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AN OVERVIEW OF THE BAHAI FAITH

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AP4 - WORLD RELIGIONS

INTRODUCTION

The German word *Zeitgeist* means the trend of thought and feeling in a period, the spirit of the age. In the late 20th century the *Zeitgeist* seems to be the prevailing desire for there to be unity in spite of differences and tolerance for almost any thought, behavior or idea, whether political, social or religious. It is because of this mindset that the religion of Baha'i has such great potential to be spiritually destructive (or very successful, from the Baha'i perspective) on a worldwide scale.

The basic concept of the Baha'i faith is that there is only one God who created one human family and the worlds major religions are a progressive revelation of Gods teachings for this family of mankind. For this reason, people from virtually any religious background can be accepted and made to feel at home in the Baha'i religion since they are not required to abandon all of the teachings from their original faith. Baha'ism is an amalgamation of the most prominent religions throughout history which, according to the Baha'is, all represent the one true and universal religion that God wants everyone to embrace. This has great appeal to the masses who, not having a clear understanding of biblical theology, are caught up in the ecumenical current flowing throughout the world today.

In this paper we intend to examine the background of the Baha'i religion and its basic teachings. We will evaluate the tenets of this faith in the light of orthodox Christian doctrine. The logical and philosophical aspects of Baha'i claims will also be analyzed to see if they are internally consistent.

BACKGROUND:

History

The movement that has become known as Baha'i originated out of the Islamic sect of the Shiites in Persia (Iran) in 1844 when Mirza Ali Muhammad, a descendant of the founder of Islam, declared himself to be the Bab (meaning gate). He said he was the Madhi (Messiah) for whom the Muslims were waiting, and referred to himself as a manifestation of God. He announced that he was the forerunner of the World Teacher who would appear to unite mankind and bring a new era of peace.

As the following of the Bab grew and his teachings became more popular, orthodox Muslims and the government condemned the movement and persecuted its followers. In an effort to prevent a political uprising, the Bab was imprisoned. But despite his bondage, the Bab taught that the Islamic dispensation had passed and that the people would now follow his teachings. He predicted that he had prepared the way for another manifestation of God to come who would be greater than he, whom the Bab referred to as he whom God will manifest. The Bab was publicly executed in 1850.

In 1863, Mirza Husayn Ali, an imprisoned follower of the Bab, declared that he was the manifestation of God promised by the Bab. Because he had been one of the leaders of the Babi movement, most of the Babis embraced him as he whom God will manifest. Ali took for himself the name Baha'u'llah, which means the glory of God, and his followers became known as Baha'is.

Although he spent the rest of his life as a prisoner of the government in various cities, Baha'u'llah wrote over 100 books and letters describing the universal faith. These writings are considered sacred by the Baha'is. At the end of his life he spent several years in exile in the prison city of Akka, where he was free to roam the city and own palaces and gardens, purchased with the funds donated by his followers. He died a natural death in 1892 at the age of 75.

The leadership of the Baha'is was assumed by the oldest son of Baha'u'llah, 'Abbas Effendi, who took the name 'Abdu'l-Baha', which means the servant of Baha. Although he never claimed to be a divine manifestation as did his two predecessors, 'Abdu'l-Baha' proclaimed that he was the only rightful interpreter of the writings of his father and that his own writings carried equal weight to those of Baha'u'llah. After being freed from prison in 1908, 'Abdu'l-Baha' wrote and traveled extensively, promulgating the Baha'i religion in Europe and North America. 'Abdu'l-Baha' died in 1921. Because of a stipulation in his will, he was succeeded by his eldest grandson, Shoghi Effendi, as the leader of the movement.

The emphasis of Effendi's leadership was on organizing and establishing local and national spiritual assemblies so that the teachings of Baha'u'llah could be propagated throughout the world. Since the death of Effendi in 1957, the Baha'is have been governed by an elected body of Baha'i representatives called the Universal House of Justice.

BACKGROUND:

Organizational Structure and Outreach

There are three levels in the organizational structure of the Baha'i religion. First, there is the local spiritual assembly which may meet in a home or center and must have at least nine members. There is no clergy or formal house of worship as with most religions. There is only a teacher who leads group discussions. Second, there is the national spiritual assembly which is made up of nine members elected yearly at the national conventions. And third, that is the Universal House of Justice which is comprised of nine representatives elected every five years from the national spiritual assemblies throughout the world.

The Baha'is have their international headquarters in Haifa, Israel. There are eight Baha'i national temples located around the world, including the American headquarters in Wilmette, Illinois.

