

How Do Bahá'ís Intend to Unify the Diverse Religions of the World?

To love the world is to me no chore;
My trouble is the man next door.

God has a progressive plan for our planet. According to a Christian author:

There is a unique harmony in the Bible. In Genesis the earth is created; in Revelation it passes away. In Genesis the sun and moon appear; in Revelation there is no need for the sun or moon. In Genesis there is a garden; the home of man; in Revelation there is a city, the home of the nations. In Genesis we are introduced to Satan; in Revelation we see his doom. In Genesis we hear the first sob and see the first tear; in Revelation we read: "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying."

In Genesis the curse is pronounced; in Revelation we read "There shall be no more curse." In Genesis we see our first parents driven from the tree of life; in Revelation welcomed back.¹

Global unity is part of God's progressive plan for our time:

Then I myself will come to gather
all nations and races and they shall

come and see My glory [the glory
of God].
Isaiah 66:18

The ultimate goal of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings is to create a unified world society, a global civilization in which everyone will see himself or herself as a unique cell in the body of humanity, working in perfect harmony with everyone else.

Bend your minds and wills to the education of the peoples and kindreds of the earth, that haply the dissensions that divide it may...be blotted out from its face, and all mankind become the upholders of one Order, and the inhabitants of one City...Ye dwell in one world, and have been created through the operation of one Will. Blessed is he who minglenth with all men in a spirit of utmost kindness and love.²

Bahá'u'lláh

The purpose of religion is to inspire love, tolerance, and hope—not hatred and prejudice. Yet untold millions have been killed and persecuted in the name of God.

A famous poet tells a story about three travelers who spoke different languages. During their journey they found a coin. Since they could not divide it, they decided to buy some food, and then to divide the food. Their inability to communicate led to a heated argument. At that point a fourth person, who spoke all three languages, came to their aid. When he learned about their argument, he

smiled and said, "You all want the same fruit: grapes." Bahá'u'lláh is the One who speaks to all faiths in a language they understand. In the Bahá'í teachings, the followers of all faiths can find fulfillment of their highest hopes and desires.

People worship the same God and ask Him for the same blessings. They want happiness, contentment, security, comfort, and peace. Despite common goals, they remain divided. They will only heed the Voice that speaks with the same authority as their own Teacher and Redeemer. Bahá'u'lláh speaks with that Voice.

In this age, Bahá'u'lláh has confirmed the divine origin of all great religions and the oneness of all Messengers and Prophets of God:

Know thou assuredly that the essence of all the Prophets of God is one and the same. Their unity is absolute. God, the Creator, saith: There is no distinction whatsoever among the Bearers of My Message. They all have but one purpose; their secret is the same secret. To prefer one in honor to another, to exalt certain ones above the rest, is in no wise to be permitted. Every true Prophet hath regarded His Message as fundamentally the same as the Revelation of every other Prophet gone before Him.³

Only the setting and dawning points of the sun change, not the sun itself. The same Spirit, the same Word,

which the Báb calls “the Primal Will,” appears in all great Messengers and Redeemers:

And know thou that He indeed resembleth the sun. Were the risings of the sun to continue till the end that hath no end, yet there hath not been nor ever will be more than one sun; and were its settings to endure for evermore, still there hath not been nor ever will be more than one sun. It is this Primal Will which appeareth resplendent in every Prophet and speaketh forth in every revealed Book.⁴ The Báb

God is one and indivisible:

I am...the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.
Christ (Rev. 21:6)

Ponder the following verses. They declare that there never has been nor will ever be any Prophet other than the Báb:

I [the divine Spirit] have appointed Thee to be the Beginning and the End, the Seen and the Hidden. Verily We are the All-Knowing. No one hath been or will ever be invested with prophethood other than Thee, nor hath any sacred Book been or will be revealed unto any one except Thee.⁵ The Báb

In our solar system, has there ever been or will there ever be a sun other than the sun? This principle is so powerful, it eliminates every trace of prejudice, separation, and superiority.

The following verses show that God Himself is the Savior. Since there is only *one* God, all those who speak for Him must also be *one*:

For I am your Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior...I, even I, am the Lord, and apart from me there is no savior. Isaiah 43:3, 11

There is no God apart from me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none but me. Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth.

