

The Discerner

“Hereby know we the spirit of truth and the spirit of error”
1 John 4:6

The Voice of the Religion Analysis Service

Volume 25, Number 3

July • August • September 2005

A NON-DENOMINATIONAL QUARTERLY EXPOSING UNBIBLICAL TEACHING & MOVEMENTS

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WELCOME

The RAS Board officially welcomes Rev. David Beebe and Rev. Steve Lagoon to the Board. Rev. Beebe pastors at the Afton Road Baptist Church in Woodbury, Minnesota and Rev. Steve Lagoon is pastor of the Faith Community Church of Independence, Minnesota. Both of these men have been friends of RAS for many years. Steve Lagoon has served on the Board before and has written previous articles for The Discerner (see his newest contribution on Bahaimism in this edition). We praise God for these men who wish to share this countercult and apologetics ministry with us.

DEAR READER

One of the most disturbing news items from the horrendous Katrina hurricane devastation is that of looters taking advantage of the situation. They forcibly entered into homes and shops and took whatever they wanted - that is, until the police and National Guard did something about it.

It is extremely disconcerting and sad when the Church of Jesus Christ allows its spiritual treasures, its people and heritage, to be tarnished, pillaged and ransacked by marauding false prophets and teachers. II Peter, chapter 2 - 3:1-4 describes aptly false teachers who bring in unscriptural “heresies”. Among other accusations, Peter states:

V.2: “Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up”.

V. 14: “They are experts in greed”.

V. 15: “They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the ways of Balaam son of Beor, who loved the wages of wickedness”.

Paul calls these false teachers “savage wolves” that ravage the flock of God (Acts 20:29).

In church and family circles we have witnessed this “spiritual looting”. We have seen the attacks of clever cultists as they exploit those who are not grounded in the Word of God. For instance, many are vulnerable to the “prosperity gospel”; others to promises of superior insights and cosmic powers through New Ageism and Scientology. Often the victims are vulnerable older people and shut-ins and unsuspecting youth.

It is not enough to avoid false teaching. We must actively, intelligently, and prayerfully confront purveyors of false teaching with their baggage of lies, deception, and greed.

Laurence J. Sutherland

WITH THIS ISSUE

What would Micaiah or Elijah or John the Baptist say about some of the current influences plaguing American Christianity? Micaiah and Elijah fought against the idolatry of King Ahab that permeated ancient Israel's society (I.Kings 17 and 18; II.Chronicles 18). John the Baptist dared to challenge both the habits of the Roman soldiers as well as the hypocrisy of the Jewish religious authorities (Luke 3). We believe that these servants of the Lord were promoting God's truth and God's glory and not just "grinding an ax".

We at Religion Analysis Service are not just "grinding an ax" when we point out or analyze aberrant teaching and movements. In this issue Dr. David Larsen warns us about the "emergent Church". Dr. Larsen has spoken and written on this and similar issues over the years for RAS. As "Professor Emeritus of Preaching" from the Trinity Evangelical Seminary his words have the weight of scholarly research and reflection.

Though not academically degreed in psychology, Woody Bridell adds his exhortative challenge in Part II of "The Fog of Self-Esteem". Bridell brings his church, music, and youth leading background into his concluding remarks.

Lastly, we are delighted that Pastor Steve Lagoon of Christian Apologetics Ministries and new member of the RAS Board has generously given of his time and expertise to cogently inform us on the Bahai religion. This cult seems to thrive on American college campuses but also with the "trendy" set.

This package of information is diverse indeed, but we live in a very diverse society and situation, don't we?

Laurence J. Sutherland

THE EMERGENT CHURCH - BEWARE

*By David Larsen, PhD, Professor Emeritus of Preaching,
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School*

From the beginning Satan and his minions have challenged the veracity and the validity of divinely revealed truth. The Old Testament abounds with the narratives of false prophets. Our Lord Jesus warned his own about false prophets (Matthew 7:15ff) and the many “false Christs” in the end-time wrap-up of human history (Matthew 24:4-5). Likewise the Apostle Paul warned the Ephesians elders of “savage wolves” which would not spare the flock (Acts 20:29ff). Paul indicated that in the end-time “evil men and imposters would wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived” (2 Timothy 3:13). The Apostle John perceived many false prophets and called for discernment (1 John 4:1-5). Jude argued that we have the duty to “contend for the faith (Jude 3). All of the above is inescapable.