At a November, 1992, gathering in New York City of Baha'is from around the world to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the death of Baha'u'llah, it was asserted that there are over five million members of the faith in more than 90,000 localities in 155 countries. More than 2100 ethnic groups are represented among the followers of Baha'u'llah, and Baha'i literature has been translated into over 500 languages. Baha'ism has been called one of the worlds fastest growing religions, and due to its virtually all-encompassing theological tenets, this is easily understandable. It is very evangelistic.

BASIC TEACHINGS: Fundamental Principles

The Baha'i religion is founded upon three basic beliefs: the oneness of God, the oneness of religion, and the oneness of mankind. From this foundation, thirteen core principles have been enumerated by the leaders of the faith.

1. The oneness of the entire human race is the pivotal principle and the fundamental doctrine of the faith. This principle is essential to Baha'i. It is the basis for its teachings and practices.
2. There must be an independent search after truth, unfettered by superstition or tradition. Anyone who wishes to be a Baha'i must be willing to search out the truth of God without relying on the prophets and the traditions of the past. The freedom of man from superstition and imitation, so that he may discern the Manifestation of God with the eye of Oneness, and consider all affairs with keen sight... is one of the basic teachings of Baha'i.
3. There is a basic unity of all religions. Baha'i teaches that all religions essentially preach the same message. This is not to say that differences do not exist among the religions of the world, but Baha'i doctrine states that all minor differences should be forgotten. In a conversation with a visitor, Baha'u'llah said:

That all nations should become one in faith and all men as brothers; that the bonds of affections and unity between the sons of men should cease, and the differences of race be annulled. . . . These strifes and this bloodshed and discord must cease, and all men be as one kindred and one family.

4. All forms of prejudice, whether religious, racial, class or national, are condemned. In one of his speeches in Paris 'Abdu'l-Baha' said:

Religion should unite all hearts and cause wars and disputes to vanish from the face of the earth; it should give birth to spirituality, and bring light and life to every soul. If religion becomes a cause of dislike, hatred, and division, it would be better to be without it... Any religion which is not a cause of love and unity is no religion.

5. Harmony must exist between religion and science. Baha'i arose in the nineteenth century, when great battles were fought between established religions and the newly emerging sciences. These two forces must be harmonized.

Ali, the son-in-law of Muhammad, said:

That which is in conformity with science is also in conformity with religion. Whatever the intelligence of man cannot understand, religion ought not to accept. Religion and science

walk hand in hand, and any religion contrary to science is not the truth.

6. There is equality of men and women. Baha'i may be the only religion in the world that has asserted from the beginning that women are equal to men.

Humanity is like a bird with its two wings - the one is male, the other female. Unless both wings are strong and impelled by some common force, the bird cannot fly heavenwards. According to the spirit of this age, women must advance and fulfill their mission in all departments of life, becoming equal to men.

7. Compulsory education must prevail. Although neither Baha'u'llah nor 'Abdu'l-Baha' had the opportunity of formal education, both preached that universal education was a necessary condition for world peace and stability.

8. In addition to universal education, Baha'i teaches that there should be a universal language. Baha'u'llah said:

We commanded the Trustees of the House of Justice, either to choose one of the existing tongues, or to originate a new one, and in like manner adopt a common script, teaching these to the children in all the schools of the world, that the world may become even as one land and one home.

'Abdu'l-Baha' advocated the adoption of Esperanto as the universal language.

9. Extremes of wealth and poverty should be abolished. Coming from a family of high rank and then spending much of his life in prison, Baha'u'llah was acutely aware of the extremes of wealth and poverty in the world. Believing that both extremes were unhealthy and abnormal, he urged their abolition. He did not offer an elaborate plan to bring about this change. Rather, he suggested to the rich of the world that they open their hearts and contribute to the poor. He also advocated that the governments of the world pass laws to prevent the two extremes.

10. A world tribunal for the adjudication of disputes among nations should be instituted. Forty years before the establishment of the League of Nations, Baha'u'llah was urging such an organization from his prison cell in Acca. However, when the League of Nations was formed in World War I, 'Abdu'l-Baha' considered it too weak to be effective.

11. Work performed in the spirit of service should be exalted to the rank of worship. According to Baha'i, a good society is one in which everyone works at some task. There are no loafers or idlers.

It is made incumbent on every one of you to engage in some occupation, such as arts, trades, and the like. We have made this - your occupation - identical with the worship of God, the True One.

12. Justice should be glorified as the ruling principle in human society and religion, for the protection of all peoples and nations.

13. Finally, as a capstone to all the teachings of Baha'i, the establishment of a permanent and universal peace should be the supreme goal of humankind.

