

An Early History of the Bahá'í Faith in Stornoway/Western Isles



Pixie MacCallum

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The Hebrides was first mentioned by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1916 in the Tablets of the Divine Plan where Bahá'ís were urged to “spread...the synopsis of the divine teachings in, among other places, the Shetland Islands, Hebrides and Orkney Islands.”

It is not known whether any visitors were made to the islands prior to 1953, when Knight of Bahá'u'lláh, Geraldine Craney, arrived in Stornoway to take up her pioneer post. Although her stay was short there were still several people who remembered her. Geraldine Craney was an office clerk who originally lived in Bray, Ireland, but moved to Nottingham, England, where she found the Bahá'í Faith in February 1953. Her acceptance of Bahá'u'lláh resulted, unfortunately, in her total rejection by her family. When the goals of the Ten Year Plan were announced, this new believer decided to fulfil the one for the Hebrides, arriving on the island of Lewis on 9 October 1953. Called a “stranger” by native residents, as were all outsiders, Geraldine lived alone on Lewis until 1959.

In the summer of 1957 Hand of the Cause Dr. Grossman flew to Inverness for his trip to the Hebrides. He went by train to the Kyle of Lochalsh, and there joined the boat in the early afternoon, and, sailing up to Stornoway, he arrived in the early evening. Here it was his joy to meet Geraldine Craney, Knight of Baha'u'llah for the Hebrides. In these islands he found the older people many years behind the times, both socially and culturally. The islanders live a hard life, in bitter weather most of the year. Their chief concern is a battle for material existence, and progress is likely to be very slow.

A 22-year-old German Anneliese Haug arrived in Stornoway on 27 April 1959. Overcoming tremendous difficulties of language, culture, employment and isolation Annaliese remained in her post leaving an invaluable legacy of trust, respect and love. Initially she tried to find Knight of Bahá'u'lláh Geraldine Craney but could not, so she began looking for work. Not being British, she had to get permission to work and several times lost jobs because she could not obtain that. Finally, in July she received a letter saying she had to leave the country but almost immediately afterwards she was offered a job taking care of an elderly woman, her husband and three adult sons. For the following two and a half years, Anneliese was able stay in Stornoway and share the Faith with those she could. In 1962 she

was offered an office job which she held until 1966 when she became a caregiver for a succession of people.

During the 1960s, travelling teachers and visitors helped to reduce the isolation of the sole pioneer. Teaching work was almost entirely sustained by the Inverness community. In October 1964, the first opportunity presented itself for the general public to encounter the word “Bahá’í”, with the insertion of the first quotations from the Writings in the *Stornoway Gazette*.

With the continued insertion of the quotations in 1965 some opposition to the Faith became apparent. It would seem that indirect approaches met with a more sympathetic response. A Persian dinner arranged by Gloria Faizi in 1965, to raise money for the swimming pool fund is still remembered with appreciation and was favourably reported at the time, although no mention of the Faith was made in connection with the event.

The first weekend school took place from 1-4 April 1967 in the Scout Hall, Keith Street. It was attended by Betty, Harold and Anne Shepherd, Topsy and Jimmy Bennet and Brian Dilworth. The programme was as follows:

Saturday Evening, Public Meeting.

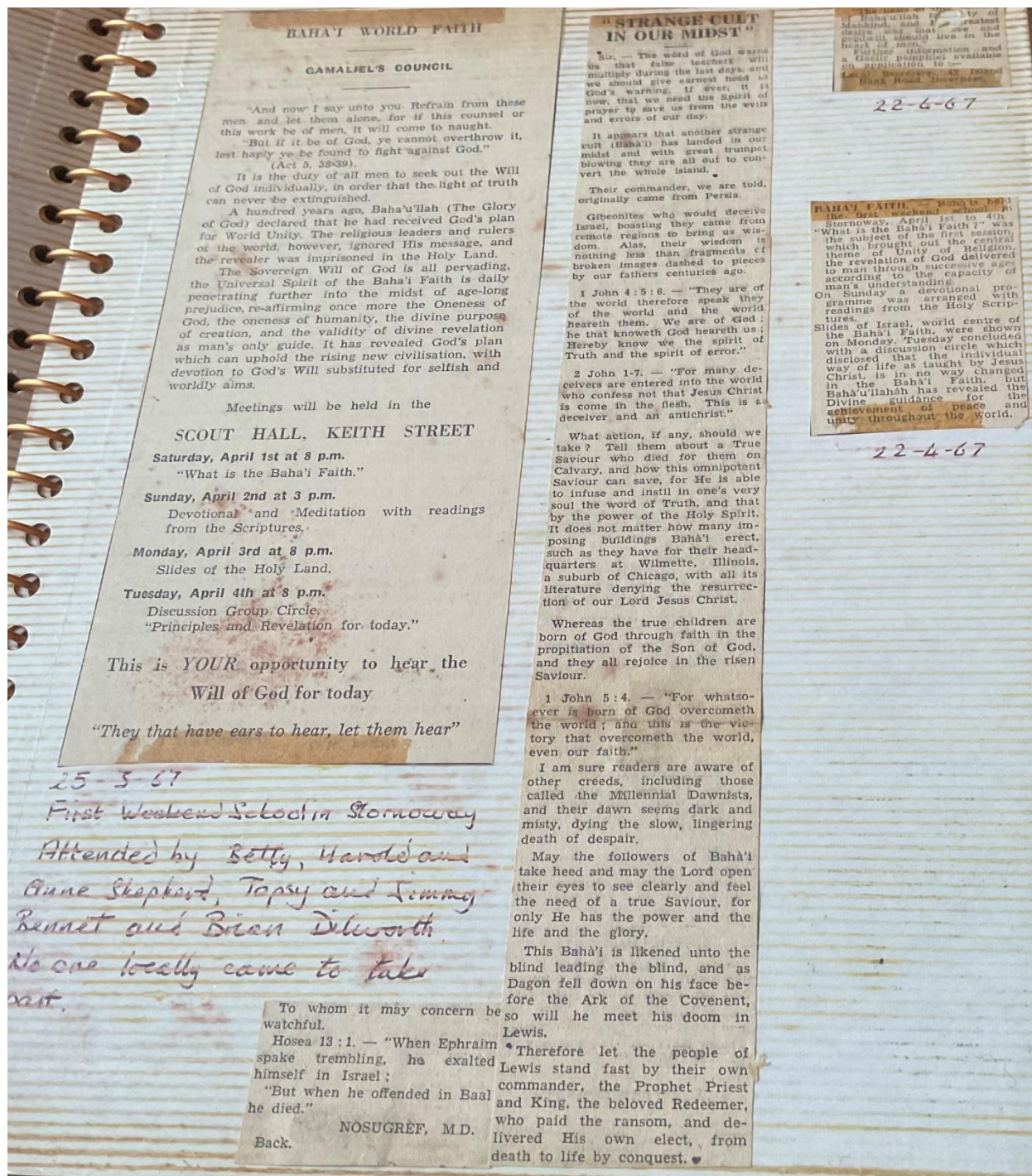
Sunday Afternoon, Devotional.

Sunday Evening, Consultation with pioneer.

Monday evening, slides of the Holy Land.

Tuesday Evening, Discussion 'Religious Unity'.

Although it was advertised in the paper no one locally took part. Although apparently on Tuesday evening, one young man appeared, who was already conversant with the Bahá’í Faith having read several books and followed a study course based on 'The New Era'. There was a brief report posted in the paper which elicited an opposing lengthy letter against the Faith using quotes from the Bible headlined “Strange Cult in our Midst”. Regular quotes from the Writings continued to be placed in the *Gazette* with the Inverness Bahá’ís as the contact.



In 1969 Richard St Barbe Baker came to Stornoway for the first time:



No Address.

Dear Sir,
You seem to think that we are very stupid and foolish in this place, when you so very foolish as to think of people believing your unsound, unscriptural talk of your false sect. Let me ask you, can you revive the spirit of faith in yourselves, far less in the world? You foolish creatures, do not dare to cross the Minch with you lies, we wouldn't go to hear you more so than we would go to hear the heathens. Thank the Lord we have the living witnesses with the word of God and the pure gospel here. Keep your pamphlets to yourself, they will only get the fire from us anyway. May the Lord open your eyes and put you right while in this world, Baha'i wont save your souls, you poor ~~creatures~~ deluded with lies.

No Name.

April 1967

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Stornoway, 4.1.69

The Editor,

Dear Sir,

The challenge put to every human being by Human Rights Year remains, although the Year itself has come to an end. We therefore seek the courtesy of your columns to set before the public the attitude and teachings of the Baha'i Faith on the vital issues involved.

The human person is a spiritual being as well as a member of society. His spiritual nature has expression in the maintenance of moral human relationships throughout the whole range of the community, and withers in a state of retirement and isolation in self, in family, in race or in class. The duty of the individual is to serve the needs of a progressive society.

An equal standard of human rights must be upheld, and individuals given equal opportunities. Variety and not uniformity is the principle of organic society.

Every age has its particular mission. The formation of world order is an obligation laid upon humanity today, it has become legally possible, socially imperative and divinely ordained. World order is nothing other than the administrative aspect of brotherhood.

In the words of Baha'u'llah, the Founder of the Baha'i Faith, "The gift of God to this enlightened age is the knowledge of the oneness of mankind and of the fundamental oneness of religion. War shall cease between nations, and by the will of God the Most Great Peace shall come; the world will be seen as a new world, and all men will live as brothers." The members of the Baha'i Faith, in every continent of the globe, are working for this end.

Yours faithfully,

A. Haug,
Stornoway.

entered in Gazette 6/1/69



Although the arrival of a short term pioneer had raised the Faith to group status, a group was not firmly established until 1969 with the arrival of two more pioneers, Doreen Holdsworth and Roderick Grant, to take up teaching posts at the local primary school.

For the first time direct local interest was expressed, and 1970 saw the gradual strengthening of the group with the arrival of more pioneers.

April 1970 the Provost was happy to accept a copy of *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*. The Rector of the Nicolson Institute and a Church of England and Church of Scotland minister were happy to accept the book *The Call of Bahá'u'lláh*. The Town Clerk and the Matron at the hospital also accepted Bahá'í books.

In a report from the Bahá'í group they wrote:

“The tremendous support from the Bahá'ís everywhere made this island vibrate with a new, very strongly felt spirit and made the people more receptive to the Faith. The week prior to the Bahá'í week and the week itself brought many blessings. Mrs. Shepherd and two other dear friends from Newcastle had a 7 minute Radio interview about the Bahá'í week on VHF which is heard in the Highlands and the Western isles and is also recorded. Press releases were in the local paper as well as in the widely read *Press and Journal*; some people are reading Bahá'í books without wanting to take part in the week.” Posters were displayed throughout the town for the Bahá'í week and Proclamation Fortnight.

“Bahá'í youth from all over the country during those two weeks (21 March to 1 April) did tremendous work and made very many contacts by going to the cafés, to the dances, and giving parties, and many local youth took part in the Bahá'í week...Certainly if it had not been for the two dear young girls (Minou Eshragh and Mahnaz Sohrab) from the Chelsea and Kensington Community, who did such wonderful contact making for us, the local youth would have not been so plentiful...To follow up we are having weekly study classes, firesides, fortnightly meetings in one of the hotels with notices in the local paper...” There were about 25 visiting Bahá'ís altogether.

However, in that same year, 1970, the first concerted opposition appeared in the press, both local and national when the Bahá'ís were refused an application to use a room in the Nicholson Institute by the Lewis Education sub-committee, and in consequence there were many letters in the *Stornoway Gazette*. Here is an example of a few of them.

MISSING THE POINT

Sir, — Your correspondent, Donald MacCuish, in dismissing my letter as rubbish, has followed the well-trodden path of those who read, and do not understand what they read. He has missed the point completely.

Surely the issue at stake is not whether the Baha'i Faith can match up to basic Christianity; it is a simple issue — yet one with far reaching consequences — of whether citizens should have equal rights in the matter of hiring public property for legitimate purposes, and whether public servants should be able to use their privileged position as committee members to suppress free speech. I do not know in any great detail what the Baha'i's preach, but as their activities do not contravene the law of the land, they as ratepayers are entitled to the same consideration as others when applying for the use of public property to expound their religious beliefs.

Donald MacCuish, in advising other local authorities to follow the example of Lewis District Education Sub-Committee and drive coach and horses over the principle of democracy and freedom of speech, positively frightens me. What if a D.E.S.C., with a majority made up of the political party in power at the time, refused the use of school rooms for election addresses to other parties on the grounds that their manifestos were "irresponsible nonsense", or that as their own party was sufficient there was no need for any other! — need I spell it out ... **totalitarianism.**

Colleen Macleod, of the Kirkwall Baha'i's Assembly, seems also not to have detected the fundamental point in the controversy, since she suggests a possible commendation to Revs. MacCuish and Gillies for not assuming the "tolerance" of flabby spirits." If these two ministers see the Baha'i Faith as a threat to their own religion, they could easily point out the 'truths' of the latter and the 'errors' of the former in open debate — perhaps even follow the example of Rev. John Mac-

position and refused the Baha'i's a platform. If Colleen Macleod can see anything praiseworthy in this, it suggests to me that a Baha'i District Education Sub-Committee might withhold the use of a schoolroom from a Presbyterian minority.

The more we consider the action of the two ministers in this case, the more evident does their error become to us. They proved unable to weigh an issue in a secular committee in a purely objective manner which the occasion demanded — and when representatives assume the role of dictators, democracy stands in jeopardy.

Yours etc.,

BEROEAN.

Harris.

21-11-70

BAHA'I'S AND EMINENT PEOPLE

Sir, — May an observer from London comment on the reaction of some of your correspondents to the Baha'i Faith. The sincerity of those who have attacked is evident and the desire to defend and uphold the Revelation of the Lord Jesus must be respected, but is their position perhaps parallel to that of the devoted Jews who, in their onslaught on Jesus, saw themselves as worthy champions of Moses? "What need have we of this Nazarene, have we not got Moses and the Prophets?" To which Christ's reply was, "If you had known Moses, you would have known me."

The teaching of Jesus is, as Mr MacCuish writes, "still bang up to date," to which Baha'u'llah testifies in most moving and majestic language, but when Mr MacCuish goes on to assert that there "is no need for anyone else," this is a contradiction of Jesus' own words, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when He, the Spirit of Truth is come, He will guide you into all

at Pentecost but the continuing words of Jesus refute any such interpretation: "For He shall not speak of Himself but whatsoever He shall hear, what shall He speak" clearly cannot refer to the Holy Spirit which is the source of inspiration and not a mouth-piece.

To any unbiased mind, it must be clear that the Message of Jesus was related to the needs and receptivity of a particular age and followed by a fuller revelation when mankind had matured and acquired a greater capacity and understanding. This is further reinforced by the words of Paul, "Judge nothing until the Lord come Who will bring to light the hidden things of darkness."

Baha'i's who believe that Baha'u'llah is indeed this Promised Lord (Christ returned in the Glory of the Father), are drawn from all levels of society, from every race and culture, but they have one thing in common — they have reached this belief through sincere and personal response. This may be the spontaneous recognition by simple peasants who possess a most precious asset, purity of heart unfettered by the veils of materialism, or it may be through the most profound intellectual exploration.

The dismissal of the Baha'i Faith as "rubbish" or "having nothing to offer" contrasts sharply with the considered opinions of many eminent people. Archdeacon George Townshend thought that "No prophet has ever come into the world with such overwhelming proofs of His mission than Baha'u'llah." The celebrated theologian, Professor Cheyne, Chief Editor of the Encyclopedia Biblica, wrote of Baha'u'llah, "There was living quite lately a human being of such con-

summate many think it both possible and inevitable even to identify Him mystically with the invisible Godhead."

Queen Marie of Romania, a grand-daughter of Queen Victoria, testified that "The Baha'i teachings bring peace and understanding. It is like a wide embrace gathering together all those who have long searched for words of hope. It accepts all great Prophets gone before; it destroys no other creeds and leaves all doors open." The renowned Dr. Jowett, Master of Balliol, said that "This Baha'i Movement is the greatest light that has come into the world since the time of Jesus Christ. You must watch it and never let it out of your sight. It is too great and too near for this generation to comprehend. The future alone can reveal its import." And the great Tolstoy referred to Baha'u'llah's teachings as "the highest and purest form of religious teaching."

Is it not then somewhat hasty judgment to dismiss so contemptuously one whom Professor E. G. Browne describes as, "The object of a love and devotion which kings might envy and emperors sigh for in vain"? Could it be that this prisoner who was brought in chains to the Holy Land 100 years ago was indeed the returned Lord, come as a thief in the night, first "to suffer many things and be rejected" but destined through the power of His word eventually to regenerate and unite all mankind in the love of God?

