was captured by Bahauallah as a charismatic leader and the movement grew as Bahai Faith. Both the Bab and Bahauallah were responding to the crisis in Iran and the need for change. But what does a Kenyan respond to in becoming a Bahai? Which religions in Kenya are becoming enfeebled or tame and worldly, so that they facilitate the acceptance of the Bahai Faith? The secularization thesis is used in the research to give insights to these questions.

As the description is almost a historiography, it may be asserted that, time and events make history. Thus the study infers from what others say of the time frame of the problem. Hannah Kinoti observes that the New Age Movement is a network of networks of various religious and non-religious institutions that come to offer hope to the human race. For the New Agers, the crises in the world today are a herald to the new era that humanity is stepping into. Consistent with this analysis, is the fact that the Bahai Faith incorporates the ideas of all religions thereby advocating the dawn of a

new era of unity and peace as 'the awaited' of all religions has been made manifest in the person of Bahauallah. Kinoti describes the New Age Movement within a Christian frame of reference. The present study incorporates the New Age ideas in answering the questions on the nature and spread of Bahai Faith in Kenya. In total, can the Bahai Faith be classified as a New Age Movement, if it can, what are the implications?

Attempting to describe the phenomenon within its time of reference is not enough; one should not forget the social setting that colour it, thereby explaining its status and why the adherents accepted it and continue to hold it. At this point, the social engineering role of religion is analyzed. Religion affects its social context in spite of all the agents of change such as secularization. Secularization makes one to almost lose The Beyond (God in the horizon) as Pratt Vernon puts it in the book Religion and Secularization (1970). But what occupies the space that was occupied by The Beyond? What are the implications of this loss when it occurs? Does this explain why people sometimes accepts the social engineering role of religion or a worldview without bothering much on the Other? J.N.K. Mugambi<sup>17</sup> argues that religion at its best should bring about social transformation and the enhancement of life. Can there be enhancement of life when religion is not at its best and what are the pointers to a religion being at its best? The current study assumes that the numerical growth and social transformations are at the periphery of a religion while the experiences<sup>18</sup> which Smart discusses are at the centre. When both the centre and the periphery are accorded their rightful status, the condition and process of religion at its best is realized. It therefore follows that when the centre of a religion is weak or negated, the periphery will wane too and what remains is the doctrinal element, the implication of which is

that, both qualitative and quantitative will be retarded. The periphery is directly proportional to the centre in terms of either strength or weakness.



**Diagram No. 1**

A diagram showing the place and relationship of the centre and periphery as represented by this study.

In presenting the Bahai Faith, the research uses ideas from the secularization thesis, insights from the New Age Movement and the aspect of social transformation role of religion. The ideas and insights are used as a guide into the inquiry of the Bahai Faith in Kenya. Integrating these ideas and insights help to develop a plausible research model. The model that the research uses highlights a market situation. In a market, there are commodities, consumers, and the distribution system. The distribution systems link the producers and their produce with the consumers. Theologically, the produce is the message of the Bahai Faith – the Bahai story as produced by the founders of the Faith. The consumers in the current study are the people who become Bahais in Kenya. The distribution system comprises the religious others who are Bahais living in Kenya but not of Kenyan origin, and the Bahai local

teachers aided by the institutions of the Faith. The distribution system helps in propagating the Faith in Kenya. The research calls the model the market model. The market model is developed to offer plausible explanations, descriptions and predictions that concern the research.

The market model is used due to the religious pluralistic environment that the Bahai Faith finds itself in. In such an environment, there are many factors that affect the consumption of the Bahai Faith. The factors should be treated holistically and not in parts. Individuals choose what they want and need. What facilitates this choice? The market model is in a position to describe and explain the nature of the Bahai Faith, the presence of the Faith in Kenya, the relationships within the Faith and the status of the Faith. From the descriptions and explanations, it is possible to make assertions on the future of the Bahai Faith in Kenya.

#### **1.6 RESEARCH HYPOTHESES**

- a) Bahai Faith is weak at the centre and this hinders its development at the periphery.
- b) Bahai Faith is very philosophical and thus, those who accept it must be the reflective ones.
- c) Those who accept the Faith have been disillusioned by the religions they previously adhered to.
- d) Social transformation is not taken seriously in the Bahai Faith and this affects the spread and growth of the Faith in Kenya.

#### **1.7 SCOPE AND LIMITATION**

Bahai Faith as a world religion is broad in content and context. With this in mind, the study focuses on the origins and the spread of the Faith in Kenya with

special reference to Nairobi Bahai Community. The study hinges much on the experiential and doctrinal dimensions thereby attempting a dialectical phenomenology (the relationship between different dimensions of religion) of Bahai Faith.

We only have to glance at religious history to see the enormous vitality and significance of experience in the formation and development of religious tradition.<sup>19</sup>

This implies that, the emotions and experiences of men and women are the food on which other dimensions of religion feed. For instance, doctrines without awe or compassion are dry. Put differently, it is important in understanding a tradition to try to enter into the feelings which it generates. However, one cannot avoid mentioning other dimensions given to connections thereof. This entails an understanding of the patterns of change, growth, and the effects of religious experience on the creative or organizational behaviour of the recipient, which the study calls transformations. The doctrinal dimension involve a collection of basic teachings on a religion's self understanding in relation to its history, environment and to other cultures.<sup>20</sup> The experiential dimension helps an individual to see the force of doctrines. Religion in this case becomes a way of life that brings transformations in people's lives.

Nairobi can be said to be a microcosm of Kenya and given the cultural plurality in cities, it is in them that big concentrations of people of various backgrounds are to be found. Also the first Bahai pioneers to Kenya began their work in Nairobi, and today, the seat of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahais of Kenya is in Nairobi.

When introducing the Bahai Faith in Kenya, the security problems in Nairobi forced the pioneers to focus on the western parts of Kenya namely Nyanza and Western provinces.<sup>21</sup> Western province has the majority (79,665) of the Bahais in

Kenya. From Western province, Vihiga district was chosen. Bahai communities in Vihiga district have the oldest Bahais in Kenya.<sup>22</sup> The old Bahais are living libraries – a vital source of information to the study. Another difference between Nairobi and Vihiga is that, while Nairobi has one Bahai community (local spiritual assembly), Vihiga has many. The time frame of this study is from 1950 to 1999. The Bahai Faith was introduced in Kenya in 1952. Thus, the Bahai history covers 49 years, which are the focus of the study.

Availability of resources also dictates the work an individual can do in a specified period. It is with all these in mind that the study is narrowed down to a geographical area and topic. Thus in describing the origin and spread of Bahai Faith in Kenya, Nairobi Bahai Community serves as a focus supplemented with information from the Vihiga Bahai Communities of Western province.

## **1.8 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

For the study to highlight details on the origin and spread of Bahai Faith in Kenya, both secondary and primary sources of data were used. On the part of secondary sources of data, a couple of weeks were spent in Jomo Kenyatta Memorial library, a week in the Kenya National archives and two weeks in the Bahai National Library in Nairobi. From Jomo Kenyatta Memorial Library, the content of the Bahai Faith was brought forward. Library research also provided information on the context of the Bahai Faith in some areas of the world especially in Europe, America and Iran – the country where the Faith originated. The National Archives provided details concerning the introduction of the Bahai Faith in Kenya. There was communication between the British colonial office in London and its representative in Nairobi during

the 1950s. In this regard, when the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahais of British Isles wanted to open Kenya to the Bahai Faith, the colonial office in Nairobi had to seek directives from the London office. The Bahai Library provided details on some aspects of the Bahai Faith and its expression in Kenya, including some statistical data.

Primary sources of data were also used. Nairobi Bahai community was chosen for field research and supplemented with some Bahai Communities from Vihiga district. The Nairobi Bahai Community was taken as the nucleus of the Kenyan Bahai Community, and Vihiga communities were sampled for corroboration. It is in Vihiga that the Faith has many adherents and the introduction of the Faith was carried out very early by the initial pioneers into the country.

Bahai Faith in Kenya is stratified in terms of: administrative bodies; nationality of the adherents; age in the Faith; and the age of adherents.

Administratively there are two institutions (Diagram 2) each distinct in structure and functions, although working hand in hand. On one hand is 'the institution of the rulers', directly from the Universal House of Justice (the international body that governs Bahais affairs worldwide), is the National Spiritual Assemblies of each country or state in the world. At the local level, there is the Local Spiritual Assembly to be found in cities and villages in any place that there are more than nine Bahais. These assemblies work hand in hand with various committees to enhance proper administrative activities. Each assembly whether national or local and even the international governing body is composed of nine elected members. Three members of

the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahais of Kenya and three members from the Local Spiritual assembly of the Bahais of Nairobi were sampled.

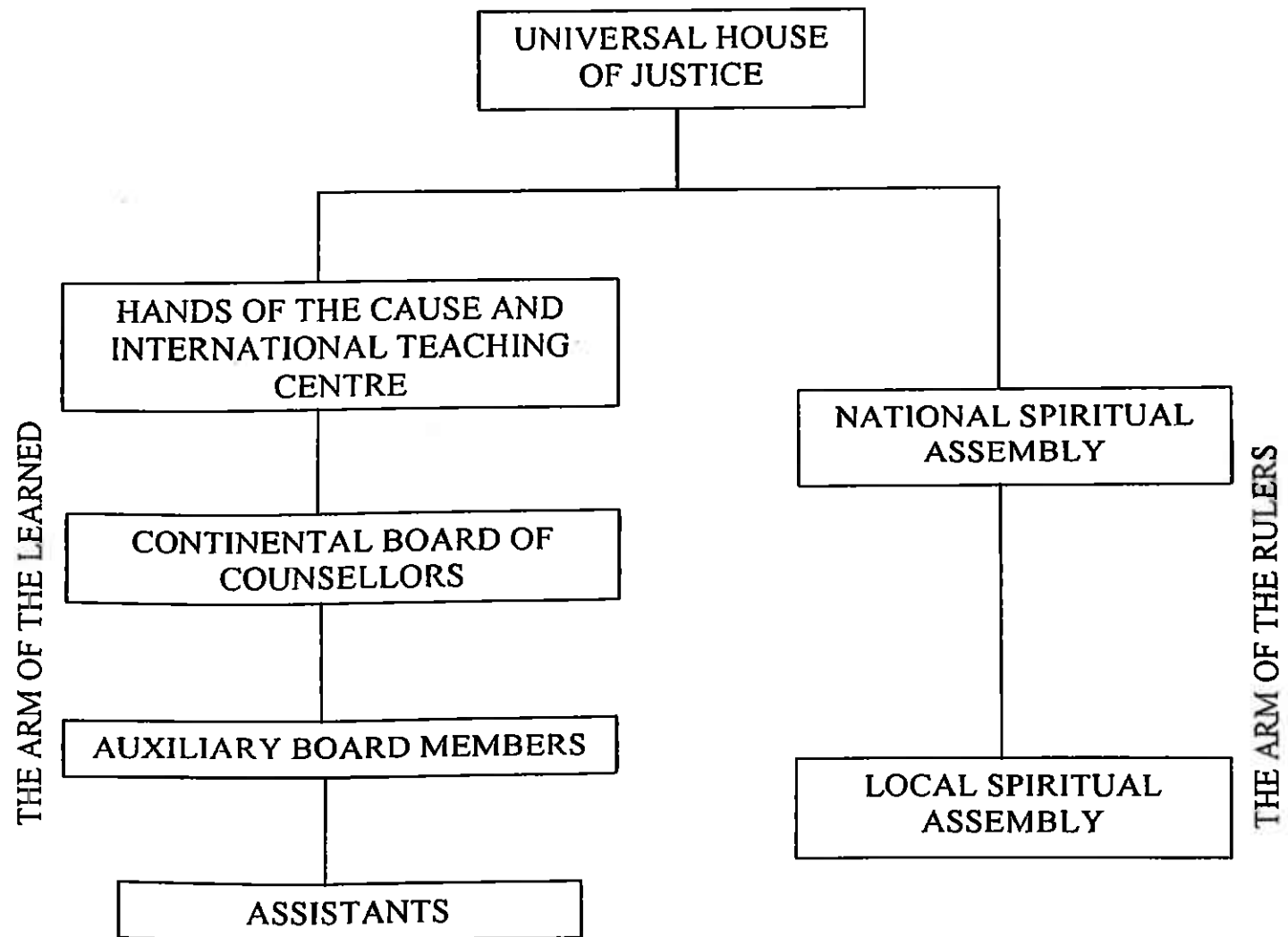


Diagram 2.

Diagram showing the administrative institutions of the Bahai Faith.

The other institution is that of the 'learned', but still headed by the international governing body. Directly below the international body, are the Hands of the Cause of God who are said to have been appointed by Bahauallah, Abdul-Baha and Shoghi Effendi. They were given the duties of propagating and protecting the Faith. Since they are no longer being appointed, their lot is diminishing in number. All the living Hands of the Cause constitute the International Teaching Centre. Other appointed



members also constitute the International Teaching Centre, the appointment of which is done by the international governing body. Below the International Teaching Centre are the Continental Boards of Counselors who then appoint their deputies known as Auxiliary Board Members who also appoint their Assistants. The institution of the learned is appointed starting with the International Teaching Centre down to the Assistants. In Kenya, the two arms are represented, the arm of rulers starts with the National Spiritual Assembly downwards while the institution of the learned start from the Counselor downwards. In this strata, those who were sampled are the Counsellor of the Bahai Faith in Kenya, four Auxiliary Board members, and two Assistants.

The two institutions at each level work for the general public of Bahai adherents. In Kenya, the general public is composed of both Kenyans and foreigners who are mainly Iranians. Most of the Iranians have become Kenyan citizens. It is worthy noting that, the Iranians come from Bahai family backgrounds unlike most Kenyans who have accepted the Faith not because they were born in Bahai families but because of the contact with Bahais in one way or another at one time in their lives. A majority of the non-Kenyan Bahais reside in Nairobi.

This stratification of the Bahai Faith favours the use of stratified sampling method in data collection. In this case Nairobi and Vihiga Communities were sampled. The Bahai Community in Nairobi was sampled since the seat of the National Spiritual Assembly is located in Nairobi. From a national office, a lot of information is expected vis-à-vis the history of the Faith. Another reason for sampling Nairobi as observed is the influx of foreigners who come as pioneers and reside in Nairobi. The foreigners or religious others are a factor in the Kenyan Bahai Community.

Taking history and numbers into account, Vihiga Communities were chosen. Historically, Vihiga district had the earliest contact with the Faith in relation to other rural areas<sup>23</sup> and hence the great number of Bahais in this region. The Vihiga communities that were sampled are: Shango and Kinundu in Vihiga division; Givogi and Kapinjari in Hamisi division; and Mambai community in Sabatia division. In these communities old adherents to the Faith were sampled using the snowball sampling method. From the community of Shango which was the starting point, old communities were identified and some of their members requested to provide the researcher with the information required. Most of the communities came to being since early 1950s.<sup>24</sup> It was observed that in each home of an old Bahai there was a Bahai Centre either permanent or semi-permanent, in other areas, plots of land not yet built but dedicated to Bahai Faith were also observed. However, most of them are not yet registered as Bahai property. Given the large number of old Bahais who consider Bahai Faith as their religion, there are many Bahai Centres where meetings are conducted. At least for every 300 metres there is a Bahai Centre. Each Centre was reported to have at least twenty active Bahais. The literature that the Vihiga Communities use is in English. Pamphlets and the few prayers are translated into Kiswahili. There is very little material in Vernacular – (Luhya) only pamphlets. In meetings, vernacular is used though the technical words are used as written and pronounced in the English texts. Words such as Bahai, Board Members, Counsellor, Ridvan and Bahai Fund among many words are used in vernacular as they are in English. The English texts have been translated from either Arabic or Persian.

In Vihiga, the researcher received a lot of collaboration from the two Auxiliary Board Members of the region namely Rhoda Ambogo and Timona A. Eboso. From their knowledge of the region, respondents were identified and sampled randomly. In one Community – Givogi, many adherents came after hearing that a certain person was researching on their Faith. They all wanted to give their form of the story. At one point, the researcher was forced to use group interview after which some members were given a questionnaire to fill and send it to the researcher.

### Methods Used

#### a. Participant Observation

In participant observation method, Bahai activities were taken into consideration. These are teaching activities, fire-side teaching activities that are held in the Nairobi Bahai Centre every Sunday or in Bahai homes where non-Bahais are welcome, worship and social activities during Bahai holidays, anniversaries and festivals and the Nineteen Day Feasts (meetings held at the beginning of every Bahai Month, where the Bahai month has nineteen days). During these observations, attendance, participation and the mode of conducting the meetings were observed considering the fact that the Bahais claim to have no clergy. In this regard, three activities of each event were observed:- three firesides, three Nineteen-Day Feasts, three holidays and three teaching activities. In Nairobi, two research assistants were used for correlation after which notes were compared. Nairobi Community provided most of the observational data. Three Bahai events were observed outside Nairobi namely: one conference in Nakuru, two firesides in Vihiga, one in Kinundu and the

other in Givogi Bahai Community. Photographs were taken during the sessions observed.



Some Bahais from Givogi Community, Vihiga.  
In the background is a Bahai Centre.



Bahais in a meeting at Nairobi Bahai Centre.



Bahais who had attended a conference in Nakuru (late 1998).  
Competitions on various subjects took place.

#### b. Questionnaire Interviews

It was not possible to have personal interviews with all members. For that reason, a questionnaire of fifty-one questions was used. The questionnaires were administered personally by the researcher. The purpose of the research was explained. One week to fill the questionnaire was allowed. Forty six questionnaires were

distributed out of which thirty eight were filled and collected. Thirty eight of the forty six were distributed in Nairobi and eight in Vihiga. In Nairobi, seven were not returned because the respondents bearing them traveled outside Nairobi and others out of the country. In Vihiga, one questionnaire was not sent back.

c. Personal Interviews

Personal interviews were conducted to get information from key respondents most of whom are members of the two arms of administration using the topics in the questionnaire. Thirty respondents were sampled, eleven from Nairobi and Seventeen from Vihiga and two from Nakuru. Among the eleven from Nairobi are: the Counselor of the Bahai Faith in Kenya, two Auxiliary Board Members, two of their Assistants, two pioneers and five newly declarants to the Faith. For the Counselor and Auxiliary Board Members and pioneers, appointments were arranged in their places of work and also at the Nairobi Bahai Centre. For the newly declarants and Assistants, interviews were conducted in the Nairobi Bahai Centre.

In Vihiga, the interviews were conducted in the respondents' homes. In Givogi Community, one home was used as members live close to one another. Key informants provided information which filled the gaps left by the information obtained through questionnaires and participant observation. This was because the researcher could clarify concepts and even get to ask more around a question. A tape recorder was used for two interviews. For the rest, a pen and note book were used to record the information. The researcher had to guide most of the respondents to stick to the questions and answer them in their respective contexts. For instance, worship and

ritual had to be defined regularly – many respondents thought that the Bahai Faith has no formalized worship and no ritual.

In total the sample was composed of sixty eight respondents, thirty of them interviewed by personal interviews and thirty eight by questionnaire interviews. The target was seventy six but eight did not send back their questionnaires thus the working sample is 68. (n=68)

### Limitations in the field

In the participant observation method, the limitation of objectivity was taken care of by having two research assistants who were briefed on what to observe and how to record the observations. This was followed by a comparison of the notes. Also more than one event was observed and an event that occurs more than once was observed thrice.

One of the major setbacks in the field was that the respondents did not understand why they were to say or write whatever was expected of them by the study. Their main question was: What will be the result of the exercise and who will benefit? It was explained to them that very little is known about their Faith, and their views and experience are tantamount to the knowledge of the Bahai Faith outside the Faith hence good public relations. This made the informants to be very cooperative.

Another setback was when the respondents wanted to know whether the researcher was a Bahai or not. This was a rather sensitive question, for if the researcher said he was not a Bahai, the respondents tried to convert him. The researcher realized that there are people whom the Bahais call seekers – people who are not yet Bahais but they go to the Bahais to investigate the truth about the Bahai

Faith. Sometimes the Researcher posed as a researcher cum religious seeker. For this purpose, the researcher had to learn Bahai greetings and the general way of doing things so as to create good rapport that necessitated data collection.

Another setback was when the camera used in the research failed to function after which another one was hired. A film of thirty six exposures was wasted. Otherwise, considerable amount of data was collected.

**End Notes**

1. Ninian Smart, The World's Religions. London/Glasgow: Collins/Fontana Press, 1989, p.479.
2. Ibid.
3. Festus Shayo, 23<sup>rd</sup> June, 1998 at Bahai Centre Nairobi.
4. Ninian Smart, The Religious Experiences of Mankind, London/Glasgow: Collins/Fontana Press, 1971, p. 18ff.
5. J.N.K. Mugambi(ed.), A Comparative Study of Religions, Nairobi, Nairobi University Press, 1990, p.7.
6. J.N.K. Mugambi, Religion and Social Construction of Reality. University of Nairobi inaugural lecture, 1996, p.45.
7. Effendi Shoghi, The Dispensation of Bahauallah, Wilmette, Illinois: Bahai Publishing Trust, 1944, p.102.
8. D.L. Edwards, Religion and Change. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1969, p.44.
9. The introduction by G. Tawnshed in the book God Passes By. by Shoghi Effendi. Wilmette, Illinois: Bahai Publishing Trust, 1944.
10. The Bab is also known as the Gate, real name is Sayyid Ali Muhammad (1819-1850) believed by the Bahais to be the forerunner of Bahauallah.
11. Ninian Smart, Dimensions of the Sacred, London: Fontana Press, 1996, p.xxiii.
12. Frederick Streng, Understanding Religious Life, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1985, p. 222.
13. Thomas Robins, Cults, Converts and Charisma, London: Sage Publications, 1988, p. 53-60.
14. J.N.K. Mugambi, From Liberation to Reconstruction, Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers Ltd., 1995, p. 60.
15. op cit. P. 57.
16. op cit.
17. J.N.K. Mugambi, Ibid., p. 40.



18. I am indebted to Ninian Smart's analysis of the experiences of religion: numinous, panhenic and contemplative. They are to be found in his book Dimensions of the Sacred, quoted above.
19. Ninian Smart, *Ibid.*, p. 13.
20. J.N.K. Mugambi, Religion and Social Construction of Reality, University of Nairobi Inaugural Lecture, 1996, p. 7.
21. Festus Shayo, Interview, Nairobi Bahai Centre, 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1998.
22. Charles Mugonye, Interview, Nairobi Bahai Centre, 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1998.
23. According to the 1998 Bahai Statistics, Bahai Faith is represented in all the provinces of Kenya.
24. Timona Emboso Mambai, Bahai Centre – Vihiga, 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1998.

