

Arise and, armed with the power of faith, shatter to pieces the gods of your vain imaginings, the sowers of dissension amongst you. Cleave unto that which draweth you together and uniteth you. This, verily, is the most exalted Word which the Mother Book hath sent down and revealed unto you. To this beareth witness the Tongue of Grandeur from His habitation of glory.

What this author has not explored heretofore are the methods Baha'u'llah employed in order to bring about this reconciliation. His treatment of Judaism, of Christianity and of Islam is very unorthodox in many of its features, and all for the purpose of reconciling these religions and harmonizing them in his own religious teachings.

In the case of Judaism, he cited passages from the Hebrew Scriptures, including from David (the Psalms), Amos, Joel, Isaiah, and Jeremiah, in his last book, the Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, thereby affirming the authenticity of these prophetic books, their divine origins, and the truth of their prophecies. This is stunning in itself, considering that most Muslims of his time rejected the Torah as accurately reflecting the revelation of God to the Hebrew prophets. Furthermore, most Muslims not having read the Bible for themselves were not familiar with the authors cited here or their books, with the exception of David and the Psalms, both of which are mentioned in the Qur'an.

His treatment of Christianity is also unconventional. In the following passage, Baha'u'llah compares the Muslim rejection of the Bab with the Jewish rejection of Jesus:

CXIII. Be fair in your judgment. Did they whom you curse, upon whom ye invoke evil, act differently from yourselves? Have they not slain the descendant of their Prophet [Jesus, descended from David] as ye have slain the descendant of your own [Siyyid 'Ali Muhammad the Bab, from the family of Muhammad]? Is not your conduct similar to their conduct? Wherefore, then, claim ye to be different from them, O ye sowers of dissension amongst men?

Baha'u'llah could be critical of the Jewish rejection of Jesus, but not to target Jews but to demonstrate resistance to the new Messenger of God. He also held Christians accountable for rejecting Muhammad, and Muslims accountable for rejecting the Bab.

In Kitab-i-Iqan (paragraph 144) Baha'u'llah writes:

Similarly, call thou to mind the day when the Jews, who had surrounded Jesus, Son of Mary, were pressing Him to confess His claim of being the Messiah and Prophet of God, so that they might declare Him an infidel and sentence Him to death. Then, they led Him away, He Who was the Day-star of the heaven of divine Revelation, unto Pilate and Caiaphas, who was the leading divine of that age. The chief priests were all assembled in the palace, also a multitude of people who had gathered to witness His sufferings, to deride and injure Him...Furthermore, it is already evident and known unto thee that those things to which the Jews and the Christians have clung, and the cavilings which they heaped upon the Beauty of Muhammad, the same have in this day been upheld by

the people of the Qur'án, and been witnessed in their denunciations of the "Point of the Bayán"—may the souls of all that dwell within the kingdom of divine Revelations be a sacrifice unto Him! Behold their folly: they utter the self-same words, uttered by the Jews of old, and know it not! How well and true are His words concerning them: "Leave them to entertain themselves with their cavilings!" [Qur'án 6:91] "As Thou livest, O Muhammad! they are seized by the frenzy of their vain fancies." [Qur'an 15:72]

He continues (paragraphs 147-148):

Thus hath the King of eternal glory referred in His Book to the words uttered by those wanderers in the vale of remoteness and error: "The hand of God,' say the Jews, 'is chained up.' Chained up be their own hands! And for that which they have said, they were accursed. Nay, outstretched are both His hands!" [Qur'án 5:64] "The hand of God is above their hands." [Qur'án 48:10] Although the commentators of the Qur'án have related in divers manners the circumstances attending the revelation of this verse, yet thou shouldst endeavour to apprehend the purpose thereof. He saith: How false is that which the Jews have imagined! How can the hand of Him Who is the King in truth, Who caused the countenance of Moses to be made manifest, and conferred upon Him the robe of Prophethood—how can the hand of such a One be chained and fettered? How can He be conceived as powerless to raise up yet another Messenger after Moses? Behold the absurdity of their saying; how far it hath strayed from the path of knowledge and understanding! Observe how in this day also, all these people [Muslims!] have occupied themselves with such foolish absurdities. For over a thousand years they have been reciting this verse [from the Qur'an], and unwittingly pronouncing their censure against the Jews, utterly unaware that they themselves, openly and privily, are voicing the sentiments and belief of the Jewish people!

In this passage from his letter to the Persian monarch, Nasiri'd-Din Shah, Baha'u'llah wrote about the Baha'is (Summons of the Lord of Hosts, Suriy-i-Haykal, paragraph 241):

Yea, these servants regard the one true God as He Who "doeth as He willeth" and "ordaineth as He pleaseth". Thus they view not as impossible the continued appearance in the contingent world of the Manifestations of His Unity. Should anyone hold otherwise, how would he be different from those who believe the hand of God to be "chained up"? [Qur'án 5:64 referring to the Jews] And if the one true God— glorified be His mention!— be indeed regarded as unconstrained, then whatever Cause that Ancient King may please to manifest from the wellspring of His Command must be embraced by all.

As a testimony to the success of his attempt to reconcile Judaism with other religions, thousands of Jews converted to his religion in Iran, and thousands of Jews have converted since his religion spread beyond the confines of Iran, to other nations where Jews reside.