Yours etc.,

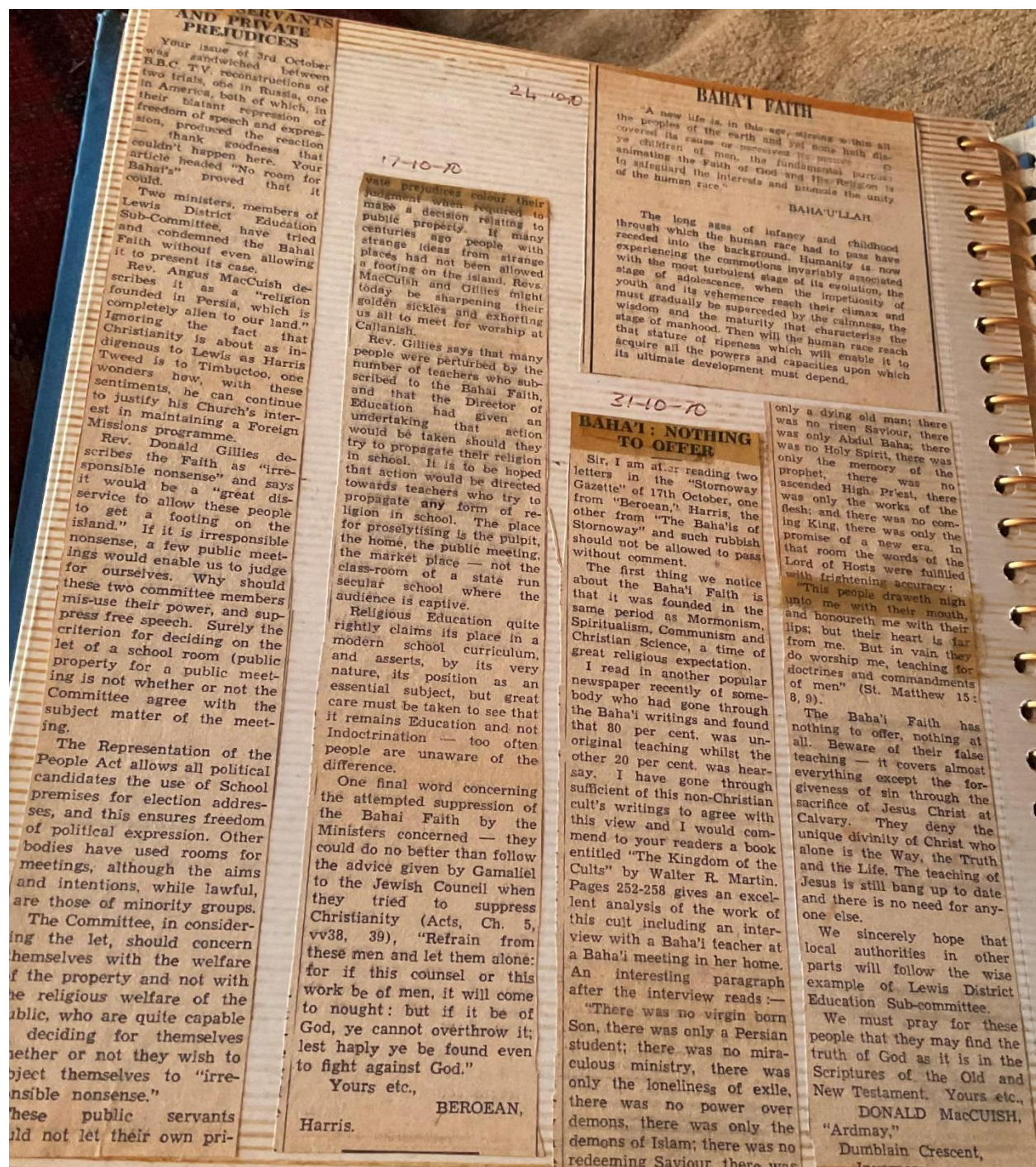
C. R. MACDONALD.

27 Rutland Gate,
London S.W.7.

BAHA'I FAITH

"Grieve not at the things ye witness in this day. The day shall come whereon the tongues of the nations shall proclaim, 'The earth is God's, the Almighty, the Single, the Incomparable, the All-Knowing!'"

BAHA'U'LLAH.



SERVANTS AND PRIVATE PREJUDICES

Your issue of 3rd October was sandwiched between B.B.C. TV, reconstructions of two trials, one in Russia, one in America, both of which, in their blatant repression of freedom of speech and expression, produced the reaction - thank goodness that couldn't happen here. Your Bahai's proved that it

Two ministers, members of Lewis District Education Sub-Committee, have tried Faith without even allowing it to present its case.

Rev. Angus MacCush describes it as a "religion founded in Persia, which is completely alien to our land." Ignoring the fact that Christianity is about as indigenous to Lewis as Harris Tweed is to Timbuctoo, one wonders how, with these sentiments, he can continue to justify his Church's interest in maintaining a Foreign Missions programme.

Rev. Donald Gillies describes the Faith as "irresponsible nonsense" and says it would be a "great disservice to allow these people to get a footing on the island." If it is irresponsible nonsense, a few public meetings would enable us to judge for ourselves. Why should these two committee members mis-use their power, and suppress free speech. Surely the criterion for deciding on the let of a school room (public property for a public meeting is not whether or not the Committee agree with the subject matter of the meeting.

The Representation of the People Act allows all political candidates the use of School premises for election addresses, and this ensures freedom of political expression. Other bodies have used rooms for meetings, although the aims and intentions, while lawful, are those of minority groups.

The Committee, in considering the let, should concern themselves with the welfare of the property and not with the religious welfare of the public, who are quite capable of deciding for themselves whether or not they wish to object themselves to "irresponsible nonsense."

These public servants should not let their own pri-

17-10-70

vate prejudices colour their judgment when required to make a decision relating to public property. If many centuries ago people with strange ideas from strange places had not been allowed a footing on the island, Revs. MacCush and Gillies might today be sharpening their golden sickles and exhorting us all to meet for worship at Callanish.

Rev. Gillies says that many people were perturbed by the number of teachers who subscribed to the Bahai Faith, and that the Director of Education had given an undertaking that action would be taken should they try to propagate their religion in school. It is to be hoped that action would be directed towards teachers who try to propagate any form of religion in school. The place for proselytising is the pulpit, the home, the public meeting, the market place - not the class-room of a state run secular school where the audience is captive.

Religious Education quite rightly claims its place in a modern school curriculum, and asserts, by its very nature, its position as an essential subject, but great care must be taken to see that it remains Education and not indoctrination - too often people are unaware of the difference.

One final word concerning the attempted suppression of the Bahai Faith by the Ministers concerned - they could do no better than follow the advice given by Gamaliel to the Jewish Council when they tried to suppress Christianity (Acts, Ch. 5, vv38, 39), "Refrain from these men and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God."

Yours etc.,

BEROEAN,

Harris.

BAHA'I FAITH

"A new life is, in this age, stirring within all the peoples of the earth and yet none hath discovered its cause or perceived its purpose. O children of men, the fundamental purpose is to animate the Faith of God and the Religion to safeguard the interests and promote the unity of the human race."

BAHA'ULLAH

The long ages of infancy and childhood receded into the human race had to pass have experienced the commotions invariably associated with the most turbulent stage of its evolution, the stage of adolescence, when the impetuosity of youth and its vehemence reach their climax and must gradually be superseded by the calmness and wisdom and the maturity that characterise the stage of manhood. Then will the human race reach that stature of ripeness which will enable it to acquire all the powers and capacities upon which its ultimate development must depend.

31-10-70

BAHA'I: NOTHING TO OFFER

Sir, I am after reading two letters in the "Stornoway Gazette" of 17th October, one from "Beroean," Harris, the other from "The Baha's of Stornoway" and such rubbish should not be allowed to pass without comment.

The first thing we notice about the Baha'i Faith is that it was founded in the same period as Mormonism, Spiritualism, Communism and Christian Science, a time of great religious expectation.

I read in another popular newspaper recently of somebody who had gone through the Baha'i writings and found that 80 per cent. was unoriginal teaching whilst the other 20 per cent. was hearsay. I have gone through sufficient of this non-Christian cult's writings to agree with this view and I would commend to your readers a book entitled "The Kingdom of the Cults" by Walter R. Martin. Pages 252-258 gives an excellent analysis of the work of this cult including an interview with a Baha'i teacher at a Baha'i meeting in her home. An interesting paragraph after the interview reads:-

"There was no virgin born Son, there was only a Persian student; there was no miraculous ministry, there was only the loneliness of exile, there was no power over demons, there was only the redeeming Saviour, there was

only a dying old man; there was no risen Saviour, there was only Abdul Baha; there was no Holy Spirit, there was only the memory of the prophet, there was no ascended High Priest, there was only the works of the flesh; and there was no coming King, there was only the promise of a new era. In that room the words of the Lord of Hosts were fulfilled with frightening accuracy:

"This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines and commandments of men" (St. Matthew 15: 8, 9).

The Baha'i Faith has nothing to offer, nothing at all. Beware of their false teaching - it covers almost everything except the forgiveness of sin through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ at Calvary. They deny the unique divinity of Christ who alone is the Way, the Truth and the Life. The teaching of Jesus is still bang up to date and there is no need for anyone else.

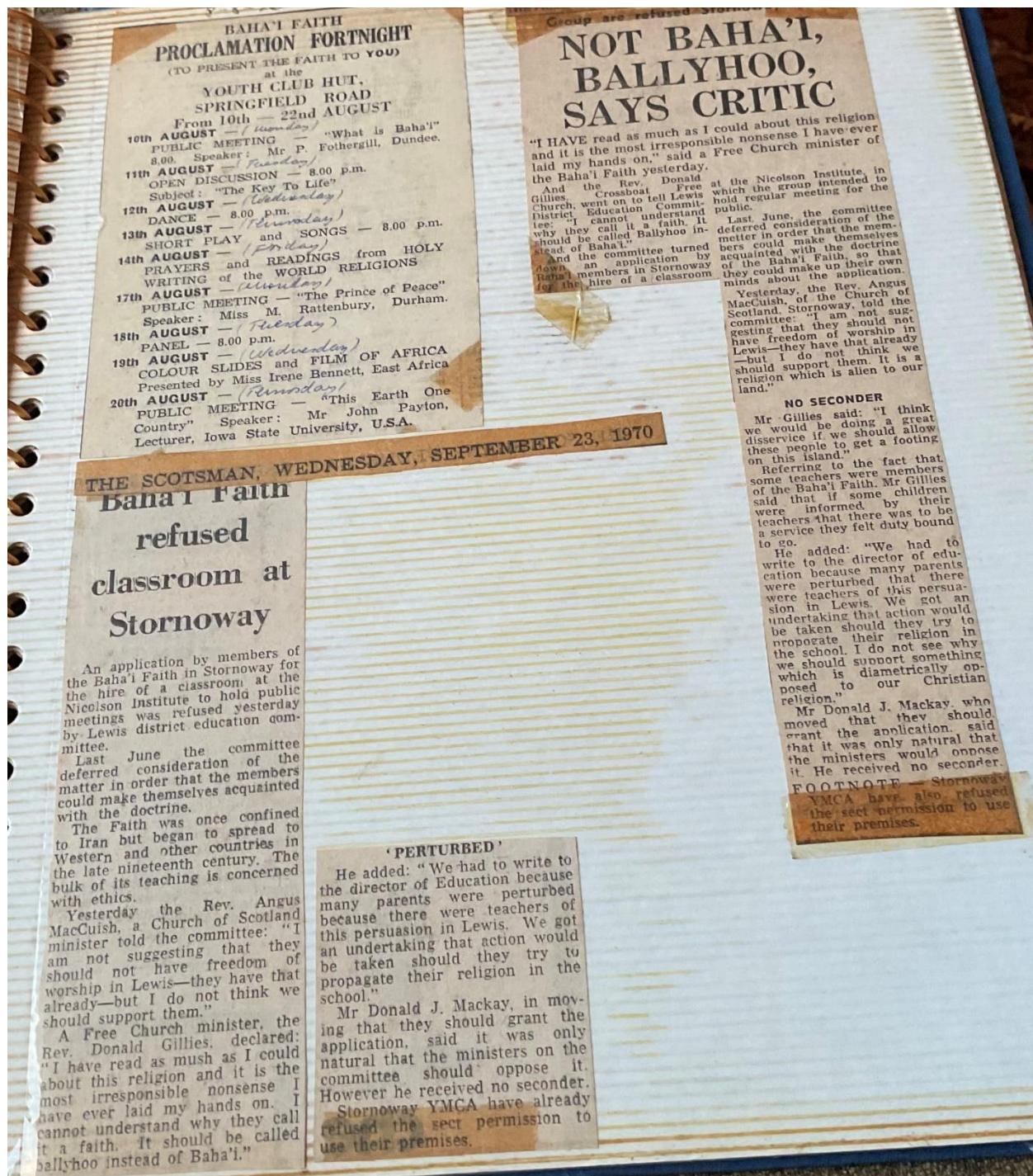
We sincerely hope that local authorities in other parts will follow the wise example of Lewis District Education Sub-committee.

We must pray for these people that they may find the truth of God as it is in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament. Yours etc.,

DONALD MACCUSH,

"Ardmay,"

Dumblain Crescent,



The attacks were faithfully recorded by a *Gazette* reporter Peter Graham who was to become the first declarant in the Western Isles.

This active Bahá'í group in 1970 was comprised of Annaliese Haug, Roderick Grant, Minou Rouhani, Alma Gregory, Rita Bridge, Doreen Holdsworth, and Verdun Wake. However, Rita Bridge, Doreen Holdsworth, Verdun Wake and Annaliese Haug, who pioneered to Crete, all left the island later that year hence the need for more pioneers to form the first Spiritual Assembly at Ridván 1971. Alma Gregory when she arrived in 1970 determined to stay there for the rest of her life and “bury her bones” in Stornoway. Which she did! She passed away in 1997. Alma was originally from America but came with her mother to England so that she could go to boarding school. In her teenage years she mingled with all the early believers and had the bounty of spending time with Shoghi Effendi, the student, on numerous occasions. She later served on the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles.

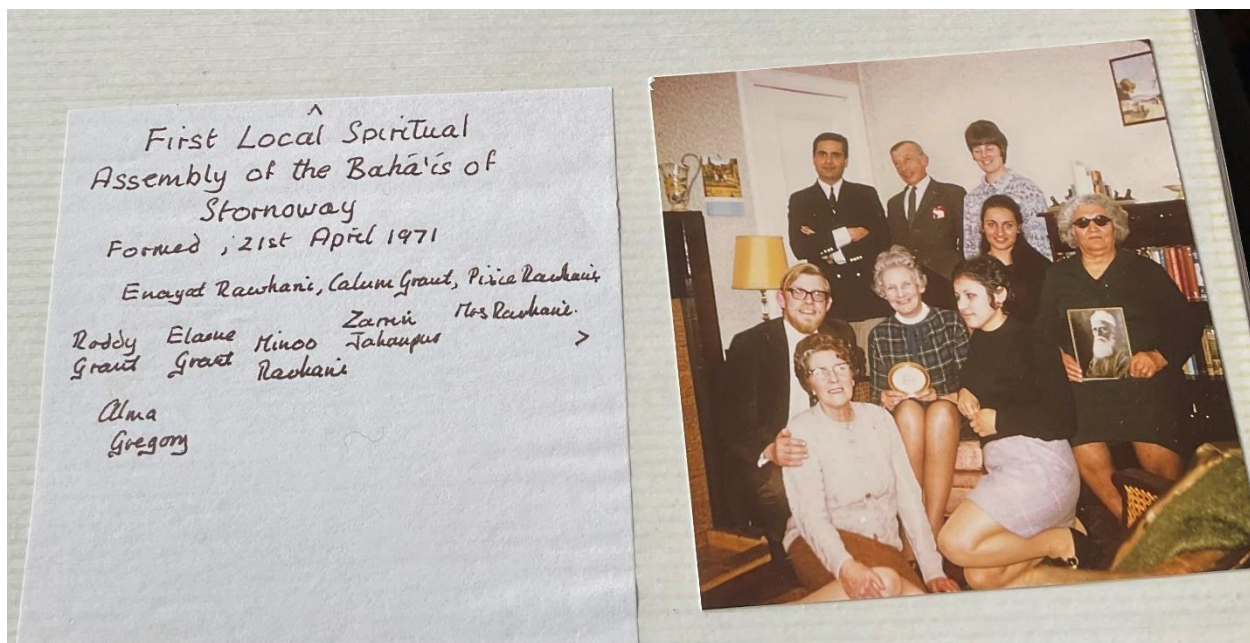


Elaine and Calum Grant arrived 19 April 1971. Zarrin Jahanpour, Mrs. Hakimeh Rawhani, Enayat and Pixie Rawhani all arrived on 20 April.



The Arrival of Pioneers. March - April 1971

- ┌ The Grants' car comes off the 'Loch Seaforth'
- ^ The arrival of Calum and Elaine Grant.
- < The arrival of Pixie, Enayat and Mrs Rawhani sen.



At Ridván 1971, the first Local Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Stornoway was formed in the presence of a representative from the National Spiritual Assembly. The members were Minou Rouhani, Calum Grant, Elaine Grant, Roderick Grant, Alma Gregory, Enayat Rawhani, Hakimeh Rawhani, Pixie Rawhani and Zarrin Jahanpour. At this time the community numbered 9 adults, all pioneers, and two children. For some time after this, accommodation was to continue to prove a problem. Since 1969 pioneers had lived in tents, caravans and lodgings. Firesides were difficult to hold. Feasts and Holy Days were observed regularly but with difficulty. The circle of contacts continued to grow and individuals moved out into the community in their attempt to put into action the principle of "work in the spirit of service", working in the youth club and hospital. This early "teaching project" has, in one instance, continued uninterrupted to this day. With the acquisition of permanent accommodation, regular study classes and firesides were established.

In 1971 the Consultant Surgeon at Lewis Hospital was presented with a book. The Lord Lieutenant, the Convenor of the Council, the Sheriff etc. were all offered the Proclamation Book but mostly no response except some interest from the Lord Lieutenant.