## Chapter Two

### **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE BAHAI FAITH**

The chapter presents the story of the Bahai Faith focussing on the key founders of the Faith, their teachings, scriptures and the experience the story commands. The information is then viewed in terms of the religious supermarket for what it stands for is attempted.

#### **2.1 ORIGINS OF THE BAHAI FAITH**

The Bahai Faith, a new religion which emerged from the Shiite branch of Islam, sees itself as the latest but not the last appearance of the ancient faith of God<sup>1</sup>. As an offshoot of Shia Islam, the Bahai share in the Ismaili doctrine of the succession of the prophets and that each give a religious law adapted to his age. From the esoteric Shia sects mostly the Druses, there are two different subjects in the line of religious development. The superior is the Divine Essence itself – the supreme God, and the Universal Intelligence. The universal intelligence takes the human form to manifest God on Earth. Through the manifestation (universal intelligence), one can know God and his plans for oneself. The Bahai Faith shares in these teachings due to the influence of the environment in which the Faith sprouted.

In 1844, a young Persian named Sayyid Ali Muhammad (1819-1850) took the title ‘the Bab’ meaning ‘the Gate’. He announced the eminent appearance of a messenger from God or a manifestation of God who would be the most recent of a long line which include Moses, Zoroaster, Buddha, Jesus and Muhammad. The state of babhood meant that the Bab was the channel of grace from some great Person still

behind the veil of glory, who was the possessor of countless and boundless perfections by whose will, he moved and to the bond of whose love he clung.<sup>2</sup>

The Bab was according to Bahais the Imam Mahdi whose mission according to Shia doctrine was to dethrone the rulers of his world and establish the reign of righteousness. Accordingly, when the Shah refused his submission to this supreme authority, the followers of the Bab drew the sword for a holy war. From this time, the followers of the Bab – Babis started to be persecuted in Iran by the Islamic rulers. They were considered to be a hindrance to the fulfillment of the expectations of the Imam Mahdi. The political motif of the Babis was a threat to the Shah government and the Islamic rulers (Mulas). This persecution of the Babis continued leading to the formation of the Bahai Faith. The Bahais were forced to move out from Iran, thereby spreading their faith wherever they found asylum.

It can be construed that eschatological theories increase when social conditions become deplorable and degrading. This was the case in Iran during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, for social life was full of prejudice, hate, corruption, injustice and all manner of evil.<sup>3</sup> In these circumstances, the Bab admonished his followers to be distinct in brotherly love and courtesy, engage in useful arts and crafts, the poor to be provided for out of the use of a common treasury, while begging was strictly forbidden, as in the use of intoxicating liquors for beverage purpose. Thus, he was a reformer of the Shiite group of Islam to which he belonged. In this case, one can note parallels of the Babi movement with Islamic teachings. For instance, caring for the needy, God is one and cannot incarnate his essence, praying facing the Qibra and fasting for a month from sunrise to sunset. However, the Bab allowed women to uncover their heads in the

presence of men and even mix freely hence the celebrated teaching of equality of men and women among Bahais. This was against the common practice of the time.

The Bab identified true faith in God with moral purity and righteous deeds, thereby raising the spirit of hope. With time, he got followers who identified with his teachings against the wish of Islamic teachers and leaders who were conservatives. The conservative forces conflicted with the reformist forces. The conflict led to the killing of the Bab in 1850 in a firing squad. The conflict escalated as more people joined the Babi movement, fueling more conflict.

The Bab is depicted to have accomplished a two fold mission. One is that his announcement(dispensation) brought to an end the cycle of prophecy, he is believed to have revealed the oneness of all the prophets that preceded him. Secondly, he inaugurated a new cycle of reality in which the ancient assurances of faith were to be fulfilled in the unity of mankind. By so doing, he promised that soon 'the Promised One of all ages' would appear. Adib Taherzadeh asserts that:

With his (Bab) advent the Bab closed, on the one hand, the 'Prophet Cycle', which began with Adam as the first Manifestation of God in recorded history and ended with the Dispensation of Islam. and on the other, he opened the Cycle of fulfillment, whose duration, according to the Writings of Bahauallah and Abdul-Baha, will be at least five thousand centuries.<sup>4</sup>

Mirza Hussayn Ali Nur (1817-1892) was one of those followers of the Bab to be imprisoned and tortured. It is recorded in the annals of Bahai Faith that, during four months, chained in the notorious 'Black Pit' dungeon in Tehran, he experienced a revelation that he was the prophet foretold by the Bab. According to Adib Taherzadeh, the Most Great Spirit of God descended upon Bahauallah as he breathed the foul air of a filthy and pestilential underground pit, chained and fettered in the appalling

conditions and surrounded by criminals and assassins.<sup>5</sup> During his exile in Baghdad, he announced his mission in 1863. His followers came to know him as Bahauallah, meaning the Glory of God. Most of the Babis followed him.

From Baghdad, Bahauallah was summoned by the Turkish authorities to Constantinople. He was then exiled to Adrianople, and in 1868, he was exiled to Acre(Akka) where he wrote a series of letters to the world rulers exhorting them to reconcile their differences and instead devote their energies in establishing world peace. In Baghdad he revealed The Book of Certainty – Kitabi – Iqan in 1862 which is an exposition of Babi and Bahai doctrine and a demonstration of the mission of the Bab.

It is notable that, after the Bab was executed, Mirza Yahya, Bahauallah's youngest brother was to be in charge of the Babi community until the 'One who God was to make manifest' declared. However, after Bahauallah declared to be the one, disagreement arose that divided the community. On one hand, there were those who followed Mirza Yahya and on the other there were the followers of Bahauallah. Mirza Yahya's followers were identified as the breakers of the Covenant of the Bab and became known as Azalis. The followers of Bahauallah were designated as the people of Baha, the Bahais.<sup>6</sup> Strife between the two groups continued to escalate forcing the Turkish authorities to separate the groups. The authorities were after peace in the empire. Due to this separation, Bahauallah and his party were deported to Acre by then in the Syrian coast but today in Israel, while the other faction went to Famogosta in Cyprus. Since that time, Israel is considered by the Bahais as Holy land, hence the World Centre for Bahais is in Haifa – Israel where Bahais go for pilgrimage. At the

Bahai World Centre, material culture is to be found comprising holy shrines, gardens and the seat of the International governing body of the Bahais. The shrines are where the key figures of the Faith are buried – the Bab, Bahauallah and Abdul-Baha. Thus in Israel, the material culture of the Bahais is more evident than in other places. This material culture has been designated by the Israeli government as the eighth wonder of the world.<sup>7</sup>

The book revealed by the Bab is called the Bayan, which contains the laws of the dispensation that he inaugurated. But with the coming of Bahauallah and in his declaration, the Bayan was reformed and new laws came to being. Such a law for the new dispensation Bahauallah gave in the Kitabi – Aqdas – The Most Holy Book, which he supplemented with various epistles.

Hushmand Fathezain in the book, The New Garden (1996), maintains that, Bahauallah was a divine architect for he drafted a magnificent plan for the unity of humanity thereby laying the firm foundation of a sacred edifice to which he selected the necessary materials. Upon the death of Bahauallah in 1892, he left the execution of the plan in the hands of his eldest son Abbas Effendi (1844-1921). In Bahauallah's will and testament, Abbas Effendi also known as Abdul-Baha (Servant of Glory) was also appointed as the centre of Bahauallah's covenant and asked his followers to turn to Abdul-Baha for guidance.<sup>8</sup>

In Bahai circles the covenant is an agreement between God and his people, and in this case Bahauallah and his followers(Bahais). In the covenant, Abdul-Baha is also considered as the perfect exemplar of the writings of Bahauallah. Abdul-Baha was a close confidant of his father, hence his awareness of the teachings of his father. Bahais

believed that the covenant cements the Bahai world. In other religions, after the death of their founders there were no clear-cut understanding of leadership hence strife and divisions.<sup>9</sup> The Bahais cite the example of Christianity and Islam, and how they have continued to have mutation due to lack of identified leadership by their founders. Bahais therefore consider their religion to be a religion of founders and not of followers hence not diluted. Perhaps this gives the Faith its rigidity to change in the different circumstances it finds itself in.

Abdul-Baha was finally free when a new regime took over the affairs of the Turkish empire. Henceforth, he traveled widely to take forth the message of his father to new lands. The places he went are North America, Europe and North Africa. He died on 28<sup>th</sup> November, 1921 in Israel. In his lifetime, he wrote a lot concerning the writings of his father and offered interpretations to his father's teachings. He is believed to be the gift of Bahauallah to the Bahais, in this regard he is also regarded as the Mystery of God.

In the will and testament of Abdul-Baha, he appointed his grandson Shoghi Effendi Rabbani (1887-1957) as the guardian of the Faith. Through the guidance of Shoghi Effendi, the message of Bahauallah was carried to many countries of the globe. He also devoted himself to translating the written works of the Faith into English so that many people could be reached. This endeavour is rooted in the plan of Bahauallah, which calls upon all Bahais to arise for the promotion of the cause, to forsake their homes and their comforts and carry the message of Bahauallah to the far corners of the world. He initiated the formation and election of National and Local Spiritual Assemblies in the areas that the Faith was accepted. This he did with the help of

individuals known as the Hands of the Cause of God. Shoghi Effendi died in 1957 in London after which the affairs of the Faith were in the Hands of the Cause who were twenty seven in number, nine of whom stayed in Holy land while the rest went all over the world to execute a plan known as the Ten Year Crusade (1953-1963) the completion of which brought forth the election of the international governing body called the Universal House of Justice.

The above mentioned individuals - the Bab, Bahauallah, Abdul-Baha and Shoghi Effendi are the key figures of the Bahai story or narrative. With the activities of Shoghi Effendi, the Bahai administrative structures gained form. The centre of the Bahai narrative is Bahauallah who was heralded by the Bab and Abdul-Baha the centre of the covenant of Bahauallah. Shoghi Effendi put into action the plan of Bahauallah, the execution of which today rests in the hands of the Universal House of Justice. In this regard, the followers of Bahauallah are known as Bahais.

Disagreements about succession and leadership in the Bahai Faith started during the initial stages of growth. After the death of Bahauallah, his son Mirza Muhammed Ali, disagreed with Abdul-Baha the appointed leader of the community. Also in the times of Shoghi Effendi – the Guardian of the Bahai Faith, there were disagreements. The disagreements brings the issue of Covenant breaking. Covenant Breakers in the Bahai Faith are individuals who wanted the positions of leadership which were not confirmed unto them by the will and testaments of the core figures of the Faith. Their activities make the early history of the Bahai Faith very uncertain. With time, those designated to hold the mantle of leadership won the activities of the day while the Covenant Breakers grew weak. These leadership conflicts influences the



kind of history that is written and eventually communicated. The Bahais have their own version while the Covenant Breakers oppose the Bahai version. Each group claim to be authentic but as noted above the activities of the Covenant Breakers have waned out. The Covenant is very vital to all Bahais, it demands obedience to the writings and those with the institutions of leadership. Since 1963, the Bahais turn with total obedience and respect to the international governing body. In Kenya, the activities of the Covenant Breakers are not evident.

This study has so far attempted to put forward the core figures of the Bahai Faith and their place in the Faith. The core figures and their teachings form the Bahai narrative or story and in market terms, the commodity to be consumed. Now the study turns to the nature of the teachings and practices, and the structures the core figures established and the framework of their activities. In other words, the proceeds of the industry in the market economy.

## **2.2 TEACHINGS AND PRACTICES OF THE BAHAI FAITH**

The Most Holy Book (Kitabi-Aqdas) of the Bahais opens with the statement that:

The first duty prescribed by God of His Servants is the recognition of him who is the Dayspring of His Revelation and the Fountain of His Law, who representeth the Godhead in both the kingdom of His Cause and the world of His creation... to observe every ordinance of Him who is the Desire of the world.<sup>10</sup>

This statement addresses three personalities whose nature and being constitute the core Bahai theology. These three personalities are God, his servants and the dayspring of his revelation or manifestation of God. The interaction of the three beings bring fourth the Bahai teachings and practices.

Bahai Faith teaches that God is transcendent and that the human mind cannot be in a position to fathom him. This is because, since time immemorial God has been veiled in the transcendent sanctity of his exalted Self, and will everlastingly continue to be wrapt in the impenetrable mystery of his unknowable Essence. This is the reason why God appoints a perfect soul to be his mouth-piece or manifestation at different times and different settings. He does this because of his transcendence and his love for human beings. Quoting Bahauallah, Shoghi Effendi states that:

And since there can be no tie of direct intercourse to bind the one true God with his creation, and no resemblance whatever can exist between the transient and eternal, the contingent and the absolute, he hath ordained that in every age and dispensation a pure and stainless soul be made manifest in the Kingdom of earth and heaven.<sup>11</sup>

This teaching and understanding make the Bahai Faith a revealed religion where the dayspring or fountain for the revelation is Bahauallah himself. Bahais believe that Bahauallah reveals the eternal religion of God – eternal in the past and eternal in the future.

Bahauallah represented himself as a new and transcendent manifestation of God – not simply a prophet like Muhammad, but a quasi-divine Being, carrying still further the succession which began with Adam and destined to be followed by other Revelations, he also made his appeal to all people not simply to Muslims.<sup>12</sup> According to Bahais, Bahauallah is the vicegerent of God on earth and not the essence of God. The Bahais in this case direct their prayers to God through Bahauallah. To the Bahais, God is unknowable – it is only through the Manifestation of God that people can know God. The Manifestation of God is the link between people and God. There can never be an incarnation of God's essence. The Bahais use the figure of the sun, its rays

and the mirror to clarify this mystery. The idea is that in a clean mirror one sees the sun in the mirror but this does not make the mirror the sun. Theologically, the sun is God, the rays his Spirit and the mirror a perfect soul or the manifestation of God.

Bahai Faith teaches that human beings are elevated creatures in the created world. God has given each human being a rational soul. The rational soul gives people the capacity to know God through the Manifestation of God. Being spirituals creatures, humanity enters into agreement with God from time to time so that people's capacities are renewed and an ever growing civilization proceeds.<sup>13</sup> In this regard, the doctrine or Bahai theory of progressive revelation is born. The idea is that, God renews the covenant when the spiritual element in man degenerates. The same spirit comes at different times and acquires different names for example Abraham, Moses, Krishna, Buddha, Zoroasta, Christ, Muhammad, Bab and currently Bahauallah.

Having such a central place in the Bahai Faith, humanity was created for two reasons; the development of the power of the spirit, to cultivate the higher nature, to acquire virtues, to know and love God, and to grow towards God. Thus people must carry forward an ever advancing civilization. In regard to this, Bahauallah is seen to have inaugurated a new age. In the new age, the community of the human race will become the main arena of action, moving towards a worldwide government. This is an age of fulfillment for the Bahais. The maturity of the human race is stressed in connection with the teachings on One God, Mankind is One and that the religion of God is One. These three teachings form the basis of the New World Order of Bahauallah – a new civilization of humanity geared towards a new kind of people working for universal peace and strongly against all forms of prejudice, persecution

and conflict. The doctrines are an initiative by the Bahais to occupy social space. In the words of Mohamed Tozy, religious renewal aims at invading the social space by means of the promotion of local services.<sup>14</sup>

To the Bahais, religious truth is not absolute but relative given the stages in the growth of humanity. The stress for a world government is very strong where there will be gender equality, a world language – Esperanto or English. This is achievable through brotherly love and sisterly love, abstention from alcohol, service to humanity and working with an attitude of worship. Very ethical in outlook. There are also daily private and obligatory prayers, a month of fasting (2<sup>nd</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup>, March), as the Bahai month has nineteen days. Fasting is from sunrise to sunset.

Burial modes and marriage are rituals that the Faith upholds together with circumambulation of the holy shrines, however, many Bahais argue that their Faith does not have rituals. Bahai activities are conducted by the local or national spiritual assembly which appoints a person to oversee the activity. The Bahais have a worldly eschatology, teaching that change is afoot and a divine new age is imminent. In this connection, the World Centre of Bahais in Haifa – Israel, represents a fore-state of the coming paradise. The Bahais are therefore busy building the Kingdom of God on earth or what they call the Abha Kingdom. The world is expected by the Bahais, to be wrapped up by great catastrophes before the Abha kingdom is realized. The structures that are being laid down will therefore be a refuge to the human race. Bahais do not concern themselves with non-Bahai activities of social transformation unless it is on teaching activities. Later on, the study looks into the effects of such concerns, to the Faith itself and the outside world of non-Bahais.

As the family is the foundation of human society, marriage for the Bahais is sanctioned for all men and women, and it is a means of spiritual development for both partners. The marriage of Bahais means that both man and woman must become spiritually and physically united, so that they may have eternal unity throughout all the divine worlds, and improve the spiritual life of each other.<sup>15</sup> From this basic unit of the society, Bahais advocate for consultation as a dynamic process for finding truth and solving conflicts and other problems. Consultation is also recommended for all Bahai social gatherings. To individuals and the community of Bahais, a moral life has a direct influence on people's spirituality, happiness and development.

For the Bahais, the soul continues to develop even after death, for the spiritual worlds of God are many and there is no literal hell but the state of being far away from God and heaven is nearness to God. To this effect, the devil or Satan is non-existent just the way darkness is non-existent. Darkness is the absence of light, for Bahais evil is the absence of good. At this point, one asks the theological importance of an enemy whether imagined or real, or does it mean that mature responsible human beings do not have enemies of their development either in material or spiritual sense. People are always encountered by challenges that hinder their development. For the Bahais, such forces emanate from the selfishness of man, lack of detachment and pride.

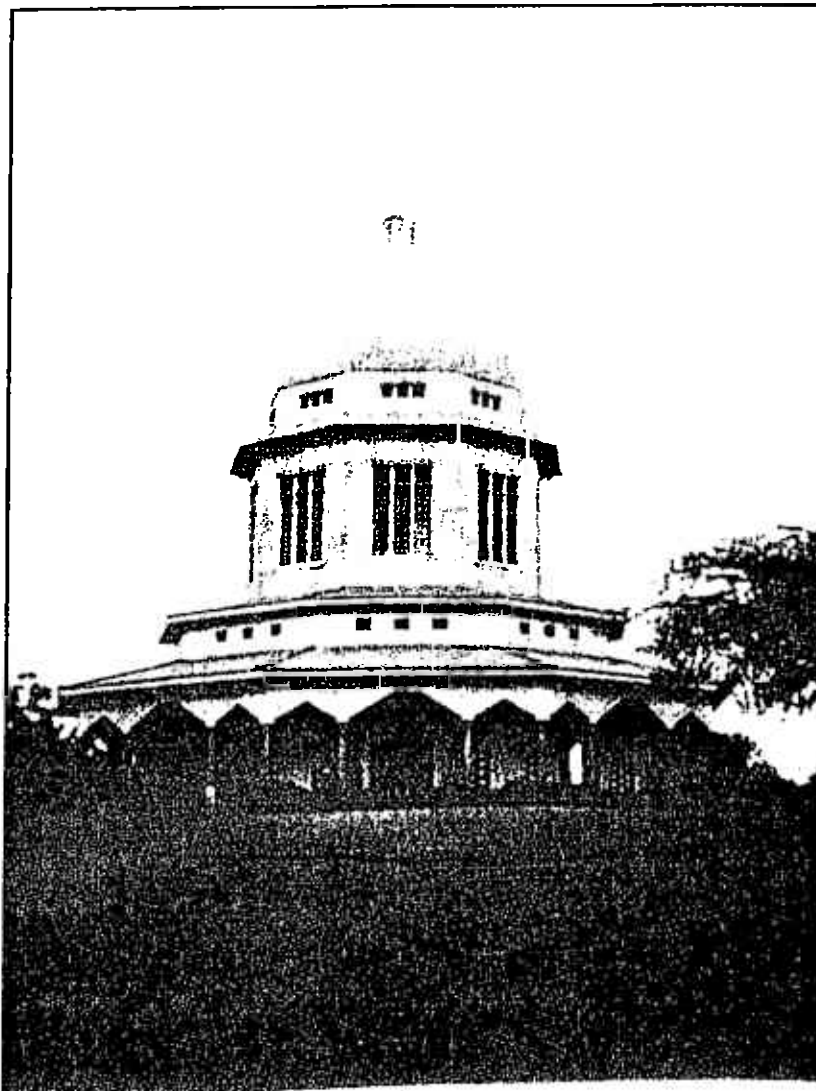
What is the impact of a change in attitude from a well defined enemy real or imagined, to an attitude that the enemy does not in whatever sense exist so that the image of the enemy is discarded? The issue of the non-existent of the devil or Satan is important to the acceptance of Bahai Faith especially for those who have grown up with the image, symbol or idea of the evil being. The study argues that, an enemy

helps man to develop into greater heights in protection and fighting mechanisms. The consciousness of an enemy make people to be serious with whatever they do. Enemies should be respected and understood in order to keep a critical distance from them by all means. For instance, if the Kenya government was conscious of an enemy worthy of any bombing in August 7<sup>th</sup>, 1998, measures could have been taken to cope up with the threat or risk. However, peace with neighbouring countries was exploited by the bombers as the authorities could not even imagine such kind of attack. The consciousness also spirals to the aspects of fighting the effects of the enemy. It is a truism that necessity is the mother of invention and one pointer to necessity is the control of enemies.

Philosophically thus, an enemy will applaud when he, it or she is thought not to be there. Human beings must have enemies in order to develop and to be serious. Enemies – imagined or real – must be respected, for without them, people cannot be in a position to measure their development or progress. In this case, when a community is used to an enemy attitude and then drastically changes to a no enemy attitude, that community is destined to collapse. Thus, it is hard if not impossible for committed Christians to become Bahais. In the teaching projects that the researcher attended, the Christians who were mainly the target of Bahais in teaching, reacted to the Bahai teaching of the non-existent of the devil or Satan. Some of these Christians identified the Bahai Faith as one among many groups of persons that worship the evil force.<sup>16</sup> The fact is that when teaching a faith, the teachers should wary of the environment inherited and acquired of the recipients. Mythically, the play Lwanda Magere (1991) written by Omtata Okoiti portrays the picture of a man assuming his enemies –

although borrowing from the story of Samson and Delilah to be found in the Christian Bible. The point is, never assume your enemy.

Bahai Faith has no priesthood or set form of worship according to the Bahai writings. Each local community meets once every nineteen days for the Nineteen Day Feast, with its three parts program of worship, community consultation and socializing. Worship includes prayers and readings from the scripture of the Bahai Faith and if the meeting is in the Temples, scriptures of other religions are read with no sermon. The Bahai houses of worship are open to all. Each house of worship has nine sides, each side with a door, a central dome symbolizing both the diversity and the unity of the human race. Decorative motifs include symbols of the various faiths that the Bahai Faith claims to fulfil. In Kenya, there is no Bahai house of



The only Bahai Temple in Africa situated in Kikaya hills in Kamapala, Uganda

worship(Temple) but in Africa, there is one in Uganda known as the Mother Temple of Africa. Bahais in Kenya meet in buildings they call Bahai Centres and in Institutes.

