

advance so far as they are meant for this age. The followers of the Bab were thus to receive his utterances as later revelations than the Quran. According to the Bab there is no final revelation: a new prophet comes when the age needs him. Nevertheless, many of his own teachings were far from progressive, and the importance of the movement lies chiefly in its giving birth to Bahaism. After years of persecution he was executed in 1850. Bahaism takes its name from Baha Ullah, who assumed the leadership of the greater portion of the community after the death of the Bab. For Bahaism the Bab was simply the "door," Baha Ullah claiming to be "he whom God shall manifest." Bahism had been definitely Moslem: Bahaism would be universal. That Baha Ullah was a very impressive personality the following, adapted from an account given by Professor E. G. Browne, is sufficient evidence: In the corner sat a wondrous and venerable figure whose face is unforgettable though indescribable.... His piercing eyes seemed to read one's very soul; power and authority sat on his ample brow; while the deep lines on the forehead and face implied an age which the jet black hair and beard flowing down in indistinguishable luxuriance almost to the waist seemed to belie. "Praise be to God that thou hast attained" ...he said in a mild dignified voice. "We desire but the good of the world and the happiness of the nations; yet they deem us a stirrer up of strife and sedition worthy of bondage and banish-

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ment.... That all nations should become one in faith and all men as brothers, that the bonds of affection and unity between the sons of men should be strengthened; that diversity of religions should cease and differences of races be annulled what harm is there in this? ... Yet so it shall be; these fruitless strifes, these ruinous wars shall pass away and the 'Most Great Peace' shall come.... Do not you in Europe need this also? Is not this that which Christ foretold? Yet we see your kings and rulers lavishing their treasures more freely on the means for the destruction of the human race than on that which would conduce to the happiness of mankind.... These strifes and this bloodshed and discord must cease and all men be as one kindred and one family.... Let not a man glory in this, that he loves his country; let him rather glory in this, that he loves his

kind.”¹

The idealization of Baha Ullah may be seen in the name given to him, the Blessed Perfection. The Bab, Baha Ullah, and his successor Abdul Baha (Abbas

Effendi) have all been described as “divine manifestations,” though the significance of the term is not clear. It ought perhaps to be interpreted in the

light of the panentheistic conception of God which predominates in Bahai writings. But the description of these three has also become more elaborate. They have been called a cosmic trinity,² and associated with love, will, and knowledge.

Bahai leaders have disclaimed the purpose of founding a new sect, maintaining their aim to be the uniting of all the great religions of the world into

a universal religion. “The object of the Bahai revelation is the religious unification of all people.”³ This side of Bahaism much impressed the late Oxford

theologian, T. K. Cheyne, who wrote that “The union of religions must

Browne, E. G.: *Episode of the Bab. Recounting a visit to Baha Ullah near Acre in 1890.*

Holley, H.: *Bahai: The Spirit of the Age.* New York, 1921. pp. 33, 45, 46, 71.

Remy, C. M.: *The Universal Consciousness of the Bahai Religion.* Florence, (Italy)

1925. p. 12.

necessarily precede the union of races, which at present is so lamentably incomplete.”⁴ “The Bahai movement is not an organization. You cannot organize the Bahai

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Movement.... The Bahai movement is the spirit of this age.”⁵ “The gift of God

to this enlightened age is the knowledge of the one-ness of mankind and the fundamental one-ness of religion.” “The principles taught by every true prophet

are the same: there is no difference between them.” But Bahai teachers have been far from showing this to be a fact. “All the religions are revealed for the

sake of good fellowship. The fundamentals, the foundations of all are fellowship, unity, and love.” The sacred books of the religions are to be interpreted allegorically: “All religions are written symbolically.” That it is

maintained is the only way in which truth can be written to withstand time and its changes. Bahaism is eclectic, and claims to embody fundamental principles held in common by every creed; it is a purifying force liberating the truth from

masses of superstition. “Bahaism has no priesthood for sacerdotalism

engenders

the spirit of caste and a struggle for mastery between secular and spiritual powers. It lays no stress on metaphysical dogmas or ritual which is their material clothing....”⁶

According to Bahaism no religion represents the absolute truth, which is not to be grasped by human minds. There is progressive revelation chiefly as the result of a closer communion of a few souls with God. The Prophet Muhammed is highly revered but as he is supposed by orthodox Moslems to have surpassed Jesus, so Baha Ullah is held by the Bahais to have surpassed Muhammed. By this belief especially, but also in other ways, Bahaism has tended to differentiate

itself from orthodox Islam. “The Bahai teachings confirm and complete all religious teachings which have gone before, and offer a practical philosophy which meets the present-day spiritual need of humanity in establishing divine harmony and peace.”⁷