Baha'u'llah made much greater efforts though to reconcile Christianity with both Judaism and Islam. He cited copiously from the Gospels, in Kitab-i-Iqan,

Jawahiru'l-Asrar and Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, and occasionally from other books of the New Testament, including an Epistle of Paul to the Romans in Epistle to the Son of the Wolf and Book of Revelation of St. John in one of his letters. As in the case of citations from the Hebrew scriptures, by quoting the New Testament, Baha'u'llah affirmed the authenticity of the books, the accuracy of their predictions, and their divine origins. Thereby he broke with Muslim tradition and with the common understanding of the testimony of the Qur'an itself. Notwithstanding this radical stance, he quoted from the Qur'an and hadith in the very same documents that featured these passages from the New Testament, and often side by side. He cited many verses from the Gospels claiming that they prophesied the appearance of the prophet Muhammad, thereby affirming that Muhammad was the return of Jesus and the coming of the Son of man in the glory of the Father. While a Muslim apologist might have cited such passages in order to convince a Christian to embrace the Faith of Islam, Baha'u'llah quoted these excerpts in order to establish the truth of progressive revelation, one of his key teachings, to bring about the reconciliation of Christianity with Islam, and to enable his reader, the uncle of the Bab, to recognize his nephew as the promised one of Islam, and to begin to prepare him as well to recognize Baha'u'llah as the promised one predicted by the Bab in his writings. He was reconciling Christianity with Islam with Babism and leading to his own prophetic claims and teachings.

As we have already cited, this did not impede Baha'u'llah from being critical of Christians when they rejected Muhammad and the authenticity of the Qur'anic Revelation. In his writings he and his son and appointed interpreter passed severe judgment on the civilization of the West, for having failed to recognize the spiritual culture of Islam and thereby descended into base materialism. Furthermore, he denies the truth of various cherished Christian doctrines, particularly those that identify Jesus as the incarnation of God, and all other prophets as essentially inferior to him.

And how successful has been his attempt to reconcile Christianity with Islam? Probably over a million Baha'is have been raised up in the West from among Christians of various denominations, and in the very process of becoming Baha'is they have accepted the prophethood of Muhammad and the divine inspiration of the Qur'an. This is a very impressive accomplishment, considering that few Christians appear to have embraced Islam, either during the lifetime of the prophet Muhammad or for hundreds of years afterwards, except when forced to do so, at the point of a sword.

Baha'u'llah's reconciliation of Islam with Judaism and Christianity has been perhaps even more miraculous, considering the thousand years of assumed superiority over these peoples of the Book. Baha'u'llah does not merely quote from the Qur'an in many of his writings, including those that cite liberally from the Hebrew prophets and the New Testament. He also denies that revelation has ended with the prophet Muhammad, citing many passages from the Qur'an itself that contradict such a dogma. He calls into question the legitimacy of the doctrines of the vast majority of Muslims who do not follow

the twelve Imams and who are called Sunnis. Hence, he depicts Islam as getting off to a bad start and then continuing to deviate from the intentions of the prophet Muhammad. Baha'u'llah denies that the twelfth Imam was a real person and affirms rather his symbolic existence in the minds of Shi'is. He calls Shi'is fanatical and ignorant and worse. So while they recognized the Imams, since their line came to an end, they have strayed far from the pure faith of Islam.

In a reference to his childhood, he states that he was greatly aggrieved by what befell the Banu Qurayza, one of the Jewish tribes residing in Medina – the slaughter of their men, and the enslavement of their women and children, a decision taken by certain followers of Muhammad and with Muhammad's permission and tacit approval. He says that the religion of God has always sought to bring about peace and unity, thereby contradicting the Qur'anic teachings advocating armed suppression of all religions save Islam. Affirming the same he contradicts those Qur'anic teachings that have mitigated against friendship and fellowship between Muslims and peoples of the Book. He says that all religions, implying that both Judaism and Christianity are included, are in agreement, calling into question the hostility towards Jews for "worshipping Ezra" and Christians for their belief in the Trinity, both of which teachings are found in the Qur'an.

Baha'u'llah redefines Islam, on his terms, as a religion of unity and peace, confirming and expanding upon Judaism and Christianity, intended to be a step forward for humanity after the appearance of these earlier prophetic faiths. He regards the true Islam as having guided Muslims to a close relationship with God and a pattern of ethical behavior far superior to what is found in the West. His son 'Abdu'l-Baha insisted that the modern progress of the West is based upon what they learned from Islamic sources and is ultimately derived from the divine influence of Islam. Both father and son depicted Islam as a factor for the civilizing not merely of polytheistic Arab nomads, but of untold numbers of people the world over. Islam lays the framework for the emergence of a New World Order that is heralded in the Qur'an as the Day of Judgment, and in the Bayan as the Day of Him Whom God shall make manifest.

So powerful is this call to reconciliation that Baha'is have sought to further extend the teaching to include many religions not mentioned by either Baha'u'llah or 'Abdu'l-Baha. Following in the footsteps of Baha'u'llah, 'Abdu'l-Baha declared that Buddhism and Zoroastrianism (and possibly also Confucianism) were also called to reconciliation with one another and with the other world religions. Thereafter, Shoghi Effendi declared that Hinduism (or in particular the Vaisnavite branch that focused on Krishna) was to participate in this reconciliation of religions. Baha'is in India have suggested that Rama also be regarded as a Manifestation of God, and Baha'is in America have suggested Quetzcoatl (from Mexico), Deganawida (from New York), and other Native American prophets for inclusion in this universal religious reconciliation. While there are some Baha'is who would close the canon,

others believe that the canon will continue to expand indefinitely, until all of humankind has been invited to this reconciliation. That seems to be Baha'u'llah's intention.

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