Where Bahai houses of worship are located, they are supposed to be silent teachers thereby attracting men and women of all walks of life to the Bahai Faith. This research postulates that, with time, worship will be formalized and professionals will be recruited and the best suited for that case, is the institution of the learned. This will happen if and only if Bahai Faith grows numerically and use the environment as a boost to teaching activities. However, many Bahais were attracted to Faith due to the fact that there are no clergy. This is part of a counter-culture that the Bahai Faith nurtures when talking of other religions and not the Bahai Faith.

The Bahai teachings and practices are contained in various books considered holy. However, there is the Most Holy Book – Kitabi-Aqdas which is a book of laws that are destined to govern mankind for at least a thousand years. The other prime book is The Lights of Guidance, by H.B. Homby, which is a compilation of the writings of Bahauallah that concern the issues that affect the Bahai Community worldwide. In the book, the quotations from the Universal House of Justice regarding any issue by the time of publication are entered.

Bahauallah is said to have revealed or written over a hundred books in his lifetime, which he wrote by his hand and others dictating to his secretaries. Most of the writings are in Persian and Arabic languages while others have been translated to English and other languages. In Kenya, Bahais have continued to interpret the Bahai writings to local languages.



Bahais are admonished to memorize and intone as much as possible the holy writings and prayers. This practice is observable in Bahai meetings. In December 1998, the researcher attended a conference in Nakuru Bahai Institute and made some observations. Long passages of the writings and prayers were being recited. All ages are encouraged to participate in such activities. Each Bahai must know and recite an obligatory prayer daily. There are three obligatory prayers from which one can choose which to use – the short, medium and long obligatory prayers. The short obligatory prayers should be recited once a day between noon and sunset. It reads:

I bear witness, Oh my God, that Thou hast created me to know Thee and to worship Thee – I testify, at this moment, to my powerlessness and to Thy might, to my poverty and to Thy wealth.

There is none other God but Thee, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting.<sup>17</sup>

The medium obligatory prayer is recited thrice a day – morning, noon and evening. The long one is recited once in twenty four hours. Each obligatory prayer has its requirements before and during recitation. But the three are regarded as equal in their spiritual potency.



A Bahai youth reciting the long obligatory prayer.

From the Bahai writings, the Sufi – mystic bias is evident. This can be demonstrated by two major texts used in the Faith but initially were texts from Sufi orientation. The two are the 'Four Valleys' and the 'Seven Valleys'. Their teaching is on the journey of the soul towards God – and the various stages of spiritual growth where the apex of the stages is the annihilation of the self or nothingness. The mystical elements excites many adherents intellectually, so much so that yoga and transcendental meditation are a practice among some urbanite and occidental Bahais.<sup>18</sup>

In prayer, the names of God are used to invoke the Holy Other (God). In this regard, one encounters a Sufi of great repute when reading the writings of Bahauallah, who attained the last stage in the seven valleys of being lost in the love of his Beloved. But differently he lived in the soul of his loved one. Hence admonitions of detachment are prevalent in the texts and prayers.

At this point, religious experiences<sup>19</sup> come to mind. The numinous experience emphasizes the otherness and tremendous and mysterious power of the Other. Panenhenic experience is a dramatic experience of one's unity with the cosmos – literary all in one-ish experience. Contemplative experience is a mode of self-discipline and mental focusing in a religion. The three experiences are generally bound to cultivate the allegedly ineffable feeling, compounded of awe, wonder, fascination, dread, a sense of strangeness, terror and other elements.<sup>20</sup> At the peak of the experiences, worship is expected which is spontaneous coupled with singing, dancing or at times speechlessness. The issue is emotional outpourings when an individual attains the presence of the religious experience or revelation. During the observations made on Bahai meetings, emotional outpourings are not a nature of the

meetings. This is a paradigm as the Faith originated from a Sufi background. This paradigm the study seeks to unravel and get its implications of denial to the individual and the community at large. The chapter on transformations deals with the problem.

Bahai teachings and practices serve the Bahais at individual, institutional and community level. At each level, Bahais are expected to carry out the activities of the Faith in accordance with the Writings. Thus, the Bahai Writings inform the structure of the Bahai Faith and hence the Writings are supposed to be read regularly by the Bahais especially in the mornings and evenings. Bahais are also encouraged to go for pilgrimage to Haifa – Israel where prayers are offered in the shrines of the core figures of the Faith. Bahais should also take it their responsibility to tell others of the Bahai Faith as there is no clergy. But what kind of a structure does the Bahai teachings and practice inspire and inform in the world?

### **2.3 THE STRUCTURE OF THE BAHAI FAITH**

The Bahai Faith is headed by a nine member council called the Universal House of Justice, whose spiritual and administrative centres are at Haifa – Israel. The council is elected every five years through secret ballot by delegates from each country that the Bahai Faith is to be found. Below the Universal House of Justice, the administrative structure is divided into two institutions namely the institution of ‘the learned’ and the institution of ‘rulers’ (see Diagram 2). The two institutions are connected to the international governing body by the International Teaching Centre, which comprises the Hands of the Cause, and some Counselors appointed by the Universal House of Justice.

The institution of rulers comprise of National and Local Spiritual assemblies. A national spiritual assembly is to be found in a country or state with various local spiritual assemblies. The two offices deal with all matters relating to the community including education or teaching the Faith. The members are elected annually during the festival of Ridvan, which occurs from 21<sup>st</sup> April to 2<sup>nd</sup> May. ( Ridvan is the garden in Baghdad where Bahauallah revealed his cause in 1863. Ridvan means paradise). Each of the assemblies is composed of nine members who later elect their office bearers from the nine. All administrative matters rest on the institution of the rulers. For instance budgeting, seeing to it that the messages from the international governing body are received and understood by the Bahais and also implementing the plans of the international governing body, among others.

The institution of the learned is given to the propagation and protection of the Faith unlike the administrative purposes of the institution of the rulers. The International Teaching Centre in coordination with the international governing body appoints Continental Board of Counselors who coordinate the works of the Faith in their respective continents and countries. The counselors are appointed every five years. After they have been appointed, then they appoint their deputies in various countries that they serve. Their deputies are called Auxiliary Board Members who also appoint Assistants to help them carry out their duties of propagating and protecting the Faith. This kind of structure is supposed to replace the office of the clergy.

At the national and local level, committees are appointed to help the assemblies carry out their tasks effectively. These committees are appointed given the necessity

of their activities and they report to the National or the Local Spiritual Assembly depending on the assembly that has appointed them. Such committees may include: Public Relations Committee, National Youth Committee, Local Women Committee, Arts and Drama Committee among many.

Teaching activities are very vital to the Bahais to the extent that international, national and local teachers known as pioneers are sent to areas of their choice and propagate the Faith in these areas. The pioneers are encouraged to settle in these areas, do business or even seek employment.

Owing to limitation of human resources with few adherents in Kenya, it is possible to find that at the national and local level, at least everybody has a formal role, and a majority have more than one role. Others serve in one office for quite a long time to an extent that an office becomes identical with the office bearer. This means that the person in office is equated with the office. Concentration of various roles to a single person results to: unfinished tasks, plans are diluted, burdening of individuals with too much responsibilities and laxity to which it is probable that one does not deliver to the best of his or her capacity. Polarization is likely to result and goals are hard to realize in this kind of state. This require basic management skills where goals are set given the resources at hand, and the process of realizing the goals is monitored and evaluated regularly with effective reporting. Also, those that are to perform any task should be the best for the set task. Otherwise, resources both human and material are underutilized or over-stretched beyond capacity, laxity develops among members for the vision is blurred by the management problems. An example in the Kenyan Bahai Community as learnt in the field is the workings of the Bahai

Institutes in the Four Year Plan, the plan was released by the international governing body to all countries in 1995, and even by the third year, the Kenyan Community is reported not to have understood the plan. This in turn affects the growth and spread of the Faith in Kenya as a lot of time and resources are used to streamline the understanding and input of individuals and the community as a whole to the Faith. The equation of who does what is hard to balance not withstanding the element of pioneers who are businessmen or employed.

The activities of the structures of the Faith cannot function without finance and good accountability. The Bahais all over the world are required out of their own discretion, to contribute to the Bahai Fund and to the various projects that the International governing body may initiate. Beside the willful contributions, there is what is called the right of God – Huququallah, which is 19% of one's net profits. Huququallah is calculated and paid annually. One is eligible to pay the Right of God when ones net profits are above 19 mithqals of gold, which when calculated to the dollar equals to US\$ 666 and when calculated to Kenya shillings, equals Ksh. 39,960.00 when the US\$ equals Ksh. 60.00. 19% of Ksh. 39,960 equals to Ksh. 7,593.<sup>21</sup>

Bahai pioneers are a group that is worthy discussing further especially their activities in relation to the Faith. Since they are not encouraged to depend on the Bahai Fund they look for employment and others do businesses, which are a great boost to the Faith and to personal economic development. However, less or even no time is spent teaching the Faith, in this case, the religious others become economic others in the Faith. It is in this regard that most pioneers are to be found in Nairobi. To

care for this anomaly, teaching activities are arranged by the Teaching Committee in Nairobi in order to take the Faith outside Nairobi and to enable the Nairobi residents to participate in the teaching of the Faith.

In any social setting, money is a big determinant when it comes to decision making. For this reason politics rests on an economic base. The economic others (pioneers) influence the decisions of the local community to the extent that the whims of the locals are sacrificed to the interests of the economic others. The economic others are not in a position to articulate properly the needs, aspirations and hopes of the locals. For instance, the researcher attended the celebration of the birthday of Bahauallah (12<sup>th</sup> November, 1998) at the Nairobi Bahai Centre. After the celebrations, each attendant was given a rose flower. In Iran, roses are valued so much even in the secular realm to the extent that during national holidays, roses are used to beautify the streets. In Kenya, only the people who have interacted with the Asians and Europeans are in position to appreciate and see the value of the rose. People who live in places where snow falls are influenced by the seasonal changes of the weather especially from winter to spring. Spring stands for the rejuvenation of life. Nature shows this rejuvenation when flowers and plants of various kinds show their beauty. Bahai Calendar is influenced by seasons – it starts on 21<sup>st</sup>, March when the sun is at the equator, when all parts of the world can receive sunlight. In Kenya, there is no winter. Thus, spring does not offer Kenyans a challenge to incorporate it in their thoughts and practices. Thus, giving everybody a rose flower in the Bahai Centre indicates how the aspirations of the Africans are overshadowed by what the pioneers think is the best. Even if the Bahai Writings advocate the use of the roses, the Africans have their own

way of showing concern and appreciation. The African Bahais should therefore be understood by their Iranian friends and what is best for Africans should be valued. Also, the African Bahais should appreciate the Bahai Faith in their best intuitions. By so doing, transformation can be evident.

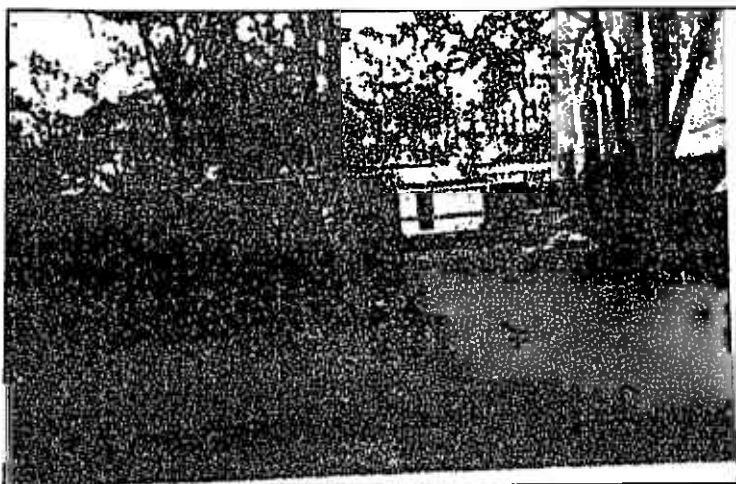
A description of the Bahai Faith is not complete without a discussion on the Bahai calendar (see appendix iii). The Bahai calendar is reported to have been 'revealed' by the Bab, it constitutes nineteen months each with nineteen days. The year starts on 21<sup>st</sup> March, which is the Bahai new year day, or Naw-Ruz. There are intercalary days (Ayyami-ha) which are from 26<sup>th</sup> of February to 1<sup>st</sup> of March. Together with Nineteen Day Feasts which are celebrated at the beginning of every month, the Bahais do celebrate anniversaries and festivals that go with the Faith throughout the year. On 21<sup>st</sup> March 1999, the Bahais entered the 156<sup>th</sup> year of the Bahai Era. The Bahai Calendar is fitted into the Christian calendar.

During the Nineteen Day Feast, matters of the Faith are discussed and new plans if any are laid down. The most celebrated of Bahai Holidays are: the Festival of Ridvan - a time of celebrating the period that Bahauallah declared his mission to his followers; the days of fasting which start on 2<sup>nd</sup> March to 20<sup>th</sup> March, this culminate in Naw-Ruz when the Bahais celebrate the new year day. During the Festival of Ridvan the elections of the national and local spiritual assemblies worldwide are conducted yearly while in every five years same period, the elections of the international governing body are held. The Festival of Ridvan starts on April 21<sup>st</sup> to May 2<sup>nd</sup>. Other celebrated days are the birth of Bahauallah on November 12, birth of Bab on 20<sup>th</sup> October and the declaration of the Bab on May 23<sup>rd</sup>.

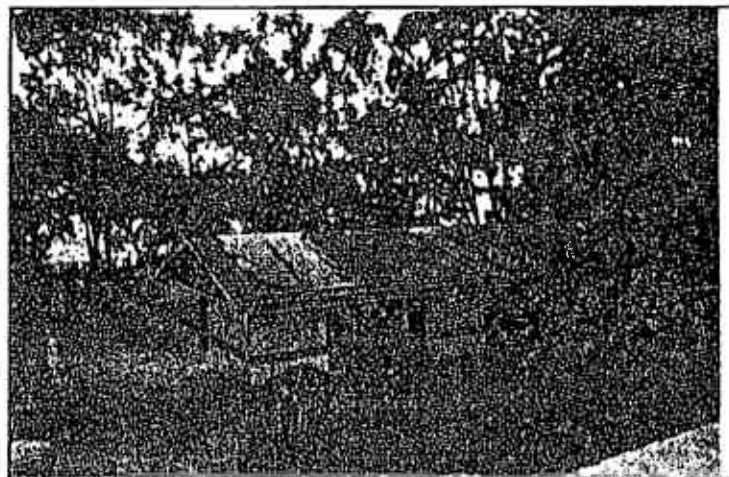


Most of the festivals, anniversaries and Nineteen Day Feasts fall on week days in the Christian calendar and are held after work mainly from 6.00 p.m. to 8.30 p.m. This is the situation in Kenya. The implication of these night meetings vis-à-vis the transport, security and convenience aspects in Nairobi is that, very few adherents attend such meetings – those who have personal cars, those assured of transport and those who reside in the neighbourhood of the Bahai Centre. Without this understanding, one can make the conclusion that Bahai Faith is a faith of an elite but weekend activities and rural visits proof otherwise.

Perhaps to ease the problem of the above inconveniences, formal transport arrangements or any elaborate programme can be made to cater for the victims. Ideally, the victims are encouraged to lodge in the Guest House within the compound of the Bahai Centre. Few individuals go for this option while a majority of them stay in their homes. Meeting times and days hinder and at the same time encourage a great deal community cohesiveness. This cohesiveness affects the group identity and activities of recruiting more members. A strongly cohesive community can achieve much in all its endeavours than a weak one. A good indicator of cohesiveness is participation in community activities. The structure of the Bahai Faith should therefore utilize all available resources and opportunities to enhance its community life and in return get the impetus for growth. In Vihiga, it was construed that meeting regularly both on Bahai meeting days (official) and Sundays (unofficial) have helped the communities to grow in strength and in numbers. However, in Nairobi only official meeting days are taken seriously hence a problem in community life given the above mentioned problems.



Nairobi Bahai Centre and the Guest House. (Front View)



The rear view of the Guest House



Bahais celebrating a Nineteen Day Feast at the Nairobi Bahai Centre

## 2.4 WHAT THE BAHAI FAITH STAND FOR

Ninian Smart explains that though Bahai Faith arose from within the matrix of Shia Islam and makes use of its eschatological themes, teaching on the idea of the Hidden Imam, it has evolved into a quite different faith with its own distinctive and modernizing characteristics.<sup>22</sup> Thus, the Bahai Faith advocates for a global state, a world culture and civilization which make the Faith attractive to the reflective folk who are dissatisfied with the rivalry of the more traditional religions, also it attracts those that are marginalized in any society. It is expected that its quantitative growth is higher in times of social strife and among societies that experience alienation and

subjugation. This is mostly due to the doctrines of: unity of mankind, God is One, and Religion is one. Bahai Faith therefore starts as a religion of the dissatisfied, marginalized and alienated, but with time, it stands on its own.

Writing on the concept of new religious movements, Eileen Barker wrestles with the idea of newness or uniqueness of the movements. She concludes that most of them have their roots in other religions but they are termed new because they arose in a new form with a new facet of their beliefs or with a new organisation or leadership which renounced more or orthodox beliefs and ways of life.<sup>23</sup> Bahai Faith has inherited Islamic characteristics from the Islamic background it originated from. However, in the endeavour to satisfy the claim of fulfilling other religions, more than Islamic flavour is evident.

Frederick Streng talks of perennial philosophy in the context of religious dialogue. In perennial philosophy, infinite reality is like light which passes through a prism, the result are various shades of blue, yellow, green and others. No one of these colours, which are like the different cultural forms of religion, is light itself. But taken together, the individual colours of the spectrum become a single light invisible and illuminating.<sup>24</sup> In Bahai circles, religious truth is not absolute but relative. This bring forth the Bahai theory of progressive revelation. In Bahai Faith, human beings are admonished to search for truth and not to follow traditions blindly. However, it is ironical that the truth that one should search is within the confines of Bahai Faith. The Faith can be construed as an agent of change. In regard to this, whatever continuity there is between religions and between traditional religion and secular cosmologies is affected by the considerations of truth claims, selection of ethical priorities and

practical decisions in implementing ideals. Thus it is difficult for persons with strong religious claims which are not Bahai in nature to drop them and become Bahais. However, if not taken too far, perennial philosophy propagate a tolerance base of religious ideal in a religious pluralistic society.

Paradoxically, the study of the progressive theory of religion brings a challenge to other religions where man is challenged to open new vistas of meaning, to stretch and even to tear the traditional forms and also recognizing oneself in the symbols and spiritual practices advocated by the Bahai Faith. Other religions are seen as outdated. However, those who are strong in the said old tradition can account for the change and continuity of their old religion. For instance, the Christianity of the 4<sup>th</sup> century is not the Christianity of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The progressive theory implicitly argues that old is bad, of which this is not always the case for instance, wine gains quality with age. Still one cannot preach de-camping by camping. Meaning, if there was only one religion, Bahais could not claim to unite people in another 'new world religion'.

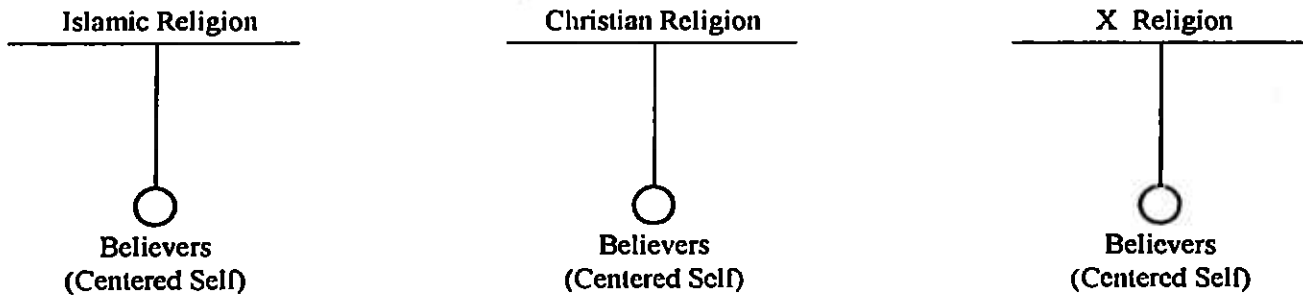
The progressive theory of religion justifies the Bahai characteristic of interpreting other people's religious doctrines anew. For instance the idea that most Christians interpret the Bible literary while it should be interpreted spiritually. Hence the death of Lazarus was not literal but spiritual.<sup>25</sup> Reinterpreting others' experiences in a different frame of reference sacrifices the context for new meanings. Reinterpreting others this way brings doubt and creates gaps in the minds of those that are not strong in the faith being reinterpreted. Why should a society wary of another society's 'problems' in a bid to put itself in order? It is with this in mind that Bahai Faith is viewed as a New Age Movement in chapter four of this study. In this case, it

will be argued how Bahai Faith portrays New Age Movement's characteristics, and hence it can be said to be a commentary on world religions that it claims to fulfil.

Samuel Beckett in the play Waiting for Godot, paints the picture of the predicament of waiting, where man waits for somebody who is present but the standards of waiting are faulty. Hence, the unrealized present and the experience that waits to be attained, escapes human mind. Theologically, Bahai Faith portrays the same idea of a God who is present without the awareness of the people of that divine presence. This is depicted by the title of the book God Passes By, authored by Shoghi Effendi. As far as this issue is concerned Bahai Faith summons man to experience the God he has been waiting for, for he has come. Thus, Christ has returned in the glory of the Father yet the Christians are still waiting. For the Bahais, attaining the presence of the one who has come and awaited by many can only happen if man stops to busy himself with literal interpretations and human standards of divine realities.<sup>26</sup>

Bahai Faith can be seen as a new pivot or a pendulum, the functioning of which will carry human beings towards more self-awareness and consciousness of the surroundings. Shifting of symbols occur when people become Bahais. The primary symbols become secondary, another symbol stands for the central symbol. A new world view is born to guide human beings in their personal endeavours. Others instead of shifting, resonate with the new pendulum's frequency. By and by, change starts. At this point Bahais advocate for the creation of a new world order on the basis of the writings of Bahau'llah who is the core figure or symbol of the pendulum.

