

based on personal responsibility, justice*, honesty, and compassion; of social justice*, respect for nature, interfaith dialogue, and gender and racial equality. - - - SEENA FAZEL

Bahá'í Faith and Christianity: Christian Perspectives

Many Christians remain ignorant of the Bahá'í Faith, introduced to the Western world at the World Parliament of Religions (Chicago, 1893) by a Christian missionary working in Syria. He enthusiastically quoted the prediction of Bahá'u'lláh (Baha 'Allah; 1817-92), the founder of the Bahá'í religion (in Iran*), "that all nations should become one in faith and all men as brothers and that diversity of religion should cease."

Some liberal Christians greeted his son and successor, Abdu'l-Bahá (1844-1921), with similar enthusiasm in London (1911). The minister of the City Temple (the historic Nonconformist Congregation where Abdu'l-Bahá preached) declared, "The Bahá'í movement is almost identical with the spiritual purpose of Christianity." At St. John's Church, Westminster, the archdeacon knelt with his congregation to receive Abdu'l-Bahá's blessing. Pioneers of the interfaith movement welcomed the Bahá'í emphasis on the unity of religions, but other Christians suspected the Bahá'í Faith of "syncretism*."

Many Christians, especially Evangelicals*, have criticized Bahá'ís for denying the uniqueness* of Jesus and question Bahá'u'lláh's symbolic interpretation of the Bible in his Tablet to the Christians (Lawh-I-Aqdas). Bahá'u'lláh taught that God, though unknowable, is revealed through manifestations, including Jesus, along with Moses, Muhammad, and others. The essential message of these manifestations is the same, although each messenger has a distinct individuality and mission. Revelation is progressive. Bahá'u'lláh claimed to be the promised one of all religions and compared his own suffering in prison to Jesus' atoning* death. These claims are incompatible with traditional Christian belief.

Bahá'u'lláh's teachings anticipated many 20th-c. creative developments: the peace* movement, interfaith fellowship, equal rights for women, the International Court of Justice, and the United Nations. Christian advocates of these causes have often been happy to work with Bahá'ís. - - - Marcus Braybrooke

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