Isaiah 45:21-22

Because of their belief in the oneness of religion and the progressive revelation of truth, Bahá'ís can communicate with the followers of all great religions. In general, the followers of each of the world's great religions accept only their own Messenger and the ones who came before Him but deny the rest. For instance, Jews accept only three Messengers—Noah, Abraham, and Moses—but deny the rest. Christians accept only four Messengers—Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus—but deny all the rest. Even the ones they accept, they do not consider equal with Jesus. Bahá'ís revere, in a spirit of oneness, all great Messengers and Teachers of the past: Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, the Báb, and Bahá'u'lláh. They also recognize Buddha, Zoroaster, and Krishna, who are denied by Jews, Christians, and Muslims.

Bahá'u'lláh's message of oneness has unified millions from every religion,

race, creed, and culture. The new Faith is a laboratory in which the unity of religion has been tested and tried with phenomenal success. It blends the peoples of our planet like threads of light into a tapestry of the utmost beauty and splendor.

Bahá'u'lláh teaches that all religions of God have the same purpose; they differ in name only. Behind the drifting clouds of differences lies a single source of light. A viewer can wear dark glasses to conceal the sun or colored glasses to see it in any colors she wants. She can also set many borders on the earth. But none of them can change this simple truth: There is one sun, one light, and one earth.

Behind the suffocating fumes of ideological conflicts and countless theological positions lies this simple truth: There is only one God, one humanity, and one faith. Divisiveness among religions and peoples has always been fueled by theological conflicts. “An elderly lady had heard a certain distinguished guest addressed as doctor. She found her way to his side and asked shyly, ‘Doctor, may I ask you a question?’ ‘Certainly,’ he said. ‘Lately,’ she said, ‘I have been having a funny pain in my side...’ The guest interrupted uncomfortably and said, ‘I’m terribly sorry, madam, but the truth is, I’m a doctor of theology!’ ‘Oh,’ she said with disappointment, ‘I’m sorry!’ She turned away, but then, overcome with curiosity, she turned back. ‘Just

one more question, doctor. Tell me, what kind of disease is theology?"

People have been taught to believe that their religion is the only true religion, the only way to the Kingdom of Heaven. And they have tended to accept this belief as an unquestionable fact. As long as they do not examine other religions with an open mind, they can persist in their beliefs. But what happens when they step beyond the boundaries of tradition? They begin to notice an astonishing similarity between the fundamental teachings of all the great religions. Once they see this, they experience a "paradigm shift," and they find it hard to go back to their original beliefs. They are like the man who is told his hometown is the best; he can believe it as long as he does not venture into other towns.

In his classic work *The Structure of Scientific Revolution*, Thomas Kuhn "shows how almost every significant breakthrough in the field of scientific endeavor is first a break with tradition, with old ways of thinking, with old paradigms."⁶

An old man picked up a little girl and put her on his lap. The girl looked at the man's wrinkled face and asked, "Did God make you?" "Yes," said the old man. "Did God make me also?" "Yes," said the old man again. "Well," said the little girl, "don't you think that He is doing a better job now than He used to?" That is how the followers of each of the great faiths judge

the ones sent before them. They think their faith is better or more true. This notion of superiority leads to prejudice, suspicion, and separation. Bahá'ís believe that all great faiths have come from God. The only difference between them is in renewal, relevance, and timing.

In a talk given in the United States in 1912, 'Abdu'l-Bahá said:

The divine religion is reality, and reality is not multiple; it is one. Therefore, the foundations of the religious systems are one because all proceed from the indivisible reality; but the followers of these systems have disagreed; discord, strife and warfare have arisen among them, for they have forsaken the foundation and held to that which is but imitation and semblance. Inasmuch as imitations differ, enmity and dissension have resulted. For example, Jesus Christ—may my spirit be a sacrifice unto Him!—laid the foundation of eternal reality, but after His departure many sects and divisions appeared in Christianity. What was the cause of this? There is no doubt that they originated in dogmatic imitations, for the foundations of Christ were reality itself, in which no divergence exists. When imitations appeared, sects and denominations were formed.

If Christians of all denominations and divisions should investigate reality, the foundations of Christ will

unite them. No enmity or hatred will remain, for they will all be under the one guidance of reality itself. Likewise, in the wider field if all the existing religious systems will turn away from ancestral imitations and investigate reality, seeking the real meanings of the Holy Books, they will unite and agree upon the same foundation, reality itself. As long as they follow counterfeit doctrines or imitations instead of reality, animosity and discord will exist and increase.⁷

The Bahá'í Faith creates a new awareness and a new understanding of religion. Once people gain this awareness and insight, they exclaim, "It's so refreshing to learn about a faith that respects all faiths."