Minou Rouhani left May 1971. She was replaced by Jim Bradly who pioneered to Stornoway. It was very hard for Jim to find work. He and Enayat initially took care of people's gardens for a pittance. One day the owner of one of the homes gave

them a big bunch of rhubarb. On the way home they met one of the church ministers. They had an amicable conversation and he said they were welcome to come and pick rhubarb from his garden any time. However, when he realised they were Bahá'ís his whole manner changed and he could not turn around and run back down the road fast enough! Later Jim got a permanent job in an electrical firm shop until he left the island in 1972.



Elaine Grant & Mrs Raekenil Roddy Grant
(1971) Graham McLachlan
(First declared Bahá'í
in Stornoway)
and Elaine Grant
1971

Auxiliary Board Member Ernest Gregory
< with Zerrin Jakaupur.

In the summer of 1971 two young travelling teachers, Tawfik Rushdy and Farid Delshad spent some time in Stornoway. They would sit on a wall in the centre of town and talk to the local youth who tended to be very shy. Eventually, at their invitation, some of the youth would come and hang out at the Rawhani home in the industrial part of town. After the summer the youth disappeared except for one interesting incident. As the Holy Day for the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh approached (12 November), Pixie bumped into one of the youth, Louise Nicholson, and asked her to let the other youth know that they are welcome to attend this Bahá'í celebration. None of the youth did participate. However, a few weeks later there was a knock on the Rawhani door and in trooped three of the local youth. They sat down, were given coffee and said very little. Then one of them came and handed Pixie a present of a silver coloured dish with a milk and sugar set saying how sorry they were that they had missed her birthday! Although deeply embarrassed Pixie expressed her gratitude and the boys upped and left soon after. Not to be seen again until Tawfik and his friend returned the following summer.

During their years in Stornoway right from day one, despite its dilapidated condition, the Rawhani residence at 42 Inaclete Road (built in 1884), which included two then three, and later four children, was home to many pioneers and travelling teachers. In August 1971 Mrs. Rawhani and Enayat left the island, the former to Iran and the latter to finish his studies, both returning in January and April respectively the following year. This left Pixie and Zarrin alone with three children under three, no car, no phone and one paraffin heater in a house where the windows of the house were rotten, the front door had a big hole in it, the stairs were riddled with woodworm, water came up through the concrete floors and the walls and bedclothes were damp in the mornings! Zarrin worked briefly in a local café then took a more permanent job in the fish factory. It was very challenging because the other workers would all speak Gaelic in front of her. The other drawback was returning home stinking of fish!

Four visitors came up in the New Year including Shahram Firoozmand and Dennis McKeown.

AN INVITATION TO REV. A. FINLAYSON . . .

Sir, — The Rev. Angus Finlayson refers in your issue of 20th February to 'purveyors of religious fiction hav(ing) their stall in the main thoroughfare of our town.' Many have understood this to refer to our shop in Cromwell Street. This is a repetition of an unfortunate rumour which has caused the staff and directors of this company embarrassment and actual loss. It is a rumour based on hearsay; Mr Finlayson told me that he learned of 'the Baha'i shop' from the casual remark of a friend.

Hebridean Books Limited is a non-sectarian company not connected with any religious or political movement. The only directors and shareholders are my wife and myself. The religion of our staff and directors is none of Mr Finlayson's business, but happens not to be Baha'i. Since a close relative of Mr Finlayson is our senior assistant, it is surprising he did not know this. We do sell Baha'i books; since November, 1971, our account with the Baha'i Publishing Trust records eight volumes valued at £6.75.

Although we have the Koran, the Talmud, the Judeo-Christian Bible in several translations, and works on Buddhism, Hinduism and many others, religious books represent a very small proportion of our turnover. The proportion might be increased if Mr Finlayson accepts our invitation to suggest works of his own faith.

In the meantime we call upon Mr Finlayson to make it clear that this shop is not the 'stall' mentioned, and that we are not 'witless in the extreme.'

Yours etc.,

IAN GORDON,
Director,

NON-CHRISTIAN CULT

Sir, — Congratulations to Mr Finlayson for his interesting letter, published in your correspondence columns on January 20. He quite rightly condemns the so-called Baha'i Faith as a "phantom religion".

This strange cult imitates Christianity in forms and ceremonies wherever possible in order to become appealing to naive and uninformed minds. They only employ teachers, who are responsible for conducting discussion

groups in homes or Baha'i Centres. They are willing to discuss (with anyone foolish enough to believe) the unity of all religion under the so-called Baha'u'llah. Baha'u'llah was only a mere man called Mirza Husayn Ali, who died in the last century, despite his claims of immortality.

Mr Finlayson wisely warns us of the danger of becoming involved with these inwardly "ravaging wolves", when he states that "the special menace of their false movement lies in the fact that their attacks on Christianity are in the name of Christianity". They are quick to quote the scriptures of any religion of their sacred nine (including Mohammed and Buddha) to defend the false teachings of Baha'u'llah and Abdul Baha.

Under the heading "World Religion Day in Stornoway", in the same issue of the "Stornoway Gazette", the Baha'i spokesman said this event was "to stress the oneness of all revealed religions". They should first put their own house in order, when their own nine equal great manifestations of the Divine Being contradict each other, but all rightly exercised Christians know full well that "God is not the author of confusion" (1 Cor., 14:33).

32-1-72

... AND A CHALLENGE

Sir, — During my weekly perusal through the revered columns of your paper, I was shocked — nay — horrified to discover a gross distortion of the truth in a letter from one of your less enlightened readers.

I refer, of course, to last week's letter from Mr Finlayson and in particular to the specific mention of "a stall in the main thoroughfare of the town."

As an employee in what Mr Finlayson would doubtlessly describe as a stall, I challenge him to lead me to this "stall" he refers to in his letter. I very much doubt that he could do this for the simple reason that no such stall exists in the main thoroughfare of town.

What does exist is a recently opened bookshop with a very high standard of literature available to all who step inside. If Mr Finlayson would care to do this instead of running hot-foot to his pen he would soon discover there is no connection whatsoever between the "Hebridean Bookshop" and the Baha'i Faith Mission. So please, Mr Finlayson, in future, get your facts straight —

Those who speak do not know,
Those who know do not speak.
Peace, love and light.

Yours etc.,

ANGUS,

Plasterfield.

Religions, such as Bahaism, that do not believe Christ is the Son of God, are false, as one cannot go to Heaven without Christ. "This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and knoweth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Matt., 18, 8, 9).

All would be well advised to take nothing whatsoever to do with this non-Christian cult.

Yours etc.,

DONALD MacCUIISH,
"Ardmay",
5 Drumblair Crescent,
Inverness IV2 4RG.

WHY I BECAME A BAHAI

Sir, — When I first heard of the Baha'i Faith, I thought of it as being a false religion. But like a lot of the young people today I was searching for something, so I decided to investigate this religion. After hearing talks and reading a little about the Faith, I realised that Baha 'u' llah is indeed a Manifestation of God.

Like all the other prophets before him, Baha 'u' llah brought a message to mankind. He brought the appropriate message for this age as did prophets before him for previous ages. As the world and the minds of its citizens progressed, so did the teachings revealed by the Manifestations of God. The mission of Baha 'u' llah is to establish the unity of mankind, and although he spent many years in prison, he revealed his teachings in writing and the Faith grew and grew.

It is impossible to put into words the feeling which enveloped me when true recognition dawned on me and I decided to declare my faith and join with my fellow believers all over the world and work for the unity of mankind. The Baha'i Faith is like a wide embrace gathering together people from every nation, race and religion who have long searched for words of hope. The Faith brought to me a sense of happiness, peace and understanding which I have never experienced before.

The unity, sincerity and enthusiasm of the Baha'is also attracted me to the Faith. It surprised me to see such a variety of age groups and personalities so very, very united. When I sit with my friends and study the Faith, I see that I must strive to become a better person now that I have an aim in life — a goal to achieve.

"One day God's Plan for mankind will be accepted in its entirety, and His rule on earth will be universally recognised". From the Baha'i Writings.

Yours etc.,

BAHA'I YOUTH,
(Aged 16),
Stornoway.

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Sir, — I have decided to write this letter after reading the past two weeks correspondence in the "Gazette".

When I first heard of the Baha'i Faith, I had reached a state of complete bewilderment with regard to my religious beliefs. I was unable to reconcile the idea of a loving God with the belief that we could only be saved through Christ when, throughout the world, there were so many people who were not Christians. Nor did it seem possible that God would allow the human race to rush so blindly towards a disaster!

The Baha'i Faith was able to supply the answer to these questions and my belief in Baha 'u' llah, as the Messenger of God for this age, stems not only from his many teachings, but from faith. This belief has enabled me to place in true perspective this society and to try to adhere to the laws of God.

The teachings of Baha 'u' llah have given myself and many others a love for God which overrides all other thoughts and considerations.

"The Prophets of God voiced the spirit of unity and agreement. They have been the founders of divine reality. Therefore, if the nations of the world forsake imitations and investigate the reality underlying the revealed Word of God they will agree and become reconciled".

Baha 'u' llah.

Yours etc.,

ANNE MACDONALD,
(Aged 17),

15 Churchill Drive,
Stornoway.

BAHA'I ATTACKS BASED ON "MISUNDERSTANDING"

Mr Charles Macdonald, secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is, visited Lewis last week to meet members of the Faith.

There are about 20 members of the Baha'i Faith in Stornoway, and more than half of those, he said, were local people.

Regarding a recent letter from a Free Church minister which appeared in the "Gazette" and criticised the Baha'i Faith, Mr Macdonald remarked, "It is rather unfortunate that they should make these attacks on the basis of misunderstanding. I can't see how they should feel any animosity against the Baha'is. Surely the world needs the concept of brotherhood? We need to break down the barriers of hatred and prejudice."

OUR READERS SAY ...

THE WORD IS TRUTH

• Sir, — After having read the two previous articles on the truth of Baha'i by two "bewildered" disciples of Baha 'u' llah, I would like, being a youth of similar age, to state my own views.

I fail to see what bewilderment there is to be found within the teachings of Scripture. I accept that the Bible is the True Word of God and that its words are inspired by Him. Here I recommend a book to suit the young mind of today — Arthur Gook's — "Can A Young Man Trust The Bible?", which is excellent reading for the young disillusioned mind.

I am not a converted Christian for I am still on the "broad way", yet I do not go searching for other religions whereby faith by works is the theme; thereby giving no place to Christ as the "Only begotten of the Father" and as the Second Person of the Adorable Trinity.

• Where people of today fall short in their interpretation of Scripture is that they look for faults within the Word, while they should be asking God for enlightenment.

When today we see the prophecies recorded in the Bible coming true, surely then there can be no doubt as to the truth of the Bible. False prophets such as Baha 'u' llah are recorded as appearing in the latter days.

"And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many".

Christ also says: "For there shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders, inasmuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect".

When Christ uses these terms twice in one chapter, as in Matt. 24, then these perils are very real and dangerous. Sudden death is also prophesied.

"Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left".

When we look around us, is this not so! There is therefore no doubt as to that the

A DISCLAIMER

Sir, — It was with some annoyance that I came across a letter in the "Stornoway Gazette" (January 27th, 1973), concerning the activities of the "Hebridean Bookshop" and the "Baha'i Faith Mission." The letter was signed "Angus, Plasterfield."

The possible confusion which might arise over the authorship of the above mentioned letter has prompted me to make three points clear.

(1) I have no strong feelings about (a) the Hebridean Bookshop; (b) the Baha'i Faith Mission; (c) the Mr Finlayson referred to in the letter.

(2) I am not the author of the letter, although in folk-circles in Lewis, I may well be known as "Angus Plasterfield." I wish to make this as clear as possible. Certainly, my Christian name is Angus. Certainly my home is in Plasterfield. I would, however, deplore any assertion that I and the writer are the same.

(3) I would certainly not like to be associated with such vague, contrived prose, as displayed in the letter. Could I make one thing clear to the writer Distortions are always gross (that is the nature of the distortion); something gross is always distorted (that is the nature of grossness). To all the adjective and noun "distorted grossness".

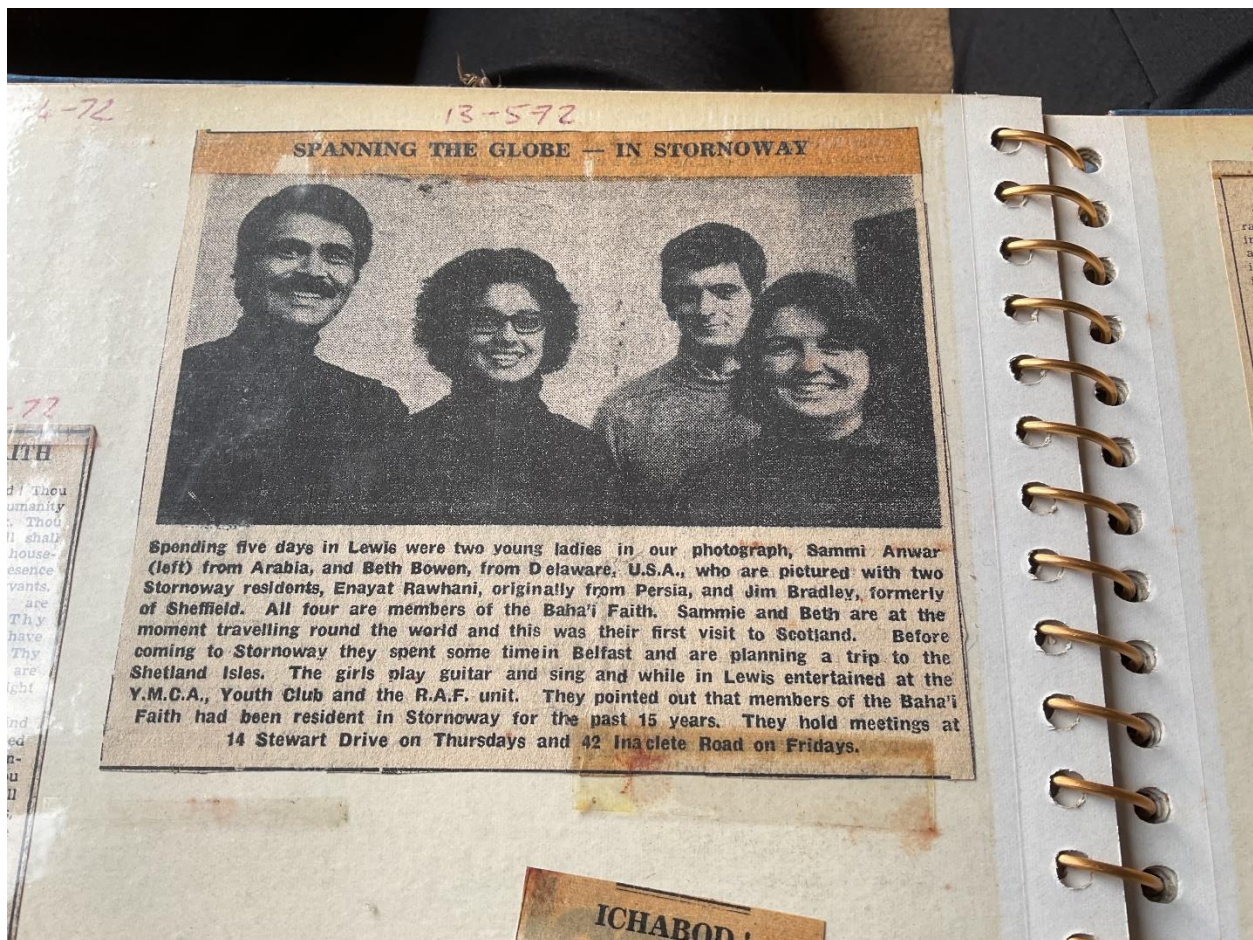
Yours etc.,

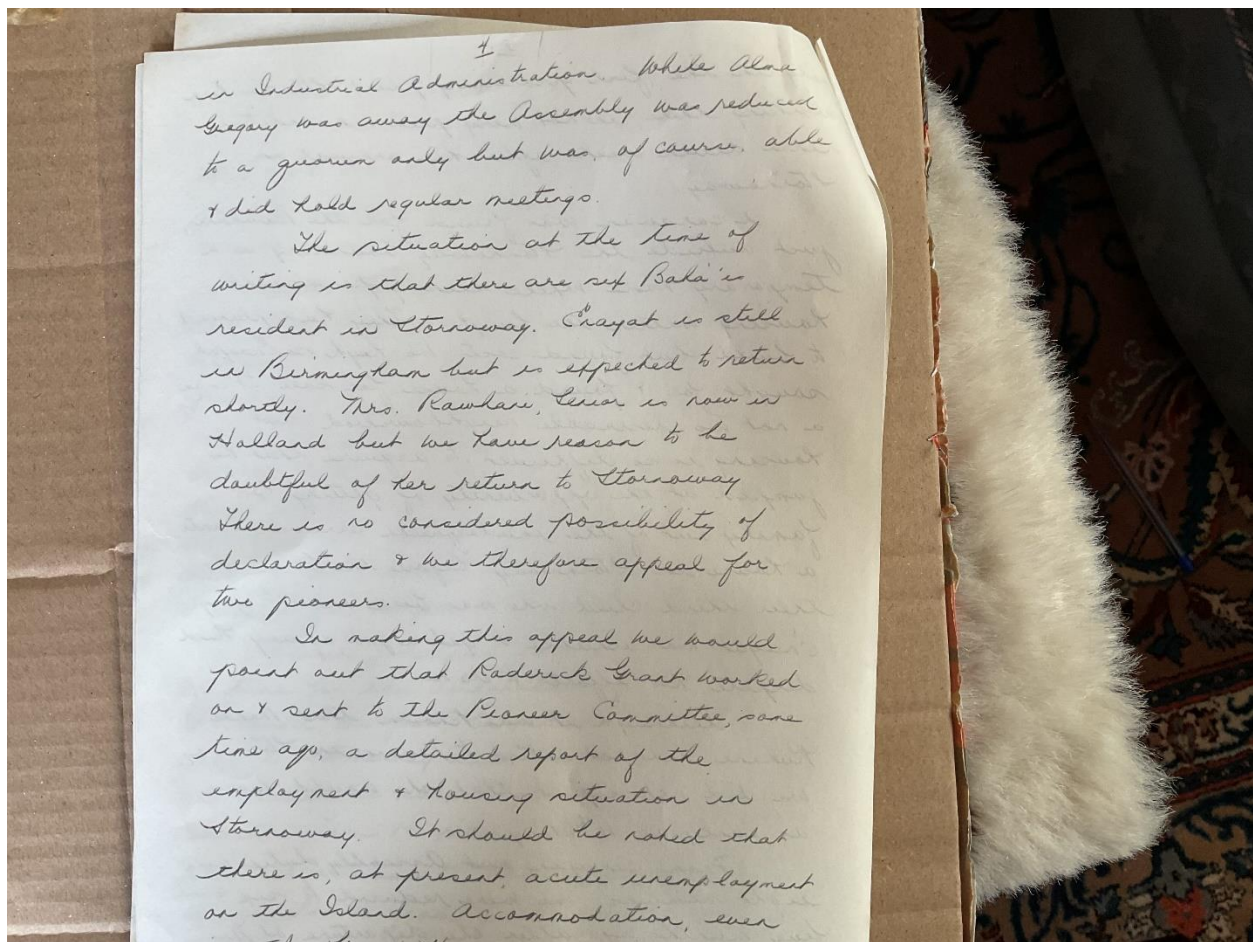
ANGUS MACLEOD
5 Crawford Road,
Edinburgh.

