

The Baha'i Faith as a Model of Peace Making

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Examples of religious conflicts in recent time

- India and Pakistan, between Hindus and Muslims
- Middle East, between Jews and Muslims
- Nigeria, between Muslims and Christians
- Ireland between Catholics and Protestants
- Iran, between Shiites and Sunni Muslims
- Between East and West after 9/11
- Now we face the possibility of war, conflict and global terrorism at a level never before possible.

From a Baha'i perspective...

while these myriad conflicts may appear to be based on a variety of separate problems they really are not. Rather, they are each symptoms of one illness. The illness is a spiritual one and has ravaged mankind throughout its history.

The Baha'i view is that...

Mankind's spiritual reality is that we are one people. Humankind is one. Like the flowers that blend in the most elegant of gardens, we come in a variety of hues, colours, shapes, sizes and temperaments. But in the final analysis we are one people. And God has an unfolding plan - namely the bringing together of larger groups of people in an ever-expanding vision of unity.

The Baha'i view is that...

In fact, each of the major religions that exist in the world today have been the tools by which God has moved us toward that vision. First from unity of the family, then the tribe, the city-state and then the nation. Today His plan is no less than the unification of the entire human race.

The goal of the Baha'i Faith is therefore the unification of the entire human race.

This makes complete sense when one realizes that the purpose of religion is in fact - as evidenced by its very definition - to reunite peoples.

The word religion comes from the Latin root word "religio" - meaning, "to re-unite". Thus, all of the world's great religions are not separate entities in conflict but rather chapters in one great unfolding plan.

The Baha'i view therefore is that...

All of the major religious movements that exist in the world today are monotheistic in principle. That is to say that each of them - Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Zoroastrianism and the Baha'i Faith, are based on the notion of one, single God. It stands to reason that if there is only one God all of His religions must necessarily be one.

Religious conflicts causes:

- Loss of lives
- Loss of resources
- Creates extremism
- Getting distant from God, especially among younger generation
- It creates opportunities for some to attack religious beliefs
- Devastation if modern weapons are used

Other effects of religious conflicts...

- In the age of IT, instead of getting closer to each other, we are getting distant from each other,
- The purpose of all religions is to create love and unity. What we see today is disunity and hatred in many parts of the world,
- All religions teach kindness and compassion towards other human being. However, half of the population of the world go to bed hungry,
- Many governments have adopted difficult policies towards immigrants and tourists entering their countries,
- Travelling has become much more difficult,
- Religious people and religious places are not secure,
- Mosques, Churches, Synagogues and Temples are loosing their young worshipers.

Religion and religious people

In all fairness, it must be acknowledged that much injustice and suffering have been inflicted throughout history in the name of religion. Even today, religious propaganda and incitement contribute to fear, hatred and warfare in many regions of the world.

In the Bahá'í Writings, it is said that, should religion become a cause of enmity, it is better to do without it.

We have to make a distinction between religion and religious people.

Religious conflicts raise legitimate questions:

- **What is the goal of religions?**
- **What is the purpose of God by sending many prophets?**
- **Couldn't God send one prophet and therefore not causing so much problem?**
- **Are all religions true? Or some are true and some are false? Or God favour one religion over another?**
- **Is this the 'End of the Time' as promised in all major Holy Scriptures?**
- **If today Jesus Christ or Muhammad or Krishna return, which Church or Mosque or temple they will attend?**
- **Is any of the existing religions suitable for a global society?**

Good things happening too...

- The Parliament of Religions, 1893, 1993, and continue every 5 years,
- Inter-Faith activities have increased,
- Religious tolerance have increased,
- People's knowledge and understanding of other religions have improved,
- There is increasing awareness for peace throughout the world,
- Major religions are taught in schools and higher education,
- More people believe in human rights,
- Freedom of religion is encouraged in many countries,
- Equality of women and men is recognised in many countries,
- In many countries there is separation of religion from politics.