BASIC TEACHINGS:

Manifestations

The Baha'is teach that God is the unknowable essence, and that it is impossible for humans to know anything about God on their own. Baha'u'llah wrote:

So perfect and comprehensive is His creation that no mind nor heart, however keen or pure, can ever grasp the nature of the most insignificant of His creatures; much less fathom the mystery of Him Who is the Day Star of Truth, Who is the invisible and unknowable Essence. . . . Every attempt to attain to an understanding of His inaccessible Reality hath ended in complete bewilderment, and every effort to approach His exalted Self and envisage His Essence hath resulted in hopelessness and failure.

Therefore, Baha'is teach that the only information that can be known about God must be revealed by individuals known as divine manifestations. Baha'is believe that the founders of major world religions throughout history were each manifestations of God who taught essentially the same truths and progressively revealed the one true religion. According to 'Abdu'l-Baha':

Therefore, all that the human reality knows, discovers and understands of the names, the attributes and the perfections of God refer to these Holy Manifestations. There is no access to anything else: the way is closed, and seeking forbidden.

Each of the manifestations is said to be both infallible in teaching and sinless in nature. 'Abdu'l-Baha' has said:

Their knowledge is divine knowledge, and not acquired - that is to say, it is a holy bounty; it is divine revelation.

[A]s the supreme Manifestations certainly possess essential infallibility, therefore whatever emanates from Them is identical with the truth, and conformable to reality. . . . Whatever They say is the word of God, and whatever They perform is an upright action. No believer has any right to criticize; his condition must be one of absolute submission, for the Manifestation arises with perfect wisdom - so that whatever the supreme Manifestation says and does is absolute wisdom, and is in accordance with reality.

For these Holy Souls are pure from every sin and sanctified from faults.

The souls of these manifestations are said to have always existed. Shoghi Effendi said:

The Prophets, unlike us, are pre-existent. The soul of Christ existed in the spiritual world before His birth in this world. We cannot imagine what that world is like, so words are inadequate to picture His state of being.

Although the founders of the great world religions were each said to be manifestations of God, it is difficult to pin down the exact number of individuals who are considered manifestations by present-day Baha'is. According to Francis Beckwith, at one time or another Baha'i authorities have recognized the following people as legitimate manifestations of God: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Krishna, Zoroaster, Jesus, Buddha, Confucius, Muhammad, Hud, Salih, the Bab, and Baha'u'llah.* Of this list, the ones that seem to be the most widely discussed are Moses, Krishna,

Zoroaster, Buddha, Confucius, Muhammad, Jesus Christ, and Baha'u'llah, representing Judaism, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Islam, Christianity, and Baha'ism.

The people who lived during each age of the various manifestations were expected to follow, with unquestioning obedience, the teachings of their particular prophet, until and unless a new manifestation came on the scene. The Baha'is assert that each of these religious leaders taught identical foundational truths about God and religion, and no manifestation contradicts or is of a greater stature than any other. 'Abdu'l-Baha' said:

If the religions investigate reality and seek the essential truth of their own foundations they will agree and no difference will be found. But inasmuch as religions are submerged in dogmatic imitations, forsaking the original foundations, and as the imitations differ widely, therefore the religions are divergent and antagonistic. These imitations may be likened to clouds which obscure the sunrise; but the reality is the sun. If clouds disperse, the Sun of Reality shines upon all and no difference of vision will exist. The religions will then agree, for fundamentally they are the same.

And Baha'u'llah said:

Beware, O believers in the Unity of God, lest ye be tempted to make any distinction between any of the Manifestations of His Cause, or to discriminate against the signs that have accompanied and proclaimed their Revelation. This indeed is the true meaning of Divine unity. . . . Be ye assured, moreover, that the works and acts of each and every one of these Manifestations of God . . . are all ordained by God, and are a reflection of His will and Purpose. Whoso maketh the slightest possible difference between their persons, their words, their messages, their acts and manners, hath indeed disbelieved in God, hath repudiated His signs and betrayed the Cause of His Messengers.

While these famous figures of religious history are referred to as divine manifestations and manifestations of God, Baha'is do not teach that these men were *incarnations* of God, but *messengers* of God, displaying and revealing His divine attributes. According to Baha'i theology, it is impossible for God to incarnate Himself because, as 'Abdu'l-Baha' said:

For God to descend into the conditions of existence would be the greatest of imperfections...

DOCTRINAL BELIEFS:

God

In His essence, God is unknowable, but His attributes are revealed by His divine manifestations. Baha'u'llah said:

To every discerning and illuminated heart it is evident that God, the unknowable Essence, the Divine Being, is immensely exalted beyond every human attribute, such as corporeal existence, ascent and descent, egress and regress. Far be it from His glory that human tongue should adequately recount His praise, or that heart comprehend His fathomless mystery. He is, and hath ever been, veiled in the ancient eternity of His Essence, and will remain in His Reality everlastingly hidden from the sight of men.

