

Title: Conversations

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Author: wizanda

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Quote:

History:

Most religious historians believe that the Bahá'í Faith arose from Islam, Christianity arose from Judaism. However, many Bahá'ís believe that it is historical connections to other faiths. It has grown to be a worldwide faith spelled Baha'i, although alternate spellings of Ba'Hai, Bahai, and Bah'ai

Siyyid 'Ali-Muhammad (1819-1850 CE) assumed the title Bab which means 1844-MAY-23 He announced the "Declaration of the Bab." He explained that His mission was to herald the arrival of "One greater than Himself", Who would fulfill the expectations of all the great religions. This date is regarded as the founding of His movement. His followers became known as Babis. 20,000 were martyred for their beliefs. This caused much religious ferment. This led to His execution in 1850 by order of the Shah. The instigation of Muslim clerics, who saw His movement as a threat to the

In 1863, one of the Bab's followers, Mirza Husayn-'Ali-i-Nuri (1817-1892) assumed the title Bab to Whom the Bab had given several indications of His future station, and to His followers and to His eldest son that He was the Manifestation predicted by the Bab. On 1863-APR-21, He began proclaiming his station openly and publicly to the public. He assumed the title, Baha'u'llah, by which He is generally known, was the title of His movement. The last forty years of Baha'u'llah's life were spent in prison or in exile. He was imprisoned in or near Acre, then a prison city. The world headquarters of the Bahá'í Faith is in the Holy Land today as a result.

Baha'u'llah's son 'Abdu'l-Baha (1844-1921), was appointed by His father as the successor to His movement after His father's death.

The religion came to North America in 1893. The Bahá'í Faith states that there are 2 million members worldwide: about 2.5 million adherents in India and 140,000 in the Canadian census found 14,730 in Canada in 1991. There have been many estimates of the number of members, but the mailing lists which have tended to estimate a total of 1 million members in the US figure is grossly inflated, and that the number of active members is much smaller. Kosmin and Seymour Lachman estimated 28,000 adult US Bahá'ís in their 1980 book "Under God." Fredrick Glaysher estimates 26,600. 1

According to the 1992 Encyclopaedia Britannica Book of the Year, the Bahá'í Faith has established "significant communities" in more countries and territories than any other religion except Christianity. They are organized in 205 areas vs. 254 for Christianity. In the World, this has increased to 235 countries and territories, including over

tribal groups. They number about 5 million members worldwide.

The official "Bahá'í Faith" website/www.bahai.org National pages are at <http://www.us.bahai.org> for Americans and <http://www.ca.bahai.org> for Canadians.

Bahá'í faith is still looked upon by many Muslims as a breakaway sect of heavily persecuted in some countries because of this, in violation of the Declaration of Human Rights.

Beliefs:

Bahá'ís believe that there is only one God who is the source of all creation. God is transcendent and unknowable. However, He has sent, and will continue to send, prophets to humanity, through which the Holy Spirit has revealed the "Word of God". Manifestations of God up to this time have been:

Adam (? BCE)
Abraham (? BCE)
Moses (1456 BCE)
Krishna (1249 BCE)
Zoroaster (1000 BCE)
Buddha (757 BCE)
Jesus Christ (34 CE)
Mohammed (613 CE)
The Bab (1844 CE)
Baha'u'llah (1863 CE)

(Dates shown are common estimates from historical and Christian sources (approximate) A new prophet is not expected for many centuries.

The Bahá'ís believe in an essential unity of the great religions of the world. This does not mean they believe the various religious creeds and doctrines are identical. The various religions as having sprung from the same spiritual source. The social and cultural conditions of the religions vary due to the circumstances at the time that they were founded. The doctrine and belief can be attributed to later accretions, after the death of the prophet.

Every person has an immortal soul. Unlike everything else in creation, it is not subject to decomposition. At death, the soul is freed to travel through the spirit world to "a timeless and placeless extension of our own universe--and not some place removed place."