Sources of conflicts between religions

- 1. The problem of reading Holy Scriptures literally**
- 2. Accepting religion by tradition**
- 3. Absence of secularism**
- 4. Followers of each religion consider their religion as last**
- 5. Lack of tolerance and accepting others**
- 6. The existence of superstitions**
- 7. The role of religious leader being unclear**
- 8. Followers of each religion consider theirs as the only true one and others as false**
- 9. Absence of clear covenant**

1. The problem of reading Holy Scriptures literally

Certain religious beliefs are not according to science and reason,

- ✓ **The story of Adam and Eve**
- ✓ **The story of creation in 7 days**
- ✓ **Heaven and hell**
- ✓ **Life after death**
- ✓ **The concept of return**
- ✓ **The belief in God**
- ✓ **Devil and Angel**

The Baha'i view...

- We have to understand the language of religions – a Holy Scripture is not a textbook
- A religious book is revealed according to the capacity of people in a particular time and place
- Universal compulsory education
- Authoritative interpretation of Baha'i Holy Writings
- Harmony of science and religion
- The role of Baha'i Institutions

2. Accepting a religion by tradition

The Baha'i view:

- **Absence of democracy is a great barrier to religious freedom**
- **Religion is a personal matter**
- **The concept of conversion**
- **Baha'i age of maturity**

3. The absence of secularism

- Politics is our relationship with others
- Religion is our relationship with God
- Therefore, religion and politics need to be separate from each other
- Prophets are the symbol of sacrifice, humility and service, and not interested in power. Why most religious leaders are power orientated?

4. Followers of each religion consider their religion as last

The Baha'i view:

- What is the significance of 'last'
- According to both reason and Holy Books, religion should be renewed.

According to reason...

The humans and human society are organic and changing, religion can not be static and everlasting.

The 4 parts of a Holy Book

1. Social teachings
2. Spiritual teachings
3. History
4. Philosophy

5. The lack of tolerance and acceptance others

We are more tolerant to others than before: It happened in stages:

- 1. It all started in 1873,**
- 2. In 1893, The Parliament of Religions**
- 3. In 1948, 'The World Council of Churches'**
- 4. In 1970, The World Council of Religion and Peace (WCRP) Japan**
- 5. Temple of Understanding or Inter-Faith**

The Baha'i view:

- Associate with the followers of all religions,
- Baha'i marriage
- Baha'i Houses of Worship open to all

6. The existence of superstitions

The Baha'i view:

- **Independent investigation of truth**
- **The harmony of science and religion**
- **Compulsory universal education**
- **Education of girls as future mothers and first educator of the child means children will be raised without superstitions.**

7. The role of religious leaders being unclear

The Baha'i view:

- **The Baha'i Faith is a religion without priest**
- **The Baha'i Institutions are in charge of the affairs of the Baha'i community at 3 levels:**
 - 1. Local**
 - 2. National**
 - 3. International**

8. Followers of religions consider theirs as true and others as false

The Baha'i view:

- **Two aspects of religion:**
 - 1) The universal (or eternal or essential)*
 - 2) The social (or temporary or non-essential)*
- **Progressive revelation**
- **Oneness of Religion**

9. Absence of clear covenant

The Baha'i view:

- **Clear, authentic and written 'Will' exist to avoid any disunity among Baha'is.**
- **There will not be any sects or branch in the Baha'i community.**

The Baha'i view...

- **Oneness of religion is at the centre of Baha'i teachings**
- **The vision of all religions were to unite all humanity (vision vs goal)**
- **All religions had the capacity to become global, but the tools were not created**
- **The unity is achieved in stages:
Tribal – city – nation - global**

Baha'is believe...

- 'That religious truth is not absolute but relative,
- That divine revelation is continuous and progressive,
- That all great religions are divine in origin,
- That their basic principles are in complete harmony,
- That their aims and purposes are one and the same,
- That their teachings are but facets of one truth,
- That their functions are complementary,
- That they differ in the non-essential aspects,
- And that their missions represent successive stages in the spiritual evolution of human society.'

(Shoghi Effendi, *The Baha'i Faith*, Hatcher – Martin, p. 84)

From the Baha'i Holy Writings...

- **'Religion is the greatest of all means for the establishment of order in the world and for the peaceful contentment of all that dwell therein.'**
- **'The purpose of religion is to establish unity and concord amongst the peoples of the world; make it not the cause of dissension and strife.'**

Bahá'u'lláh

Questions

&

Answers

Thank you

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