"Remember now Creator in the day youth, while the come not, nor the y night, when thou sh have no pleasure in
Yours etc.,

On Friday, 3 March, the Baha'is attended Women's World Day of Prayer. It was the first time that Baha'is had been welcomed by the local churches and had joined with them in worship. The World Day of Prayer provided an opportunity for a representative of the Spiritual Assembly to meet the minister in whose church the service was held. A request for permission for the Bahá'ís to attend the service resulted in a two hour discussion on many aspects of the Faith, during which the minister produced and read from one of his Bahá'í Prayer books!

In May of 1972 the Stornoway Gazette printed a picture of Sammi Anwar from Arabia and Beth Bowen from the U.S.A. In a letter to the Scottish Goals Committee, the Local Spiritual Assembly asked them to stress to the young ladies that if they bring their car it should not have the foot-high lettering of "Bahá'í" on it. "This is a matter of real importance for it has been proven beyond all doubt that such teaching methods, which can be successful on the mainland, are not acceptable on the Island of Lewis. They could, in fact, do real harm to the Cause here and further increase certain difficulties for the resident pioneers."





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The Spiritual Assembly appointed a publicity committee right after it was formed. This was followed by a youth committee in 1972, and a Teaching, deepening and consolidation committee in 1973. The Local Spiritual Assembly in those days had some growing pains. Sometimes it was a great struggle to even finish a meeting. However, whenever there was opposition to the Faith in the newspapers the Assembly was as strong as a rock.

In 1972 three Bahá'ís were granted leave of absence on three Bahá'í Holy Days. Bahá'í children were granted leave on three days at the primary school and all Holy Days at the secondary school. Our visiting Auxiliary Board member Joan Gregory reminded us that this demonstrates the recognition of the Faith. However, Bahá'í teachers were refused leave of absence on those days.

1972 saw the continuation of public meetings. In the summer of 1972 the Bahá'ís went out to the villages. Their primary purpose was to say prayers and then if possible find opportunities to talk to the local inhabitants.

Also in the summer the Rawhanis bought a peat bank for £1. This allowed them to dry out and warm up a second room in their home for Feasts and other gatherings during the coming year.

Mrs. Rawhani left the island in 1972 to pioneer with other members of her family to the Netherlands.

1972 saw the most dramatic expansion of the Faith, with eleven youth declarations between May and December. The first youth enrolled in the Faith in 1972 - James MacPherson ("Speedy", he served on the Assembly in 1976), Ian Stephen ("IB") - see the photo of the first youth enrolments April 1972. Angus MacDonald ("Angel"), Louise Nicholson, Colin McCormack, Wilma Alliston, Stuart MacLean (withdrew).

1973 enrolments were Norman Campbell, Norman Strachan, Joyce Cook, Joanna Nicholson (withdrew 1976 - she joined an obscure sect while off the island!), Janet Campbell (withdrew 1976), Iain MacDonald, Scott and Kathleen Murray, Carol Cook, Anne Slater (under 15, did not redeclare at 15), Ian MacDonald, Catriona MacDonald (Nov 1972), Jane Stephen (March 1973), Peggy Marie MacLeod, Kenny Stephen (October 1974, he served on the Assembly in 1976) Austin Brown 1974 moved south), Maureen Knight (September 1975), Derek Alliston (January 1976), Richard Knight (March 1976), Marjorie MacLennan (1977).



Jim Bradley & Eucay at Rarukani - 1972
(Pioneer replacing
These Rarukani)

Pirie and Elaine
visiting friends
- 1972

Ian Stephen
& James Macpherson
- First local Baha'is

Beryl Hargreaves, Jim Bradley, Richard Sloan 1972



In October 1972 we held a week of activities, including a prayer vigil, which culminated in a weekend school. In December/January a number of activities were held supported by some youth from the mainland.

23-1-73

PHANTOM RELIGION

Sir, — At no time in world history was it more necessary for those who take their views from the Bible than now to mark the Saviour's warning, "Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves." And we are warned "not to believe every spirit, but try the spirits whether they be of God." We believe the false prophets we are warned against and the spirits we are not to believe are false cults.

With the chaotic conditions brought about by political upheavals throughout the world, these erroneous systems are mushrooming into existence with the rapidity of the prophet's gourd, which, "came up in a night, and perished in a night". Unlike the gourd, these persist and persevere in their pernicious activities, "compassing sea and land to make one pro-se-lyte." In an age of unreality, makeshift and make-believe these have more or less of an extensive vogue in many lands, but especially in ours occupying the vacuum occasioned by Modernism, and the lop-sided nature of much that goes under the guise of Evangelicalism.

The special menace of their false movement lies in the fact that their attacks on Christianity are in the name of Christianity. Professing to be sheep, their utterances prove them to be, inwardly, "ravening wolves." They adorn their theories with high sounding Christian titles. And they usually preface their introduction by making the most of whatever spots Christianity has either truly or supposedly been guilty of in all ages. And it is characteristic of each and all of these sects that they are insidious and insolent in spreading their false beliefs.

We had occasion recently to take a cursory glance at the inflated pretensions of one of these, and one much advertised these days — the so-called "Bahai Faith." And of all the systems of error, none has less claim to the designation. Faith implies some basis on which we rest our hope of what we hope for. Here there is none, but much which resembles "the baseless fabric of a vision."

Baha'u'llah, its architect, had apparently dabbled in the writings of the ancients, including Mohammed, Zoroaster, Krishna — not to be confused with the "glamour boy" Mrs Besant claims to be the Messiah.

It is evident from Baha'u'llah's productions that most of his time was spent absorbed in the study of the hallucinations of his own riotous imagination. These he mixes with what he has gleaned from the various philosophies. And to this conglomeration of absurdities, he adds passages from Holy Writ, which in handling he subjects to the same treatment as the hyena metes out to its victim — mangling it in the process of assimilation.

Christ is credited with breaking the Sabbath — the Law of which He says, "I came not to destroy the Law, but to fulfil it." Thus the false prophet borrows from Christianity employing its terms in his endeavour to mix truth with error.

In the prospectus to the new faith, "Baha'u'llah and the New Era", we are informed that, "his writings are most comprehensive in their range, dealing with every phase of human life etc., etc." The truth is he left no writings of his own. As we indicated, he has plagiarised in various fields, and clumsily and hazily collected his spoils into an heap, decking them with the misnomer, "The Bahai Faith." The miracles ascribed to this 'man of straw' are legion. The advances in science, including, we presume, the Piltown Skull. The revolution in building, flying, the admis-

We understand that these purveyors of religious fiction have their stall in the main thoroughfare of our town. We do not believe in so-called psychiatrists no more than in the proverbial "witch doctor." But we believe that any and all who, with the Word of God in their possession, can embrace this phantom religion, in this age of doctrinal indifferentism, are witless in the extreme.

Yours etc.,

A. FINLAYSON,
41 Matheson Road,
Stornoway.

30-1-73

WRITINGS OF BAHÁ'U'LLAH

Sir, — In view of the correspondence, week ending 20th January, we feel that we should like to share with your readers the following passage from the writings of Baha'u'llah:

"Verily I say, this is the Day in which mankind can behold the Face, and hear the Voice, of the Promised One. The Call of God hath been raised, and the light of His countenance hath been lifted up upon men. It behoveth every man to blot out the trace of every idle word from the tablet of his heart, and to gaze, with an open and unbiased mind, on the signs of His Revelation, the proofs of His Mission, and the tokens of His glory.

"Great indeed is this Day! The allusions made to it in all the sacred Scriptures as the Day of God attest its greatness. The soul of every Prophet of God, of every Divine Messenger, hath thirsted for this wondrous Day. All the divers kindreds of the earth have, likewise yearned to attain it. No sooner, however, had the Day Star of His Revelation manifested itself in the heaven of God's Will, than all, except those whom the Almighty was pleased to guide, were found dumbfounded and heedless.

"O thou that hast remembered Me! The most grievous veil hath shut out the peoples of the earth from His glory, and hindered them from hearkening to His call. God grant that the light of unity may envelop the whole earth, and that the seal, the Kingdom is God's, may be stamped upon the brow of all its peoples".

Yours etc.,

SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY OF
THE BAHÁ'IS OF
STORNOWAY,
42 Inaclete Road,
Stornoway,
Isle of Lewis.

Marietta MacDanald was the first adult islander to express her belief in the Faith in December 1972 and she served on the Assembly in March 1973.

In January we celebrated World Religion Day, and were able to hold a Unity Feast in the Retirement Centre. They invited us to use their premises anytime and indeed that is what we have done and are still doing in 2024. Many Unity Feasts were held primarily in the Retirement Centre. After a while the parents of some of the local Bahá'í youth would participate. At the same time the friends were holding firesides in their homes.

During that time the short obligatory prayer was translated into Gaelic. It is interesting to note that a retired church minister contributed towards the translation and permitted a recording to be made when he recited the prayer in Gaelic. Around this same time some of the Bahá'í youth participated in the discussion at a meeting of the Stornoway Youth Fellowship and were invited again to their next meeting.





Some travelling teachers during those years were Peter and Sammi Smith, Eline Mackie, Alan McFadyen, Vera and John Long, Geoff Bridle, the Davidsons, the Shepherds, Ada Williams, Charles MacDonald, Topsy and Jimmy Bennett, Barbara and Charles Pierce and Scott Thomson and many more.

In August 1973 Nick and June Saunders pioneered to Stornoway. This allowed our Auxiliary Board member Ernest Gregory to be relieved of his temporary service on the Assembly. Board members Ernest and his wife Joan both visited the island at different times.



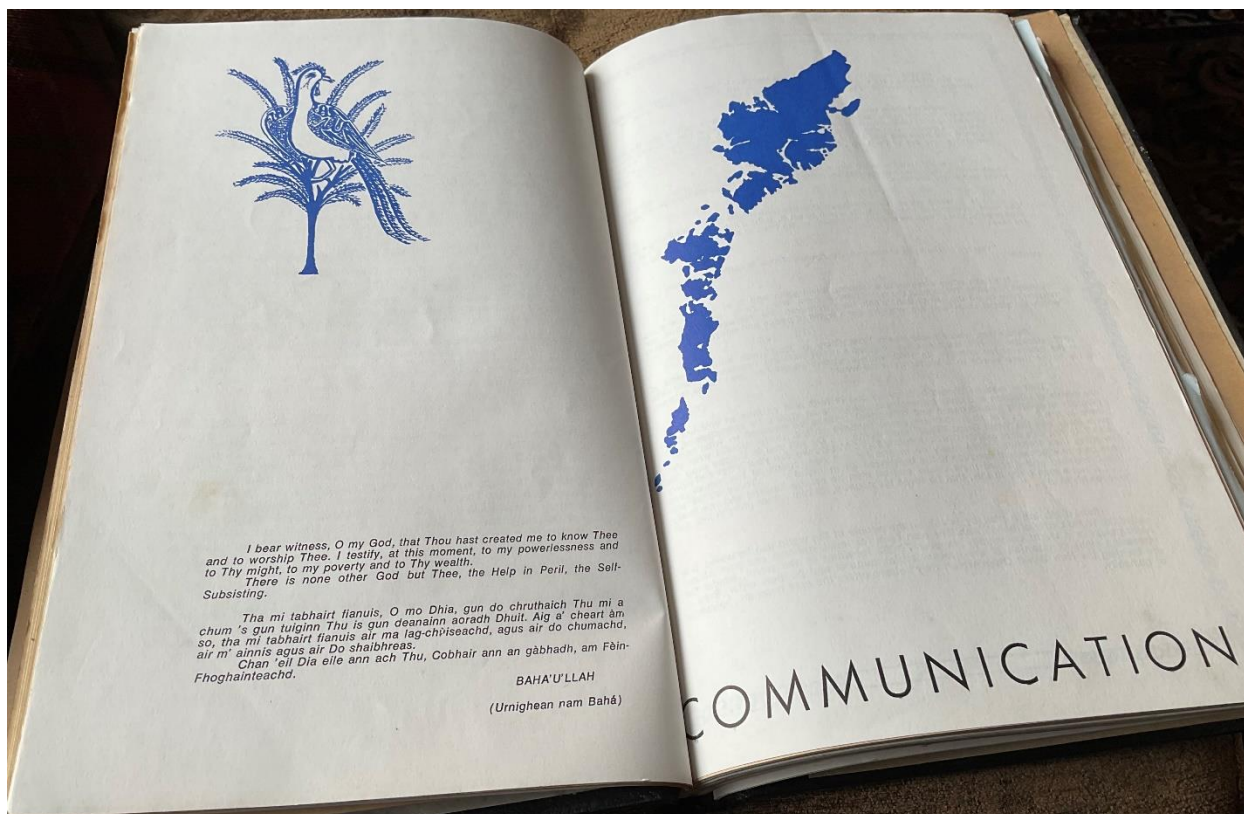
In the summer many visitors arrived including the “Hand-in-Hand” team. Belle McNeilly, Karen Kerr, Jeremy Fox and two American youth. We showed the film “It’s Just the beginning” many times as it was so well received by everyone.

The team went out into the villages teaching, i.e. praying and hoping to meet people. Prayers were in fact said in some sixty villages and active teaching has taken place in over fifty. In some villages, when going from door to door to invite people to a public meeting, up to 400 houses were visited. At church on Sunday the local minister made it clear to the local people that they should not attend the public meeting on Monday. Only he came and stood outside!

The tempo of community life quickened and the acquisition of a centre was seriously considered. There was a week of activities in October in the Arts Club and weekly firesides and deepenings at 42 Inaclete Road. This was followed by a weekend school.

Firesides for youth were held in relays, those for their parents and other adults had a regular attendance of 10-12 seekers. Holy Day and Unity Feast celebrations regularly attracted 20 – 40 friends of the Faith. In March 1973 there were a further three declarations, some being attracted by the attacks in the press earlier in the year. Naw-Rúz was celebrated by some 60 participants.

The Assembly was faced with the task of confirming and strengthening the new believers, enabling them to withstand the many pressures to which they were subjected. As a link between the Assembly and the community, which was now scattered over a 20 mile radius, the periodical 'Communication' was launched in April 1973 with Pixie and Alma serving on the Editorial Board. Wilma was also invited to assist them. It continued to be produced for some 59 issues.



Although named the Spiritual Assembly of Stornoway, this body had been authorised by the National Spiritual Assembly to accept declarations from outside the civic boundaries. Problems of deepening were magnified by poor or non-existent transport and by isolation.

Zarrin Jahanpour left the community in the summer of 1973. That year Bahá'í books were presented to the local library and the Nicholson Institute. In August a request was received from the Reverend Mackinnon in the Manse on the Isle of Barra for the book *Christ and Bahá'u'lláh*.

Also in the summer, the “Islands 73” team of six arrived, visiting eleven localities in Lewis and Harris. Brian Averill from the US participated with his songs and guitar. The first comprehensive selection of the Writings in Gaelic was produced. During 1973 there were eleven declarations. and the Retirement Centre, was in regular weekly use by the Bahá'í community. The Assembly began to hold receptions for the new believers, and deepening institutes, study classes, firesides and devotional meetings were held practically on a daily basis. The end of the year

saw the first Bahá'í marriage on the island, that of Nick and June Sanders. This was held in the home of one of the local youth, Anne MacDonald, who lived with her mother Carol.

The year was crowned by the visit of Hand of the Cause, Dr. Muhajir in December.



In our efforts to teach minorities on the island Scott Murray was instrumental in reaching out to the “Tinkers” especially one beautiful family with children, the two youngest being severely mentally and physically challenged. We visited them when we could and encouraged them to seek government assistance. We also befriended the Pakistani families who mostly owned the draper shops.