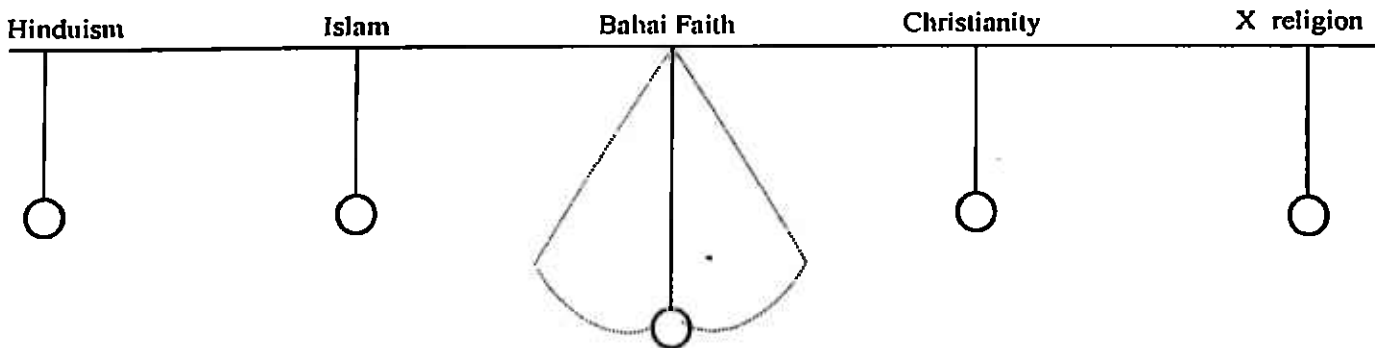
**Diagram showing religious pendulums**



Each religion is independent and has its own space.

Diagram 3.

In resonance, Bahai Faith sets the pace for the other pendulums.



Bahais aim at their religion becoming the only one in the social space but they start with resonance – Bahai Faith is like any other religion.

Diagram 4.

In Shifting, Bahai Faith is portrayed as the only pendulum.

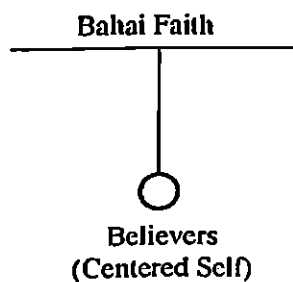


Diagram 5.

In shifting, Bahais expect all the followers of other religions to join Bahai Faith (see Diagram 5). This is the goal of the progressive theory of religion advocated by the Bahais.

Intrinsically, Bahaiism is the spirituality of any religion when fully grown. At the practical level, human beings recognize each other as authentic in their different environs and reality styles. No wonder the call for unity, peace and justice is a concern for the majority of mankind especially those of goodwill in every society regardless of their orientations. The call for maturity and responsibility is to be found in every worldview be it secular or religious. This should be the point of celebration, where peoples of different orientations join hands to celebrate and share their experiences and in return boost more progress in the affairs of humanity for sharing calls for cooperation but not for competition. The underlying issue is including one another in the struggle for life.<sup>27</sup> Thus it is possible for any worldview to claim finality but a finality with recognition of the authenticity of others.

The Bahai Faith in principle presupposes a religious and cultural crisis meaning that the dominant value complexes and religions are being challenged by the Faith in its claim to completeness using the theory of progressive revelation. This idea kindles the idea of counter-culture in which, people and in this case Bahais, are against what has been offering satisfaction. Thus in the religious supermarket, Bahai Faith represents a new and effective reality style, beckoning humanity to abandon what it has been using. A counter-culture has serious implications to the adherents and the entire Bahai community. Will this counter-culture bring forth the new world order? Counter-culture negates religious pluralism, its practice and continuity and seeks to assert itself to the environment.

In religious life, the Bahai Faith portends the de-institutionalization of spiritual life. Individuals should be responsible for their own spiritual growth. Mankind is seen

to be of age hence no need for clergy. But one wonders about the effects of shifting from a religious orientation with clergy to a religion with no clergy. This is another point where counter-culture is exhibited. To this effect, anything from other religions especially Christianity is outdated, for instance listening to a sermon. For Bahais, one should always feed oneself spiritually.

By and large, it can be asserted that Bahai activities that enshrine its content have helped to widen its base, restate its fundamentals, reconcile its aims, demonstrate its refine-ness and to assist in the realization of its highest aspirations. The activities are achieved and carried forward amidst the call of unity of mankind, oneness of God and oneness of God's religion.



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## Chapter 3

### **THE SPREAD AND CONSOLIDATION OF THE BAHAI FAITH IN KENYA**

After dealing with the story of the Bahai Faith, the study turns to investigate how the Bahai Faith came to Kenya and the factors that facilitated the process. The nature of the Bahai Faith in Kenya is analyzed with reference to Nairobi and Vihiga Bahai Communities. Also the challenges to the process of growth and consolidation are highlighted.

#### **3.1 THE INTRODUCTION OF THE BAHAI FAITH IN KENYA**

Between 1949 and 1950, the Guardian of the Bahai Faith, Shoghi Effendi Rabbani gave a two year plan to the National Spiritual Assembly of British Isles in which the assembly was required to open new areas to the Faith especially those under the British government in Africa. The assembly accepted to execute the plan by sending pioneers to the new identified lands. This plan made the assembly of British Isles to start communicating with the colonial office in Kenya so that Bahai pioneers could be given immigration documents to settle in Kenya. The communication started in late 1950 and ended by late 1951. The reason for the correspondence was that the colonialists did not understand anything about the Bahai Faith, while for security reasons they wanted to dig out all the information and know whether the organisation's activities were within the interests of the colonialists. Though British missionaries enjoyed the protection of the colonial masters, and were also encouraged to take the gospel to areas where the British government had spheres of influence, the question was, how mission oriented were the Bahais since they were not Christians?

Also in their application to settle in Kenya, their activities besides teaching the Faith would include doing business and seeking employment where possible.

This desire to come to Kenya among the Bahais, developed a lot of concern to the colonial administrators who were in charge of the colonies in East Africa. They all wanted to know who are the Bahais, are they worthy to be allowed into the colonies at a time when security was at a blink. The London Colonial Office giving advice to the inquisitive officers in East Africa, one time replied:

In general, we feel with you and with others who have approached us on this matter from colonial territories, that, it is in general undesirable that any brand of missionary, particularly non-Christian missionaries of this sort, should be admitted and we shall frankly be happy if we can find grounds for the exclusion of the particular people who form the subject of this letter.<sup>1</sup>

From the contents of the letter and the advice therein, the Bahais were delayed with no explanation as the offices continued to seek for more information from all sources available. Incidentally, their search made them aware of the activities of the Bahai Faith in the world and what it teaches. The teachings on obedience to the government, non-partisan politics and respect for the dignity of kingship appealed to the colonialists for they could use the religion to pacify the natives who were by then becoming difficult to contain. By January 1952, the Bahais were allowed to apply for immigration through the principal immigrations officer in Nairobi who was to deal with the Bahais as individuals and not as groups.

It is after this go-ahead that Ted Cardel and his wife arrived in Kenya as pioneers to propagate the Bahai Faith. The same year, Aziz Yazidi joined them. These pioneers were encouraged by the National Spiritual assembly of British Isles to settle in Kenya so that they could achieve much for the Faith. The main reason for

their coming was to set the ground ready for the Ten Year Crusade which was to start in 1953 and go on up to 1963. The crusade was intended to establish local spiritual assemblies in various localities and at the national level the delegates from the local spiritual assemblies to elect a national spiritual assembly for Kenya in this case. At the international level, delegates from different countries were to elect for the first time in 1963, the international governing body of the Bahais. The Ten Year Crusade was thus for areas that the Bahai Faith had made a footing all over the world.



Aziz Yazidi – one of the oldest Bahai pioneer in Kenya during his visit to Kenya (late 1998)

In Nairobi, the Africans were not allowed to mix freely with the Europeans. There were areas that Africans could not go or visit. Teaching was therefore difficult given the climate of non interaction. Most of the times as reported by Aziz Yazidi, the Bahai pioneers went to the Nairobi United Club opposite St. Paul Catholic Church

along State House Road. The situation of lack of trust was exacerbated by the Mau Mau war of independence in central parts of Kenya.

The pioneers thus visited limited places during the initial times. The Bahais learnt that colleges and institutions of learning were a major contact points between the Bahais and the Africans.<sup>2</sup> However, meetings became hard to hold in Nairobi due to the state of emergency in the early and mid 1950s, the pioneers opted for the Western side of the country in Nyanza and Western province. The districts within Western province also received pioneers from Uganda.<sup>3</sup> Thus, Vihiga district had an early interaction with the Bahai Faith. Another factor that contributed to the presence and acceptance of Bahai Faith in Kenya was the ease interaction of Bahai pioneers and the Africans. By mixing freely in an environment that did not recognise the humanity of the African as such, the Bahais won the hearts of the Africans who then decided to accept the Bahai Faith.

In Western Kenya, Maseno College provided an easy contact with the Africans who would later introduce the Bahai Faith to their localities. As the Africans started becoming Bahais in Kenya via the various methods of teaching, the Faith started to spread. Local Spiritual Assemblies were elected and also the National Spiritual Assembly for the Bahais of Kenya. For the Bahais, the Ten Year Crusade was very fruitful in terms of new adherents.<sup>4</sup> During this period, many pioneers visited Kenya, majority of whom went to the Western side of the country in Western and Nyanza provinces. By 1955, there were eight local assemblies in Kenya, one in Nairobi and the other six in Nyanza and Western provinces. In 1955, the Regional National Assembly of Central and East Africa based in Kampala was elected. Members

included: Kenya, Uganda, Tanganyika(Tanzania), Rwanda – Urundi, Belgium Congo, Comoro Islands and the Seychelles.

The introduction of the Bahai Faith in Kenya owes much to pioneers and the established institutions and assemblies of the Faith which at the time decided to put into practice the wishes of the Guardian and later, the international governing body. Thus, with the establishment of the institutions that cater for a country's interests in Kenya, brought about the spread of the Faith in the country, for they could monitor at close range Bahai activities in Kenya. By 1955, the stage was thus set for the Bahai Faith to start its major activities in Kenya.

### **3.2 THE SPREAD AND CONSOLIDATION OF THE BAHAI FAITH IN KENYA**

As the pioneers continued to propagate the Faith in Kenya, with time the Faith started to grow quantitatively. During the initial stages, there was intensive and extensive interaction between Bahais and the locals. This is especially so during the first decade of the Faith in Kenya. This culminated in the election of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahais of Kenya in 1963. The assembly comprised eight Kenyans and one pioneer – Aziz Yazidi. The Faith continued to get new adherents as statistics show (see Table below). What facilitated this consumption of the Bahai Faith?

<u>Year</u>	<u>Communities</u>	<u>No. of Bahais</u>
1960	445	3,040
1970	698	25,564
1980	6,970	56,308
1986	9,444	100,376
1998	9,500	131,772

**Table 1.** The numerical growth of the Bahai Communities and individual Bahais in Kenya.

At this point, it is worthwhile to consider the words “convert”, “recruit” and “commitment”. “Recruitment” refers to joining a group, while “conversion” implies radical change in personal belief and identity. “Recruitment” tends to be rather sudden whereas conversion is a gradual evolutionary process though at times, it can be sudden. In “conversion”, one shifts the pendulum of identity to the point that one comes to see oneself as a particular reference group sees one. Put differently, “conversion” entails an individual’s decision to adopt a new faith. In “recruitment”, a club or society adds membership through invitation of new ‘recruits’. Recruitment may figuratively mean resonating to another person’s reality style though one retains his or her stance.

Shifting and resonating affects one’s commitment to the new group or reality style that one responds to. In shifting to the new locus, the personality of an individual is affected in total while resonating affects only a part of the person. For recruits their involvement, while seemingly intense and total, tends to be ephemeral and ultimately shallow. This is the challenge the current study faces in dealing with the spread and consolidation of Bahai Faith in Kenya.

Thomas Robbins<sup>5</sup> enumerates the variables of conversion, where he states that, conversion depends on: degree of social pressure involved in conversion; temporal duration of conversion experience; level of affective arousal involved in conversion; affective tone or content of conversion experience; and the belief-participation sequence. For most Bahais, the above variables with the exception of the second one, brought them to the Bahai Faith. The meetings that the early pioneers conducted, acted as social pressure in various situations aimed at inculcating the Bahai principles.



This was done in a very affective way so that the pioneers become like brothers to the locals. In Vihiga, the pioneers resided in African's homes thereby creating social bonds and developing confidence and trust with the locals.<sup>6</sup> Ultimately, the locals



Seated is Musa Sipendi – one of the oldest Bahais in Kenya from Kapinjari community, Vihiga district. With him are his grandchildren and on the right side is the researcher.

accepted the Faith arguing that ‘if these men can accept us the way we are and be comfortable in our situations, accept to walk long distances on foot, then their religion must be very true and living in their hearts’.<sup>7</sup>

Though the above variables are seen as conditions for conversion, they are also effective means of recruitment as the rational and ethical part of the message is accepted out of respect but not so much on conviction. It is in this regard that in some areas the Bahais were seen as drunkards or social misfits.<sup>8</sup> However, the picture continued to change as the understanding of the Bahai Faith deepened and conviction brought about change in character and to some, personality. But what leads one to be converted?

Besides the variables of conversion, Robbins names six keys to conversion, which he calls the dimensions of conversion. The dimensions include: intellectual, mystical, experimental, affectional, revivalist and coercive.<sup>9</sup> The intellectual dimension entails an individual who privately investigates the possibility of new grounds of meaning, and of being or is inspired through contact with disembodied media such as books, pamphlets, television or even lectures. In this pattern, a reasonably high level of beliefs is attained prior to actual participation in organized activities.<sup>10</sup> The Bahai Faith with its ornate teachings and many publications appeal to many this way. A majority of those who joined the Faith in 1970s-1990s attributed their adherence to this fact. It may be asserted that for those that are contemplative and liberal, it is easier for them to close over from one perspective style to another, than the conservative ones.

The mystical dimension of conversion is characterized by high subjective intensity and trauma. It may involve ecstasies, awe, love or even fear. Belief then ensues which is followed by participation in organized actions.<sup>11</sup> Few among the respondents accounted their being Bahais on the mystical dimension. The few felt guilty of their past and they were seeking a way out whence they came across the Bahai Faith. Belief ensued and was then followed by participation in organized actions. This group of people was found in Vihiga district most of whom were very old for they were above sixty five years and they accepted the Faith during its early days in Kenya when they were young.

Thomas Robbins argues that, when an individual experiences acute and persistent tensions within a religious problem solving perspective, he moves to define

himself a religious seeker, after he encounters the movement at a crucial turning point in his life thereby he forms an affective bond with one or more adherents...<sup>12</sup>

According to Robbins, the affectional conversion highlights the importance of affective bonds to the conversion process. Religion becomes a place where troubles are dealt with and peace is offered in return. This only applies to the troubled, otherwise the peaceful will stick to their places which they are okay with.

The element of dissatisfaction and disillusionment encourages man to drop the traditional orientation and then experiment on new ones. Experimental conversion is present when individuals constantly decide to participate in a movement without yet having accepted (or totally discerned) the movement's worldview.<sup>13</sup> Chances are that when traditional systems fail to deliver as per the expectations of individuals, then an attitude of dissatisfaction and disillusionment thrives, people feel betrayed thus they seek for systems that will deliver. This is a case observable for all social systems especially political systems. In this regard, majority of Bahais talk of how their former religious background mostly the catholic and mainstream churches failed to spiritually satisfy them. Others like Raphael Munguti, Haron Bogita, Bob Kinya and Bernard Gitonga talked of the divisions within the Christian fold. Since Bahai Faith calls for unity, they argue that it is more practical and reasonable. But as found out, the dissatisfied lot were never strong in their religious backgrounds, that is, they had no devoted commitment. To these people, Bahai Faith gives them a chance to be practical, but when the issue of transformation is highlighted, the practical-ness they talk about is far from realized.

It is worth noting that, as society changes, needs change; so do the means of satisfying the needs. Must old traditions die to give forth new ones? In most cases, they do not, they also change with change. The quicker they do it the more they avoid disillusionment and dissatisfaction among their members. But history has it that the traditional orientations change after some of their members have gone out to find another orientation. An example from church history suffices, for when the reformation took place it was followed by counter-reformation. The underlying current is the conflict between conservatism and reformist tendencies in any society.

There are those who become Bahais out of curiosity, they see the Bahai Faith as another religion and go ahead to experiment and finally, interest becomes involvement. These kind of people participate in Bahai activities till affective bonds are established, and then as a sign of respect, they accept even to sign the declaration cards.<sup>14</sup> This aspect of Bahaiship(sic) illuminate the social dimension of religion and the desire for individuals to be in a group that recognizes them and makes them feel human. In return, a sense of identity is created. In this case, those who are denied affection or place to feel they belong, find refuge in an orientation that seeks to confirm their humanity.

The new community becomes a family in which the basic needs are met. During the colonial days, it is probable that this dimension attracted many to the Bahai Faith. The affectional dimension was further fuelled by the Bahai aspect of counter-culture. Counter-culture here means, an attitude and practice that goes opposite and against what is dominant. The dominant culture is also seen as outdated, crude hence the need for change. The dominant culture is also seen to be on the ebb. In general,

social circumstances make a person identify with a different religious orientation other than the one he is used to profess.

Revivalist and coercive dimensions of conversion entails programmed endeavours geared towards recruiting people into an organization. The two dimensions share the high levels of social pressure and effective arousal and the sequential priority of participation over belief.<sup>15</sup> The two motifs (revivalist and coercive) are not keys to being a Bahai in Kenya.

The probability of being recruited into a particular movement is largely a function of two conditions: links to one or more movement members through a pre-existing or emergent interpersonal tie; and the absence of countervailing network.<sup>16</sup>

It is observable that friends, families and work-mates facilitate the shifting or the resonating process in the Bahai Faith. To this effect, for the Bahais to be successful in facilitating the conversion of recruits, the Faith need to be structured in such a way that it can foster intensive interaction among group members.

Age in Years	Number interviewed	No. influenced by families to be Bahais	No. influenced by friends and work-mates	No. influenced by Bahai Teachers
50 – 90	20	6	–	18
30 – 49	24	14	4	6
15 – 29	24	19	–	5

Table 2. Table showing how the sampled Bahais came into contact with the Faith.

n=68

The above table shows that, most of the old Bahais in Kenya were influenced by Bahai teachers to become Bahais while those of middle age and the youth were highly influenced by family ties. This challenges the teaching methods for they seem

not to add to the number of Bahais in Kenya. This poses a future challenge to the Faith, for the table shows that the Faith can end up to be a family and friendship affair.

When a religion does not satisfy the needs of its devotees, it indirectly creates a nexus of innovation and diffusion of new ideas that are sometimes rooted in the prophecies that are not yet fulfilled. The new group consider and teach the fulfillment of such prophecies. This may explain the innovation novel idea of a new society which partly constitute new combinations of existing cultural elements. This can be a kind of cultural mutation where new forms are changed forms of the old kind. At this juncture, the doctrine of progressive revelation impressed those that wanted something else, yet clinging to some form of the old tradition. It is to this effect that the Bible proofs assured many Kenyan Bahais of the authenticity of the Bahai Faith as the return of Christ in the person of Bahauallah. In regard to this, the book Thief in the Night (1997), by William Seers, is oft quoted by many as a facilitator to their Bahaiship. The book tries to show how in 1844-45 religions especially Christianity were waiting for their promised messengers. William seers then uses the Biblical prophecies of the second coming of Christ to show how in 1844 really 'the return' took place.

William Seers argues that the waited one came but in a new name, that is Bahauallah. The Christians are challenged by the Bahais to accept the Lord they have been waiting. The theme of waiting and a coming that is not realized comes closer to that of Samuel Becket in the play Waiting for Godot. The predicament is waiting for somebody one has never seen, hence the imaginations of how he will come. In general the standards of waiting are faulty. This idea is used by the Bahais when teaching

Christians about Bahai Faith. This is where doubts and gaps are exploited. According to Bahais, literal interpretations of scriptures hinder mankind from getting spiritual meanings in the scriptures. To them, the Christians do not understand the Bible for if they do, they can recognize that Christ has come back!

However, the Christian perspective of Christianity is not the same as the Bahai perspective of Christianity or of any other religion. It depends on the frame of reference that one is using. To Christians, the Bahai perspective of Christianity is erroneous. In this case, the strong religious adherents find it hard to join other religious movements. But for those that do not understand their faith properly, they can and will be tossed around like the waves of the sea by the wind. Religious irony entails doubts and gaps that can be compared with shimmering but flowing sand which can swallow the curious individual unawares. Can one build a permanent house on this kind of foundation?

Another observable factor of Bahaiship, is that quite a big number of Bahais never used to have any appetite for religion either of their parents, neighbours or any other. This background influences their attitude towards other religions. They do not fully understand why people should continue waiting for Christ yet he has come! The Bahai Faith found them literary out of the church, mosque or temple. But they had reasons to stay away from the church and to disassociate themselves with any religion – they were dissatisfied or disillusioned. They could not feel at home in the religions that they now criticize as outdated. Capitalizing on this situation and highlighting on the unity of mankind and of religion, the Bahais won their confidence. What was being represented intrinsically is not a spirituality or transformation, but a

commentary on world religions. With time, the religious others(pioneers) recruited more locals. This disillusionment explains the growth of the Bahai Faith in the 1950s in Kenya, when the church was being identified with the colonialists. This group of early declarants has given the Bahai Faith in Kenya the first generation Bahais.

Bahai achievements in Kenya, be they qualitative or quantitative can be attributed to the Guardian of the Faith – Shoghi Effendi, and from 1963 onwards to the international governing body. As noted earlier, Shoghi Effendi issued the Two Year Plan which made Kenya to come into contact with the Bahais. The Two Year Plan was followed by the Ten Year Crusade - 1953-63 where many Kenyans received the Faith. Since 1963, the international governing body of the Bahais has continued to issue plans to all Bahais in the world through the Continental Counselors and the National Spiritual Assemblies (see appendix for the plans). The plan for the late 1990s is called the Four Year Plan, where the goal is 'entry by troops' into the Bahai Faith. Thus the Bahais have continued to spread the Faith through the directives of the international governing body.

Some of the activities geared to the aid of 'entry by troops' are: holding symposia where people of capacity (influential) are invited, for instance lecturers, doctors, lawyers among others. The objective is that, after hearing about the Bahai Faith, they will tell others for they (the people of capacity) have an influential role in the society. On the process, the Bahais get sympathy from the participants. Other activities include, holding firesides - meetings in Bahai's homes or Centres in which non-Bahais are invited to be taught the Bahai Faith, distributing pamphlets that contain Bahai teachings, and holding official teaching programs in various parts of the



country. All these activities make the Bahai Faith very assertive and aggressive in spreading their Faith. But why does the assertiveness and aggressiveness fail to show an impact on the results? This is a question of transformation for ironically as observed and gathered during the field research, Bahais are not aggressive in trying to understand their Faith and making it their own.

