

The Baha'i Community

Religious group has mixed media message

By DAVE CAMPBELL
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Thirteen members of the world wide Baha'i Community will be in Brandon tomorrow and Thursday. The group began a tour of 25 cities across the country with an exhibit at the National Arts Centre in Ottawa on Jan. 12.

The Baha'i community was formally founded by Baha'u'llah, a Persian nobleman, in 1863, when he called together a group of followers on an island in the Tigris River to announce that he was the latest in a line of prophets of God, following such messengers as Buddha, Moses, Muhammad, Krishna and Jesus Christ.

When he made his announcement Baha'u'llah had a reputation throughout the Near East as a reformer and teacher. In his native land his championship of the oppressed had cost him estates, position and wealth, but elsewhere he won the admiration of diplomats, scholars and writers.

He was imprisoned in Tehran and later exiled successively to Baghdad, Constantinople, Adrianople and Akka, Palestine, where he died in 1892 at the age of 75.

A co-founder of the religion called "The Bab," had been executed by troops of the Iranian Army in 1850 in the city of Tabriz after his doom had been pronounced by the religious leaders of the Islam faith.

Both branches of the Islam faith, the Shia and Sunni sects, believe that the Qa'im (Messiah) will someday come to purify the religion of the Koran as laid out by Mohammed who they consider to be the final prophet of God — the "Seal of the Prophets."

The Bab ran into persecution from Muslims after he made clear that although his authority was equal to that of Mohammed, he was the heralding force of a greater religion based upon a new book, the Bayan.

The Bab's first disciples known as "The Letters of the Living," consisted of 17 men and one woman who went

out to spread the gospel of the new age.

More than 20,000 men, women and children, including the 18 disciples and Bab himself, were slain by mobs stirred up by religious and political leaders of Islam nations in the Near East.

Baha'u'llah soon took over where the Bab had left off, and after his final exile to Akka he appointed his son 'Abdu'l-Baha as interpreter and exemplar of the religion. Under his leadership, Shoghi Effendi, Baha'u'llah's great grandson, was constituted first guardian of the faith in 1921.

A century ago this year, Baha'u'llah, from his prison in Akka, sent letters to the rulers of Europe and Asia warning of an impending world crisis.

He told them that the society as they knew it was about to burst apart through the rise of a world civilization. Spiritual forces were at work, he said, which would compel universal recognition of the truth underlying all existence — the organic oneness of the human race.

"The earth is one country and mankind its citizens. . . . The welfare of mankind, its peace and stability, are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established."

He warned of dangers which would befall mankind:

"A strange and wondrous instrument exists in the earth, but it is concealed from minds and souls. It is an instrument which hath the power to change the atmosphere of the planet, and its infection causeth destruction. . . . This is the day whereon every man will fly from himself, how much more from his kindred, could ye but perceive it. . . . After a time all the governments on earth will change. Oppression will envelop the earth."

When the leaders of the 19th century rejected his warnings and appeals, Baha'u'llah set about to create a model of what he felt the whole world could be like. That model has become the Baha'i faith, a worldwide community with membership

drawn from every race, class and culture, established in over 30,000 local centres in 130 countries around the globe. Adherents to the faith believe it is the pattern and the nucleus for a world order and world civilization of the future.

One interesting aspect of the Baha'i community is that the majority of its early followers and martyrs were people in their teens and early 20s. A large part of its present membership, and over half of its current enrolments in North America, are students and other youth.

The Baha'i community sees global revolution as the dominant factor of this age. It is seen as a two-sided revolution: first, through demands for more economic and political equality, which is often manifested in violence, and secondly, a type of cultural upheaval challenging the quality of modern life.

It is the second part of the revolution that concerns the Baha'i followers. The community describes the content of this revolution in a recent position paper entitled "Revolution and Community."

"It is a massive reaction against the materialistic ethic which now dominates our civilization. It is a protest against the deliberate exploitation of the arts, the sex instinct, the negative emotions like fear and aggression, for the purpose of selling things. . . . It is spiritual."

"We are being told further, that no existing social system truly serves man's spiritual and psychological needs; that there is none in which human identity does not seem to be increasingly imperiled; that there is none which appears, in the eyes of vast numbers of its own members, to possess real moral authority. The charge levelled against both communistic societies and Western ones; against cultures based on the Christian values and against others founded, for example, or Buddhism. . . . It is universal."

"Far from being the most important feature of the revo-

lution, violence is incidental to it, or even entirely absent. The real revolution advances quietly, often entirely unnoticed, in the hearts of millions of ordinary people who spiritually drop out of a world they have found meaningless. The routine tasks are done; laws are obeyed; but the roots of belief, without which no society can long endure, have been cut. Forever. . . . It is out of control."

Members of the Baha'i group coming to the city tomorrow include: Don Rogers, a well-known Western Canadian painter and associate professor of fine arts at the University of Saskatchewan; Alex Frame, a former CBC television producer, currently producing for a major private broadcaster; Phil Cunliffe, a Montreal industrial designer who worked on the creation of the "theme pavilions" for Expo '67; Jim Milne, an environmental designer with the CNR's architectural department; Glen Eyford, who is

currently completing a doctoral dissertation at the University of Toronto on the theme "The Artist as Educator."

Also included are team manager Dick Slanton, who has travelled extensively, working with Baha'i communities in many parts of the world including the Canadian Arctic and the countries of the Far East, and seven young students from Saskatchewan who have taken three months out from their studies to make the cross-country tour.

Their presentations of the message of Baha'u'llah will take place tomorrow and Thursday starting at 7:30 p.m. both days in the Canteen Lounge of Brandon University, which is downstairs from the main university dining hall.

The presentations will utilize film, sound and slides, as well as traditional art forms, and will include a mobile environment. The public is invited to attend.

Will Miss Streisand reply? Maybe. Will the Queen?

EDMONTON (CP) — When Alderman David Ward wants something done, he doesn't fool around—he goes to the top. Monday he mailed letters to the Queen, Gov.-Gen. Michener, Lt.-Gov. Grant MacEwan of Alberta and Barbra Streisand — although he mis-spelt the singer's first name.

Mr. Ward wants Louis Riel, Gabriel Dumont, Poundmaker, Crowfoot and Big Bear reinstated as Canadian citizens instead of being shown in history as traitors.

Riel was executed in 1885 for treason and the others aligned themselves with his cause: a better life for the Indian and Metis people of Canada.

In his letter to the Queen, a copy of which was sent to Mr. Michener and Mr. MacEwan, Mr. Ward said:

"I would respectfully request the Crown to urge the Canadian government to—

"1) Review the aims of and objectives and efficiency of the department of Indian affairs and northern development; and

"2) Take whatever action necessary to bring about the reinstatement of the above named persons in such a manner that it will benefit Canada."

In his letter to Miss Streisand, he said he apologized for imposing, but "if the way to a man's heart is through his stomach . . . maybe the way to a man's head is through his heart."

Miss Streisand has recently been a companion of Prime Minister Trudeau.

"As I am just about at the end of my rope as far as gaining the attention of the prime minister is concerned, I thought you might intervene on my behalf—if only to the extent that you brought the matter to his attention."