Jesus Christ

Jesus was one of a long line of manifestations of God, in no way superior to those who preceded or came after him. He was not God incarnate, but the prophet of God for his dispensation. 'Abdu'l-Baha' wrote:

Was Christ within God, or God within Christ? No, in the name of God!

Trinity

The Christian concept of the triune God is false. God is one, absolutely indivisible. 'Abdu'l-Baha' explains:

That Lordly Reality admits no division; for division and multiplicity are properties of creatures which are contingent existences, and not accidents which happen to the self-existent...

... For God to descend into the conditions of existence would be the greatest of imperfections; ...

... the Essence of Divinity is absolutely unique and has no equal, no likeness, no equivalent.

Salvation

Salvation is not obtained by realizing our separation from God and by receiving Christ as our Savior, but by believing in the manifestation of God in the age in which we live and by following his teachings. Baha'i writers Hatcher and Martin explain:

Baha'u'llah repeatedly stressed that only revealed religion can save us from our imperfections. It is because God has sent his Manifestations to show us the path to spiritual development and to touch our hearts with the spirit of Gods love that we are able to realize our true potential and make the effort to be united with God. *This is the salvation that religion brings. It does not save us from the stain of some original sin, nor does it protect us from some external evil force or devil.* Rather, it delivers us from captivity to our own lower nature, a captivity that breeds private despair and threatens social destruction, and it shows us the path to a deep and satisfying happiness.

Indeed, the essential reason for such widespread unhappiness and terrible social conflict and crises in the world today is that mankind has turned away from the true religion and spiritual principles. *The only salvation in any age, Baha'is believe, is to turn again towards God, to accept his Manifestation for that day, and to follow his teachings.* (Italics mine.)

Resurrection

Baha'is deny the literal, physical resurrection of Jesus Christ. They believe the gospel accounts should be taken allegorically. 'Abdu'l-Baha' states:

Therefore, we say that the meaning of Christs resurrection is as follows: the disciples were troubled and agitated after the martyrdom of Christ. The Reality of Christ, which signifies His teachings, His bounties, His perfections and spiritual power, was hidden and concealed for two or three days after His martyrdom, and was not resplendent and manifest. No, rather it was lost, for the believers were few in number and were troubled and agitated. *The Cause of Christ was like a lifeless body; and when after three days the disciples became assured and steadfast, and began to serve the Cause of Christ, and resolved to spread the divine teachings, putting his counsels into practice, and arising to serve Him, the reality of*

Christ became resplendent and His bounty appeared; *His religion found life; His teachings and His admonitions became evident and visible.* In other words, the Cause of Christ was like a lifeless body until the life and the bounty of the Holy spirit surrounded it.

Such is the meaning of the resurrection of Christ, and *this was a true resurrection.* (Italics mine.)

Return of Christ

Baha'is do not believe that Jesus of Nazareth is going to return to this Earth someday. They believe, rather, that Baha'u'llah was the return of Christ in the sense that he, like Christ, was a manifestation of God, and therefore the return of another divine prophet in the line of manifestations. Baha'u'llah declared:

O kings of Christendom! Heard ye not the saying of Jesus, the Spirit of God, I go away, and come again unto you.

Wherefore, then did ye fail, when He did come again unto you in the clouds of heaven, to draw nigh unto Him, that ye might behold His face, and be of them that attained to His Presence? In another passage He saith When He, the Spirit of Truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth, ye refused to turn your faces towards Him, and persisted in disporting yourselves with your pastimes and fancies. Ye welcomed Him not, neither did ye seek His Presence, that ye might hear the verses of God from His own mouth, and partake of the manifold wisdom of the Almighty, the All-Glorious, the All-Wise.

Baha'i author John Ferraby adds, Since all the Manifestations of God are as one, Baha'u'llah is the return of all the Prophets, Jesus not less than the others. Prophecies of both Old and New Testaments, and of the Quran too, confirm this.

Sin, Evil, Satan

Baha'is reject the notion of man having a sin nature and they deny the existence of Satan and evil as a force.

The Baha'i Faith does not therefore accept the concept of original sin or any related doctrine which considers that people are basically evil or have intrinsically evil elements in their nature. All the forces and faculties within us are God-given and thus potentially beneficial to our spiritual development. In the same way, the Baha'i teachings deny the existence of Satan, a devil or an evil force. Evil, it is explained, is the absence of good; darkness is the absence of light; cold is the absence of heat. Just as the sun is the unique source of all life in a solar system, so ultimately is there only one force or power in the universe, the force we call God. . . . 'Abdu'l-Baha' has said that evil is imperfection.

Satan, heaven and hell are also allegorically understood by the Baha'is, being only symbolic.