Bahaism is regarded as suitable for this age in insisting on the harmony of religion and science. Civilization and science are necessary for the highest religion and

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must be intimately associated with it. “There is no contradiction between Religion and Science.” “Religion and Science are the two wings upon which man’s intelligence can soar into the heights, with which the human soul can progress. It is not possible to fly with one wing alone. Should a man try to fly

with the wing of Religion alone, he would quickly fall into the quagmire of superstition, while on the other hand with the wing of Science alone he would also make no progress, but fall into the despairing slough of materialism.”⁸

The

harmony of science and religion is thus viewed by an ardent Bahai: “To behold

Cheyne, T. K.: *The Reconciliation of Races and Religions*. London, 1914. Preface.

Holley, H.: *op. cit.* p. 28, quoting Abdul Baha.

Skirne, F. H.: *Bahaism, The Religion of Brotherhood and its Place in the Evolution of*

Creeds. London, 1912. p. 57.

Remy, C. M.: *op. cit.* p. 17.

Talks by Abdul Baha given in Paris. London, 1915. pp. 132-133.

all things of the universe as animate with a divine animation, so that a single atom becomes as wondrous as a sun; to feel in all things the essence of a consciousness so that not even a stone remains insignificant; above all, to realize

by what eternities of evolution matter has been trained in order to serve as the

temple of man — whereby man becomes the perfect microcosm within the perfect macrocosm — this glory that was the crown of ancient seers, returns now universally to become the education of all.”⁹

It has been maintained that Baháism teaches a conception of God as an impersonal force immanent in the universe. But though at times it is suggested that God is beyond the capacity of human thought to comprehend, the most frequent references are to attributes only intelligible as applied to a spiritual being. To the human mind God is incomprehensible, for the finite understanding cannot be applied to this Infinite Mystery. “God is love and peace. God is truth.

God is omniscient. God is without beginning and without end. God is uncreated and uncreating, yet the Source, the Causeless Cause. God is Pure Essence, and cannot be said to be anywhere or in any place. God is Infinite: and as terms are finite the nature of God cannot be expressed in terms but as man desires to express God in some way, he calls

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God ‘love’ and ‘truth’ because these are the highest things he knows.... But

while God does not create, the first principle of God, love, is the creative principle. Love issues from God and is pure spirit.”¹⁰

In the main the terminology and the general thought of the Baháis is immanentist, stressing the inner spirit of a creative movement of a universal evolution. In this manner it endeavors to unite certain aspects of Moslem mysticism with what is taken to be the fundamental idea in the modern scientific

theory of evolution. Thus, though the transcendence of deity is not denied, is even implied, the characteristic of divine personality tends to be blurred.

It is quite clear that for Baháism God is not simply an intellectual principle of interpretation, a philosophical hypothesis but a Being calling for definite response from man. “It is astonishing; it is a most amazing thing; that God has

created all humanity for knowledge of Himself, for the love of Himself, for the virtues of the human world, for the Life Eternal; — for perfect spirituality, for

heavenly illumination has he created man; — nevertheless, man is utterly negligent of all this! He is seeking the knowledge of everything except the knowledge of God.”¹¹ Nevertheless, it is in relation with God that men are to seek and will find their highest happiness. “There is nothing greater or more blessed than the Love of God. It gives healing to the sick, balm to the wounded,

joy and consolation to the whole world, and through it alone can man attain life

everlasting. The essence of all religions is the Love of God, and it is the foundation of all the sacred teachings.” Love as the central quality of

existence

is of four kinds, “(a) The love of God toward the identity of God: Christ has said: God is Love, (b) The love of God for his children — or his servants, (c)

The love of man for God; and (d) the love of man for man. These four kinds of

Holley, H.: op. cit. p.111.

Holley, H.: Bahai Scriptures. New York, 1924. Section 609.

Ibid. Section 648.

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love originate from God. These are rays from the sun of reality; these are the breathings of the Holy Spirit; these are the signs of reality.”¹²

In his account of human nature, Abdul Baha appears to place all evil in the material part of man. “In man there are two natures: his spiritual or higher nature

and his material or lower nature. In one he approaches God, in the other he lives

for the world alone. Signs of both these natures are to be found in man. In his material aspect, he expresses untruth, cruelty, and injustice; all these are the

outcome of his lower nature. The attributes of his divine nature are shown forth

in love, mercy, kindness, truth, and justice, one and all being expressions of his

higher nature. Every good habit, every noble quality belongs to man’s spiritual

nature, whereas all his imperfections and sinful actions are born of his material

nature. If a man’s divine nature dominates his human nature we have a saint.”