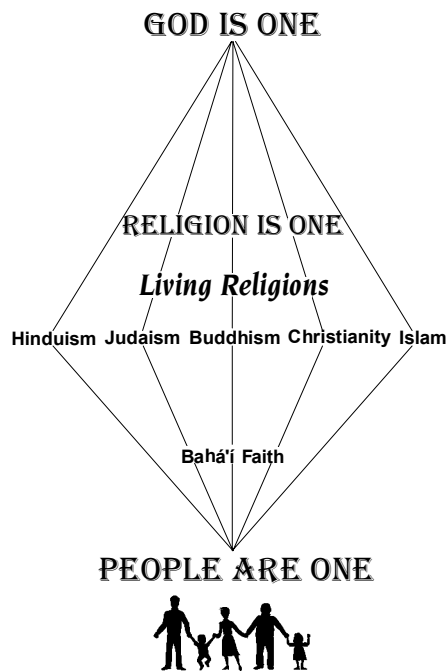
Although people believe in the uniqueness of their religion, somehow they sense that this belief does not fit into their understanding of a benevolent Creator who loves *all* His children. They hear a Voice in their soul murmuring, "The Creator cannot descend to a level lower than humans. He cannot care for *some* of His children, and ignore or abandon the rest."

In my youth I read various passages from the Qur'án from time to time. At one point I decided to read it from cover to cover. During this reading I was overtaken by a sense of awe and mystery. The feeling came from hearing the same Voice I had heard many times before, during repeated readings

of the Bible. I can never forget that unearthly experience.

A student asked her professor, "Would it be possible for all the peoples of the world to live in America?" The professor paused, made some calculations, and said, "Yes, if they were all friends." The power of the Bahá'í Faith lies in this: It makes friends of old enemies.

The following diagram portrays the spiritual design for the "tabernacle of unity" as declared by Bahá'u'lláh.



On that day the Lord shall be one Lord and his name the one name. Zechariah 14:9

He Who is your Lord, the All Merciful, cherisheth in His heart the desire of beholding the entire human race as one soul and one body.⁸ Bahá'u'lláh

In every dispensation, the light of Divine Guidance has been focused upon one central theme...In this wondrous Revelation, this glorious century, the foundation of the Faith of God, and the distinguishing feature of His Law, is the consciousness of the oneness of mankind.⁹

'Abdu'l-Bahá

This prophecy is specifically addressed to us; it is both an invitation and a warning to the people of our time:

Gather together, gather together... before the appointed time arrives... before the day of the Lord's wrath comes upon you. Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, you who do what he commands. Seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you will be sheltered on the day of the Lord's anger. Zephaniah 2:1-3

Thus, our failure to bring unity will lead to grave consequences for all humanity.

A president's fondest dream was to initiate "a thousand points of light" in his nation. Yet, despite his power, he failed. Bahá'u'lláh's purpose is to make every heart an immortal point of light. Every Bahá'í on this planet works for this very end.

Only God can touch hearts, only He can build "the house:"

Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders have toiled in vain.

Psalms 127:1

Prayers for unity from the Bahá'í Scriptures:

O my God! O my God! Unite the hearts of Thy servants, and reveal to them Thy great purpose. May they follow Thy commandments and abide in Thy law. Help them, O God, in their endeavor, and grant them strength to serve Thee. O God! Leave them not to themselves, but guide their steps by the light of Thy knowledge, and cheer their hearts by Thy love. Verily, Thou art their Helper and their Lord.¹⁰

Bahá'u'lláh

O Lord God! Make us as waves of the sea, as flowers of the garden, united, agreed through the bounties of Thy love. O Lord!...make all mankind as stars shining from the same height of glory, as perfect fruits growing upon Thy tree of life.

Verily, Thou art the Almighty, the Self-Subsistent, the Giver, the Forgiving, the Pardoner, the Omniscient, the One Creator.¹¹

'Abdu'l-Bahá

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3. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 78-79.
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5. *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, p. 159.
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7. *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 198.
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9. Shoghi Effendi. *The Promised Day Is Come*, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1951, pp. 123-124.
10. *Bahá'í Prayers*, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991 edition, p. 204.
11. *Bahá'í Prayers*, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991 edition, p. 205.



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