Baha'u'llah explained that references to Satan in the Scriptures of earlier religions are symbolic and should not be taken literally. Satan is the personification of mans lower nature which can destroy him if it is not brought into harmony with his spiritual nature...

In the same way, heaven and hell are, Baha'u'llah taught, not literal places. Rather, they symbolize the psychological and spiritual states of being close to God or far from him. Heaven is the natural consequence of spiritual progress while hell represents the results of failure to progress spiritually.

CRITIQUE OF BAHA'I TEACHINGS:

Fundamental Principles

Many of the thirteen core principles stressed by the Baha'i faith have merit and make this religion appealing to its members. The abolition of religious, racial, class and national prejudice, the desire for equal opportunity for men and women and for education for all people, justice for everyone, and the idea that all persons should work and contribute to the overall society are all noble ideals.

Christians agree that all human beings have the same origin and are of equal value in the eyes of God (Mal. 2:10; Acts 17:26; Gal. 3:28). The concept that there is harmony between science and God's revealed truth is compatible with Christianity. So too is the view that people should search for that objective truth apart from superstition. However, Christians must strongly disagree with other Baha'i principles.

There cannot be a basic unity of all of the major religions of the world because they clearly contradict each other in their essential doctrines (this will be discussed later). Christians are constrained to reject this plank in the Baha'i platform because the Bible reveals the exclusivity of Jesus Christ as the *only* way of salvation and the *only* one through whom a right relationship with God can be had (John 10:27-28, 14:6, 17:3; Acts 4:12; 1 Tim. 2:5).

The simultaneous elimination of wealth and poverty may sound good in theory, but it is unrealistic. In practicality, in a fallen world, this is impossible. Jesus said, For you have the poor with you always (Matt. 26:11). The Baha'i ideal fails to take into account that most people who are wealthy worked hard to obtain their wealth and that the poor are often poor (at least in the west) because of their own habits, either through the absence of a proper work ethic or through wasting their resources on unhealthy or profligate living. If everyone were given or allowed to keep the same amount of material possessions (as impossible as this would be to achieve), it would destroy human initiative and contradict the biblical directive that we are to work to provide for ourselves and our families, knowing that God enables us to work and blesses us for it (Deut. 8:18; Luke 10:7; Gal. 6:5-7; 1 Cor. 9:9; 2 Thess. 3:7-13; 1 Tim. 5:18).

The idea that there should be one universal language and a one-world government, complete with an international police force, may appeal to the wisdom of the world, but to the Christian these goals evoke memories of another time in history when men tried to use these conditions to pridefully rid themselves of the God that Baha'is want to serve (Gen. 11:1-9). If these goals were to be realized, the outcome would probably be similar. This may indeed come about, and the results will be devastating (Psalm 2).

CRITIQUE OF BAHA'I TEACHINGS:

Manifestations

While Christians can agree with Baha'is that man can only know about God that which He has chosen to reveal (Deut. 29:29), we must strongly disagree with the premise that His truth has been progressively revealed throughout human history through the founders of the major religions of the world. Because of the wide diversity of theology taught by these various men, this claim is contrary not only to Scripture but to logic as well.

Three assertions made by Baha'i founders about the manifestations of God need to be addressed: that their teachings are in complete harmony, that they are infallible, and that they are each sinless.

That there are irreconcilable disagreements among the tenets of the prominent religions of the world is aptly summed up by atheist philosopher Bertrand Russell:

I think all the great religions of the world - Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, and Communism - both untrue and harmful. It is evident as a matter of logic that, since they disagree, not more than one of them can be true.

While Christians disagree that *all* of these faiths are untrue and harmful, there can be no doubt, because of the law of non-contradiction, that either *all* of the religions of the world are false *or one of them is true*.

Adherents of each faith think that theirs is true, but when one considers what the founders of each movement taught (according to the sacred writings of each religion), the inescapable conclusion is that these religions hopelessly contradict one another. This is evident from a comparison of their doctrines on the nature of God, the most basic tenet of any theistic belief system.

Moses wrote that there is one personal God who created all things. Krishna taught a mix of polytheism and pantheism and believed that the universe is eternal. Zoroaster was a dualist, claiming that there are two equal forces, one good and one evil, eternally battling each other. Buddha was essentially agnostic; God was not relevant to his teachings. Confucius was a polytheist, but did not emphasize worship of gods. Jesus Christ declared that there is only one true and living God and that He was the incarnation of that God (God the son) (John 5:17-18, 8:58, 10:30-33, 17:3). Muhammad also maintained that there is one God, but that He cannot have a son. The Baha'i doctrine of God is that the one God and the universe, which is an emanation of God, are co-eternal. Baha'u'llah teaches that the universe is without beginning in time. It is a perpetual emanation from the Great First Cause. The Creator always had His creation and always will have. Worlds and systems may come and go, but the universe remains. Thus the Baha'i concept of God contradicts *all* of the previous teachers.