A one day school was held during the winter of 1973-74. In January 1974, the Rawhanis started renovations on their home which were finally completed on the eve of their departure in 1977!

As a result of the boundary changes made by the government at Ridván 1974 the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Western Isles was formed now having jurisdiction from the Butt of Lewis to Barra Head.



First Day of Ridván 1974
14 Stewart Drive.

Roddy Grant, Enayat Rawhani, Calum Grant
Jane Stephen, Ann-Marie Boyle, Elaine Grant
(standing, L-R).

Ian Stephen, Scott Murray, John Boyle
(seated L-R).

By Ridván 1974, there were seven Bahá'í working in the Harris Tweed jacket factory owned by Samuel MacDonald, including Enayat Rawhani, Scott Murray, Zarrin Jahanpur and Catriona MacDonald, and when it closed, the Faith threatened to become entangled with the subsequent 'work-in'. Constant vigilance by the National Spiritual Assembly, the Board of Counsellors and the Local Spiritual

Assembly clarified the situation which probably resulted in the most widespread public mention of the Faith in the Western Isles.



THE LAST DAYS OF SAMUEL

MACDONALD

BRIAN BARR

The fate of the Samuel MacDonald Ltd. factory in Stornoway, closed two weeks ago because of a shortage of cash, will be settled at a meeting of creditors of the company to be held in Stornoway on March 29.

The two principal creditors — the Highlands and Islands Development Board who helped to set up the firm with a £15,000 loan, and the Bank of Scotland — hope to find private capital and expertise to keep the firm going. And following press reports of the work-in by the 30-odd employees, several businessmen have expressed interest in taking over the factory as a going concern.

The work-in, which started on March 11, was never more than a gesture. Without electricity and the patterns for making jackets, the workers could do nothing about finishing off work in progress. And on the first day after the factory was closed by Mr Samuel MacDonald, he ripped out the telephone in a fit of anger at the occupation of the building by the workers.

"The main reason for the work-in was simply to hold the work-force together," said Enayat Rawhani (29), the Iranian shop-steward, who went personally last Monday to Inverness to try to persuade the Highland Board to set up a holding operation.

"The closure of the factory came as a real shock to us," says Scott Murray, designer and cutter and a member of the shop-floor committee. "We knew MacDonald was in trouble, but as far as we were concerned the take-over by Pitlochry Knitwear was all sewn up."

The Pitlochry Knitwear Company pulled out at the last minute and their decision came immediately on top of the death of Mr George Henney, production manager at the factory. The two events, combined with the urgent demands of suppliers who had not been paid for materials sent to Samuel MacDonald Ltd., convinced Mr MacDonald that liquidation was the only course open to him.

Hearing a rumour that the factory was closing, representatives of the workers went to see Mr MacDonald on Friday, March 8 (the factory was closed because of the three-day week). They were told that letters explaining the situation would be sent out to all the workers.

The next day, the representatives again approached Mr MacDonald, offering to work for nothing to keep the factory going until some new arrangement could be made. They were told to get out.

When Mr MacDonald came into the factory on the following Monday, he found several of the workers in occupation and the rest of the employees turned up to start work as usual. Again Mr MacDonald told them to get out, and when Scott Murray tried to telephone Mr Robin King, development officer for Lewis, Mr MacDonald ripped the telephone from the wall.

The shop-floor committee decided to start work anyway, but then found that the all-important patterns were missing, re-

moved by Mr MacDonald.

Relations between Mr MacDonald and his employees were never cordial. He considers the islanders were slow to pick up the new skills involved in manufacturing jackets and believes this is the main reason the factory never achieved production targets which would have brought in profits to cover costs.

His employees, in contrast, lay most of the blame on poor management. They cite, for instance, the situation last November when Mr MacDonald set off for a marketing trip to Japan. He not only missed the plane from Stornoway — and had to charter a aircraft to Glasgow — but, more seriously, he forgot to leave work to be done during his four-week absence. Mr Henney and Mr Murray between them had to work out production schedules based on intelligent guesswork to keep the factory operating.

An indication of Mr MacDonald's attitude to his workers was the prolonged battle fought several months ago before chairs were installed in the canteen so that the girls could sit during their tea-breaks.

Suggestions that the workers are militant — unofficially given as the reason why Pitlochry Knitwear pulled out at the last minute — appear to have no foundation.

The local girls are notoriously reticent in defence of their rights. And this reticence was the only reason Enayat Rawhani was persuaded to become their spokesman. As a member of the Baha'i faith he is forbidden from any direct involvement in politics and he was only too well aware that his position as shop steward was liable to lead to conflicts between his faith and his wish to use his fluency on the workers' behalf.

"We are ready to co-operate fully with management," said Mr Rawhani, "and I must emphasise that our actions have not been motivated by militancy but merely by a desire to keep a well-trained work-force together." In this respect, he has the backing of Mr King, who urged Mr Rawhani to do all he could to prevent the work-force from breaking up.

Attempts were made to have electricity restored to the factory so that work in hand could be finished. But once the firm was officially in liquidation, the Highland Board — who might have guaranteed to pay electricity bills — felt they could not intervene directly.

Replying to criticism that the Board had not even sent an official to Stornoway to discuss the situation with the workers, a spokesman for the board said:

"We are working quietly, but very hard, to find new backers for the firm. No purpose would have been served in going to Stornoway."

He added that suggestions that the board had failed to keep abreast of developments in Samuel MacDonald Ltd. were unfounded: "Every firm in which the board is involved is visited frequently and benefits from a very careful after-care service."



Commemoration of Ascension of Bahá'ulláh
Gallows Hill Armistice Sunday 1974

Talibh Colin
Iain, Vanessa, Munirah, Scott
Pirie

Exakat, Roddy

In August 1974 Tom and Ann Shaw arrived on the island and at the end of the year Scott and Kathleen Murray pioneered to the Isle of Mull. John and Ann-Marie Boyle also left the island that year. Two of our Bahá'í youth left the island for work and studies. During the summer we had a few community outings one to Garry Beach and another to Coll beach. Both were well attended by people of all ages. In October four Bahá'ís participated in a conference in Inverness to consult on teaching plans for the North and Western Isles as part of Arctic and sub-Arctic

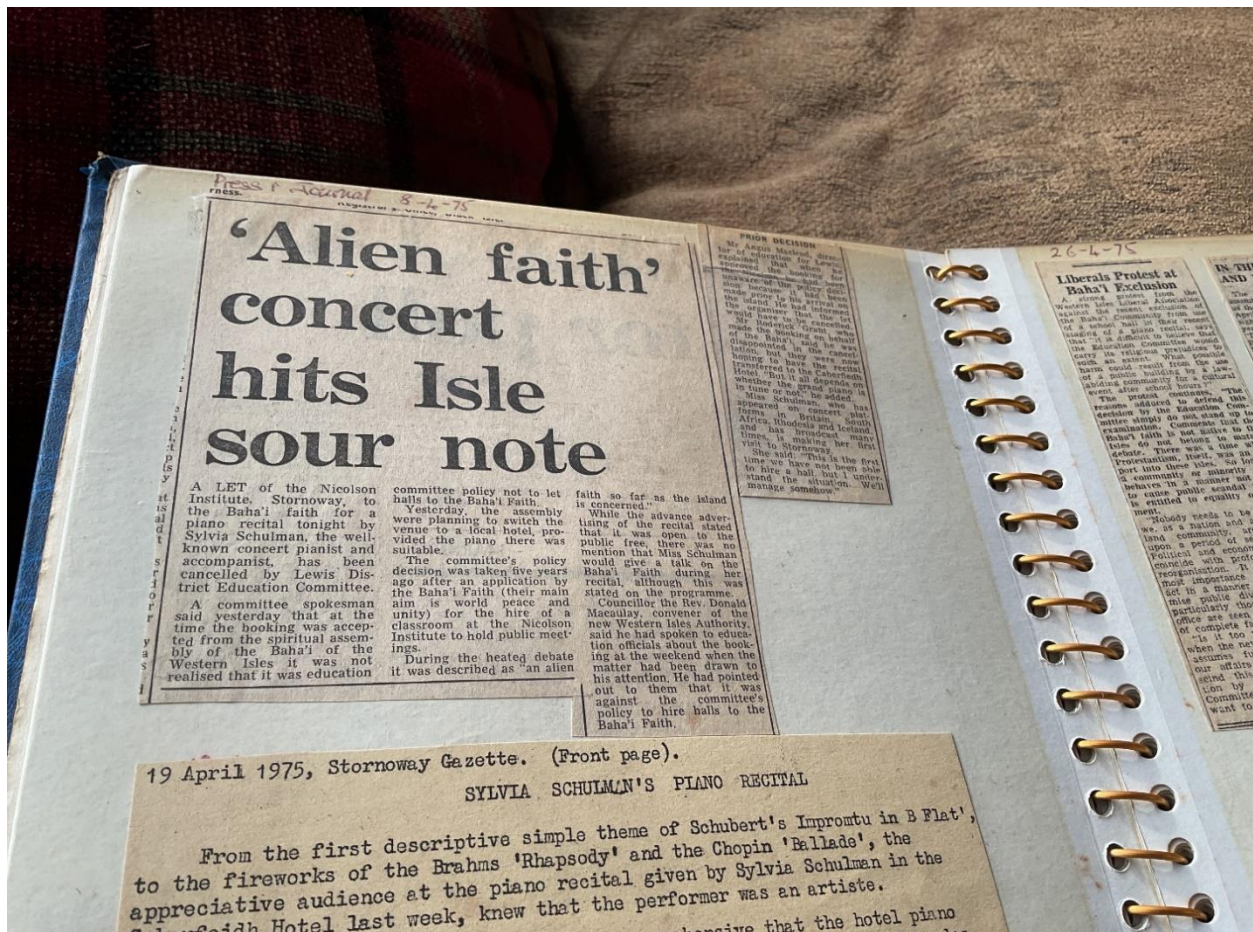
Europe. At the conference we reported that there were 11 adults, 17 youth and 7 children currently in our community.

“Little Lamp”, a children’s magazine, was produced.

In January 1975 a one day school was held at number ‘42’.

From 20 March to 13 April 1975 there were activities practically every day, including Naw-Rúz, in the Retirement Centre which was particularly focussed on the children and well attended by them; there were arts and crafts, a Nineteen Day Feast, a gathering to discuss the topic “How can Bahá’ís relate to the turmoil in the world around them?” There was a one day teaching conference, another discussion evening “How can we effect change?” There was an arts workshop, another discussion evening on “unity in diversity”, Sylvia Schulman’s piano recital in the Nicolson Institute, a Unity Feast, a slide show “He Has Come to the Nations”, a fireside on “Bahá'u'lláh’s Purpose for Humanity”, and a one day school with the Covenant as the theme. Counsellor Betty Reed joined us for the first weekend and inspired the friends during the teaching conference. She and Auxiliary Board member Ruth Riding visited the island a few times.

The visit of the pianist, Sylvia Schulman, aroused a storm of controversy resulting in a good deal of press publicity.



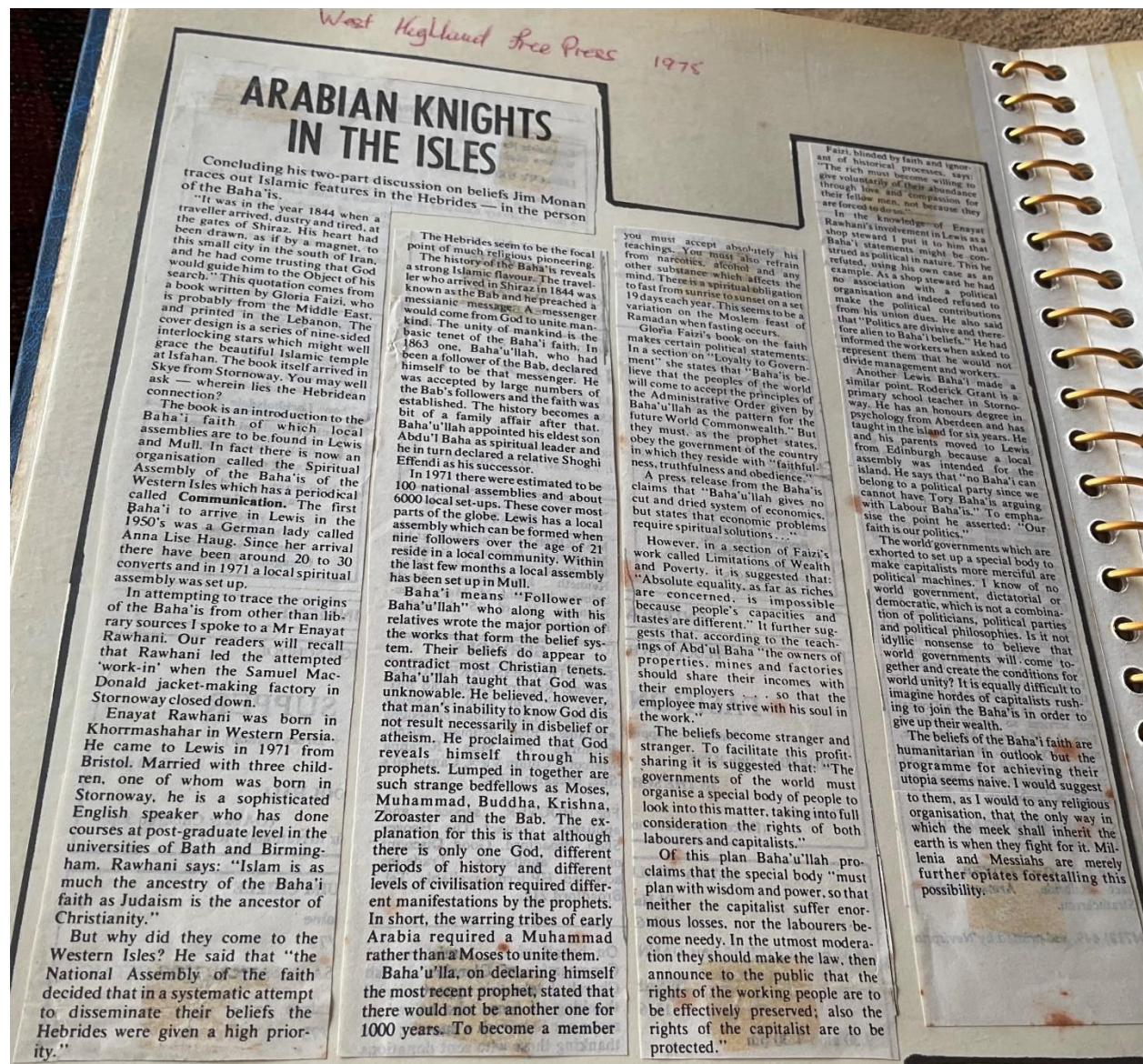
There was another week of activities from 3-10 August. We were grateful for Marjorie Georgi's participation. While she was here she was able to visit informally with many island people as well as visiting the Bahá'ís themselves. During the week we had a delightful evening of poetry and music in the Retirement Centre. An excellent panel evening was held in the Arts club. Among the topics discussed were: "Bahá'u'lláh's Purpose for Mankind", "The Teachings and Principles of the Faith" and "The Purpose of Pilgrimage". As one of the believers noted: "The quality of singing at the Unity Feast may not have been perfect but certainly the volume is improving, and together with the stories taken from the life of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and the spirit of fellowship that was enjoyed created a very happy evening." The week also included a barbecue on Ness beach where the warm fire was very welcome.

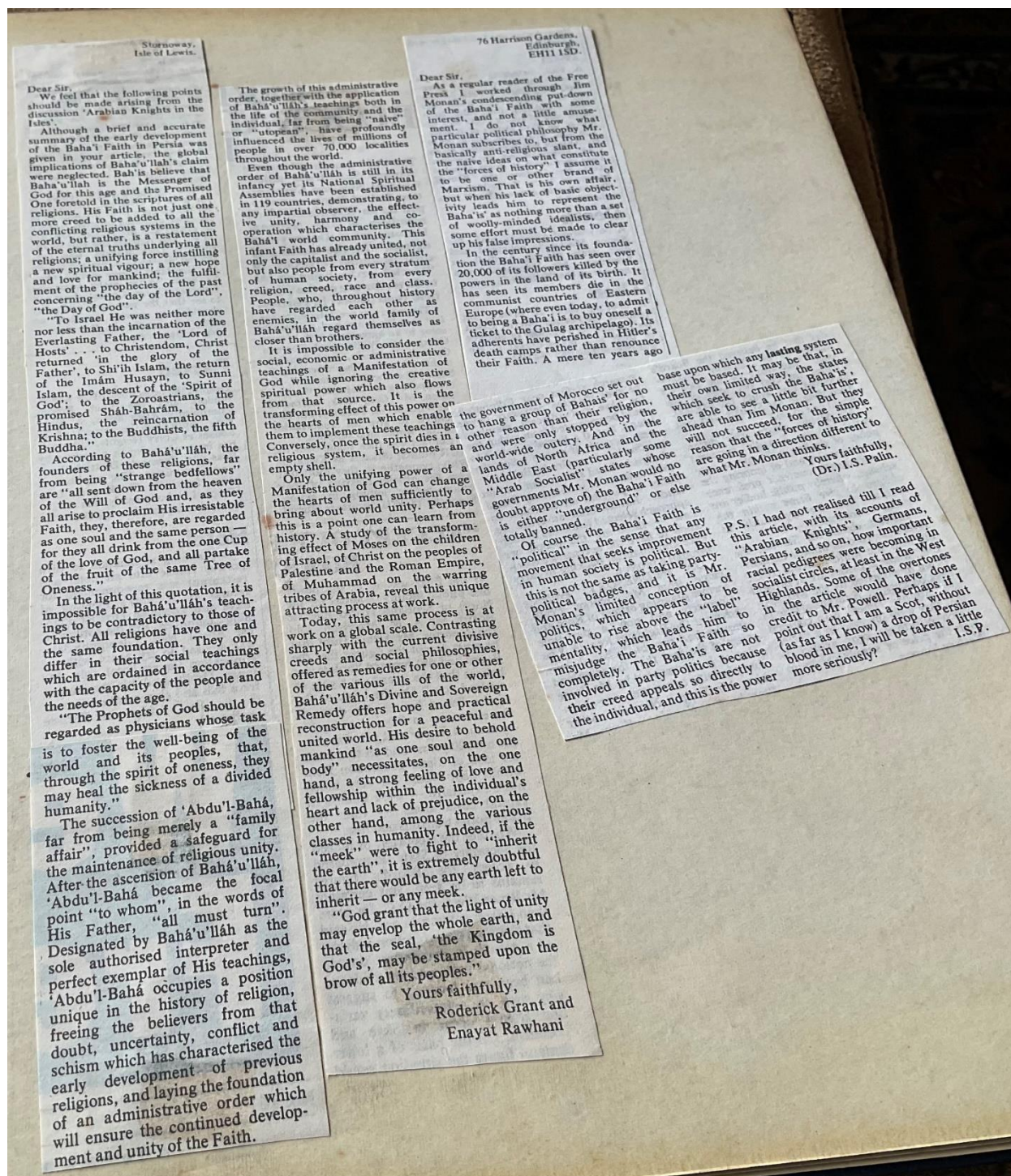
During the Priems' visit to the island they were warmly received at the Arts club where they presented a programme entitled "An Artist's Source of Inspiration" with slides and a talk. They gave a similar programme in Ian Stephen's home as

well a programme about Bernard Leach. The Priems travelled around the island and had opportunities to meet local people.