Some of Baha'u'llah's most famous sayings are: "The best beloved of all things is justice,"

"The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens"

"The well-being of mankind, its peace and security, are unattainable unless justice is firmly established."

Bahá'í beliefs promoted major social changes when originated in the 19th century: gender and race equality; world government; freedom of expression and assembly. In many ways, they were a century or more ahead of many other faiths. F

involved in promoting these concepts today. Also, unlike many other religions, scientific inquiry is essential to expand human knowledge and deepen their understanding. They feel that science needs to be guided by spiritual principle so that its application benefits all of humanity. Notably missing from the Baha'u'llah's teachings is the acceptance of homosexuality as normal, natural sexual orientation for a minority of humans. Neither the Canadian nor the national web sites in Canada 19 or the U.S. 21 appear to contain any information on this issue. The Canadian web site, for example, states:

"The Bahá'í teachings promote the elimination of all forms of prejudice and the recognition of the oneness of humanity and respect for all peoples, regardless of their racial, ethnic, religious or national origin. Equality of men and women, the elimination of extremes of poverty and wealth, the promotion of peace for all peoples, universal education, and the dignity of the individual are central to the Faith."
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However, sexual orientation is notably absent from their list of protected characteristics.

Another policy, which appears to contradict the faith's promotion of gender equality, is the prohibition of women from serving on its highest religious court.

They believe that there will eventually be a single world government, to be established based on the Faith's administrative framework.

Practices:

The Universal House of Justice in Haifa, Israel, is the global governing body of the Faith, elected out by Baha'u'llah. It is an all-male body.

National Spiritual Assemblies (NSA) supervise affairs in each country. There are 254 NSAs, one in Wilmette IL at the site of a Bahá'í House of Worship, one of 7 worldwide Houses of Worship.

In each locality where there are more than nine adult believers, affairs are supervised by local spiritual assemblies. Each of these institutions has nine members and is elected annually. Their functions have been defined by Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha in Bahá'í Writings. Bahá'ís have no clergy, sacraments or rituals.

Members: pray each day
observe the 9 holy days
fast 19 days a year
work to abolish prejudice
regard work as a form of worship
make at least one pilgrimage, if they are able, to the Shrine of the Bab in Haifa, where Baha'u'llah lived, which are situated near the Bahá'í world headquarters.
Reflecting their origins in Shiite Islam, Bahá'ís do not consume alcohol.

Sacred texts:

Bahá'í scripture comprises the writings of the Bab and Baha'u'llah, together with the writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha. Among the better known writings of Baha'u'llah are, The Most Holy Scriptures, Certitude, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, The Hidden Words of the Most Holy Scriptures.

There are many others books of Bahá'í scripture.

Holy days:

The Bahá'ís have a new calendar. Its year begins on March 21, the spring equinox. The seasonal days of celebration or commemoration are:

April 21, 29 & May 2: Baha'u'llah's public declaration of his mission

May 23: Bab's declaration of his mission

May 29: Passing of Baha'u'llah

July 9: Martyrdom of the Bab

October 20: Birth of Bab

November 12: Birth of Baha'u'llah

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Persecution of Bahá'ís in Iran:

There are about 350,000 Bahá'ís in Iran who are experiencing oppressive treatment for their religious beliefs. They are looked on as heretics, because of Bahá'u'llah, the latest prophet of God. Mohammed, the founder of Islam, declared himself prophet centuries earlier.

In 1996-APR, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights expressed concern over the lack of religious freedom in that country for members of the Bahá'í and other religions. On 1996-MAY-14, Reuters news service quoted the most senior judge in Iran, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, saying that the Bahá'í faith "is not a religion but an espionage enterprise." In the 1970's, the government of Iran has accused Bahá'ís of spying for other countries. The Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States stated on 1996-MAY-14 that since the regime took power, more than 200 Bahá'ís have been executed on account of their faith. Thousands have been imprisoned. Bahá'ís have systematically been denied employment, jobs and pensions, and both personal and Bahá'í community properties have been confiscated.

