

The Baha'i Faith in Papua New Guinea

Press Statement released on May 10, 1993

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'i of Papua New Guinea would like to take this opportunity to clarify the nature of the Baha'i faith, its relationship to other religions, its principles, and its history.

The Baha'i faith began in 1844, and arrived in the South Pacific in the beginning of this century. Today, the Baha'i faith is the second-largest independent religion in the South Pacific region after Christianity, and is listed in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* 1991, *World Christian Encyclopedia* 1982, as the second-most widespread religion in the world. It first came to Papua New Guinea in the early 1950s. Currently, there are over 20,000 Baha'i in Papua New Guinea, and there are Baha'i in virtually every district of every province in the country. The Baha'i faith is a deeply-rooted part of Papua New Guinea society, with many Baha'i communities that have followed its teachings for two or more generations. There are over 300 consultative administrative councils, called Local Spiritual Assemblies, and a number of social and economic development programmes throughout the country.

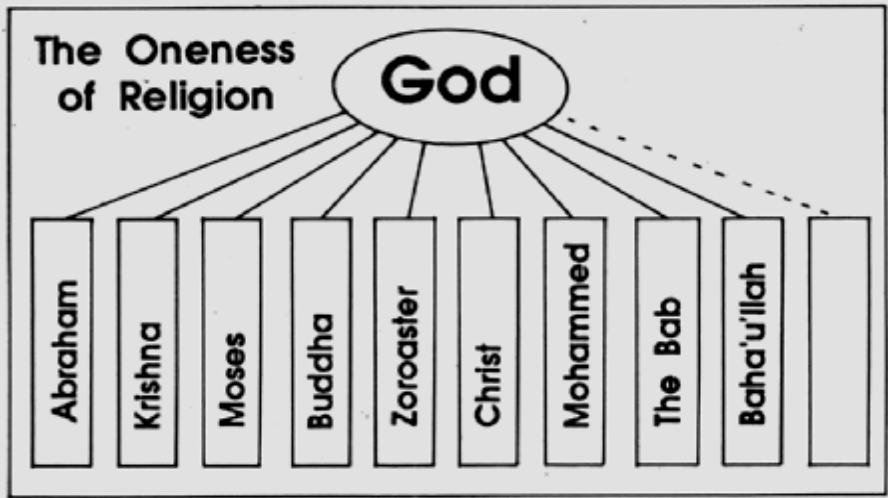
The Baha'i faith is an independent world religion, on par with recognised world religions, such as, Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, and Hinduism. The Baha'i faith is not a sect of any other religion; it is a separate religion, and has consultative status with the United Nations agencies.

The fundamental principle of the Baha'i faith is unity. Baha'is believe that there is only one God, and that the successive revelations of God's will, through His messengers, have been the chief civilising forces in history. Baha'is follow the teachings of Baha'u'llah, the prophet founder of the Baha'i faith. Baha'u'llah (1817-1892) is regarded by Baha'is as the most-recent in the line of messengers of God, a line that stretches back beyond, and includes, Abraham, Moses, Krishna, Buddha, Zoroaster, Christ, Muhammad, and the Bab.

Corresponding to some essential principles, is the principle of the unity of the human race. Baha'u'llah says that, "The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizen". Vital to the establishment of the unity of the human race, are principles such as:

- the abandonment of all forms of prejudice;
- the realisation of equal rights and privileges for women and men;
- the elimination of extremes of poverty and wealth;
- recognition of the common source, and essential oneness, of all the world's great religions;
- the value and necessity of universal education;
- the recognition that true religion is always in harmony with reason, and with the pursuit of scientific knowledge; and
- the need of every individual to adhere to high personal moral standards.

Religious tolerance is vital to the unity and stability of any society. Where there is intolerance, there is the evil of discord, strife, oppression, and hypocrisy. Where there is tolerance, there is peace, harmony, brotherhood, and love. The constitution of Papua New Guinea is a document, which upholds these important "Christian" ideals, and safeguards them from the dark clouds of intolerance, self-interest, prejudice, and ignorance.



The above diagram shows how – according to the Baha’i beliefs – all the world’s religions are related. Baha’u’llah taught that there is only one God, the Author of all religions; that there is only one great religion, which He has progressively revealed to man; that there is only one human family, which is destined to become unified under God; and that God will continue to send His messengers to mankind for eternity.

