

Jews and the Crucifixion

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Letter from the National Spiritual Assembly
Letter from the Local Spiritual Assembly

NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE
BAHÁ'ÍS OF THE UNITED STATES

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY 21 November 1980

Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís
of Iowa City, Iowa

Dear Bahá'í Friends:

The National Spiritual Assembly has asked us to respond on its behalf to your letter of 10 July 1980. At the outset, we offer our sincere apologies for the delay in replying. We hope that the delay has not greatly hindered your Assembly's work and that the following information will assist you in counselling believers with a Jewish background.

In your letter you mention that the Bible indicates that the Roman rulers were responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus. Yet a careful reading of each Gospel account does not confirm this view. The accounts clearly state that it was the Jewish priests and elders that plotted and brought about Jesus' death. A few quotations from "The Gospel According to Matthew" will suffice to support this position:

Matthew 26:3-4 - Then the chief priests and the elders of the nation met in the palace of the High Priest, Caiaphas; and they conferred together on a scheme to have Jesus arrested by some trick and put to death.

26:59 - The chief priests and the whole Council tried to find some allegation against Jesus on which a death-sentence could be based . . .

26:63-66 - The High Priest then said, 'By the living God I charge you to tell us (the Council): Are you the Messiah, the Son of God?' Jesus replied, 'The words are yours. But I tell you this: from now on, you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of God and coming on the clouds of heaven.' At these words the High Priest tore his robes and exclaimed, 'Blasphemy! Need we call further witnesses? You have heard the blasphemy. What is your opinion?' 'He is guilty,' they answered, 'he should die.'

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Matthew 27:1 - When morning came, the Chief Priests and the elders of the nation

met in conference to plan the death of Jesus.

27:20 - Meanwhile the Chief Priests and elders had persuaded the crowd to ask for the release of Bar-Abbas and to have Jesus put to death.

Similar passages can be found in the Gospels of Mark, Luke and John. (Each of the above quotations is from The New English Bible.)

Throughout the Gospel accounts, the chief antagonists of Jesus are the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the elders. In general, the scribes and rabbis belonged to the Pharisaic party; while the top people in the priestly hierarchy belonged to the Sadducees. The Sadducees were the priests of the Temple and they also controlled the Council (or Sanhedrin). Although Rome occupied the nation, it allowed the Sanhedrin to retain jurisdiction over religious matters. It was to this Council that Jesus was brought for questioning and, ultimately, condemnation.

The martyrdom of the Báb has often been compared with the crucifixion of Jesus, and this comparison can be extended to the reaction of the priestly castes to each of Their Messages. The Báb strongly censured the hypocrisy of the Mullás, and Jesus did the same with the Pharisees and the Sadducees (see Matthew 23). We know how the Mullá reacted to the Báb by inflaming the people's emotions against Him, and it is apparent from the Gospels that the Jewish leaders reacted similarly.

Of course, the above does not mean that the entire Jewish population was against Jesus and wished His death. After all, many of the early followers of Jesus rose from the Jewish community. Still, other members of the Jewish community remained neutral about the whole issue. The key point though is that in ancient cultures it was the political and religious leaders who expressed the official will of the people and in the case of Jesus, the will presented was for His death.

Not only did the Jewish divines oppose the Person and Message of Jesus, they reacted even more severely to Muhammad. The early history of Islam contains numerous accounts of treachery and betrayal on the part of Jewish leaders toward Muhammad and His disciples. We mention this so that you do not consider the statements made by Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá about the Jewish community to apply solely to its behavior toward Jesus. They apply toward the persecution and opposition encountered by Muhammad as well.

When reading Bahá'u'lláh's and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statements about past oppositions, however, we should not lose sight of Their primary purpose in describing such

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events. On each occasion They are making the points that the Religion of God is one; that the divisions that are created result from the shortsightedness of men; and that God does not sanction such divisions. It is a message that the Jewish community of Jesus' time failed to comprehend, and it is a lesson that

mankind as a whole has still not learned.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

For the Office of the Secretary

THE SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE
BAHÁ'ÍS OF IOWA CITY
P.O. BOX 2012, IOWA CITY, IOWA 52240

July 10, 1980

Dear __,

The Assembly thanks you for coming to us with your question regarding how (?) to respond to Jews who question 'Abdu'l Baha and Bahá'u'lláh's recorded (?) statements that the Jews crucified Christ. We would like to capsulize our (?) consultation on this issue for your reference.

1) We, in 1980, do not really know of any historical authority who truly knows what the power dynamics were at the time of Christ. Just as the Bab was killed by order of the Shah (a polical ruler) at the urging of the Muslem clergy, this may have been the situation in Christ's time.

2)It is fruitless to argue with people about our beliefs. Argument only causes anger and closes the ears further. It is especially useless to say "This is true because Bahá'u'lláh said it it true." If something it is true historically, it is true of itself, not because Bahá'u'lláh said it. We Bahá'ís know that if Bahá'u'lláh said it is true, then we can believe that He truly knew what was correct. However, this is not a criterion of truth for one who does not accept the authority of Bahá'u'lláh.

3) The Assembly feels that it is inflamatory and unjust for a person to accuse the Bahá'ís of anto-Semitism. This attitude is totally opposite of the Bahá'í spirit of acceptance of all major religions and of all races and peoples and its striving for unity and harmony between all religions.

The Assembly will ask the National Assembly for any clarifying materials they may have on these statements by the Founders of our Faith. We hope that you will continue to search until you become confirmed and at ease on this issue. We offer our continued prayers and assistance.

(signed)

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