Freedom of expression within the Bahá'í Faith:

Although Bahá'ís have been very active in the promotion of freedom of expression throughout the world, there are significant restrictions on freedoms of individual Bahá'ís. These are enforced through shunning or expelling non-conforming adherents. Some Bahá'ís have been expelled from the community.

Gay males and lesbians in monogamous, committed relationships who have been recognized by the community have had their religious rights removed. Bahá'í couples who were married in a non-Baha'i ceremony have had their marriages annulled.

The Bahá'í authorities have imposed pre-publication censorship on all members about the Faith. Until recently, all such material has to be first approved by a committee of the Bahá'í National Spiritual Assembly of the country in which it is published. This was a temporary policy introduced many decades ago. It was ended in 2001-JAN for U.S. materials. Censorship responsibility has been transferred to the local assemblies. Changes have been made elsewhere in the world.

The "Talisman" mailing list was closed down in 1996-MAY, after several posters were investigated at the orders of the Baha'i World Center in Haifa. The list owner, were allegedly threatened with being shunned ("coming in breach of the Covenant") if they did not fall silent. 2 Baha'i authorities have denied this. The list was closed. Juan Cole was one of those allegedly threatened. He resigned from the Baha'i Faith and declared his private belief in Baha'u'llah in 1999-FEB. He maintains a non-Baha'i website.

The Bahá'í electoral process does not permit public nominations or discussions. As a result, there has been no change in the nine person US National Spiritual Assembly except for those caused by deaths, retirements, or a member leaving the Faith.

Michael McKenny, a Canadian fantasy writer was expelled from the church in 2001. He expressed in Emails.

Divisions within the Bahá'í Faith

All religions evolve. Followers of established religions break away and form new ones. Schisms are triggered by the death of the founder of the religion, or a succession of leaders of the splinter group follow most of the beliefs and practices of the original group. They generally regard their own faith group as being the true representative of the original faith. Most observers believe that the Bahá'í Faith arose from Islam, and Christianity, Judaism, and the Mormons split away from Protestant Christianity. Sometimes a dominant group. The Bahá'í Faith itself has experienced a number of schisms.

The founder of the Bahá'í Faith, Baha'u'llah, selected Abdu'l-Baha to inherit his authority after his death. Some members refused to accept the authority of the new leader. Abdu'l-Baha, the authority passed to Shoghi Effendi, "the infallible Center of the Cause," the generally accepted sole interpreter of the Bahá'í Faith. Some members refused to accept his authority. After his unexpected death in 1957, there was a dispute over his successor. One webmaster 4 states that there are now 7 faith groups claiming to be the "true" Bahá'í Faith. Of the six new groups, five were created since the death of Shoghi Effendi, The sixth broke off later. All of the new groups have very few members compared to Bahá'í World Faith. All have been declared covenant breakers by the Universal House of Justice:

The World Faith is followed by the vast majority of believers. In the United States, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States. Authorized by Shoghi Effendi is now transferred to the Universal House of Justice in Haifa.

Bahá'ís Under the Provisions of the Covenant who recognized Mason Remey as the successor who succeeded Shoghi Effendi. They have organized a series of International Conferences. They claim a membership approaching 144,000. Their Baha'i Center is located in Los Angeles.

They claim to be the Faith of God, (a.k.a. the House of Mankind and the Universal Palace of the Faith). Jamshid Ma'ani. They "are no longer active (listed as 'defunct' in Gordon's book on Religions)." 7

The Orthodox Bahá'í Faith," (a.k.a. Mother Bahá'í Council), who follow J.
The Orthodox Baha'i Faith Under the Regency, who follow Rex King.
The Charles Mason Remey Society, who follow Donald Harvey and Francis
A dissident group organized around The Friends Newsletter.

Another group teaches that a Third Manifestation is coming in the immed