In order for the Baha'i teachings to be acceptable, either the infallible manifestations are allowed to contradict each other, or there are contradictions within the nature of God. If the manifestations can contradict one another, then there is no way to discern a genuine manifestation from a counterfeit one, and Baha'u'llah was wrong when he said their messages were identical (see page 10). If there are contradictions within the nature of God (e.g. God is both one and many gods, both personal and impersonal, both triune and not triune), then the Baha'i perception of God is both illogical and absurd.

The pronouncement that all of the manifestations were sinless is also contradicted by the writings associated with each religion. Moses murdered an Egyptian (Exod. 2:11-15) and was not allowed by God to enter into the promised land because of his trespass against the Lord (Num. 20:7-13; cf. Deut. 32:51). Moses recorded in Genesis that Adam committed the first sin, causing the cursing of creation (Gen. 1-3) and that Noah got drunk (Gen. 9). Confucius admitted defects in his conduct, and Muhammad was exhorted several times in the Quran to seek forgiveness for his faults. The only person in the Baha'i list of manifestations to be declared sinless by both friend and foe alike was Jesus Christ (Matt. 27:4; John 8:46, 18:38; 1 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15; 1 Pet. 1:19, 2:22).

Baha'is attempt to circumvent the fact that their manifestations (except of Jesus) were neither in harmony, infallible, nor sinless by simply denying the validity of any scripture or historical record that disagrees with their preconceived notions. They do not cite other extant ancient writings that support their position. They merely declare that any contradiction to the teaching of Baha'u'llah must be in error, and they attribute any clear statement in the Bible which is antithetical to Baha'i doctrine as either a corruption of the original text, an exaggeration, or a legendary account.

Their bias against both the Old Testament and the New Testament is unfounded. The Bible has been proven to be the reliable, inerrant, inspired word of God over and over again, by manuscript evidence, internal evidence, external evidence and archaeological evidence. Jesus confirmed the Old Testament (Matt. 5:18, 19:4-5, 22:29,43, 24:15; Luke 16:16, 17:27; John 10:35) and promised the New Testament (John 14:25-26, 16:13). Jesus Christ proved that His teachings and prophecies were trustworthy not only by the miracles He performed by the power of God (John 3:2; Acts 2:22), but also by fulfillment of His promise that He would rise from the dead (Matt. 16:21; John 2:19-21, 10:17-18; cf. Luke 24:13-32, 36-43; John 20:27-31).

CRITIQUE OF BAHA'I TEACHINGS:

Doctrinal Beliefs:

God

In response to the Baha'i teaching that God is an unknowable Essence, the Christian can agree that we, as fallible and finite human beings, cannot have a complete and comprehensive knowledge of the infinite God. However, we can know Him by what He has chosen to reveal to us (Deut. 29:29) through the inspired teachings of the apostles and prophets (2 Tim. 3:16; 1 Pet. 1:21) and through His Son, Jesus Christ (John 1:18, 14:7-10). God is unique, eternal, personal, and desires a relationship with His people (John 3:16). He is the Creator of the universe out of nothing (Gen. 1:1) and is transcendent above it (Is. 57:15), yet He is omnipresent in it (Ps. 139:7-12; Jer. 23:23-24). He is omnipotent (Jer. 32:17) and has the power to incarnate Himself so that He could redeem those who would receive Him (Luke 1:35-37; John 1:1, 14).

Jesus Christ

Jesus was not merely a reflection of the attributes of God as Baha'u'llah claimed all of the so-called manifestations were. Jesus claimed to be God in human flesh (John 8:24, 58; cf. Exod. 3:14; John 10:30-38). He forgave sins (Mark 2:1-12; Luke 7:48-49), accepted worship (Matt. 8:2, 14:33; John 9:38, 20:28), and told His disciples to ask of Him and He would answer their prayers (John 14:13-14). Each of these would have been blasphemy if Jesus had not been God incarnate. Neither Baha'u'llah nor any other religious leader made the claims that Christ made, and because of this He is forever distinct and separate from everyone else who ever lived.

Trinity

While Christians can agree with the Baha'is that Essence of Divinity has no equal or likeness, this fact does not contradict the concept of the trinity. The Bible reveals that there is only one God (Deut. 6:4; Is. 43:10, 44:6, 45:5) who is revealed in three Persons: the Father (Rom. 1:7; 1 Pet. 1:2), the Son (Matt. 1:23; Heb. 1:8), and the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3-4). Therefore each Person is God and possesses the same undivided essence (Phil. 2:6). We are exhorted to partake of the grace, love, and fellowship of each Person of the one God (2 Cor. 13:14). As finite creatures, we can apprehend this concept, but we cannot fully comprehend it. It is not inherently contradictory, however, as it maintains that there are three Persons in the one God, not three Gods in one God or three Persons in one Person.