A one day conference on 14 September enabled all the Bahá'ís in the Western Isles to gather together and consult about the development of the community.

In 1975 *The West Highland Free Press* published a long feature article titled "Arabian Knights in the Western Isles."





Our response was also printed in the newspaper.

During their years in Stornoway the Rawhanis served as the National Spiritual Assembly's distribution Centre for Bahá'í audio visual materials throughout the UK.

Over the years the Faith has been attacked from the pulpit and pressure has been put on parents and grandparents of local Bahá'ís. Bahá'ís who teach in schools stand to be dismissed if they talk to pupils about the Faith. Religious discrimination is thought to have been practised against Bahá'ís applying for jobs. For example Enayat Rawhani after he arrived in Stornoway tried unsuccessfully to find a job. One person, Mr. McLeod, after a long chat, did offer him a job but the next day he came and found Enayat and said that he could not give him the job after all and offered him £20 in lieu of a week's notice which of course Enayat refused. Mr. McLeod admitted the hypocrisy but he had to succumb to the pressure put on him by the church not to hire a Bahá'í. Some non-Bahá'ís have been 'accused' of being members of the Faith and this has been used as an excuse to discriminate against them too.

A summary of attacks in the press to 1975:

January 1965 – 3 letters on occasion of the first quotes in the paper

March 1967 – Six letters after first weekend school.

August to December 1970 – 14 letters, six articles (4 national dailies) on application of use of school premises

Jan to March 1973 – 8 letters, 2 articles on erroneous allegation of 'Bahá'í Bookstore' in Stornoway.

March 1974 – 30 articles, mostly national dailies, 2 radio interviews on Jacket factory "work in"

April 1975 - 6 articles (2 national dailies) on refusal of school premises for a piano concert.

Baha'is ^{12/4/75} Clobbered Again

The spectre of intolerance raised its head in Lewis this week when the district education committee abruptly cancelled a hire of the Assembly Hall at the Nicolson Institute which they had earlier let the Baha'i Faith in the Western Isles who were organising a piano recital by Sylvia Schulman, the well known concert pianist.

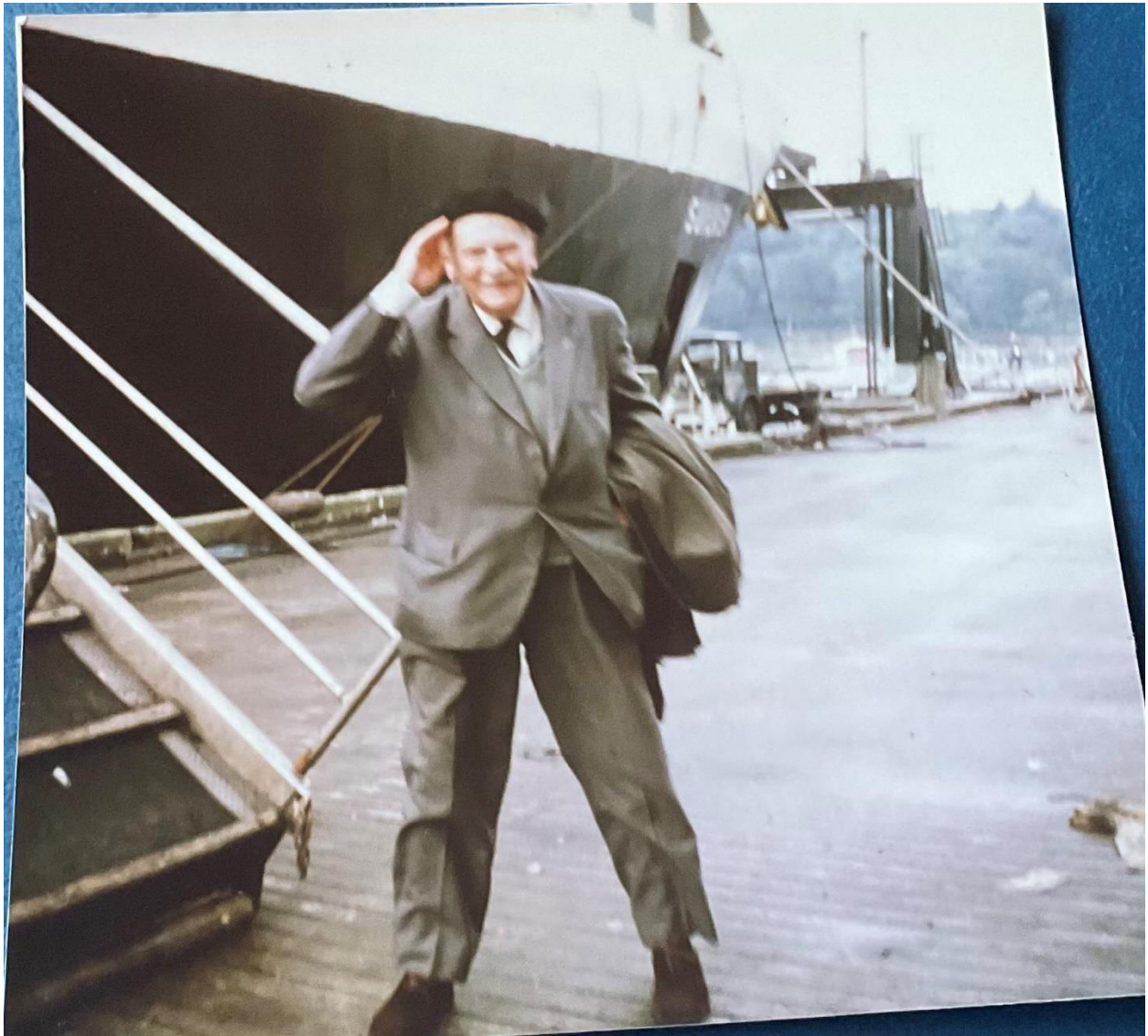
Total confusion was only avoided through a last-minute booking becoming available in the Caberfeidh Hotel, Stornoway — and the piano there proving suitable.

Basically the previous decision to let the school hall was overturned because the Baha'is are Baha'is. In 1970 the education committee had taken a decision in principle not to hire halls to the Faith. During the debate in committee at that time a barrage of ministers and attendants proceeded to clobber the Baha'is from a great moral height and the Faith was described as "an alien faith as far as the island is concerned." Their decision at that time was taken in the context of an application by the Baha'is for the hire of a classroom in the Nicolson Institute to hold meetings.

Explaining the turn-about, Mr Angus MacLeod, director of education for Lewis, said that when he approved the booking for the Nicolson he had been unaware of the policy decision because it had been made prior to his arrival on the island to take up his post. He had informed the organiser that the let would have to be cancelled.

Displaying a degree of tolerance she could have been forgiven for disregarding, Miss Schulman, who has appeared on concert platforms throughout Britain, South Africa, Rhodesia and Iceland, and has broadcast many times, commented: "This is the first time we have not been able to hire a hall but I understand the situation."

It was her first visit to Stornoway.



Richard St Barbe Baker returned to the island in September 1975. He stayed at 42 Inaclete Road, where unfortunately all weekend he had to listen to the cows mooing in the market next door as they awaited their fate at the Monday market! However, during his stay he was received by the Provost, the Rector of the Nicolson Institute, the Principal of Lews Castle College and the head of the College of Agriculture. The chairman of the National Spiritual Assembly was also received by the Rector of the Nicolson Institute.

Every Saturday, the community met to make articles which could be sold for the Fund. This activity raised an appreciable amount and enabled everybody to participate to a greater extent to contribute to the Lifeblood of the Cause.

In 1975 there was an Icelandic project which resulted in Jane Stephen's pioneer move to Iceland where she has remained. There was also an intensive teaching week in the summer followed in September by a one day community conference, which included a programme for children. During this time the Bahá'ís created exhibition materials and held an exhibition in 1976.

In 1977 The Assembly purchased 17 copies of the *Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh* giving many as gifts to the Western Isles authority. We also sent Bahá'í books to the Ullapool library where continual efforts were made to open the community to the Faith. Our own Bahá'í community library was always kept well stocked. In April the Assembly appointed an all purpose committee rather than the previous separate ones for youth, teaching and publicity. However, later in the year a publicity officer was appointed once again. The Assembly placed quotations from *The Hidden Words* in Gaelic and English in the *Stornoway Gazette*.

In 1977, 500 copies of a special issue of 'Communication' were ordered and distributed across the Western Isles as well as to Ullapool, friends of local Bahá'ís, Bahá'í youth residing off the island at that time, the area convention, regular subscribers, the Isle of Skye Peace Centre, and other administrative bodies. In September there were 4 newspaper articles and 3 letters (national dailies) regarding the mass distribution of 'Communication'.

The Monthly Record

of the Free Church of Scotland
September 1977

FOCUS

Mixed Marriages Baha'is in the Western Isles Blasphemous Libel

The Baha'is of the Western Isles. Some of our readers have probably received unsolicited copies of the magazine *Communication*, published by the Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the Western Isles.

This move marks the beginning of a determined effort in literary propaganda. Besides *Communication* the Baha'is publish *Little Lamp*, a periodical free of charge, and copies of both are available from the children, and also produce several books (some of them in Gaelic) which may be obtained from the local Baha'i library or, more significantly, from Stornoway Public Library (are copies of Knox Press publications offered to public libraries?). In addition, it is their deliberate policy to draw attention to themselves through both the advertising and the correspondence columns of the local press. The mentality behind this can be gathered from the observation that "to date, a total of 1,524 column inches have appeared in local and national papers generated by the development of the faith in Lewis". It will, no doubt, be carefully noted that we have added a few inches to the total.

The first Baha'i group in the Western Isles was formed in 1969. It consisted of three pioneers (people who deliberately settle in an area, find employment and seek to inform those who are interested). Further arrivals led to the formation of the first local spiritual assembly in 1971 (there were still no converts, but local assemblies are formed when there are at least nine adult Baha'is in a community. Shortly afterwards, the first two Lewis converts declared their faith. *Communication* obviously believes in the propaganda value of creating an illusion of success, because it

claims that "by 1973 there was a growing community in Stornoway and groups and isolated Baha'is in the Point area, Gress, Tong, Coll and Laxdale. The community has mirrored the population drift from the islands and Baha'is from Lewis now live in most of the major cities in Scotland and in Canada." One has a vision of a Lewis Baha'i community thousands strong. But how near is this to the truth?

The Baha'i faith originated within Islam and Baha'is themselves should still be seen as basically a Muslim sect. *Communication* itself briefly reminds us that the Baha'i movement began in Persia and that the person who first met the Bab was a member of a Muslim group. It is thoroughly misleading, however, to write that the teaching of the Bab, having spread rapidly throughout Persia, "aroused the opposition of Church and State," and thus to attribute the guilt of the ensuing bloody persecution to the Christian community. If the Islamic orthodoxy of Persia was responsible for the martyrdom of 20,000 followers of the Bab, then let us say so. But the persecuting power, however religious, was not a church.

The opposition of their Muslim co-religionists does, however, make clear that the Baha'i faith cannot simply be identified with Islam. It is in fact, an eclectic religion which claims to have brought together the eternal truths which underlie all other faiths. *Communication* claims that the cause of Baha'u'llah is the same as the cause of Christ. Christians repudiate this utterly and unreservedly. Nothing is compatible with Christianity which does not accord to Jesus Christ a unique and exclusive eminence as the Son of God and as the only Saviour. Nor would we agree that great, eternal truths underlie the ethnic religions. These religions have been man's greatest crimes and they represent not truth but that process of the apostate human mind which changed the glory of God into a lie.

The Baha'is Of The Western Isles

An important belief in the Baha'i Faith concerns the independent investigation of truth. In his search after truth, each one of us must investigate with an unbiased mind and decide what is really an objective imitation. It is in this spirit that the following comments are offered on the report 'The Baha'is of the Western Isles' extracted from the 'Monthly Record' and published in the Gazette last week.

Oneness Of Religion.

One of the most fundamental objections raised in that report concerns the principle of the oneness of revelation: that God, seeking to guide His creation, reveals His will to man from age to age according to his needs and capacity and that the pure teachings contained in the resulting religions — far from being man's greatest crimes — emanate from the one God, contain the same spiritual truths and differ only in the specific mission of the Founders. Note that this belief refers to the pure undiluted teachings of the Messenger of God. The clouds of dogma, blind imitation and superstition which have come between man and God must first be utterly dispelled.

To compare what each Divine Messenger had had to say about the nature of God, His relationship to man and man's relationship to his fellow beings, and to observe the striking similarities which would result, would fill many issues of this paper. One can only refer the reader to such books as 'Prayers for the Future of Mankind' — available from many Christian bookshops — and 'By Word and Deed' and ask him to make his own comparison.

Elsewhere in the September issue of the 'Monthly Record' appears these words: "God taught men as they were able to bear and the whole history of biblical religion is that of a progressively cumulative revelation". Every Baha'i would fervently endorse this. To most Christians the challenge lies in the Baha'i belief that God taught all His children, not just the children of Israel and that revelation did not end with Christ. Those who have studied the Bible must face the question: Is no revelation indicated after Christ? The Rev. R. A. Torrey lists over 250 separate passages on the certainty and consequences of such an event. It is to this event that Baha'u'llah refers when He addresses the followers of Christ with these words:

"Surely the Father hath come and fulfilled that which you were promised in the Kingdom of God. This is the word which the son veiled when he said to those around Him at that time they could not bear it. But when the stated time was ended and the Hour arrived, the Word shone forth from the Horizon of the Will. Beware, O Concourse of the Son (i. e. Christians) — Cast it not behind you but hold thereunto. It is better for you than all which is before you!" This is indeed a momentous claim. It must be investigated carefully and tested with the tests which Christ himself gave. Those who approach this task, do so with the example of Jesus before them, and should avoid the error of judging by fallible human standards, expectations and interpretations.

An Eclectic Religion.

When faced with the Baha'is' claim that the Baha'is are followers of all religions, it is easy, but false, to assume that this eclecticism is a selective — that they arbitrarily borrowed from here and there and form a compromise between fundamentally opposing views. Had the Founder of the Baha'i Faith been active in a country where different religions and philosophies were in close contact with one another, this claim might have some substance. The fact is that Baha'u'llah appeared in Persia when the population was 95 per cent Muslim and where hardly any points of contact with other religions existed. Moreover Baha'u'llah, like other Manifestations of God, never attended a school and spent no less than forty years of His life isolated in prison or exile.

The 'eclectic' argument is also false in substance because Baha'u'llah never made a compromise. He did not teach that what the Jews and the various Islamic and Christian denominations or sects said was true. What He did teach was that Moses, Krishna, Zoroaster, Buddha, Christ and Muhammad were Messengers of God speaking to men at God's command. But men by their interpretation and speculation, narrowed and darkened the horizon of religion and distorted the divine word.

Baha'u'llah makes no appeal to theologians of different religions to tolerate each other or meet each other half way on particular questions. What He does say is that people should, once and for all, give up challenging the living Word of God with their own opinions.

Muslim Sect.

The 'Monthly Record' is correct in saying that "the Baha'i Faith cannot be identified with Islam". Unfortunately in the preceding paragraph it asserts that "Baha'is themselves should still be seen as a Muslim sect". This matter is concisely settled by one expert on comparative religion who writes: "The religion of the Baha'is, although derived from Islam, represents an independent form of faith, not an Islamic sect. Otherwise, by the same token, we should have to consider Christianity a Jewish sect since it derived from Judaism".

Church And State.