Sharing ideas should be envisaged in the meetings that Bahais hold with non-Bahais other than trying to convert people. Sharing will enhance the continuity of symposiums with increasing number of attendants. Conversion and recruitment tendencies make the non-Bahai participants to loose interest for their views are not acknowledged. The essence of Bahai Faith should be well articulated to avoid misunderstanding. For some can regard the Bahai Faith as part of the many non-governmental organizations that have mushroomed in Kenya in the 1990s.<sup>17</sup> Viewed thus, the spiritual base of a religion is negated.

The contribution of pioneers and other teachers to the spread of the Faith cannot be underestimated. For instance, Vihiga district and its environs received many pioneers in the early times of the Faith in Kenya. Even "Hands of the Cause"<sup>18</sup> visited Kenya on teaching trips. These included: Amatul-Baha Ruhiyyih Khanum (wife of the guardian of the Bahai Faith), Enock Olinga, Dr. Rahmatullah Muhajir, Musa Banani and Hooper Dumbar who is presently a member of the Universal House of Justice in Haifa – Israel. The pioneers traveled widely making known the Bahai Faith in Kenya.

Travel teachers, as they are called, do not have time to study a people's culture and know how to present the Bahai message contextually. This shortcoming has resulted in calling Africans pagans, or using the idea of tabula-rasa – meaning a clean

slate on which anything can be written. African generosity and hospitality have frequently been abused. This is where the nature of the Africans make them prone to all agents of change. For instance, hospitality make the African very malleable to the extent of denying himself the authentic goodies of life (personality) for the sake of a foreigner. Hospitality and generosity arouse the affection and experimental motifs (dimensions) of conversion. When a person affectionately experiments with another person's perspective of reality, the original perspective is sacrificed. For example, Chinua Achembe, in the book Things Fall Apart, demonstrates how the Europeans abused the hospitality of the Africans. In the evil forest that the Ibos abhorred, the Europeans built their centre including a church. The Ibos thought that the spirits in the evil forest would turn against the Europeans. Ironically, the Europeans turned against the Ibos. With time, acceptance becomes alienation, since the foreigner is not ready to understand the Africans and accept their perspectives of reality. When teaching a people, their culture must be well understood, failure to which the new ideas will have no effect and if accepted, they become a source of conflict and strife. Any society destined to overcome the obstacles of its development must learn from the mistakes of others not necessarily from its own mistakes. For example, Bahais view Christianity as out-dated. If the Bahais were to positively understand the factors that have helped Christianity survive, the Bahais can learn from the Christians. The Christian elements of fellowship and personal relationship with Christ can aid the Bahais in a positive direction. The negative attitude that Bahais have towards Christians hinders this learning and the consequential development. In general, societies that share the same environment depend upon one another for their survival. This interdependence when

practiced alleviates conflicts since no single society will try to dictate to another. There is therefore no assertion of superiority.

When it comes to the consolidation aspect, the internal growth of the Bahai Community is assessed. This is where living the life of a Bahai is important through which the adherent is expected to inspire goodness in the lives of others, and also the vision and pure ambition a person calls forth in the lives of others. To this effect also, the organisational structures should stand the test of time in terms of delivering what they are expected to deliver. The consolidation efforts start with individuals whereby all decreed practices and teachings are followed. Consolidation also brings forth a subculture of a people who are serious with what they stand for and are ready to give others the best they can. The society accepts the best that cares for its highest good – social relationships are stressed and quality life by example and the endeavour to overcome the obstacles of the common good for all. Consolidation of individuals leads to the consolidation of institutions and the community at large.

The natural test of a person's faith is living as required by the faith he accepts. Bahais are admonished to let deeds and not words be their adorning. Positive actions bring effective growth of the community. The study has approached the issue of consolidation and strength of the Bahai Faith indirectly. Indicators used include: numerical growth and dwindling of membership, care of facilities, participation in Bahai activities, social bonds in the Faith and to some extent the understanding of the adherents about the essence of Bahai Faith.

It is expected that a well consolidated community will be cohesive, with its own distinctive characteristics – not what the community is not but what the

community is. From the statistics of 1997 and 1998, it is recorded that in mid 1997 there were 1200 local spiritual assemblies in Kenya and by late 1998, there were only 420 assemblies.<sup>19</sup> In Nairobi, statistics as at 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1998, show that there are over 1000 Bahais (see below). The average attendance as was observed during Nineteen Day Feasts and festivals is seventy attendants at most.

Thus, only 7% of the registered Bahais attend the Bahai meetings. This problem of consolidation the research grappled with till several explanations were identified: Signing a declaration card is not in itself enough to being a Bahai; a recruit is not a convert; resonating is not shifting and understanding is not belief. These explanations hinge on how the Faith was introduced, methods used in Kenya and the people the Faith attracts. Shoghi Effendi asserts that:

One thing and only one thing will unfailingly and alone secure the undoubted triumph of this sacred cause, namely the extent to which our own inner life and private character mirror forth in their manifold aspects the splendor of those eternal principles proclaimed by Bahauallah.<sup>20</sup>

It follows that a Bahai is that person whose inner life and private character, mirror forth the eternal principles proclaimed by Bahauallah. Bahauallah teaches unity but by observing Bahai meetings, it appears that the Iranians(pioneers) keep to themselves, and the Kenyan Bahais too. For instance, in Nakuru, a national youth conference was held but only Kenyans were present. Thus, the Bahai community is not well consolidated.

THE STATISTICAL REPORT

National Spiritual Assembly: Kenya

Information as of: 2 May 1998

REPORT ON BAHAI POPULATION

Return to the World Centre by: 31 August 1998

CIVIL AREA (District, State, Province, Territory, Island, etc.)	Men (21 and over)	Women (21 and over)	Total Adults (21 and over)	Total youth (15-20)	Total Children (under 15)	Enrolments since last reporting period				Since last reporting period	
						Men (21 and over)	Women (21 and over)	Youth (15-20)	Children Registered	Births	Deaths
Central	5447	1313	6760	189	556	8	-	5		1	
Coast	5800	1302	7102	61	780	8	7	4			
Eastern	3106	655	3761	387	490	6	5	6			
Nairobi	710	422	1132	65	52	6	5	5		2	2
North Eastern	36	20	56	6	-	-	-	-			
Nyanza	13727	3438	17165	1561	7501	35	9	32			
Rift Valley	6550	1691	8241	501	3480	34	10	24			1
Western	59122	20543	79665	4157	10738	307	102	164	5		
Total Kenya	94498	29384	123882	6927	23597	404	138	240	5		

Table 3. A statistical representation of the Bahais of Kenya province-wise.

### **3.3 CHALLENGES TO THE SPATIAL SPREAD AND STRENGTH OF THE BAHAI FAITH IN KENYA**

#### **a) Non Clerical Structure of the Bahai Faith**

According to Streng F.J., to have any kind of religious commitment is to make choice among the ideas one uses, the relationships one has with others and the symbolic and aesthetic sensitivities employed thereof – the most profound limitation is not however in the finite [though vast] number of possibilities in a given situation; the greatest danger often is to crystallize the status quo with religious fervour and thereby reject the dynamic, the uncontrollable, the indefinable and undefined character of the spiritual.<sup>21</sup> Change and continuity in a religious orientation are hard to balance especially in a secular and pluralistic society.

Secularization is the process through which human beings become responsible for his destiny amidst many choices. The non-clerical structure in Bahai Faith raises the issue of responsibility in the sphere of individual life. According to Bahai Faith, humanity is of age and can therefore live without the clergy. Clergy are considered by Bahais to be responsible for religious divisions. The clergy are only useful when humanity is not yet of age. Secularization therefore becomes a means towards a decentralized religious life.

However, mankind has an affinity to authority and power, hence submission and obedience are virtues that man embodies. This non-clerical structure of Bahai Faith is misused as polarizations start in the religious institutions. In any social institution, there must be a distribution of social influence whether official or unofficial. If the distribution of social influence is not formalized and well articulated, groups emerge that seek to influence the decision making trends in the society. For

instance, in Central Province of Kenya, this kind of polarization has wrecked the Bahai Faith to the extent that various factions have emerged, which are opposed to one another.<sup>22</sup> The result is that the facilities are deserted and others misused. To this effect, spiritual realities are not seen to operate in the day to day activities of the Bahais. What takes place is the wielding of power at the expense of the growth and consolidation of the Faith. In Vihiga, a respondent argued that Bahais should participate in the election of the Auxiliary Board Members being the ones who know the right people more than the Counselor who does not live daily with the local Bahai communities.<sup>23</sup> When teaching about the non-clerical structure of the Bahai Faith, Bahais would like the world to believe that any religion with priests and clergy, is prone to divisions and factions. However, though the Bahai Faith is non-clerical religion, there are misunderstandings and factions within the Faith. To cope with this problem of factions, the institutions of the Faith should be strengthened and well articulated to all the Bahais.

b) Attention given to the new converts

With polarization, one worries for the new adherent – how they will be confirmed in their new faith and understanding. A reading culture is needed for the adherent to grow toward maturity in the Faith. During meetings, individuals should share their life experiences, joys, hopes, fears and future aspirations. This kind of sharing can only take place in an environment of trust. The deepening sessions as was observed are ad-hoc rather than formal. In ad-hoc groupings, people with similar interests or life experiences join together in studying the Holy writings. The importance of deepenings should be seen in the light of enhancing the identity of

individuals as they study with other members of the community. Thus, when meetings fail to take place formally, the social bonds of the community will wane and eventually individuals will start stratifying themselves according to their problems, concerns and experiences. At the time of field research, such ad-hoc groups were noted. The major group comprised of Bahais from Central province but working in Nairobi. This kind of ad-hoc grouping denies some people access to the formed groups, those who do not have similar interests and qualifications are locked out. However, it is a good example of how social bonds come to being when they are not encouraged. The advantage is that new adherents from the sphere of influence of the group will have it so good for they will have a group to identify with.

Fellowship entails the promotion of a community amongst those who become committed to follow a certain religious orientation. Thus, fellowship is an indicator of growth in a community. Promotion of fellowship should concern the Bahais especially those in the institution of the learned. Individuals should be understood and welcomed into the fellowship not out of duty but out of love and concern for the wellbeing of the individuals who staff the community. This requires training in the basics of social groups and politics together with psychology. If this is done, the learned will do their best for the betterment of the community.

This kind of training can take place in Bahai Institutes and Centres, otherwise when non-professionals carry out a professional's job, results tell more about ineffectiveness and efficiency. People must always seek to perfect their art for effectiveness and efficient performance. Thus, for purposes of consolidating and spreading the Faith, 'the institution of the learned' is better placed than anybody else



in the Faith to be well versed in matters dealing with human beings that they are serving. The pioneers can also be included in this category where an understanding of people before and during teaching activities should be sought. When new adherents join the Faith, they should be formally cared for. To this effect, research should be part and parcel of the teaching activities. Eventually, the Bahai Faith will recognize the vital role of individuals who understand better the main writings and central teachings of the Faith. Such individuals are indispensable in the spread and consolidation of the Faith. Such people will require special training in order to manage the Faith and the adherents in a way that is harmonious with the growth of the organisation.

c) Lack of professional skills in carrying out Bahai activities

For any social organisation to be successful, the factors of production must be well understood and put into their rightful place. The factors of production include: capital, labour, time and management. Bahais do not give much time to the Bahai Faith as they claim to have no priesthood. So the Faith is given very little attention. Others claim that there is no money to pay for people to work for the Faith. This means that professionals' job is done by anybody. Provided you understand the writings, you can be allowed to translate them! Such a translator works during his free time for there is no remuneration. At the end, very little is done and that little sometimes may be shoddy. The research has found out that the Bahais can grow very fast numerically and qualitatively if they were to use professional skills to carry out the activities of their Faith. The Faith can still prepare its own professionals or skilled labour for effective performance and efficient realization of goals.

d) Negative attitude towards other religions

The Bahai Faith came to Kenya after the religious market had been highly exploited by Christians, Muslims and African Religion. Both Christianity and Islam are missionary religions and have established mechanisms of spreading their glad tidings and also they protect their 'catch' very skillfully. Without skilled personnel, the Bahais cannot measure to the competition of the Christians and Muslims in making and protecting their 'catch'. Much work is needed to convince the African to join the Bahai Faith. The ones that get convinced are those that are not yet strong where they are or have no religious institution with which they identify. This lot of people as argued somewhere else harbour doubts on what they believe and do not believe. The weak ones in their beliefs, join the Bahai Faith in an attempt to experiment with a new perspective of reality. For the ones that have no religious orientation, with which to identify, they take Bahai Faith as a weapon to fight other religions. The essence of a faith is thus lost. For the two groups, progressive doctrine of religion propounded by Bahais appeals much for they are already tired with their 'present' and want something new. They thus develop a negation of the present (counter-culture).

A counter-culture thrives so long as there is something to oppose. This kind of negation is a pointer to some extent, on how a people are alienated from old bonds of unity. These are people who want to express their identity but in the reverse direction and in opposition to the other people's identity – kind of defiance. The function of religion should be to supply meaning, integration and identity of oneself in relation to others and the world but not the other way round. Bahai Faith targets those that do not have any faith and those that are weak in their faiths. Any religion seeks to claim its

converts fully and to continue adding more converts. Practically, there are things in a religion that people do not fully understand and can be interpreted in different ways. This means that there are gaps in the faith and answers are not fully provided. This research calls this aspect, religious irony. Exploiting religious irony (teaching on the basis of the gaps of a Faith and its doubts), bring forth a people who want to do things differently. Such a community thrives so long as there is something to negate. This affects the consolidation aspect for it is like building a house on rabble.

The exploitation of gaps and doubts allegorically creates resonance, the frequency of which is set by the pendulum that has been made to swing (see Diagram 4). Resonance frequency is directly proportional to the force applied to the primary pendulum. Practically, the frequencies decreases with time. Religiously, one cannot rely on the experience of another to sustain his own religious fervour. In this case stumps of indigenous trees remain to give forth new offshoots which may even be grafted or grow sideways. This is the irony or paradox of resonance and counter-cultures.

In a pluralistic religious environment, religious traditions should be in a position to share with others whatever their characteristics. Sharing can achieve much more than attack which produces defense in return. The teachings should be well propagated so that individuals who are not Bahais can understand and perceive what is given by the Faith. This calls for change of attitude especially when social conditions are not on the ebb meaning each situation and time need its unique teaching method. Different groups of people should thus be taught differently. Shoghi Effendi asserts that:

Far from aiming the overthrow of the spiritual foundation of the world's religious system, its (Bahai Faith) avowed, its unalterable purpose is to widen their base, to restate their fundamentals, to reconcile their aims, to reinvigorate their life, to demonstrate their oneness, restore the pristine purity of their teachings, to coordinate their functions and to assist in the realization of their highest aspirations.<sup>22</sup>

This quotation shows the kind of attitude that the Bahais should have in teaching their Faith to non Bahais. This kind of attitude encourages sharing and not competition.

The study found out that in Kenya, the Bahai Faith repudiates the deep experiences that warrant the growth and development of any religion. Lack of spontaneity and enthusiasm is the probable result and the implication is that those who are disenchanted with the routinized and unexciting old faiths cannot find accommodation. It may thus be asserted that, when a religion does not cater for the needs, aspirations, hopes and fears of its adherents, the spiritual shoppers find themselves in a conundrum of choice. The variegated and provocatively packaged array in the spiritual supermarket fails to deliver as per the advertisement and expectation. In return, converts stay at home instead of attending religious functions, others return to their old orientations and others search for new grounds where satisfaction is to be found. Religious experience affects the communication of the religion – when the experience is weak the communication is also weak.

e) Effective articulation of the Bahai Faith

When there is articulate communication, the revelation is shared and it helps to bring into being a community of faith. The community embarks on the transformations generated by living the revelation. To this effect, individuals speak out of the abundance of their hearts, speak of an experience that they are a witness to and shared in its results. Mankind has emotional inclinations in religion. People thus

desire to experience the divine presence or the confirmation of their belief and their understanding of the Holy. From these inclinations, transformation starts to affect the outside world of individuals. An African proverb states that, though an eagle flies very high it has very strong legs. The eagle can fly, but since there is more to life than flying, the eagle needs strong legs for perching and feeding. Theologically, the two elements of religion – the spiritual and social, do have a purpose for humanity. When this duality is harmonized, the growth and development of the faith will come about and social transformation will be rooted on spiritual transformations. This means that, for a religion to be world transforming, it must at first transform its adherents in all the various aspects. A balance should thus be struck between the social and spiritual aspects of the Bahai Faith. Otherwise, writings will differ from practice and with time, a living faith will turn to be a body waiting for revival and resuscitation.

**End notes**

1. A letter from London Colonial Office written by one P. Rogers directed to the colonial offices in East Africa dated December, 1950.
2. Aziz Yazidi, Interview, River Side Park, Nairobi, 18<sup>th</sup> December 1998.
3. Ibid.
4. Shilo Jethro, Interview, Nakuru Bahai Centre, 9<sup>th</sup> December 1998.
5. Thomas Robbins, Cults, Converts and Charisma. London: Sage Publications, 1991, p.67.
6. Moses Shipendi, Interview, Kapinjari – Vihiga, 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1998.
7. Ibid.
8. Christopher Golva, Givogi – Vihiga, 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1999.
9. T. Robbins, Ibid., p.67.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid., p.68.
12. Ibid., p.80
13. Ibid., p.68.
14. Declaration cards are documents that a new adherent into the Bahai Faith signs. The declarant pledges that he believes that Bahauallah is the prophet of God for this day.
15. T. Robbins, Ibid., p.71.
16. Ibid., p.85.
17. Rachel Mwaura, Interview, Bahai Centre – Nairobi, 7<sup>th</sup> April 1998.
18. 'Hands of the Cause' are individuals who were appointed by Bahauallah, Abdul-Baha and Shoghi Effendi for the propagation and protection of the Bahai Faith in the initial stages of the Faith.
19. Charles Mugonye, Interview, Bahai Centre – Nairobi, 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1998.

20. Shoghi Effendi, Bahai Administration. Wilmette – Illinois: Bahai Publications, 1960, p.66.
21. F.J. Streng, Understanding Religious Life. California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1985, p.256.
22. Simon Mwaura, Interview, Bahai Centre – Nairobi, 26<sup>th</sup> November 1998.
23. Jamin Odera, Interview, Shango – Vihiga, 4<sup>th</sup> December 1998.
24. Shoghi Effendi, The Dispensation of Bahauallah. Wilmette, Illinois: Bahai Publishing Trust, 1944, p.114.

## Chapter Four

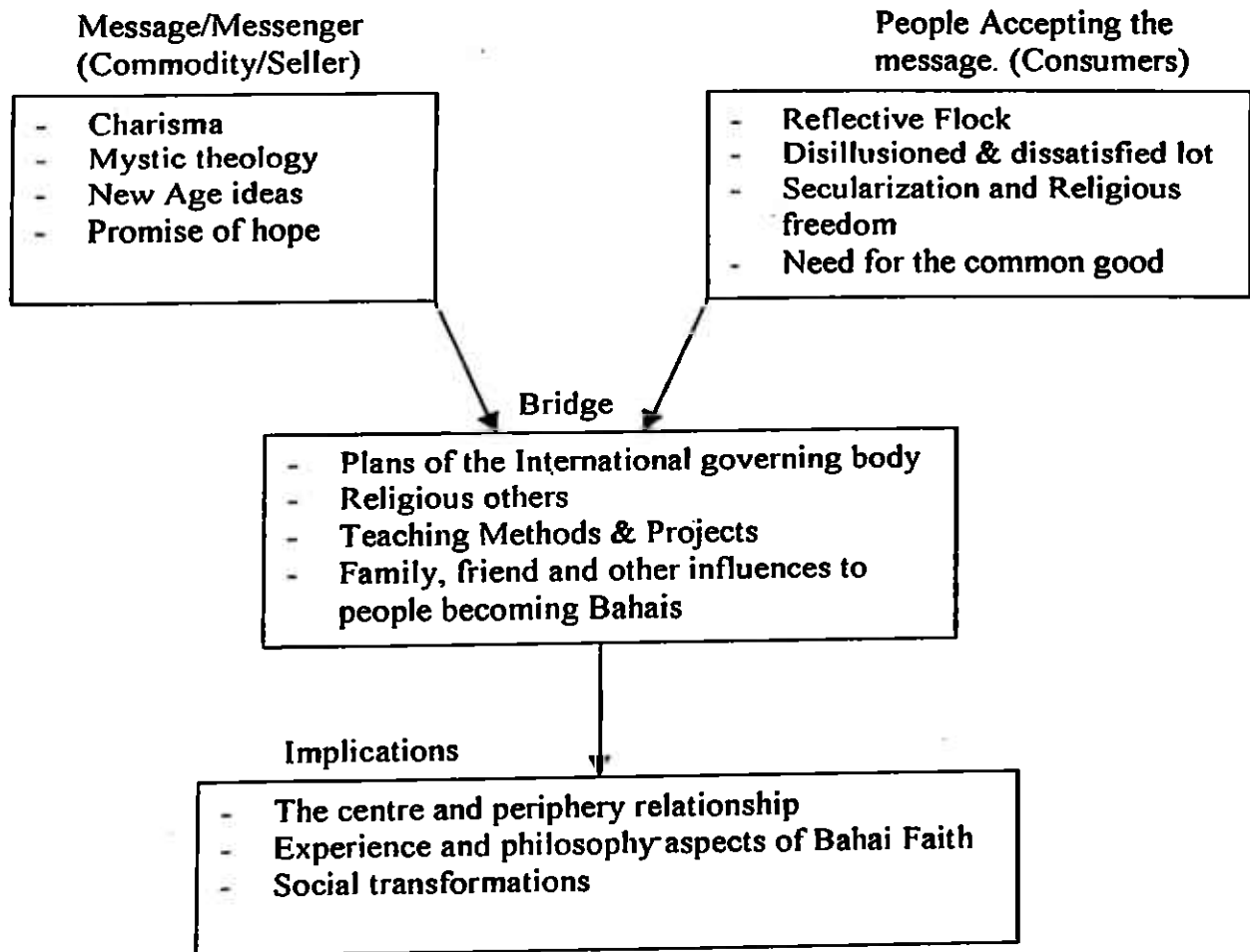
### **BAHAI FAITH AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION**

When the content of a religion is taken to a people and they put it into practice, it is expected that the acceptance will bring about a change of life in the endeavour to attain the highest good which this study calls social transformation. Social transformation is the visible element of a religion that the outsider can pin point and the element that members of a religion are proud about. Social transformation entails implications of the Faith to its adherents and the wider society. The Bahai Faith is assessed as an agent of change. The concern is how social transformation takes place in Bahai Faith.