Apparently man’s spiritual life has no beginning, but the character of its pre-existence is not discussed. Similarly, it has no ending, though again the nature of its future is not defined otherwise than as a process to perfection.

“Divine perfection is infinite, therefore the progress of the Soul is also infinite.

From the very birth of a human being the Soul progresses, the intellect grows, and knowledge increases. When the body dies the Soul lives on. All the differing

degrees of creative physical beings are limited, but the Soul is limitless.”¹³

“Though death destroy his body, it has no power over his Spirit — this is eternal, everlasting, both birthless and deathless.”¹⁴ “Life is eternal, but the

individual human consciousness is not inherently so. It can only gain immortality by uniting with the pure Divine Essence.”¹⁵

Bahatism is no passive mysticism. Perfection is to be attained only by constant effort, which when inspired by lofty motives is true worship. Further,

Bahatism recognizes the profound significance of much of the suffering

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that man endures. “The trials of man are of two kinds, (a) The consequences of his own actions’ (b) Other sufferings there are, which come upon the Faithful of God. Consider the great sorrows endured by Christ, and by his apostles. Those who suffer most, attain to the greatest perfection.” “Grief and sorrow do not come to us by chance, they are sent to us by the Divine Mercy for our perfecting.... Men who suffer not attain no perfection.”¹⁶ True to the Moslem background of its origin Bahatism insists on prayer. “Know thou that prayer is indispensable and obligatory, and man under no pretext whatsoever is excused from performing prayer unless he be mentally unsound, or an insurmountable obstacle prevent him. The wisdom of prayer is this: That it causeth a connection between the servant and the True One, because in that state man with all heart and soul turneth his face toward the Almighty, seeking His association and desiring His love and compassion.”¹⁷

Talks by Abdul Baha. pp. 74, 169.

Ibid. pp. 53-54, 81.

Ibid. p. 59.

Bahai Scriptures. Section 614.

Talks by Abdul Baha. pp. 44, 45.

Bahai Scriptures. Section 869.

The general neglect of religious meditation by the feverishly occupied peoples of Europe and America is a marked defect of modern life. Bahatism emphasizes its importance not only for attaining a state of peacefulness but also to recognize the profundities of existence. “Meditation is the key for opening the doors of mysteries. In that state man abstracts himself; in that state man withdraws himself from all outside objects; in that subjective mood he is immersed in the ocean of spiritual life and can unfold the secrets of things-in-themselves.”¹⁸

There is to be complete tolerance toward all religions. Bahais remain members of the religions in which they were nurtured. They may interpret dogmas and practices allegorically. Thus: “Real fasting is to abstain from carnal desires and the promptings of ego. Fasting means to purify the heart from every stain of egotism, replacing material tendencies with spiritual susceptibili-

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ties, refining the moral fibre, intensifying the fire of the Love of God,

cleansing

the self from the dross of haughtiness, teaching humility, and dispelling the darkness of ignorance.”¹⁹ The ideas of hell and heaven are to be explained ethically, “Hell is the state of mind in which there are evil thoughts and purposes, yielding to the desires of the senses, and clinging to material things. In

that state man is separated from God and in his ignorance he suffers. Salvation — heaven — is the conscious realization of God in this life, which is gained by

love, kindness, and good deeds.”²⁰

The ethical teaching of Bahaism is a definite humanitarian cosmopolitanism. It sets in the forefront of its thought the “oneness” of mankind, and the aim of universal peace, “the Great Peace,” to attain which it

advocates a world council and a world language. It champions the causes of liberty and justice in all their forms, making definite mention of the equality of

the sexes. The claim is made,²¹ though apparently with little justification, that

the teachings of Baha Ullah solve “the economic problems.” It is unfortunate

that though universal peace and brotherly love occupy so prominent a place in their teachings, the Bahai movement has suffered from considerable inner conflict between different groups, most often on questions of organization and the seat of power and authority.²²

Talks by Abdul Baha. p. 163.

Sohrab, M. A.: Abdul Baha in Egypt. New York, 1929. p. 148.

Phelps, E.: Abbas Effendi, His Life and Teachings. New York, 1912. p. 134.

Remy, C. M.: The Bahai Revelation and Reconstruction. Chicago, 1919. pp. 77-78.

See, e.g., White, R.: The Bahai Religion and Its Enemy the Bahai Organisation.

Rutland, 1929.

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