If readers of 'Communication' are left with the impression that 20,000 followers of the Bab (the forerunner of Baha'u'llah) were put to death by Christians, as the 'Monthly Record' points out, this is simply not so. The fierce persecution referred to was instigated and executed by elements of the Muslim population. Any attempt to encapsulate the history of a faith on two sides of a page leaves itself open to inadequacies and inaccuracies of this kind and this is a welcome opportunity to put the record straight.

The Baha'i Community.

The remaining points raised are all related to the activities of the Baha'is in the Western Isles. The individuals concerned are to be commended for their purpose is to attempt day by day to live our lives in accordance with what we believe to be God's Will and to build a community which will stand in sharp contrast to the forces of Godlessness, materialism, divisiveness and prejudice which are so evidently at work today. We consider it a great privilege to share the Message of Baha'u'llah with those who are interested. It is not the intention of Baha'is to 'draw attention to themselves'. We are only 'children of the half-light' — hardly even a shadow of a reflection of the Glory of Baha'u'llah. It is our constant endeavour to make His healing message available to all those who wish to investigate it, remembering always these words of Baha'u'llah: "The wise are they that speak not unless they obtain a hearing even as the cup-bearer who proffereth not his chalice till the thirst be quenched".

Communication.

As stated at the beginning of this article, each human being must investigate truth for himself. The Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is covers the whole of the Western Isles region. Entrusted with this Mighty Message of Baha'u'llah and with a numerically small number of followers (no — not thousands), it has produced and distributed 'Communication'. In so doing it offers material for the investigation of the Baha'i Faith. What people choose to do with these materials is their own responsibility. In the last analysis, each individual, alone and unaided, must choose to seek the mercy of God.

(The Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the Western Isles.)

Religious Unity

See — Your fellow men eagerly contained reports and correspondence which has highlighted the goals which, all too often exists between Christian and fellow Christian.

Day by day, we can witness a world-wide process of disintegration which has weakened and destroyed time-honoured institutions, values and authority and through which the bonds which unite men are being replaced by disunity and disharmony. It must be distressing to many to see these same processes at work among the followers of One who said "for one we are brethren".

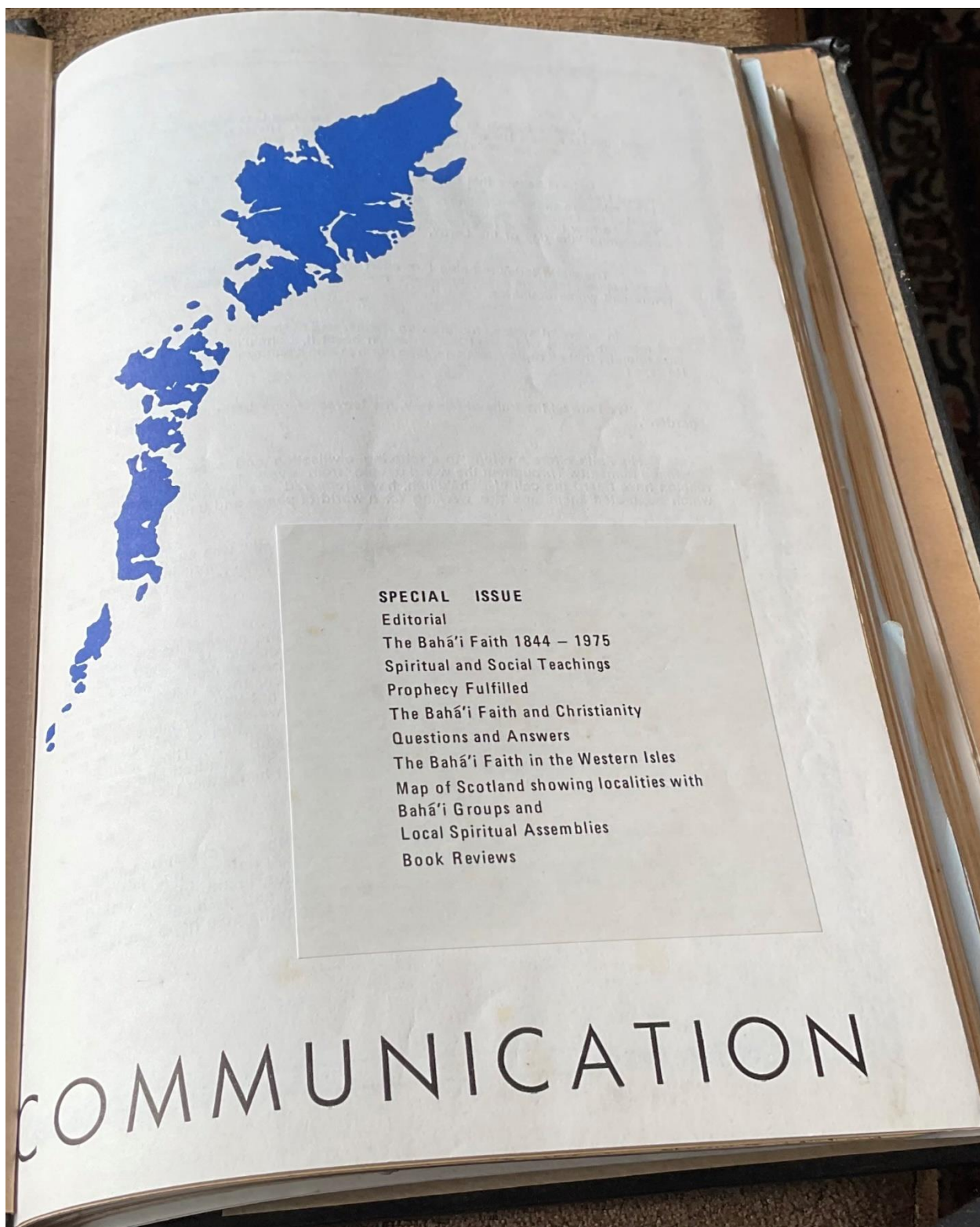
The word of God and His love to the most potent, indeed the ONLY force which can unite the hearts of men. As one writer testifies, "See, after the time of Christ, through the power of the love of God, how many races, families and tribes came under the Shadow of the Word of God: the divisions and indifference of a thousand years were entirely destroyed and annihilated. The thoughts of race and fatherland completely disappeared; the union of souls and existence took place, all became true spiritual Christians".

Do the contending denominations of Christianity fulfil the same purpose today? Certainly recent issues of your paper can give little reassurance to anyone seeking the unifying force of the love of God.

In a church in Paris, some sixty years ago, these words were spoken. We may do well to ponder them today. "God has created us, one and all, why do we act in opposition to His wishes, when we are all His children and love the same Father? All these divisions we see on all sides, all these disputes and oppositions, are caused because men cling to ritual and outward practices of religion that are so different and it is they that cause disputes and enmity — while the reality is always the same and one. The Reality is Truth, and truth has no division. Truth is God's guidance; it is the light of the world; it is love, it is mercy."

Doctors of religion were instituted to bring spiritual healing to the peoples and to be the cause of unity among nations. If they became the cause of division they had better not exist! A remedy is given to cure a disease, but if it only succeeds in aggravating the complaint, it is better to leave it alone. If religion is only to be a cause of disunion it had better not exist".

Yours etc.,
Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the Western Isles.



SPECIAL ISSUE

Editorial

The Bahá'í Faith 1844 – 1975

Spiritual and Social Teachings

Prophecy Fulfilled

The Bahá'í Faith and Christianity

Questions and Answers

The Bahá'í Faith in the Western Isles

Map of Scotland showing localities with

Bahá'í Groups and

Local Spiritual Assemblies

Book Reviews

COMMUNICATION

Two of our youth, James McPherson and Ian Stephen went travelling teaching in Mull.

By this time, pressure on the youth declarants had taken their toll. Many were inactive, had withdrawn or left the islands. The challenge to hold a Bahá'í wedding caused some to fall by the wayside. In those days youth had to reconfirm their Faith at 21. It was quite challenging to follow up with a couple of them as they lived outside Stornoway. Several active adults left, some to pioneer, others because of lack of accommodation or employment. The community thus became burdened with a large number of inactive believers. This trend was to continue for several years. In 1975 there was only one declaration, three in 1976 and one in 1977. During these years the eighth and ninth members of the Assembly tended to fluctuate all the time with people leaving and new Bahá'ís having to take their place. For example, Richard Knight served on the Assembly in 1976.

Other travelling teachers during those years were Sandra Hardy, Richard Parkes, Alan Macfadyen, the Pearces, and Scott and Kathleen Murray in 1975.

In 1977 the Rawhani family were required to move to London on account of Enayat's election to the position of secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly.

By 1977, a now diminished community was able to assess its resources, evaluate past experience and embark on a renewed programme of proclamation and teaching. Proclamation letters were sent to the Lord Lieutenant and Reverend Donald Macaulay and other dignitaries. The Assembly compiled a 'Study Pack' of materials for use in schools. This was distributed to 15 secondary and junior secondary schools in the Western Isles and also available in a local shop. Free Church reaction formed the last period of opposition in the press to date.

In 1978 a new dimension opened with the settlement of a Bahá'í family in North Uist and one in Barra. Three separate Feasts had to be held and, at Ridván 1979, a new Spiritual Assembly had members from Barra, the Uists and Lewis. A new format had to be adopted. Assembly meetings were held every six weeks at considerable expense to a dwindling community. A most successful trip in January 1980 produced three separate groups of contacts. Although there are no Bahá'ís in Barra and the Uists at that time, the arrival of pioneers opened Benbecula. By 1990 there were additional Bahá'ís in the Uists.

In 1979 a 'Year of the Child' issue of 'Communication' was sent to the Chairman of the Education Committee, Director and Assistant Directors.

In 1980 'The Bahá'í Faith and the Gaelic language' issue of 'Communication' was sent to the Gaelic Advisers, colleges, local radio etc. The Gaelic translation of the Writings was sent to Colleges, An Communn Gaidhealach, and to the Council who listed it in their catalogue. Bahá'í books were presented to libraries in Stornoway, Tarbert and Benbecula.

Christ and Bahá'u'lláh was offered to all the Church ministers although only one reply was received.

Here is a summary of the development of Bahá'í literature in Gaelic:

1960s – Pamphlet Creideamh na Bahá'í

1973 – Booklet Tagadh Bho Sgrìobhtairean

1974 – Translation of the short obligatory prayer for the Bahá'í World volume XV

1976 – Three hundred booklets sent to Canada

1979 – Literature displayed at National Mod and publicised in Gaelic Cpouncil catalogue

1980 – Translation of full bilingual cover of 'Communication' and issue of 'The Bahá'í Faith and the Gaelic Language.'

There is a distinctive trait of shyness and conservatism in Hebrideans which can only be overcome with patience and wisdom although a 100 people attended intercalary parties in 1980.

Sadly with lack of manpower after 1978 and into the 1980s the Assembly ceased to function as it had in the earlier years which needless to say affected the teaching and proclamation work.

February 1981 saw the second Bahá'í wedding in Stornoway, that of Tawfik Rushdy and Mary Keogh, who were living at 42 Inaclete Road at that time.

West Isles' first Baha'i wedding

THE first Baha'i wedding in the Western Isles will take place today at Stornoway when 28-year-old Limerick girl Mary Keogh will wed 29-year-old Egyptian Tawfik Rushdy. The groom has been working as an accountant in Stornoway for the past year.

The wedding will be marked by a simple ceremony held according to Baha'i law, and present at the ceremony will be Surgeon Cdr. John More-Nisbet, Edinburgh, one of the three Baha'i marriage officers in Scotland.

The bride and groom have chosen prayers and readings in Gaelic, English and Arabic. The guest list includes people from the Hebrides, Ireland, Wales, Oman, Iran, India, Pakistan and Holland.

At the reception, the meal will include fresh trout from lochs in Lewis, mutton from Shawsbost on the west side of the island, and spiced Middle East dishes.

The Sunday Post, February 15, 1981

NOW HERE'S A WEDDING WITH A DIFFERENCE

GUESTS from all over the world attended the first ever Baha'i wedding in the Western Isles yesterday — St Valentine's Day.

The happy couple were 28-year-old Limerick girl Mary Keogh and 29-year-old Egyptian Tawfik Rushdy. The groom has been working as an accountant in Stornoway for the past year. They met at a Baha'i conference in Blackpool.

The simple ceremony took place in the Lewis Day Retirement Centre in Stornoway, and present at the ceremony was Surgeon Commander John More-Nisbet, of Edinburgh, one of the three Baha'i marriage officers in Scotland.

The bride and groom chose prayers and readings in Gaelic, English, and Arabic. Guests came from the Hebrides, Ireland, Wales, Oman, Iran, India, Pakistan, and Holland.

At the reception afterwards the buffet included fresh trout from lochs in Lewis, mutton from Shawsbost on the west side of the island and spiced Middle East rice dishes.

● Baha'i — a Persian religion, which tries to combine the best in all religions.

THE PRESS AND JOURNAL MONDAY FEBRUARY 16 1981

Western Isles wedding with a difference

A GAELIC prayer, an Arabic chant, and English readings all formed part of the ceremony for the first Baha'i wedding in the Western Isles, which took place on Saturday before 150 guests from all over the world at Stornoway.

The couple were 28-year-old Limerick girl Mary Keogh, from Jamesboro, and 29-year-old Egyptian Tawfik Rushdy, who has been working as an accountant in Stornoway for the past year.

Mary was a secretary at the national headquarters of the Baha'i in Dublin and they met at a Baha'i conference in Blackpool.

The wedding took place in the Lewis Day Retirement Centre and the couple's statutory declarations and vows were given before Surgeon Cdr. John More-Nisbet, Edinburgh, one of three Baha'i wedding officers in Scotland.

Mary and Tawfik were piped into the reception and then the three-piece band struck up "When Irish Eyes are Smiling" and the most appropriate tune they could find for the groom, "The Sheik of Araby". The couple plan to set up home in Stornoway.



WED at the Lewis Day Retirement Centre, Stornoway, were Mary Keogh, from Limerick, and Egyptian Tawfik Rushdy, an accountant at Stornoway. The ceremony was the first Baha'i Faith wedding in the Western Isles.

SUNDAY MAIL, February 15, 1981

MAIL SPOT GUESTS from all over the world attended the first-ever Baha'i wedding in the Western Isles yesterday. The happy couple, Limerick girl Mary Keogh, 28, and Egyptian Tawfik Rushdy, 29, were married in the Lewis Day Retirement Centre in Stornoway. The service was performed by Surgeon-Commander John More-Nisbet of Edinburgh — one of the Baha'i faiths three Scots marriage officers.

19/20 August 1981 the islands received a special visit from Hand of the Cause Amatu'l-Bahá Ruhíyyih Khánum.



(S.G. 404)

SHE VISITED 26 COUNTRIES IN A YEAR

RUHIYYIH RABBANI, traveller, author and distinguished member of the Baha'i Faith, wanted to experience as much of the island of Lewis as possible during her brief visit. There was little hope of her resting, despite having just visited Orkney and Shetland — and this after a full year's travel through twenty-six countries.

So she and her companion made a straight line for the quiet inner-harbour area. They also helped the local Baha'is dispose of some Lewis lamb, before going on to a public meeting.

Her themes ranged world-wide. She depicted both the spread of a debilitating materialism and the gradual rise of a more positive alternative: values which go out beyond self or national interest. In the same breath, Ruhiiyyih Rabbani spoke

of dignified meetings with Mr Kenneth Kaunda and with dignified consultations with remote tribal villagers.

About fifty people stayed for more informal discussion over a cup of tea. The next port of call for Madame Rabbani and her companion, Mrs Violette Nakjavani, is the Isle of Mull.

5-9-81

STORNOWAY GAZETTE



The Oban Times, Thursday 3 September 1981

After having visited 26 countries this year, Madame Rabbani, wife of the late Guardian of the Baha'i Faith, ended her trip visiting Shetland, Baha'is on Orkney, as far as Western Isles and finally on Mull, where Baha'is from Stirling, Galloway, Couper, William and Galloway came to meet her. Among other things, she spoke of the great beauty and unpolluted air of these islands and their healthy children, for bringing up children in the purest of the great cities of the world. She is pictured here with the local spiritual assembly of the Baha'is of Mull.

1984
WEST HIGHLAND FREE PRESS, FRIDAY, 1 JUNE, 1984

THE BAHÁ'ÍS OF THE WESTERN ISLES

Cordially invite you to a series of talks and discussions:

- Monday 4th June — BALIVANICH SCHOOL
"THE CONCEPT OF EVOLUTION — the Bahá'í View"
Tuesday 5th June — LOCHMADDY SCHOOL
"THE CRISIS OF OUR AGE — the Bahá'í View"
Thursday 7th June — RETIREMENT CENTRE, STORNOWAY
"CREATION OR EVOLUTION — the Bahá'í View"
Friday 8th June — RETIREMENT CENTRE, STORNOWAY
"PEACE AND DISARMAMENT — the Bahá'í View"

ALL TALKS START AT 8pm.

This series of talks will be given by Professor Jamieson Bond, eminent Canadian anthropologist and Government economics adviser.

EMINENT BAHÁ'Í TO VISIT UISTS

In the first week of June the Bahá'ís of Uist will be receiving a visit from Canadian anthropologist Professor Jameson Bond. Apart from his academic work on the Inuit (eskimos) of North America he has served the Canadian government for many years as a policy advisor. He has also acted as a Bahá'í spokesman in consultation with the United Nations Organisation.

BAHA'IS IN IRAN

Sir, — I wonder if your readers are aware of the plight of Baha'is in Iran; the torture of my family, relatives and friends in Iran. They suffer cruelty for refusing to renounce their faith.