#### **4.1 RELIGION AS A MEANS OF ULTIMATE TRANSFORMATION**

Religion at its best is a means to ultimate transformation. An ultimate transformation is a fundamental change from being caught up in the troubles of common existence to living in such a way that one can cope at the deepest level with those troubles. This is where authentic life is experienced or worked out. Bahais attest to the idea that their being is grounded in the Cause of Bahauallah, which gives their lives a new meaning, destined to make anew the whole creation. They talk of Bahauallah as inaugurating a divine civilization that the Bahais are helping to cultivate. Religion though divinely inspired, is the cultural expectation of particular interests and convictions. It thus becomes a way of life requiring a sense of worth and purpose which engages the stronger emotions and strengthens the weakened will.<sup>1</sup> The interest of the study here is to understand how Bahais struggle toward enhancement of life. This concern is the last in the market model of this study:





**Diagram. 6.**

The model that is the concern of the study throughout, showing how the components interrelate in the analysis of the origin and spread of Bahai Faith in Kenya.

It may be asserted that human beings in their endeavour to attain ultimate transformation will always change stances to get the one or many ways that suit them best at any particular time and place. Making a stance requires knowledge and commitment. However, any stance is a product of the inner transformations, (which this study calls spiritual transformations) that give fuel to any activity towards enhancement of life. As the inner and external transformations attain form, one's life is fulfilled, dignity asserted and the journey of self-actualization is set. Self-actualization here implies the enhancement of life that is based on the 'Now'. This fulfillment gives an individual the confidence to override all barriers on the road towards the highest

good or ultimate transformation. When religion aids people in this endeavour, then it can be said to be at its best.

Religion at its best therefore aims at complete enjoyment which must be accomplished without one individual interfering with another and without any individual being physically or economically advantaged at the cost of another. This should be a process in living the religious teachings and practices. A.B. Fuller asserts that humanity today is on the threshold of self-transfiguration, of attaining new powers over itself and its environment that can alter its nature as fundamental as walking upright over the use of tools.<sup>2</sup> No aspect of people's existence can escape being revolutionized by this fundamental fact – their consciousness that Fuller calls culture, their pattern of interaction seen as the society, their very biological structure itself – complex events have altered the nature of humanity, the complex of discoveries and powers that Fuller speaks of as modern society.<sup>3</sup> Religion gives people a worldview, it is thus expected that amidst all the changes, religion is keen to harmonize all aspects of an individual towards the betterment of life. Religion in this case becomes the conscience of a society.

The Bahais in the endeavour of ultimate transformation talk of creating the whole world anew. Alluding to the theme of transfiguration as described by Fuller above, the Most Holy Book of the Bahais states that:

The world's equilibrium hath been upset through the vibrating influence of this most great, this new world order. Mankind's ordered life hath been revolutionized through the agency of this unique, this wondrous system the like of which mortal eyes have never witnessed.<sup>4</sup>

Bahais believe that, given the potency of the revelation of Bahauallah, humanity has become increasingly Homo technologious (sic). In this regard, spiritual

transformations are seen as the key to man's civilization or ultimate transformation. The study of religion thus becomes a study of civilizations. For the Bahais, these transformations are both direct and indirect. The direct are designated as 'the minor plan of God' while the indirect, 'the major plan of God'. The minor plan is executed by the Bahais while the indirect by non-Bahais whose justification is to make people realize the divine plan of God, which is a plan of unity and peace in a new world order. It is in this connection that Bahais concern themselves with the Bahai problems and leave to God the non-Bahai activities since the major plan caters for them. In the minor plan, Bahais are to build the Bahai structures of administration, strengthen and establish them for future use for it is expected that the old world order will collapse and the Bahai order will be the refuge for mankind. The two plans work hand in hand though indirectly in creating the whole world anew. One unfolds the new order as the other folds the old.

The Bahais believe that the potency of their Faith can be seen in the non-Bahai world. It is believed that since 1844 when the revelation of Bahauallah was inaugurated by the Bab, science and technology has made a quantum leap. This progress in science as the Bahais believe, started with the Morse-code that was invented by Samuel Morse in the same year that the revelation was inaugurated.

In the fields of genetic engineering and nuclear technology, Knowledge is climbing loftier heights. In the field of information technology, the internet plus its ramifications is narrowing the distance, and the time of accomplishing activities is minimized. In the secular world, the talk of globalization and the global village is engulfing almost everybody. All these innovations are aimed at helping people to live

to their best in the world. To the Bahais, when a manifestation of God appears, God releases new powers to all things in the world:

The minor plan part of transformation starts when people realize the ultimate reality, becomes conscious of the problematic human situation and then act for the enhancement of life. In the Bahai Faith, the first duty of mankind is to know and worship God. The next is to grow in virtue and to serve mankind. When these transformations take place, a culture is interwoven in a people's life. To enhance the activities of the minor plan of God, quality and responsible leadership and spiritual knowledge is demanded for the development of humanity. Thus, Bahais advocate a welfare society through political freedom, public finance, fairness in appointment and promotion, voluntary sharing, work for all, ethics of wealth, narrowing the gap between the poor and the rich, non industrial slavery, bequest and inheritance, equality of men and women and education for all.

This welfare society guided by the teachings of Bahauallah is a pointer to world peace and civilization that the Bahais await, hope and work for. One wonders to what extent these ornate teachings are practiced within the fold of Bahatism. This study concerns itself more with the minor plan of the Faith, for it is the responsibility and duty of the Bahais in ultimate transformation. Probably because of the infancy of the Faith, only few Bahais, most of them foreigners, find the enhancement of life practical in their lives. Transformations are experienced and realized in concentric circles where actualization increases as one goes to the centre of the circles. A respondent in Vihiga lamented that those Africans who became Christians when they (the Bahais) became Bahais in the 1950s, today there is no comparison in terms of self

actualization or a good life.<sup>5</sup> For Christians, they pull their meager resources and come up with projects that help the individual and the society at large. These Bahais have a case in point when the ultimate transformation role of religion is analyzed. But other Bahais argue that, Bahai Faith is not Christianity so that it should entice people by material things. The Bahais claim that theirs is spiritual food. Religion, whether formally or informally must be evident in a people's way of life guiding them to overcome the obstacles to the betterment of life. To this effect, religion at its best must illuminate the stronger emotions, strengthen the weakened will and call them to action from the individual level to the communal level.

The individuals are expected to appropriate the teachings in their own life and since these individuals staff the community, coming together will mean more appropriation. In this respect, the basic unit of the society – marriage cannot be ignored. For Bahais, marriage and family are a holy institution for everybody. Bahais believe that, all people should marry not only for procreation but because in marriage, a man and wife help one another to grow spiritually. From their spirituality, their progeny come to emulate them in obedience to God and service to mankind. Divorce is thus not advocated unless sealed by the members of the local spiritual assembly. Spirituality in social life makes any civilization to hold together and maintain its growth. Meetings and other social occasions should be geared toward revitalizing the spirituality in one way or another. However, Bahai meetings have no sermon and no clergy. Thus the individual spiritual growth is not as such highlighted. Rather, the sessions focus on community affairs – technical issues such as translation, teaching projects, public relations, and so on. The individual is expected to care for daily

personal spiritual growth. Bearing in mind that people do not have the same capacities to understand and to belief, Bahai spiritual life can be likened to any other individual activity such as going on a journey. At some point, one will need the advice and guidance of an expert in tours and travel. This means specialization and the acceptance of one's limitations. But do Bahais in their spiritual journey need any specialized guidance? Humanity is of age, why should he be guided! They assert.

The minor plan and the major plan, when analyzed, point to the core of Bahai Faith. As discussed above, the minor plan starts from the individual Bahai and the major plan is not the concern of the Bahais. Nevertheless, the kingdom of God has come and it is being established! One who is in need of it and have not seen it may ask, what colour is it? And in the predicament of not realizing the kingdom one can lament out of desperation, it is better when we waited for we had hope. D.L. Edwards asserts that:

Spiritual transformation takes root when an individual freely and deliberately subjects his whole personality – thought and conduct to the dominance of belief in God or a future state.<sup>6</sup>

When it comes to traumatic social transformations, a society must always arise to challenge the tradition of the day. The book Gilgamesh written by Herbert Mason can be used as an emphasis to this point. In the book, the second major character Enkindu leaves the calmness and the peace of the jungle to enter the world of the main character – King Gilgamesh and his society. At first Enkindu and Gilgamesh fight but since they tie in strength, they become friends. Enkindu becomes a champion of change for Gilgamesh and his society through their corporate activities. Most of the time, the two go hunting till their friendship becomes so strong that they start even challenging the gods. In this bid, Enkindu kills the Bull of heaven. The gods are angry

and to this effect, Enkidu dies. After the death of Enkidu, his friend Gilgamesh starts on a journey towards the abode of the gods for an explanation of the death of his friend and for a plea to the gods to restore him to life. The journey proves futile. Gilgamesh goes back to his society never the same again – humbled. Seeking for magic to bring life back to his friend, Gilgamesh realized that he has to bury his own loss and build his world anew with his own hands and out of will. He thus sees the society with new eyes – he understands the limitation of human beings and the power of the gods.

The story of Gilgamesh teaches that there are those who act as the catalysts of change in the society – the opinion leaders. The opinion leaders are people of dreams and visions, people who deny themselves for the sake of the society. To this lot, the transformations they seek to initiate into the society, have already transformed them totally.

From the content of Bahai Faith, the faith can be construed as a strong agent of change. The change in world views that it champions is deemed to bring transformation in culture for the adherents and the civilization to all mankind. In Haifa – Israel, the Bahais material culture has been designated by the Israeli Ministry of Tourism as the eighth wonder of the world.<sup>7</sup> Using the state of the art, technology especially architecture and design, Bahais have designed their World Centre in such a way that the International Centre and the Bahai Gardens have become an international tourist attraction. When such projects will be carried at the local level through the Local Spiritual Assemblies, the change that the Bahai Faith champions will be evident. For transformation to take place, the Bahais must own the minor plan of God

and live it. Only by living and owning the plan, can they be a source of hope to the troubled ocean of life as they claim. The following poem quoted by Peter Slater explains when and how transformations take place:

The various centres of concern dry up  
 The relationship between one part of a symbol system  
 and another are broken  
 The river becomes a stagnant pool eventually to be  
 transformed into a meadow  
 The process need not happen all at once  
 Old central symbols become new primary and  
 secondary symbols  
 Living believers become dead witnesses  
 Living faiths become dead tradition...  
 The religion has gone out of the temple  
 We may see shades of the old faith haunting the streets  
 But the power and the glory will be forgotten  
 and the names on the doors will be changed  
 The emptiness becomes a silence, which allows  
 new voices to be heard ...<sup>8</sup>

The poem suggests that radical social transformations take place when "things fall apart, no longer at ease, the centre cannot hold".<sup>9</sup> For the Bahais, the major plan of God is expected to bring worldwide chaos that will make mankind turn to the voice of Bahauallah and the greatest peace will be ushered in. Chaos are possible if and only if the society crumbles. The study of religions shows that each system of religion grows with time as the individual understanding is refined. At the zenith point of growth, individuals cease to identify themselves with the label for the labeled becomes more important than the label. The refinement causes people to understand other's point of



view and hence they share their experiences. At this point, people from and of different traditions share and understand one another as witnesses to the same reality, only differing in perspective.

At this point of growth, there are those that will not be in a position to reach there (zenith), so they cling to the label and insist that it is the only way to reality even it is itself reality. It means that though some members of a religion will grow and recognize the authenticity of other religions, there are some who will not grow to that level. The ones that are not refined are the conservatives and the refined are the reformists. For the Bahais, people of all walks of life must accept and adhere to the Bahai perspective of reality, for they believe that other religions are different stages in the eternal history and constant evolution of one religion – divine and indivisible, of which the Bahai forms but an integral part which is the latest. World religions are expected to shift to the Bahai Faith for the divine civilization to take place. In regard to this, Bahai's attitude while teaching is that others are clinging to outdated forms of religion for the spirit of God is in this age in the Bahai Faith. Ironically, bare facts of history depicts otherwise. Judaism did not end with Christianity, neither did Christianity end with Islam in reference to the progressive theory of religion. By and by, the Bahais can be seen to place much emphasis on others becoming Bahais and not the Bahais to be better Bahais. In reference to the progressive theory of religion, Bahais are concerned with the followers of other religions becoming Bahais. By so doing, the Bahais fail to concern themselves with their internal affairs appropriately. For example, deepenings for the new followers are not conducted.

This study asserts that, when the experiential dimension of religion is accorded its place, cultivated and understood, the superstructure evident in the circumference – social transformations, doctrines, ritual, myth and material dimensions will be quite explicit. Eschatological notes will not be future oriented but realized eschatology where the ‘Now’ become the time for fulfillment and not the future or the golden past (see diagram 1.). In this regard, human beings grow beyond mere rhetoric and start to be proactive instead of reactive, re-constructive rather than destructive, inclusive rather than exclusive, and cooperative rather than confrontational.<sup>10</sup>

Peter Slater argues that, a religious transformation occurs with a complete change in the surrounding cultures so as to give new meaning to life centered in a particular way.<sup>11</sup> For example, the contribution of Islam to the Arab world is that Islamic civilization was brought up by living the revelation of Muhammad. The phenomenon of centering can be elaborated using the pendulum. From a fixed point, a pendulum swings freely and when the fixed point is changed this is the centering though the swinging continues. This gives insight into the continuity of identity of a changing pattern of faith. The story of religion in this figure becomes a story of shifting centres and the realization of a centered self. Though there is change, the identity and integrity of adherents are retained. Shifting means that religious meaning changes in changing times and religious truth include an essential reference to contemporary circumstances as religion gives a people a worldview. For example, Bahais from Christian background come to regard Bahauallah as the return of Christ.

Religion is a social phenomenon which always is to be found fully blended with the way of life of individuals and communities. This produces a culture which is

the artificial manifestation of a people's preoccupation with social reconstruction.<sup>12</sup>

Social reconstruction is a day to day activity – an activity of the present not of the future. Daily, human beings deal with their natural and social environments so that they can attain the highest good. The highest good changes with time, for people's needs change as they continue satisfying others.

Any society desires and struggles for the common good and highest good. Religion at its best is well equipped to take the responsibility and duty to equip its adherents with the tools of social engineering. In life, human beings do not depend on an individual element of life such as food when other aspects of life such as knowledge, security, and health are also vital in life. In Bahai Faith, work done with an attitude of service is regarded as a form of worship but not a burden. Thus when one is working hard, one is serving God. In return, there are high proceeds, which are consumed and the surplus taken to the market to enable people to buy what they do not have. In the market, the Bahai idea of unity and cooperation is vital. Individuals can come together and then in the process, they will have power to decide the market price of whatever they produce. By so doing, social transformations starts, only what is needed is to sustain the growth. Fueling may be done through many aspects, for instance, business courses are offered at the Nairobi Bahai Centre on weekends when those in need request. The courses must be action oriented and regular. The 'Now' is therefore actualized and the security of tomorrow is established.

In the endeavour toward ultimate transformation, it must be borne in mind that there is an interplay between ideas and geography, between thought and the landscape that thought encounters, between inherited ideas and acquired environment. This

understanding brings a sensitivity to people's needs given their environment. Sensitivity in the manner that from a people's environment and knowledge, they produce what they need to consume and consume what their environment favours. The Bahais of Vihiga join together in brick making. Iranian Bahais in Kenya have come up with 'The Village Market' – a shopping complex, ten kilometres away from Nairobi along Limuru Road. The shopping complex is a source of income for a number of Kenyan and Iranian Bahais. Also, other people who are not Bahais use the premises for business enterprises. Religion at its best can influence a great deal this process of ultimate transformation. This is because religion takes care of the whole of humanity. With this in mind, Bahai Faith at its best is an agent of change and the adherents must utilize it as such for them to realize what it promises – the Abha kingdom on earth, otherwise it will be an end in itself.

#### 4.2 BAHAI FAITH AND THE SECULAR SOCIETY

In a secular society, no one is entitled to the claim of truth or exclusivity. All those who staff the secular society should embrace one another's ideas in the endeavour to bring about a good society. Peter Slater argues:

Rather than fear proliferation of conflicting schemes for the good life, we should welcome the variety of ends proposed. We learn as much about ourselves from the ends we reject as from those that we affirm.<sup>13</sup>

For a culture to emerge, there must be a people's understanding and interpretation of themselves and their environment, what results is a social product. At this point, the concern is the connection between the Bahai Faith and the environment in which the Faith find itself. J. N. K. Mugambi argues that deeply religious people of all religions ought to be peacemakers – agents of reconciliation. In all cultures, the majority of

people are searching for lighthouses in the troubled ocean of life. Those who accept to become converts and those who tolerate the religions in which they have been brought up, all adhere to their faiths with the conviction that those faiths are the lighthouses that provide the safest course in the billow ocean of life.<sup>14</sup>

In a religiously pluralistic society that the Bahai Faith finds itself in, cooperation and consultation with other religions and agents of change should be the norm in order to give and take while forging a common strategy for social transformation. In this regard, all religions and human traditions can be viewed as part of a common human heritage worthy of respect and recognition. Thus people of good will in all religions and from other agents of change of the world are called upon to share a common vision of the global society. By so doing, cooperation rather than competition is nurtured for the betterment of human life on earth. Bahai theory of progressive revelation teaches otherwise. Bahai Faith is the beginning of a new prophetic cycle that started with the Bab and the fulfillment of the promise of all ages'.<sup>15</sup> The previous religious traditions, that is, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Zoroastrianism and Babis, will only experience fulfillment if they accept to be reborn in the Bahai Faith.

In a secular society, no one has the monopoly of social transformation but people of goodwill of all walks of life everywhere round the globe. In the words of Mugambi, it is arguable that:

... In this spaceship – earth, we ought not to behave as if any of us could jump out and survive alone. In this lifeboat – earth cruising on a perilous ocean of space, none of us ought to puncture the bottom or try to jump out – we have all to sail together, or perish together. The us-them syndrome is self

destructive because there is only one side for all of us to join – either mutual reconstruction or mutual destruction.<sup>16</sup>

Using the doctrine of progressive revelation, Bahais indirectly claim to be the most refined religion of God. All the followers of other religions should therefore shift to the Bahai Faith. The doctrine entails competition in the religious supermarket. When stating the independent nature of Bahai Faith, Bahais claim that their Faith as an independent religion has the same status as Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Judaism. The doctrine of progressive revelation is a key one among the Bahais. However, in a religiously pluralistic society, competitive attitudes breed conflicts and chaos. Bahais should therefore realize that they do not have any monopoly in the social space. In the words of Mugambi, the winner-looser dichotomy is unrealistic and inappropriate in the African situation.<sup>17</sup> Africa and Kenya in particular, needs winner-winner configuration in the endeavour of bringing the seal – the kingdom is God's on earth.<sup>18</sup> The new world order demands cooperation but not competition. Bahai Faith teaches unity and oneness, a pointer to cooperation. This will only come as a realization of the authenticity of people's perspectives of reality and respecting them as so – past, present and future.

Religion in the new world order should therefore concern itself with inclusiveness rather than exclusiveness. It should also be people centered rather than institutional-centered. This is because, the end of the old world order is the beginning of the new world order in which all peoples of the world can participate without being branded with either one ideological label or the other.<sup>19</sup>

However, as the world embraces cooperation, there is the politics of large cartels or consortiums swallowing the small companies or rendering them redundant.

Implicitly, cartel formation can be the probable teaching motif of the Bahai Faith where they want to be the only religious force in the world if that is possible. This is where the political element of the Faith come to play – selling its ideas in order to incorporate weak or strong religious groups. This also explains the administrative structure and the Mt. Carmel projects in Haifa, where it is believed that the world leaders one time will be visiting the Universal House of Justice (the international governing body of Bahais) for guidance and pay homage to the core figures of the Faith in the shrines. In this light, the Universal House of Justice will be a peace and a power broker in the world hence it will be such a powerful political body if and when the dream is realized.

Bahai teaching activities are meant to bring more people to the Faith. Such activities include symposiums held for people who are influential in the society. Such people include university dons, lawyers, doctors and administrators. Bahai call them the people of capacity for they are assets to the Faith if and when they declare to be Bahais. It is expected that these people will in turn introduce the Faith to others hence a quantitative growth of the Faith.

In the secular world, people are freed from fatalism and are encouraged to take the responsibility of their destiny and accept with humility their limitations and get courage to continue living even when on the verge of death, knowing that there are things they can change while there are others they cannot change. Secularization as a process also weakens or wrecks the traditional patterns of culture and new forms appear. It marks a change in the way people understand their life together. This process is affected by people of different traditions who come together and the

traditional unquestionable values are confronted. The Bahai Faith is an agent of secularization for it advocates a change in perspective toward the individual and the society at large. The Bahai teachings on: One God; Mankind is One and Religion is One; harmony of science and religion; equality of men and women; elimination of all kinds of prejudices; and universal peace upheld by a world federation; encourage human beings to be responsible of their own destiny. However, people should be allowed to respond to the alternatives offered according to their own best intuitions.

As an agent of secularization, Bahai Faith aims implicitly at disintegrating the social bonds that have traditionally held the society together. This is done through their teaching programmes. The language of teaching is mainly English and if translators are available, Kiswahili or the audiences language are also used. Bahais introduce Bahai perspectives of reality into the minds of their listeners, a perspective which is bound to call the old religious order into question. For instance, when Christians are told that the Christ they have been waiting came in 1844, they do not comprehend what the Bahai mean. However, transformations call for self-criticism on what one is offering to the society and how enough and complete is the offer. A tailor does not boast about his tailoring skills when he himself is in a goatskin. There are many tailors whose tailormanship is reciprocated in the kind of fashions they make. For Christians, Christ's presence on earth about 2000 years ago is the pivot of their history. Christians believe that wherever Christ went, he did good, for example, healing the sick, feeding the hungry and exorcising demons. Christians would thus expect complete peace, unity and prosperity in the kingdom of God. Bahais believe that the kingdom of God has come with the coming of Bahauallah. Bahauallah is the



return of Christ. However, wars, conflicts and immorality are still evident in the world. If Bahais are the tailors of the kingdom of God on earth, human beings should experience the kingdom of God on earth! The Bahais represent a new understanding of Christ and the kingdom of God. People required to focus on the situation and overcome their obstacles rather than busing themselves with waiting for Christ.