Salvation

Salvation to the Baha'i believer is not the forgiveness of all sins and escaping the wrath of God and eternal punishment. It is, rather, a social salvation that benefits society as the believer follows the teachings of the latest manifestation, in an effort to be united with God. This definition is foreign to the Bible.

While the Baha'i religion teaches a salvation based on the works of each person, the word of God reveals that it is only by His grace, through faith in the atonement of Christ for our sins on the cross, that we can be saved (Eph. 2:8-9; Titus 3:5). Our works (i.e. keeping the law of God) can never merit salvation (Acts 13:38-39; Rom. 3:28, 4:4-5; Gal. 2:16, 3:11).

Resurrection

The literal, bodily resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth is perhaps the most essential of the essential tenets of the Christian faith. It has been stated that there is no historic event of the ancient world better or more variously supported than the resurrection of Christ. Yet the Baha'is dismiss the gospel accounts as mere allegory because if the resurrection is literally true, then it has been said that religion is in contradiction to science, and science in opposition to religion... Since to the Baha'i mind the revivification of a dead body goes against science, it is rejected and explained away without refuting, or even examining, the evidence for it.

The Baha'i interpretation of the resurrection does not deal with the fact that the disciples claimed to have seen, talked to, eaten with, and touched Jesus several times after His death (Luke 24:36-49; John 20:19-31; Acts 10:41; 2 Pet. 2:16-18; 1 John 1:1-4). Neither does it account for the transformation of dejected, cowardly disciples (Luke 24:13-24; John 20:19) into men of great boldness and courage (Acts 2-3), to the extent that they were willing to endure suffering, imprisonment, and even death for their convictions (2 Cor. 11:24-31; Phil. 1:19-21; 1 Pet. 4:14-16).

Belief in the bodily resurrection of Christ is a condition for salvation (Rom. 10:9-10), it is at the core of the gospel (1 Cor. 15:1-4), and there is no hope of eternal life for man if it is not true (1 Cor. 15:12-19). Although Baha'is say that the teachings of Baha'u'llah are compatible with Christianity, this is clearly not true.

Return of Christ

Jesus taught that He Himself would one day return to this Earth and establish His kingdom (Matt. 24:27-30; John 14:3), and He specifically warned against those, like Baha'u'llah, who would arise claiming they are the Christ (Matt. 24:23-26). At the ascension of Christ, two angels appeared and told the disciples "This *same* Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). Scripture teaches that when Christ returns every eye shall see Him (Rev. 1:7), not just a few as with Baha'u'llah.

Baha'is are totally inconsistent in their use of the Bible to prove their assertions, for they quote John 16:13 and claim that this is referring to Baha'u'llah, while ignoring the very next sentence which says the coming Holy Spirit will glorify *Jesus*, not God the Father. Also, Jesus promised the disciples that the Holy Spirit would come within a few days of His ascension (Acts 1:4-5), not more than 1800 years later. This was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4).

Sin, Evil, Satan

When Baha'is claim that there is no such thing as original sin and that all people are born intrinsically good, they render meaningless the death of Christ on the cross. To define sin as merely imperfection due to a lack of education, rather than as a transgression of the holy law of God, is to mock the purpose of God in sending His Son for us. Jesus was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification (Rom. 4:25). All human beings are born dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1-5) and naturally have a deceitful heart (Jer. 17:9) which must be replaced with a clean heart (Ezek. 36:26-27).

Satan, who by his own pride brought sin and evil into the universe (1 Tim. 3:6), was considered to be an actual being by Jesus (Matt. 4:10, 16:23; Luke 10:18, 22:31) and by the disciples (Acts 5:3; 2 Cor. 11:14). Christians are looking forward to the day when Satan is cast forever into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:10), after which believers in Christ will exist apart from all temptation, sin, and evil (Rev. 21:1-8, 27).

CRITIQUE OF BAHA'I TEACHINGS:

Contradictions Within Baha'ism

Baha'u'llah taught that while normal human beings have two natures (physical reality and rational soul), the manifestations of God have a third nature (the spirit and attributes of God reflected in them). The same spirit of God (although not the same as the Holy Spirit in Christianity) is said to have dwelt within each manifestation, which is why Baha'u'llah claimed to be the return of Christ.