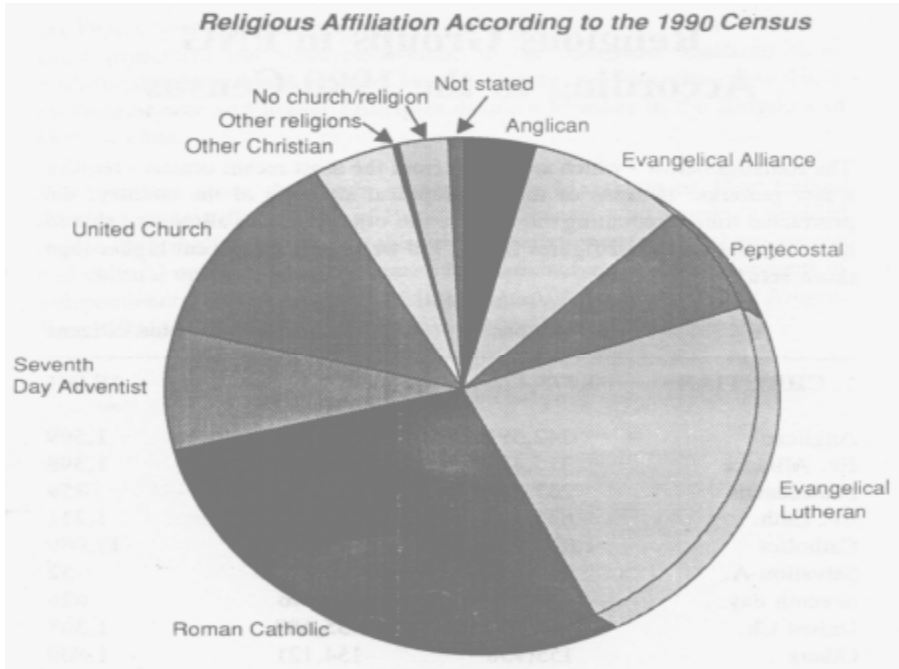
As Papua New Guineans, we have found, in the teachings of Baha’u’llah, those principles and standards, which, on the one hand, reaffirm those traditional truths, which uphold human dignity, and, on the other hand, establish new and higher principles, destined to usher in the kingdom of God on earth.

We, therefore, share the views of Mr Apelis Mazakmat, of New Ireland Province, and the first Baha’i of Papua New Guinea, who stated: “I decided to join the Baha’i faith, because this religion satisfies my spiritual aspirations, and cultural upbringing, and because it is conducive to the development of independence, self-respect, and spiritual welfare” (Isabel Kavo, in: *Niugini News* 1986).

Religious Groups in PNG: According to the 1990 Census

The statistics below – which are culled from the most-recent census – require a few remarks. Because of the geographical situation of the country, the protracted time of counting the results, and other reasons, allowance should be made that the actual figures from 1990 were 10 to 15 percent higher than those actually recorded.

	All persons	Citizens	Non-citizens
1. CHRISTIANS	3,478,478	3,458,577	19,901
Anglican	142,591	141,082	1,509
Evangelical Alliance	315,421	314,023	1,398
Pentecostals	253,845	253,086	759
Evangelical Lutheran	832,949	831,598	1,351
Catholics	1,023,180	1,012,091	11,089
Salvation Army	7,493	7,441	52
Seventh-day Adventists	290,072	289,446	626
United church	456,997	455,689	1,308
Others	155,930	154,121	1,809
2. OTHER RELIGIONS	11,478	10,319	1,168
Islam	440	237	203
Hinduism	460	146	314
Buddhism	459	5	404
Jewish	40	30	10
Baha'i	6,834	6,721	113
Others	3,254	3,130	124
3. NO RELIGION	96,105	91,771	4,334
4. NOT STATED	21,884	21,666	218
Totals	3,607,954	3,582,333	25,621



One may note that, because of political problems, a census for the North Solomons Province was called off – so that another 100,000 inhabitants of PNG are not included, either, and we still stay – for Bougainville – with the 1980 figures. (An indicative figure, taken from the *Annuario Pontificio* of 1993, puts the total at 134,800 people – of which, there would be 125,500 Catholics.)

Again, if one is interested in updating the figures given, further recalculations should be made, keeping in mind a yearly growth index of, say, +2.4%, as far as PNG citizens are concerned (as based upon the growth figures of 1980-1990). For expatriates there was, then, a negative factor of 3.4%.

Theo Aerts