As an agent of secularization, Bahai Faith can be seen to embrace the ideas of New Age Movements. Bahais use the Bible outside its context and thereby draw different conclusions that even question the authenticity of the claim to finality of Christianity together with Judaism and Islam. The idea that Christ has returned is seen as a new age doctrine that is to be found among the Bahais. For Bahais, Bahauallah is the return of Christ, who has come to establish the kingdom of God on earth. This doctrine relegates Christ of the Christians to a lower place than the one given to him by the Christians. To Bahais, the Christians and other religions are seen as outdated. But what is the New Age Movement? Hannah Kinoti writing on the challenges of the New Age and Oriental Mysticism gives some characteristics of the New Age Movement: a huge canopy sheltering much religious truth; inclusive, syncretic movement tolerant to all except to exclusiveness of Christianity and Judaism; and seeks to satisfy people's spiritual needs. The myriad New Age Movements can be described as a an "ecumenism" of many networking organization whose ultimate aim is a new world order.<sup>20</sup> The movements are geared towards the transformation of the world through spiritual substitutes for monotheistic religions – Christianity, Judaism and Islam. In the New Age perspective, it is a time to throw off the earlier crippling system of religious thought. Kinoti puts it that the New Age is the Golden Age – the

age of enlightenment for humanity. There is also an aspiration of a universal world government. The Christ of the New Age has been back on earth since July 1977. This Christ is concerned with human needs – political, economic and social. He is not a religious leader, but an educator in the broadest sense of the word, pointing the way out of present crisis.<sup>21</sup> About the nature of the Christ of the New Age, Kinoti argues that:

...as the Christians await the second coming, so the Jews await the Messiah, the Buddhist the fifth Buddha, the Muslims the Imam Mahdi, and the Hindus Krishna. These are all names of one individual. His presence in the world guarantees there will be no Third World War.<sup>22</sup>

Understanding the Bahai Faith, one sees each and every characteristic of the New Age Movement as described by Kinoti. The only difference is that for Bahais, their Christ came and claimed so in 1844. Also historically, the Bahais can argue that their Christ came earlier and thus they are the authentic group for the New World Order. The New Age movement as an institution was founded in 1875 when the esoteric Theosophical Society was founded in New York by Helena Petrovna Blavasky and two other friends Col. Henry Steel Okott and William Quan Judge.<sup>23</sup> The other major difference is the Bahai doctrine of a transcendental God who is unknowable save through his manifestations, but in the New Age Movement God is in all and all is God, and to know him one turns inward, this is where Yoga, Silver Mind Control and Transcendental Meditation are practiced by Most New Agers.

After all is said and done, there is a very thin distinction between the Bahais and the New Age Movement. It can be argued that Bahai Faith is an ideal New Age Movement given all its doctrines, practices and future hope of a world government. The Bahai Faith seen thus, ceases to be a religion but an ideology geared to rule the

whole world, and the ideology is clothed in a religious gurb to make it more appealing. This interplay require more research, that is, religion and ideology in relation to the New World Order of Bahauilah.

Religion for the Bahais will be a private affair. Nevertheless, it will be used to conquer the world. The single stream of history into which the peoples of the world are being drawn is a single stream of questions not answers, and what unites the peoples is their common experience that their own societies are breaking up.<sup>24</sup> Humanity will eventually find itself faced with things it has invented and created but beyond its control, for religion should be an agent of harmonization in society or the conscience of the society.

These innovations are today fueled by genetic engineering, which is a vast growing science. People without the sanction of religion can transfigure themselves with destruction that can be beyond control for instance, the use of race-specific viruses. On the other hand, science with morality can achieve much for the benefit of man. This morality is founded on religion.

Religion can be defined as, all matters pertaining to believe in God, gods and a future state of being. Religion as an aspect of human life is a pointer to individual and communal self-understanding and self-orientation. Religion becomes an ideology when it occupies the central aspect of culture thereby seeking to control each element of culture – economics, politics, aesthetics, kinship and ethics.<sup>25</sup> With this in mind, Bahai Faith has an affinity towards being an ideology where it will be the pivot of the Bahai society at any level. Bahai Faith as an ideology embraces a political philosophy that is imperialistic in nature. The aim of the ideology is to enable Bahais to rule the

world. Bahais are therefore cynical about religious customs, contemptuous about theological claims and hostile to ecclesiastical institutions. This is depicted in their teachings and practices for instance the issue of the outdated-ness of other religious orientations and a negation of even the best in other religions. To the Bahais, the clergy in any religion are the cause of conflict and dissension. However, activities of a religion aimed at the highest good should be connected to the things that matter most – enhancement of life.

It may be asserted that, any religion at its best should be conscious of cultural transformations instead of relegating the transformations to nature. In this connection, the words of surrender and selflessness must echo deep within the individual and the community. Words of a Christian hymn tell it more:

Take my life and let it be  
 Consecrated Lord to Thee  
 Take my moments and my days  
 Let them flow in ceaseless praise.<sup>26</sup>

Surrender and obedience are virtues in the Bahai Faith. The practice of these virtues will bring about new strengths to the community whereby all structures are to be given new meaning and their effectiveness and efficiency in any programme worked out. But the Writings of the Bahai Faith do not advocate for most of the issues that hinder community growth. The gap between the Writings and practice leave the transformations outside. The secular world is also left to care for itself through 'the major plan of God'. However, the study assesses the possibilities of enhancement of life in both the secular and religious world. The secular world become a partaker in the kingdom not a competitor or foe.

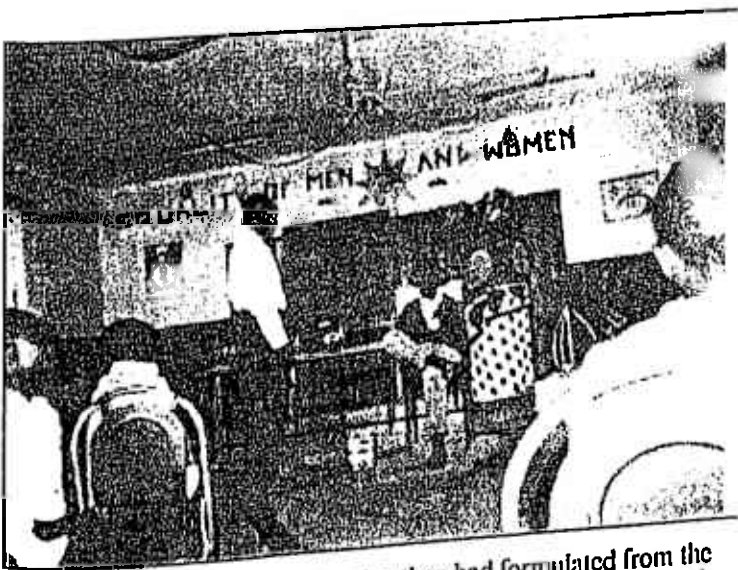
In the secular world, the implicit political aim of the Bahai Faith shows itself more than the religious or spiritual aspect. In this arena of transformations, the minor plan of God is celebrated by those who have acknowledged that Bahauallah is the Manifestation of God for this age. As was observed earlier, this celebration is in concentric circles. The major plan of God according to Bahais is to make people realize that God (Bahauallah) is beckoning them. These two plans when harmonized are to bring about the New World Order of Bahauallah. There should be no contempt or fear or proliferation of conflicting schemes for the good life. Variety of ends proposed from different reality styles should be welcome in a positive attitude if transformations are to be realized.

#### **4.3 THE FUTURE OF THE BAHAI FAITH IN KENYA**

After describing the content and context of Bahai Faith by mapping its presence in Kenya and highlighting its activities in the religious pluralistic society, one question remains: What is the future of the Faith? At this point, the study tries to project into the future, guided by the foregoing description of the Faith. This is the place of theology, which is a systematic articulation of human response to revelation within a particular situation and context.<sup>27</sup> Bahai theology is vital for the progress of the Faith in any place at any time. Bahai theology has not developed in Kenya and that is why there is no harmony between the Writings, practices and what Bahais know about their Faith. For instance, many Bahais do not understand how their Faith has rituals such as marriage, death, the Nineteen-Day Feast and the circumambulation of the Holy shrines. In dealing with the non-clerical nature of the Bahai Faith, Bahais do not note the institution of the learned and its duties in the community. Bahai theology

entails systematic reflection and systematic articulation on the side of the individual and the community in order to provide internal coherence of the Bahai experience and expression. How can reflection take route where a reading culture is not cultivated and deepenings are ad-hoc?

Bahais are not encouraged to reflect on the Writings but they are supposed to take the writings as they are. The Writings should be read with the minimum personal interpretation to eliminate disagreements.<sup>28</sup> In meetings and conferences, individuals should be allowed to reflect on the Writings. Reflection helps the individuals to appropriate the Writings in different areas. Practical theology is tied to research on the environments and its need then articulating how well the Holy Writings can at best meet the needs of specific areas. When Bahais decide to go out and teach their Faith, they do not study the people to whom they take the Glad Tidings of Bahauallah. Teaching work should celebrate the results of research. Research goes hand in hand with statistics. The statistics should be interpreted for the wellbeing of the entire



A group of Bahais act out a play they had formulated from the Bahai Writings based on the equality of men and women (14<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1998)

RIGHT: From a tender age, Bahai children are encouraged to memorize portions of the sacred writings.



community. Interpreting the statistics helps to note where growth comes about and what necessitates failure. Failure in research is failure in theology and vice versa, and in return the internal structures of the Faith are affected. In Kenya, Bahai theology has not had a chance to grow. Bahais centre their discussions mostly on the doctrine of progressive revelation thereby analyzing other religions. The trend should reflect on what Bahai Faith is and not on what others are not. Applied theology also affects the communication of religious truth. Research helps to understand a peoples environment, their needs, aspirations and hopes, then one decides how well to offer the best possible solution. In such undertakings, the cultural and philosophical viewpoint of the prospective adherent(s) is understood. Understanding a community's cultural and religious heritage helps in understanding what the community has and what it doesn't have. One will then know what to offer – is it the concept of God, the concept of heaven or what? If or when a community's cultural and religious heritage are negated, conversion should not be an endeavour since one does not understand fully the basis(from what to what) of conversion. The strengths and capacities of a people are to be utilized instead of weaknesses, gaps and doubts. When people's problems, hopes and fears are appreciated as part of their concerns and needs, they feel at ease within the religion they adhere to and identify with. Feelings of aloofness and alienation are washed away, therefore bringing forth a community that is unique by itself given the bonds that are nurtured . This ensures the future of religion and in this case Bahai Faith.

This atmosphere of ease-ness cannot be nurtured in a counter-culture environment. This is why 'including one another in the struggle for life'<sup>29</sup> is

encouraged for the growth of the community while taking itself seriously. If the Bahai Faith is determined to forge ahead, capturing loftier heights, tearing down every obstacle and opening up new horizons and winning victories as a religion, it must help the adherents from the individual to the community via the institutions of administration to look forward, that is, self-criticism, fanning more energy to do more especially in regard to inner transformations. This entails a people owning their faith and putting it into practice in their conditions.

The first rule of all closed systems is that they can only be questioned in accordance with their own rules. And since their rules always force us to validate the system, the system can never be effectively challenged.<sup>30</sup> The closed system's way is that there is only one way – our way, get or perish. There is no such thing as an alternative order. The Bahai Faith viewed thus, become a totalizing system which cannot accept rivalries. Paradoxically, the Bahais are enjoined in the Writings to consort with peoples of all religions and traditions with friendliness. In so doing, sharing is facilitated and the system opens up to recognize the authenticity of others in all dimensions for they have the same mission at heart. This is where the people of good will are called to champion the idea of the new world order where cooperation replaces competition. As an organic system, it should allow holding and releasing excitation and quiescence. Bahais will thus be made not born.

Psychological studies confirm that the human personality requires stimulation from others to develop. So one learns how to be human from other people. Our awareness of the world and our way of functioning within it come in large part from models set by 'significant others'. Thus daily encounters have power and significance



in people's lives. Social encounters should not be taken for granted especially when Bahais receive new adherents. Writings are not enough and effective, particularly with regard to personal encounters that will bring the adherent toward maturity. Frederick Streng stresses that human interaction can only become a religious encounter when a dynamic and living exchange with another leads to a life changing self-discovery.<sup>31</sup> In the experience of a sensitive touch, the warmth of companionship, or the feeling of being understood and needed, many people become aware that their loneliness or fear is healed.

Growing, sensitive and caring relationships that are deep and meaningful give people something to live for and courage to excel. When such interactions are not nurtured, the community will not grow and even the centre will be weak. Thus, though there are no clergy in the Faith, Bahais should care for their individual members and their needs. The spiritual assemblies should therefore be encouraged to initiate the growth of the community through understanding and love for all members. In return, this will wipe out proliferation that create disunity and growth mutations.

For the survival of a social institution, there must be 'hope, faith and love'<sup>32</sup> as virtues to guide the individual and the community. In relation to hope, faith and love, Mugambi argues that:

Hope is nurtured by the determination of an individual or a community to survive despite any threats to survival. Faith is the conviction that despite all evidence towards despair, yet there is hope for survival. Love is the bond which holds the people together to enable them survive against all odds.<sup>33</sup>

When all the above factors are considered by the community of faith, there is a future to the Faith as a living organisation but if not, the body will be visible though things will have fallen apart and the centre will not hold.

For the Bahai Faith to spread and get consolidated, the adherents must take themselves seriously especially on matters concerning individual and community religious experience. This will result to consolidation, a process which will necessitate quantitative growth and in return human needs will be cared for, bringing fulfillment of life. The non-Bahai sphere is also to be taken seriously as it is the stage on which the Bahai Faith starts to make anew. Simplicity of doctrines and 'abundance of life' should be the principle of growth. All this should be a conscious process.

Social transformation is difficult if not impossible with uniformity and conformity. People's identity counts in their confidence towards social transformation. African and in particular Kenyan Bahais should be encouraged to 'sing the Bahai song not only in their language but in their own accent' for they should be responsible for their own destiny and present. In this connection, Kinoti in the discussion of New Age Movement, strongly argues that Africans should take themselves seriously and not allow themselves to be overwhelmed by the philosophies of the day that seek to pacify the African and make him an object of another man's game.<sup>34</sup> Bahai Faith should not muzzle the indigenous African thought and theological expressions. Rather, it should encourage and use the indigenous African thought if the future is to be assured. Bahai theology should articulate the challenges of the Faith in order to give coherence to the Faith, especially in practice, for the survival of the Bahai Religion.

Human beings are by nature insecure and seek security, satisfaction, communal identification and belonging-ness. For this purpose, human beings seek guidance and direction in some greater supernatural authority. Thus when one alternative does not deliver, another one old or new is sought. In the contemporary world, people can do

what previously was impossible, can celebrate the power and responsibility of adulthood and that they have to reconcile themselves with the fact that, because they cannot do everything, everything will not be done, they must accept tragedy maturely.<sup>35</sup> Bahai Faith must thus plausibly symbolize the society's corporate passions. In regard to this, new commodities perform and are expected to perform better.

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## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Bahai Faith sprang from Islamic roots in Iran. The Faith is seen by its followers as a religion that fulfills all previous religions. Bahai Faith was heralded by a young Persian known as the Bab (the Gate). In 1844, the Bab proclaimed himself to be a messenger of God and a channel of one Greater than himself – ‘the one whom God shall make manifest’. The Bab was opposed and finally killed in 1850 in a firing squad.

In 1863, Bahauallah (the Glory of God) declared himself to be the one whose coming, the Bab and all previous prophets had foretold. For nearly forty years of exile and imprisonment, Bahauallah committed to writing the teachings of his revelation, as well as teaching and training his followers. He died in 1892 in the prison city of Akka (Accre), Israel.

Abdul-Baha, the eldest son of Bahauallah is the one to whom Bahais are enjoined by Bahauallah in his will and testament to turn for instruction and guidance. Abdul-Baha (Servant of Glory), is considered by the Bahais as the centre of the Covenant of Bahauallah. He is also the authorized interpreter and exemplar of the Bahai Faith. Abdul-Baha shared his father’s sufferings in exile and prison. He remained a prisoner until 1908, when the old regime in Turkey was overthrown. Afterwards, he traveled in Egypt, Europe and America, explaining and exemplifying the principles of the Bahai Faith. He also inspired and directed the activities of the Faith throughout the world. He passed away in Haifa – Israel in 1921. Abdul-Baha appointed Shoghi Effendi, his grandson to be the guardian of the Faith and interpreter of its scripture. Under the guidance of Shoghi Effendi, the Faith spread to other parts

of the world. Shoghi Effendi died in London in 1957. Since 1963, the Faith has been under the guidance of the Universal House of Justice.

Bahai Faith was introduced in Kenya in the early 1950s through an order from Shoghi Effendi. The order was given to the National spiritual Assembly of the Bahais of British Isles. From Early 1950s, Bahai pioneers started to flow to Kenya. The pioneers concentrated their activities in Western and Nyanza provinces. The central parts of Kenya were very insecure due to the Mau Mau war of independence.

Bahai Faith has two institutions – ‘the institution of the rulers’ and ‘the institution of the learned’ (see diagram 2). Since the Bahai Faith has no clergy, these two institutions oversee the activities of the Faith from the local to the international level through the national level. The institution members are not given any official training to enable them carry out their duties. Thus, the activities carried out are not systematic and methodical. For the Faith to realize its goals in Kenya, ‘the institution of the learned’ ( the Counsellors, Board members and Assistants), need to be given professional skill. The skills will enable them to meet the needs of the communities they serve more effectively and efficiently.

The practices and teachings of the Bahai Faith revolve around three core beliefs: God is one, mankind is one, and religion is one. The teachings are mainly to help mankind to realize their potentials in the social plane. This makes the teachings attract the reflective, especially those concerned with life here and now. The main teachings are: independent investigation of truth, essential harmony of science and religion, equality of men and women, elimination of prejudices of all kinds, universal compulsory education, universal auxiliary language, and universal peace upheld by a

world federation. More research into particular teachings and practices of the Bahais demands research in a bid to bring out the specific views and implications of these aspects into the Bahai communities and their environment.

Bahai Faith in Kenya attracts people that never used to be committed to any particular religion. In Kenya, more than 75% of the Bahais are men. It shows that women are more committed to other religions than men meaning that the women cannot be easily lured into the Bahai Faith. Thus, the Bahai Faith attracts men who are not committed or affiliated to any religion. A balance of both male and female in a society reflects a healthy community: The balance means that the future is guaranteed since all categories of people are represented in the Faith. But in Bahai Faith, only men are mostly represented, hence, the future is bleak. The Faith needs to device modalities to attract women for the sake of the community's wellbeing and survival. In this regard, the aspect 'women, marriage and family life' in Bahai communities needs more research.

Interaction between Bahai teachers and the people who are interested with the Faith generate bonds of affection that nurture involvement. Others become Bahais out of want to experiment with the Faith like any other religion.

Attracting people who are not strong followers of a particular religion, brings forth a people who have negative feelings towards other religions. The religion(s) that the Bahais lived with before becoming Bahais are the target of the negative feelings. The negative feelings are exacerbated by the progressive theory of religion that the Bahais advocate. The feelings influences the growth of Bahai Faith. The negative attitude towards others prevents the Bahais from learning from the positive elements



of the religions the Bahais claim to fulfill. For instance, Bahais think that religious rituals and clergy have no place in the contemporary world.

Negative attitudes make the Bahais of Kenya not to take into consideration the acquired and inherited environment of prospective followers. Bahais should strive to understand the Africans perspective of reality. The understanding thereof will help the Bahais in teaching activities. This understanding can only be fostered when Bahais consider themselves as part of what the world needs but not the whole of what the world needs.

In teaching activities, the best of a people should be used. In living the Faith, the best a people has should be utilized. For instance, songs and Holy Writ in vernacular can achieve a lot. The much that can be achieved is owning the Faith by the locals to the best of their intuition. Allegorically, a seedling in a pot grows as dictated by the capacity of the pot, but when transplanted into suitable soil, under normal conditions, the seedling grows to its genetic capacity. It means that the Bahai Faith need to be stripped off its Persian (pioneer) garb for the Faith to grow and spread, and influence the social space in Kenya.

When the Bahais of Kenyan decent will own the Bahai Faith, they will start to identify their needs in accordance with their environment. Owning the Faith will foster a Kenyan Bahai theology. The theology will be culture and life affirming. Bahais will thus understand themselves as co-actors with other religions in the social arena. Owning the Faith and living it is the central aspect that the Bahais of Kenya are lacking for the growth of their Faith. The deficiency makes Bahai Faith to appear very

philosophical and more attractive to the reflective flock. However, when the Bahais live their Faith, the Faith becomes a way of life and not a topic for discussion.

The Bahai idea of 'a new world order' headed and governed by a council designated as the Universal House of Justice is a pointer to the future edifice of the Faith. Bahais believe that their Faith is the panacea to the crisis of the contemporary world. The future edifice is to be founded on the laws in the Kitabi-Aqdas – The Most Holy Book of the Bahais. Religious laws are thus state laws. Religious sentiments are very strong since they entail emotional, psychological and spiritual needs of humanity. When the sentiments are awakened politically, history has it that much is achieved either positively or negatively. For example, the role of Islam in the Iranian revolution of 1979 headed by Ayatollah Khomeinini, the role of the church in South Africa in the campaign against apartheid. Thus, in the secular world, Bahai Faith proposes an alternative to the existing social and political systems. In a world seeking a way out of her problems, the political aspect of the Bahai Faith calls for more research.

As the Bahais continue teaching their Faith in Kenya, people will come to know and understand the Bahai Faith. Bahai principles will even infiltrate into non-Bahai circles. For instance, the ideas of equality of men and women, and the harmony of religion and science. However, only people that are not committed to any religion will change(shift) to Bahai Faith. The greatest challenge the Faith encounters is to make the people who are not committed or affiliated to any religion to be committed in the Bahai Faith and own the Faith.

The centre of the Bahai Faith must therefore be made strong for the Faith to have a positive impact on the social plane of life, and for the Faith to have a future in Kenya.

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## APPENDIXES

- i. The Questionnaire.....132
- ii. List of informants.....136
- iii. Bahai Calender of 1999.....138-139
- iv. Representation of the Bahai Cycle and plans....140-142

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

NATIONALITY: Origin: \_\_\_\_\_ Current: \_\_\_\_\_

AGE: \_\_\_\_\_

OCCUPATION: \_\_\_\_\_

EDUCATION BACKGROUND:

- Certificate
- Diploma
- Degree
- others (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

NAME OF YOUR LOCAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Do you hold any Bahai administrative office(s)? Yes/No

Which if any? \_\_\_\_\_

2. How long have you served in the office(s)? \_\_\_\_\_

3. When did you become a Bahai? \_\_\_\_\_

4. Who introduced the Faith to you? \_\_\_\_\_

5. In what circumstances was the Faith introduced to you?

- Place of work
- Friendship
- Relative (Family)
- Teaching by a group or individual Bahai(s)
- Others (specify)



## Appendix I

6. What was your first reaction?
7. Which religious group were you in before you became a Bahai?
8. What does it mean to be a Bahai?
9. Why did you choose to be a Bahai?
10. How do you sustain yourself in the Faith?
11. How often do you attend Bahai functions?
  - Weekly
  - Fortnightly
  - As they occur in the Bahai Calendar
12. Which are the common Bahai functions?
13. Which are the most important days in the Bahai calendar?
14. Which is the most important for you and why?
15. How many of your close relatives are Bahais?
16. In your place of work, how many people are Bahais?
17. What is the work-mates' attitude towards your Faith?
18. How does Bahai Faith affect your day to day life?
  - School/College life
  - Family life
  - Socio-economic
  - Political life
19. How do you bring people to know about Bahai Faith?
20. Which are the methods of teaching people Bahai Faith?