If this is so, how could two different manifestations of God live in the same era of history? Not only were Buddha and Confucius contemporaries (both lived between about 550-480 B.C.), but Baha'u'llah was a disciple of the Bab. Did each of these men only have half of this spirit, or are there two different spirits? Baha'is reject both of these options. The Bab said of He whom God will manifest whose coming he foretold, Were He to appear this very moment, I would be the first to adore Him, and the first to bow down before Him. Yet Baha'u'llah was regularly near the Bab, yet the Bab did not recognize Baha'u'llah as this manifestation, and there is no suggestion that he ever bowed down before him.

'Abdu'l-Baha' said that the physical universe has neither beginning nor end. Baha'u'llah taught this too, but he also declared that God created all things out of utter nothingness. Obviously both cannot be true. But if the Baha'is hold that the universe has eternally existed, this violates their basic principle that religion cannot contradict science. The second law of thermodynamics says that the universe is running out of usable energy, hence it could not have been here forever or it would have already spent itself. It must have had a beginning in a moment of time, brought into existence by God. Therefore, the Baha'is are in serious error.

Baha'is also believe in a form of macro evolution, but they do not believe that man evolved from species of animals. 'Abdu'l-Baha' said that while man may have existed in the *form* of animals which changed and progressed to the present state, he was always *by nature* the human species, distinct from animals. In this attempt to reconcile the pseudo-scientific theory of evolution with the belief in a Creator, the Baha'is contradict both the Bible and the widely propagated Darwinian view of evolution. We know that each species of plant and animal has a unique, unchanging DNA code. Therefore a dog cannot give birth to a monkey, and a monkey cannot produce a human being. And the Bible affirms that plants and animals were created according to their kind, with man being created separate and distinct from them, in the image of God (Gen. 1-2).

One of the greatest contradictions within the teachings of Baha'u'llah is the fundamental principle that religious truth is not absolute, but relative. This means that the truth which a manifestation teaches may later be contradicted by another manifestation, yet the teachings of each manifestation were true for his time. Baha'u'llah may have thought that this was a solution to the insurmountable problem of vast differences among the doctrines of the religions of the world, but this concept is self-defeating. The statement religious truth is relative must be a religious truth, since it was uttered by Baha'u'llah who, as a manifestation of God, claimed to be infallible. If his statement religious truth is relative is *absolute*, then the statement religious truth is relative cannot be true. If, however, his statement is *relative* (i.e. true only some of the time), then his statement is not universally true in all times and in all places, meaning that absolute revelation does indeed exist. Either way, this doctrine of relative revelation is false.

This revelation by Baha'u'llah by itself condemns him as a false prophet to be avoided by those who seek truth (Deut. 18:22).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

While claiming to be the great unifier of all religions, Baha'is ironically *deny* all other religions by attempting to make each one conform to their concept of the universal religion of God. They have amalgamated bits and pieces of each faith into one eclectic mass of religious confusion.

Their denial of the essentials of the Christian faith - the trinity, the deity of Christ, the substitutionary atonement, the sin nature of man, the resurrection and return of Jesus - forever prevents Baha'i from being compatible with Christianity. When Baha'i doctrine collides with orthodox Christianity (as well as with reason and logic), the result is cacophony, not symphony.

Since the teachings of Baha'u'llah clash with observable science, the principles of their faith demand that Baha'is reject their own religion. The internal and external inconsistencies and contradictions of Baha'ism make it unpalatable, unbelievable, and untrue.

The Baha'i idea that education is the key to salvation, in that sin is simply imperfection caused by lack of knowledge, is completely false, both experientially and biblically. Some of the most villainous figures in history have been brilliant. To educate an unrepentant thief is to increase his capacity to steal more cleverly. The Bible reveals, however, that there must be a change in the heart of man to effectively enable him to avoid doing evil (Ezek. 36:26-27).

Shoghi Effendi provides the most fitting description of the crucial difference between the message of Baha'u'llah and the message of Jesus Christ:

The object of life to a Baha'i is to promote the oneness of mankind. The whole object of our lives is bound up with the lives of all human beings; *not a personal salvation we are seeking, but a universal one. . . . Our aim is to produce a world civilization which will in turn react on the character of the individual. It is, in a way, the inverse of Christianity, which started with the individual unit and through it reached out to the conglomerate life of man.* (Italics mine.)

If the Baha'is truly seek to reside in a society where peace, harmony and righteousness prevail, they would do well to heed the exhortations of the Lord Jesus Christ:

Woe to you . . . For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. . . first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also. Woe to you . . . For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead *mens* bones and all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness (Matt. 23:25-28).

Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God (John 3:3).

And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent (John 17:3).

Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid (John 14:27).

Come to Me, all *you* who labor and are heavy laden, and I will

give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke *is* easy and My burden is light (Matt. 11:28-29).

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