Since the '79 revolution, there has been a steady systematic campaign of persecution against Baha'is; killing over 200, imprisoning and torturing many hundreds more, and forcing tens of thousands into exile.

For those Baha'is who remain in Iran, they are stripped of their jobs, homes and dignity. Daily life is an ongoing agony of fear and death. Young Baha'i girls have been abducted — wives have been jailed when they attempted to visit their imprisoned husbands. Baha'i children have been ordered out of schools and universities. And Baha'i Holy places have been demolished. Pensions have been cancelled and been ordered to repay salaries earned before being sacked.

In one hamlet, an elderly farmer and his wife were burnt alive. In the city of Shiraz, Baha'i corpses were pulled out of graves. Many Baha'is are dragged away in the middle of the night, imprisoned, then killed without telling what the person was charged with. Trials, when they take place at all, are a travesty. A friend of mine was in the court room only ten minutes. The judge asked her if she was a Baha'i "Yes," she replied. He asked her if she would renounce her faith. She answered "No," then she was hanged instantly.

Baha'is won't strike back at the regime — we are not against the Iranians or Khomeini and we will never take vengeance at anyone. Our only hope is diplomacy and international protest.

Let's pray that the world will come to their aid by continuing to accept Baha'i refugees and by putting diplomatic pressure on Iran.

Yours etc.,
MRS SHEPPARD,
17 Sheshader,
Point.

WHPA 18-1-85 The Fate Of Baha'is In Iran

17 sheshader
Point
Isle of Lewis

Dear Sir

I wonder if your readers are aware of the plight of Baha'is in Iran; the torture of my family, relatives and friends in Iran. They suffer ruthless cruelty for refusing to renounce their faith.

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In one hamlet an elderly farmer and his wife were burnt alive. In the city of Shiraz Baha'i corpses were pulled out of graves. Many Baha'is are dragged away in the middle of the night, imprisoned, then killed without mention of what the person was charged with.

Trials, when they take place at all, are a travesty. A friend of mine was in the court room only 10 minutes. The judge asked her if she was a Baha'i. "Yes," she replied. He asked if she would renounce her faith. She answered "no", then she was hanged instantly.

Baha'is won't strike back at the regime. We are not against the Iranians or Khomeini and we will never take vengeance on anyone. Our only hope is diplomacy and international protest. Let's pray that the world will come to their aid by continuing to accept Baha'i refugees and by putting diplomatic pressure on Iran.

The Oban Times, Thursday 17 January 1985

DEATHS

ASDAQI — Executed by hanging on November 19, in Iran, after 4 months imprisonment and torture — Dr Farhad Asdaq.

MANI-USKU'I — In Tabriz prison, Iran, recently — Mr Diya'u'llah Mani'i-Usku'i.

NIKAYAN — In Tabriz prison, Iran, recently — Mr Alirida Nikayan.

In the "Deaths" column you will see the names of three people who have recently been executed in Iran. They died for their love of God. So that their deaths may not go unnoticed, we would like to bring to your attention some facts about the present situation in that country.

Since 1979, 188 named Baha'is have been executed, many without trial, a further 15 have disappeared, and 19 are at present under sentence of death. Persecution of the 300,000 Baha'is in Iran is being perpetrated solely on the grounds of religious intolerance, and shows no sign of abating as evidence of the persecution continues to mount. The authorities even demand money from relatives for the bullets which are used to execute their loved ones.

Meanwhile, the details of tortures being inflicted upon the Baha'is in prison are horrendous. In some cases this has resulted in death and in others blindness. Over 750 Baha'is now in prison have refused to recant their faith, and face a similar fate.

Requests have been made to Her Majesty's Government and international fora that appeals be made to the Government of Iran to cease from further atrocities and rescind the order on the 19 condemned to death.

In March 1985 the Bahá'ís were refused to change the use of a house to a Bahá'í Centre on Francis Street.

Free Church anger over Bahai's plan for house

THE Bahai's, who have had a presence on Lewis for about 20 years, are planning a place of worship of their own at Stornoway — across the road from the Free Church seminary.

They have applied for planning permission to change a house at 27 Francis Street, into a building for public worship and a residential flat.

Mrs Ann Shaw, treasurer of the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahai's of the Western Isles, said they hoped to have the building ready for public use in about a year.

She said they had about 12 adult members, two

teenagers and six youngsters. However, they were scattered throughout the Western Isles and the flat would be used to provide residential accommodation for them when they visited Stornoway. They also hoped to have a caretaker eventually.

The Rev. Murdo Macleod, moderator of the Free Church Presbytery of Lewis and minister of Stornoway Free Church, said: "I am appalled that a sect of this nature should want planning permission for a place of worship in Stornoway. The deacon's court will be lodging objections to this application."

Week Ending March 23, 1985

BAHA'IS BUILDING

Sir, — The Bahá'is of the Western Isles deeply regret that our application for planning permission to change the use of a building near the Free Church Seminary in Stornoway to a place of worship has "appalled" the Moderator of the Free Church Presbytery. (S.G. 16.3.85)

We also regret his erroneous use of the word 'sect' when referring to the Bahá'í Faith. We regard the Bahá'í Faith as the latest in a succession of independent religions, all divinely revealed. To use the word 'sect' in relation to the Bahá'í Faith would in our view be

equivalent to saying that Christianity is a sect of Jadaism rather than a fulfilment of God's progressively revealed message.

We are sure that if the Moderator should choose to consult us about his fears he will find us very good neighbours as we are taught "to consort with the followers of all religions in a spirit of friendliness and fellowship".

Yours etc.,

GRAHAM BARNES,
(Secretary)

Baha's elect members

At a meeting in Sheshader, Lewis the Baha'i community of the Western Isles elected the following members of the Spiritual Assembly to serve for a period of one year: Graham Barnes, Barry Bartlett, Margaret Bartlett, Peter Bird, Roderick Grant, Janet Hewitt, Harold Lane, Lyndon Payne and Mina Sheppard.

The new Assembly is the official body looking after the affairs of the local community.

The election took place on April 21, which is the first day of the Festival of Ridvan. It also takes the form of an annual general meeting for each Baha'i community when the outgoing Assembly can present its annual report and nine members are elected for the coming year.

Week ending 4 May 1985:

Free Church act to block Baha'i centre

RESIDENTS of Francis Street would be inconvenienced if a Baha'i centre was established there . . . say the Free Church.

For this would mean that there would be three churches within a matter of yards — the Free Church Seminary, the Episcopalian Church and the Baha'is.

And in an objection to Comhairle nan Eilean's Development Services Committee yesterday (Wednesday) against the Baha'is' application to change the house at 27 Francis Street into a building for "public worship and/or religious instruction with residential accommodation", the Deacons' Court of the Stornoway Free Church gave their reasons why the application should not be granted.

"We recognise", said Rev. Murdo Alex Macleod, "that our objections on the basis of the nature of the religious beliefs of the Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is do not in themselves constitute objections that your committee can consider."

"At the same time, the fact that the area can be taken up, and the problems of congestion and vehicular circulation can occur."

Mr David Skinner, 29 Francis Street, said that he had contacted the applicant, who informed him that perhaps 25-30 people would be using the premises on social occasions, with some limited music. He was also told that there was no intention in the near future of using the premises for accommodation.

Mr Skinner said he was objecting on three grounds — damage to his premises from an unoccupied building, the fact that there was no guarantee as to the noise level which could disturb the occupants of his house, which was used as a guest house, and the fact that parking facilities were already strained in the area.

"I wish to make it clear that I have absolutely no objection to the application on religious grounds, surrounded as we are by different religious denominations, but I fear for the revaluation of my property and the disturbance of residents, were this application to be accepted", said Mr Skinner.

And Mr J. Mitchell of 25 Francis Street commented: "I object to the planning proposal mainly on the grounds of possible noise. The level could be quite high if they hold services regularly and also it seems that no one is going to be living there permanently. There is a fair amount of dampness coming through to us just now, with the property being empty for so long."

In a statement in support by the applicant's (Mr R. Grant, 63 Keith Street) agent, it was stated that the Western Isles Baha'i Community stood at 27 individuals, of whom 12 lived in Lewis and 15 in the Uists.

The Baha'i Centre would be used by three categories — Baha'is only, Baha'is plus interested friends, and events of interest to the general public.

Regarding noise levels, the agent stated: "Noise emanating from worship would be minimal. Worship is in the form of prayers and readings. These are spoken or occasionally chanted by one person, not by the congregation. On occasion, these may be spoken to music and this, of course, would be no louder than the speaker's voice. Unison singing or speaking is not practised as an act of worship . . ."

The agent also stated that congestion would be most likely to arise when use was being made of the Baha'i Centre and church buildings in the area at the same time. However, the "set" dates in the Baha'i calendar seldom coincided with dates in the church calendar.

"Gatherings involving the present Baha'i community would account for 3-4 vehicles", he said. "Where an event is not tied to a set date or time, for example devotional and study meetings, we would, of course, take account of the fact that at certain times of the week there is already congestion in the area."

The Director of Planning and Development, in his report, said that certain of the objectors were entirely correct in their assertion that there were severe parking difficulties at present there, chiefly on Thursdays and Sundays (when church services were being held).

He stated that in a typical Baha'i year, there were seven occasions when worship would take place on Thursdays at the same time as worship would take place in the Free Church Seminary.

On these occasions, said the Director, even the 1-4 cars referred to could represent a worsening of an already difficult situation regarding car parking in the area.

The Director recommended that planning consent be refused for the following reasons:

(a) the development would be contrary to the provisions of the Town Map, which shows the site as being included in an area allocated for residential use.

(b) the development of the site in the manner proposed would be prejudicial to the interest of the amenity of neighbouring residents, and in particular those occupying houses on either side of the proposed Baha'i Centre by way of increased noise nuisance and additional vehicular movement and parking.

church plan

The right to acts of faith

Sir — The usual British reaction to news of the continuing persecution in Iran of the Baha'i religious minority there, is one of gratitude, because "It can't happen here."

That this view is often based on a patronising and hypocritical view of the world, is thrown into sharp focus by recent events in Stornoway on the Isle of Lewis, where a "change of use" planning application has been refused by the local council.

This planning application was to change a house owned by local Baha'is from residential use, to allow it to be used for acts of worship. Among the various grounds for the refusal was cited, "opposition from local clergy."

The United Nations Covenants on Human Rights came into force in 1976, and are legally binding on some 85 states, including Great Britain.

Article 18 of the Declaration on Human Rights states that,

"Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion: This right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others, and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practise, worship or observance."

When they applied for this planning permission, the Baha'is were trying to obey an important tenet of their faith, which states that a Baha'i must obey the laws of the country in which he or she lives.

They are, to say the least, shaken, because their request has been refused on grounds which include the sort of cultural and religious intolerance that this country considers to be illegal.

Many churchmen have been prominent in deploring the depredations against our community in Iran, and for this we are deeply grateful. Perhaps these same wonderful people can be persuaded to speak out against intolerance which is equally repugnant, but closer to home.

The Baha'i Faith has been in this country for about 80 years and its basic teachings are by

now well known, and respected as being constructive, beneficial, gentle and non-proselytizing. Indeed, a person usually only becomes a Baha'i after they have carried out a personal, independent intellectual investigation, without pressures of any kind.

The Baha'i Faith is fundamentally concerned with the development of a world-wide consciousness, which starts with the spiritual growth of the individual. Baha'is believe that, eventually, spiritually-motivated individuals create spiritually-motivated societies. There can be no harm in these activities.

As a Briton, I am saddened, distressed and ashamed to find that an official body should use grounds of religious intolerance to justify refusal of what would be a reasonable request, coming from any religious group, under the terms of the United Nations Covenants on Human Rights.

Can our society really be so heedless as to fail to recognise the tip of a most unpleasant iceberg, which assuredly lies across our course? — Yours sincerely,

KEITH A. MELLARD
Menthorpe, South Duffield,
Selby.

Different attitudes to Baha'is

Sir,—I would like to bring to your attention a remarkable difference in the attitudes of planning authorities in different parts of Scotland.

There is in North Fort Street, Edinburgh, a Baha'i Centre. This property has been used by the Baha'is all over Scotland without any objection since planning permission was granted for this use in 1977.

You will thus be most surprised to learn that the Baha'is of the Western Isles have had their application for planning permission for a similar Baha'i centre in Francis Street, Stornoway, to be used by just 27 local Baha'is, turned down at a meeting of the Western Isles Islands Council Development Services Committee.

It would appear that the Free Church seminary across the road from the proposed Baha'i Centre in Stornoway has objected on the grounds of car parking space. This is quite remarkable as there is also an Episcopalian church, a public house, and two shops in the same area and the Baha'i community consists only of those 27 persons.

It would further appear that the

Western Isles Islands Council Development Services Committee has accepted that it is contrary to the town plan for Stornoway for there to be a Baha'i house of worship in this area, although there are already two Christian churches there.

I can only regret that such differences in outlook exist between these different areas of Scotland and conclude that there has been a fundamental misunderstanding on the part of the Western Islands Council of both the innocuous uses to which this building will be put and the nature of the Baha'i faith itself. Baha'is believe that one should consort with the followers of all religions in a spirit of friendliness and fellowship and also recognise the station of Christ as well as that of the prophet founders of all the world's major religions. It is universalist in its outlook: "The earth is but one country and mankind its citizens" and proclaims that there is only God whom all worship.

Harmony,
Raitloan,
Naïm.

Ken Alae-Carew.

A Forlorn Dream

*It makes me wonder what's
about,
When all of you stand up
and shout,
"No", you say, with arms
raised high,
The Baha'is cannot justify,
A place to worship and to
pray,
They don't conform with us
you say.*

*To all of us in this great
sphere,
The message must be crystal
clear,
Hand in hand let's walk
along,
Tolerance will be our song,
Live and let live here and
now,
Come you lot, take a bow.*

PERPLEXED.

Appeal To Be Lodged: The Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the Western Isles—who have been refused planning permission for the change of use of a terraced house at 27 Francis Street, Stornoway, into a place of public worship—are to lodge an appeal against the decision. This follows a meeting of the Baha'is in Uist. In a statement a spokesman said that they were concerned that some aspects of the case against the change of use seemed to be based on speculation, and also the objections raised could be resolved to the satisfaction of all concerned. The council refused planning permission on the grounds of increased noise nuisance and additional traffic and parking problems. There were three objections—two from neighbours and one from the Deacons' Court of the Free Church of Stornoway, who have premises across the road. Their objection was on the grounds that the parking problems in Francis Street were already acute because of the Free Church Seminary and the Episcopal Church.

1990-1991 - The Lewis and Harris Spiritual Assembly was elected. Ann Moqbel moved to the island with her two children. A weekly 'open house' was held at Elizabeth and Royce Emerson's home. Elizabeth and Royce Emerson and their five children had moved to the island in 1989 and stayed until 2005. Royce worked for the Western Isles Health Board until he retired. Liz mostly worked as a speech therapist or with children with special needs. She was also able to give cello lessons for a while and teach music in a primary school for a year.

During the year we received a number of visitors – Wendi Momen, Paddy O'Mara, John Parris, Marjorie Giorgi and Ramin Habibi.

1991-1992

THE SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY OF THE BAHÁ'Í IS OF LEWIS AND HARRIS

ANNUAL REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY

PUBLIC OPEN EVENINGS

There have been Public Open Evenings held in the Retirement Centre throughout the year, and although these have not been well attended, the LSA has thought them worthwhile as part of an overall plan to make the public aware of the continued existence of the Faith in the Islands. These evenings are also part of our "Visiting Teacher" plan to bring speakers from the mainland for the public and for our own community deepening.

The hire of the Retirement Centre, and advertising the evenings have been costly but the LSA has felt the cost to be justified, although later in the year a decision was taken to reduce costs as much as possible in order to be able to give the NSA more financial support, which has led to smaller adverts being placed when possible - although when there is a visiting speaker it is not practical to reduce the cost of the advert.

VISITORS

During the year we have had visits from: Jackie Mehrabi, Marjorie Giorgi, Lou Turner, Ridvan Moqbel, John Huxtable and the folk of the Kimberley Glover Travel Teaching Project.

ISLANDS CONNECTION

We started to investigate the possibility of holding an Islands Connection gathering but came up against the problem of our inability to hire Council premises for Baha'i events. This meant we could not carry on with the project.

We are currently trying to clear up this problem with the Council but so far no conclusions have been reached.

TWINNING

We have written to ask Westminster LSA if they are interested in a "Twinning" arrangement with us, since over the years they have offered a great deal of support to the Islands. Although they sent us a generous donation to support the teaching work on the Island, this has not yet been taken any further.

STORMING THE GATES

On 6 January the Remover of Difficulties was said 500 times for guidance on a Centre for the Western Isles. Adults, youth and children took part in this.

Regular children's classes were held every Sunday in Sheshader at Ray and Mina Sheppard's home, and in Stornoway, and there were youth evenings in Leurboost on Fridays. Weekly adult classes were also held. Ray and Mina had moved to the island in 1984 and, although Ray has passed away, Mina has continued to live in their same home in Sheshader to the present day (2024)

Once again advertisements have been placed in the *Stornoway Gazette*. About 100 people attended the Naw-Rúz party.

They lost the Spiritual Assembly again in 2001 when there was a change of boundaries

In 2024 there was an article in the *Stornoway Gazette* regarding the sit-in in the jacket factory 50 years ago:

<https://www.stornowaygazette.co.uk/business/fifty-years-on-an-iranian-shop-steward-and-a-lewis-work-in-4574624>