## Appendix I

21. Who has the authority of determining what is right and acceptable in the Bahai Faith?
22. Which are the major difficulties in the process of making the Faith known?
23. Can you have some improvements of the methods? Yes/No. Specify.
24. How is a new Bahai cared for towards maturity in the Faith?
25. Is there any Holy book in Bahai Faith? Yes/No. Specify.
26. What is the importance of the book(s) in the Faith?
27. Which are the most important verses of the Holy text(s) to you and why?
28. How is the Bahai Community organised?
29. What is the reason of this kind of organisation?
30. How does the organisation help in the development of the Faith?
31. What is the mission and vision of Bahai Faith?
32. What is being done to achieve the goals?
33. What are the major achievements of Bahai Faith in your local area?
34. Which are the major drawbacks to the achievement of the goal(s)?
35. Who introduced the Faith in Kenya and when?
36. Which were the obstacles that were encountered in the introductory period?
37. How has the Faith been growing since then?
38. How did it come to be assimilated or accepted in Nairobi?
39. Do we have major events of the Bahai history in Kenya and more specifically in Nairobi? Yes/No. If Yes, name them and the time of their occurrence.
40. Which are the core beliefs of the Bahai Faith?

## Appendix I

41. Which are the core rituals (e.g. baptism, marriage, etc.) of the Bahai Faith?
42. Who conducts these rituals?
43. How is the Bahai worship ordered?
44. Which part of the worship do you enjoy most and why?
45. Which is the best Bahai hymn and why is it good to you?
46. To whom are the prayers of Bahai Faith directed?
47. What is the origin, purpose and destiny of human beings and the rest of the world according to Bahai Faith?
48. What is the language of Bahai worship?  
Does this exclude people or is it inclusive?
49. Is Bahai Faith involved in projects of social and economic change? Yes/No.  
If yes, give examples.
50. What is Bahais response to Kenyan/African culture?
51. What other information do you wish to add in relation to the questions asked and the answers you have given?

## LIST OF INFORMANTS

## A

- |                    |  |
|--------------------|--|
| 1. Shabani S. Seff | 7 <sup>th</sup> April, 1998, Nairobi Bahai Centre.     |
| 2. Dr. C. Rouhani  | 5 <sup>th</sup> June, 1998, Riverside Park.            |
| 3. Ray Collins     | 12 <sup>th</sup> November, 1998, Nairobi Bahai Centre. |
| 4. Festus Shayo    | 12 <sup>th</sup> November, 1998, “                     |
| 5. Charles Mugonye | 23 <sup>rd</sup> November, 1998, “                     |
| 6. Bob Kinyua      | 24 <sup>th</sup> November, 1998, “                     |
| 7. Aslan Laloi     | 24 <sup>th</sup> November, 1998, “                     |
| 8. Azizi Yazidi    | 18 <sup>th</sup> December, 1998, Riverside Park.       |
| 9. Bernard Gitonga | 5 <sup>th</sup> January, 1999, Nairobi Bahai Centre.   |
| 10. Jan Duliak     | 17 <sup>th</sup> January, 1999, Nairobi Bahai Centre.  |
| 11. Meheraz Ehsani | 26 <sup>th</sup> January, 1999, “                      |

## B

- |                         |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| 12. John Onzele         | 1 <sup>st</sup> December, 1998, Kinundu, Vihiga. |
| 13. Ezna Onzele         | 1 <sup>st</sup> December, 1998, “                |
| 14. Anita Kindambu      | 1 <sup>st</sup> December, 1998, “                |
| 15. Eunice Ajando       | 1 <sup>st</sup> December, 1998, “                |
| 16. Rhoda Ambogo        | 1 <sup>st</sup> December, 1998, Shango, Vihiga.  |
| 17. David Onzele        | 2 <sup>nd</sup> December, 1998, Kinundu, “       |
| 18. Mmboga Shipendi     | 2 <sup>nd</sup> December, 1998, Kapinjari, “     |
| 19. Beatrice Shipendi   | 2 <sup>nd</sup> December, 1998, “ “              |
| 20. Moses Shipendi      | 2 <sup>nd</sup> December, 1998, “ “              |
| 21. Enos Lugalia        | 3 <sup>rd</sup> December, 1998, Givogi, Vihiga   |
| 22. Joel Golfa Mwanzi   | “ “ “ “ “  |
| 23. Hezron C. Onyango   | “ “ “ “ “  |
| 24. Ziliper Anjenga     | “ “ “ Mambai, “                                  |
| 25. Nemble Kagonya      | 4 <sup>th</sup> December, 1998, Shango, Vihiga   |
| 26. Safania Gadwa       | “ “ “ “ “  |
| 27. Edwin Dindira       | “ “ “ Kinundu, “                                 |
| 28. Jamin Odera         | “ “ “ Shango, “                                  |
| 29. Noah Shipendi       | 22 <sup>nd</sup> December, 1998, Nakuru          |
| 30. Jethro Sasalo Shilo | 22 <sup>nd</sup> December, 1998, Nakuru          |

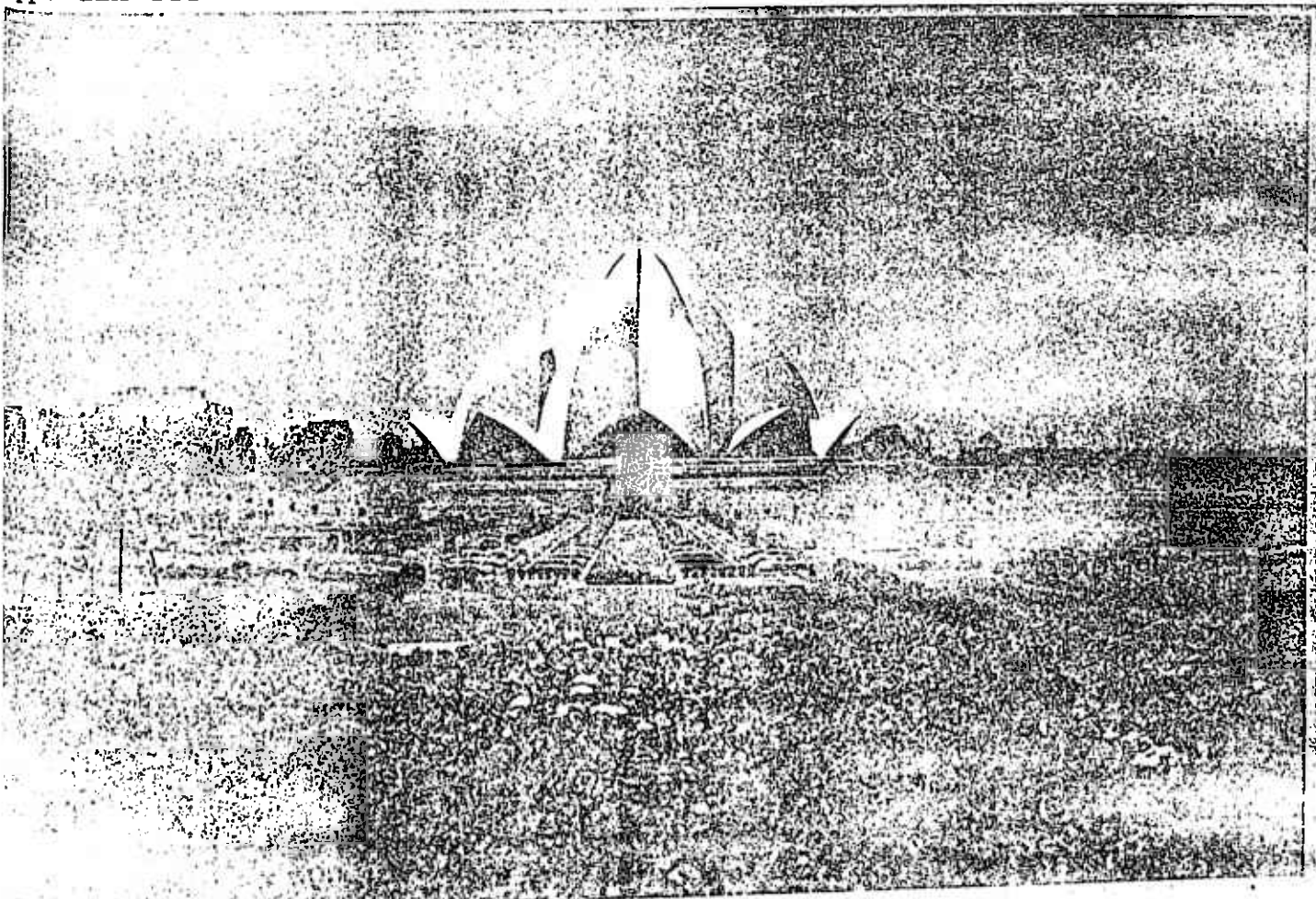
## C

- |                           |                        |
|---------------------------|------------------------|
| 31. Hamad Ehsani          | 35. Ian Sliny          |
| 32. Jamshi Yazamadi       | 36. Dr. Kasiri         |
| 33. Ferdos Yazamadi       | 37. Martin Olewe       |
| 34. Jaleh Ehsani          | 38. Bev Collins        |
| 39. Rachel Wanjiku Mwaura | 41. Sarah N. Kataka    |
| 40. Margaret N. Muranda   | 42. Fredrick O. Masara |

## Appendix II

- |                         |                        |
|-------------------------|------------------------|
| 43. Haron Bogita        | 56. Christopher Golva  |
| 44. Raphael Munguti     | 57. John Marungu       |
| 45. Njuru Nganga        | 58. Zekiel Kenyan Vome |
| 46. Rachel N. Ndegwa    | 59. Solomon Atsihamba  |
| 47. Samuel Kiiria       | 60. Allan C. Musungu   |
| 48. Simon Mwaura        | 61. William Musungu    |
| 49. Mary Muthoni        | 62. Sessia Linet       |
| 50. John Maina          | 63. Adib Birklard      |
| 51. John Mwangi Kagira  | 64. Timona A. Eboso    |
| 52. Amos Wandera        | 65. Safania Kindabu    |
| 53. Morgan Muranda      | 66. Kazim Amadi Otieno |
| 54. Methode Sentabyo    | 67. Kabisae Bulimo     |
| 55. Kiprotich C. Sangok | 68. Eunice Kendi       |

- A – This group of informants reside in Nairobi to whom personal interview were conducted
- B – This group compose of respondents from Nakuru Bahai Community but a majority are from Vihiga Communities. Personal interviews were conducted.
- C – This is the group which compose the majority of respondents from both Nairobi and Vihiga Communities. Each respondent was given a questionnaire to fill.



Bahá'í House of Worship, New Delhi.

1999

155/156 B.E.

JANUARY						
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NOVEMBER						
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Baha'í Holy Days - Work should be suspended  
 Ayyam-i-Ilá ) ( Days of Fasting

Baha'í Holy Days  
 Naw-Ruz

Feasts  
 Festival of Ridvan

**Bahá'í Holy Days**

Fast of Naw Rúz (Bahá'í New Year),  
March 21  
Fast of Ridván (Declaration of  
Bahá'u'lláh), April 21-May 2.  
Declaration of the Báb, May 23.  
Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh May 29.  
Martyrdom of the Báb, July 9.  
Birth of the Báb, October 20.  
Birth of Bahá'u'lláh, November 12.  
Day of the Covenant, November 26.  
Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Bahá,  
November 28.

**Bahá'í Holy Days on Which  
Work Should Be Suspended.**

The Fast of Naw-Rúz, March 21.  
The first day of Ridván, April 21.  
The ninth day of Ridván, April 29.  
The twelfth day of Ridván, May 2.  
The anniversary of the Declaration of  
the Báb, May 23.  
The anniversary of the ascension of  
Bahá'u'lláh May 29.  
The anniversary of the martyrdom of  
the Báb, July 9.  
The anniversary of the birth of the  
Báb, October 20.  
The anniversary of the birth of  
Bahá'u'lláh, November 12.

**Days of Fasting**

Nineteen Days beginning March 2.

**Short Obligatory Prayer**

*I bear witness, O my God, that  
Thou hast created me to know  
Thee and to worship Thee.  
I testify, at this moment, to my  
powerlessness and Thy might,  
to my poverty of to Thy wealth.  
There is not other God but  
Thee, the Help in Peril,  
the Self-Subsisting.*

Bahá'u'lláh

**Calendar of the Nineteen Day Feast**

MONTH	ARABIC NAME	TRANSLATION	TEST DAY
1 <sup>st</sup>	Bahá	<i>Splendour</i>	March 21
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Jalál	<i>Glorry</i>	April 9
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Jamál	<i>Beauty</i>	April 23
4 <sup>th</sup>	'Azamát	<i>Grandeur</i>	May 17
5 <sup>th</sup>	Nur	<i>Light</i>	June 5
6 <sup>th</sup>	Rahmat	<i>Mercy</i>	June 24
7 <sup>th</sup>	Kalimát	<i>Words</i>	July 13
8 <sup>th</sup>	Kamál	<i>Perfection</i>	August 1
9 <sup>th</sup>	Asmá'	<i>Names</i>	August 20
10 <sup>th</sup>	Izzat	<i>Might</i>	September 8
11 <sup>th</sup>	Mashiyat	<i>Will</i>	September 27
12 <sup>th</sup>	Ilm	<i>Knowledge</i>	October 16
13 <sup>th</sup>	Qudrat	<i>Power</i>	November 4
14 <sup>th</sup>	Qawl	<i>Speech</i>	November 23
15 <sup>th</sup>	Masá'il	<i>Questions</i>	December 12
16 <sup>th</sup>	Sharaf	<i>Honour</i>	December 31
17 <sup>th</sup>	Sultán	<i>Sovereignty</i>	January 19
18 <sup>th</sup>	Mulk	<i>Dominion</i>	February 7
19 <sup>th</sup>	Alá'	<i>Lightness</i>	March 2

Ayyám-i-Ilá (Intercalary Days) February 20 and March 1 and 10  
— four in ordinary and five in leap years

**Bahá'í Anniversaries**

The Bahá'í day starts and ends at sunset, and consequently the date of Bahá'í anniversaries should be adjusted to conform to the Bahá'í calendar. For further particulars on this subject, you should refer to the section entitled "Bahá'í Calendar" in "The Bahá'í World".

"The Guardian would advise that, if possible, the faithful should commemorate certain of the feasts and anniversaries at the following time:

"The anniversary of the declaration of the Báb on May 2nd, at about two hours after sunset.

"The first day of Ridván, at about 4 p.m. on the 21st of April.

"The anniversary of the martyrdom of the Báb, on July 9th, at about noon.

"The anniversary of the ascension of Bahá'u'lláh, on May 29th, at 4 p.m.

"The ascension of 'Abdu'l-Bahá on November 28th, at 1 a.m.

On other anniversaries the believers are free to gather at any time during the day, which they find convenient.

— translated from the Tablets  
— dated June 16, 23, 1901

"Regarding the question of the proper time to celebrate or hold our meetings of commemoration, the time should be fixed by counting after sunset the Master passed away one hour after sunset, which falls a certain number of hours after sunset as His passing should be commemorated according to the sun and regardless of daylight saving time. The same applies in the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh who passed away about eight hours after sunset."

— translated from the Tablets  
— dated June 16, 23, 1901  
— Bahá'í Publishing Agency

**Basic Principles of  
the Bahá'í Faith**

- The oneness of the world of humanity
- The foundation of all religion is one
- Religion must be the cause of unity
- Religion must be in accord with science and reason
- Independent investigation of truth
- Equality between men and women
- The abolition of all forms of prejudice
- Universal Peace
- Universal Education
- A universal auxiliary language
- Spiritual solution of economic problems
- A universal auxiliary language
- An international tribunal

**Some Other Teachings of  
the Bahá'í Faith**

- We are created as noble and spiritual beings
- The family is the foundation of human society
- Marriage is a means for spiritual development of both partners
- Consultation is a dynamic process for finding truth and for solving conflicts and problems
- Living a moral life has a direct influence on our spiritual happiness and development
- The soul continues after death

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Tel. 212-677-1447

Bahá'í Cycle (destined to last for 500,000 years)

Bahá'í Era (comprising the Dispensation of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh)

Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh (destined to last at least 1000 years)

Heroic Age  
The Primitive, the Apostolic Age

Formative Age  
The Transitional, the Iron Age

Golden Age

1st 2nd Epoch 3rd Epoch 1st 2nd 3rd 4th Epoch

The Báb

The Ministry of Bahá'u'lláh

The Ministry of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

Plans: 7YP 7YP 10YC 9YF 5TYF 6 3

Other Plans

1853

1892

1921

1937

1963

1986

1993

140



# Systematic Unfoldment of the Divine Plan

	Plan	Date	Objectives	Outcome
1st Epoch Formative Age	1st Seven Year Plan	1937 - 44	Spread of the Faith throughout North American and into South America and completion of the exterior ornamentation of the House of Worship.	LSAs in every province of Canada, every state of US, & 14 republics of Latin America. Exterior of House of Worship completed. 136 LSAs, 197 groups, 1300 localities on homefront.
2nd Epoch Formative Age	2nd Seven Year Plan	1946 - 53	Consolidate victories won; complete interior ornamentation; form 3 NSAs in Canada, Central & South America; support spread of Faith into Europe; supplemental goals to support Africa.	NSAs in Canada, Central & South America; assist systematic spread of Faith in Europe, incl. forming 10 LSAs in goal cities; interior ornamentation complete; support building the Shrine of the Bab; expansion & more LSAs on homefront.
2nd Epoch Formative Age	Other National and International Plans	1938 - 53	Spread of the Faith on the homefronts and in International regions.	Spread of Faith to a total of 2500 localities, incl. North America
	African Campaign (Involved 5 NSAs)	1950 - 53	Expansion of the Faith in Africa.	Sent pioneers, teaching, basis laid for 10YC; by 1954: 600 believers, 60 tribes, 190 loc.
	Australia - New Zeland 6YP	1947 - 53	Homefront goals.	7 LSAs & 21 groups; > doubled believers.
	Britain 6YP	1944 - 50	Homefront goals.	24 LSAs, proclamation, great inc; believers.
	2YP	1951 - 53	Homefr. & African campaign goals	Strengthen LSAs inc. literature, pioneers.
	Canada 5YP	1948 - 53	Homefront goals.	30 LSAs, 100 localities, NSA incorporation.
	Cent. Amer. 1YP	1952 - 53	Homefront goals.	Expand teaching; lit. trans., Fund increase.
	Egypt-Sudan 5YP	1948 - 53	Homefr. & African International goals	3 LSAs, African pioneers, women on LSAs.
	Germany/ Austria 5YP	1948 - 53	Homefront goals.	14 LSAs, translation of lit., Hazira obtained.
	India, Burma, & Pakistan 6YP	1938 - 44	Homefront goals.	LSA formations, literature translations.
	4 1/2 YP	1946 - 50	Homefront goals.	Over 26 LSAs formed, Hazira purchased.
	19 Mo. P	1951 - 53	Homefr. & Inter. (later incl. Africa).	Pioneers to 8 countries, 12 homefront LSAs
	Iraq 3YP	1950 - 53	Homefront goals.	Raised LSAs, built national headquarters.
	Persia 4 YP	1946 - 50	Homefr. & inter. (later incl. Africa).	Int; 160 plo. fam. 4 LSAs; Nat; 93 LSAs, 37 gr.
2nd Epoch Formative Age	10 Year Crusade	1953 - 63	Simultaneous initiation of 12 national plans in the first global plan; the 10YC aimed to develop the Faith in the Holy Land, consolidate the 12 homefront areas, consolidate opened territories, and open the remaining virgin territories on the planet.	131 countries opened, incl. 100 virgin territories in first year; 47 national assemblies formed & 33 incorporated; lit. trans. into 220 more languages; completion of Temples in Africa & Australia, started Temple in Europe; acquired endowments worldwide; > 11,000 localities; about 5000 LSAs. with > 350 incorp.; start of mass conversion.

	Plan	Date	Objectives	Outcome
3rd Epoch Formative Age	Nine Year Plan	1964 - 73	69 National plans aimed at developing the World Centre, consolidating opened territories, open virgin territories, & worldwide proclamation in 1967-68. The twin objectives were expansion and universal participation.	44 NSAs (113 total), 12,000 LSAs (17,000 total), 54,000 localities (69,500 total); literature translated into 225 lang. (571 total); many properties acquired; 3553 pioneers sent out; worldwide proclamation of Baha'u'llah's claim to rulers; Boards of Counsellors created.
3rd Epoch Formative Age	Five Year Plan	1974 - 79	Preservation of victories, vast and widespread expansion, & development of Baha'i life/communities; strengthening of Local Spiritual Assemblies.	Total of 96,000 localities, >25,000 LSAs; 18 new NSAs (125 total); operation of International Teaching Centre since 1973; progress in spiritual dev., maturation of assemblies, & dev. of Baha'i community life; construction seat UHJ begun; Initiation of Indian & Samoan Temples.
3rd Epoch Formative Age	Seven Year Plan	1979 - 86	Continue expansion and consolidation process; achieve remaining 5YP goals. Work to financial independence, continue construction projects, develop institutions, promote spiritual, intellectual and community life.	Completion of seat UHJ & Samoan Temple, approval of plans for Arc, expansion of ITC & Counsellors, creation of Social & Economic Dev. Office & SED projects, 8000 new LSAs, 16,000 new localities, 300 new tribes, 2196 new publications (898 of Holy Text), maturation of institutions & community life.
4th Epoch Formative Age	Six Year Plan	1986 - 92	Formation of goals by Counselors & NSAs; seven major objectives: carrying the Message to mankind; involvement in the life of society; increase in literature; maturation of communities; universal participation & spiritual enrichment of Ind.; extension of Baha'i education & strengthening of family life; and pursuit social and Economic dev. projects.	1 1/2 million new Baha'is; not just numerical victories, but mature development; Faith spread to all countries; worldwide proclamation from <i>The Promise of World Peace</i> & persecutions; completion Indian Temple with 20,000 daily visitors; emergence from obscurity reflected in unprecedented contacts with leaders of thought, media, & public; social & economic dev. projects greatly multiplies & attracting attention of world; youth activities, esp. period of service; dev. of
4th Epoch Formative Age	Three Year Plan	1993 - 96	Same objectives as the Six Year Plan, With a focus on enhancing the Faith of individuals, developing human resources, & fostering the functioning of local & national institutions.	?