MOVEMENTS IN OUR TIME

In the forty-three years of my association with “Religion Analysis Service” and “The Discerner” I have never seen such a multiplication of unsound and unbiblical movements. I am not now speaking of the cults or of apostate mainline denominations. I am talking about those from among conservative bodies and independents who shock us by their defection. Date-setters like Harold Camping of Family Radio are all around us and are manifestly false prophets. One prominent youth evangelist is taking his texts from “Tales from Dracula” rather than Scripture and finding great satisfaction in his new creativity. Veggie-Tales and other extra-Biblical motifs are a common substitute for the Word of God itself. Adult Bible Classes and small group discussions are increasingly topical as Biblical literacy increases among us. R.C. Sproul becomes a preterist (NT prophecy about the end-times was fulfilled in 70 A.D.) and D. James Kennedy writes about “the gospel in the stars”, while he and John Piper deny any special future divine plan for Israel. John Stott denies everlasting punishment for the wicked. The chair of New Testament at a large evangelical seminary denies the substitutionary atonement. Rick Warren’s “purpose-driven” movement flourishes exponentially with purpose-driven nap-

kins and purpose-driven t-shirts to boot. Close theological analysis of his materials shows fuzziness on the way of salvation and lack of clarity on sin, salvation and the substitutionary atonement (cf Thomas Johnston, "Trinity Journal", Fall, 2004, pp. 157-185). The Baptist General Conference is being shredded by "Openness of God Theism" which denies that God knows all things (and hence denies predictive prophecy!). This last is an adaptation of Alfred North Whitehead's process philosophy and would argue that God improves everyday and loves us more today than yesterday. It is clear that serious challenges to Christian orthodoxy are proliferating on every side of us. We must beware. There is grave peril on every side.

METHODOLOGIES IN OUR TIME

Many argue that our methods must change but not our message. Certainly technology has introduced immense change in every aspect of our lives, including how we do church. But we must beware of the thinking that any means is acceptable if we have the proper end. The great Canadian communications theorist, Marshall McLuhan, may have overstated the fact, but it is true that the medium becomes part of the message. His disciple, Neil Postman, in his classic "Amusing Ourselves to Death" well argues that the move from the expositional model to the entertainment model in our time has the most serious of consequences. Neil Gabler has called our American culture "the Entertainment Republic". The bumper sticker, "Are We Having Fun Yet?" captures the contemporary mood. In Bible camps the trend is to replace the Bible teacher with a comedian. Bishop Culbertson of Moody Bible Institute well warned us: "What you win them with is what you win them to". Ahaz, king of Judah, saw a pagan altar in Damascus and ordered it duplicated for use in Jerusalem (2 Kings 16:10ff). He continued to offer burnt offerings and grain offerings on it, but it was an abomination to the Lord. The means to the end can affect our outcomes. The nation's largest church in Houston, Texas, has waterfalls but very little of the Word of God. It has a café but no cross. The "simple self-help message" fills the 16,000 seats again and again. Its pastor, Joel Osteen, offers financial prosperity to his hearers. He is a motivational speaker, not a preacher of the Word. "I don't get deep or theological," he says. He begins every sermon with a joke and gives his testimony how God has given him a house, parking space, a happy marriage, etc. There is no grappling with the problem of suffering. This is "Christianity

Lite” with no recognition of Christ’s call to suffer with him (Matthew 16:24, Hebrews 13:12-14). A little dispensational light would disclose that the promises to Israel were physical prosperity in the land, but no such promises were ever made to God’s heavenly people, the Church. Osteen had to apologize to his people for what appeared to be a clear denial of the gospel on the Larry King program (The Berean Call, July, 2005). The drift from hasty and careless methodology to the denial of the message and the importation of “another gospel” (Galatians 1:6-9) comes quickly. We can be seeker-sensitive to the point of giving away the store in the interest of pleasing and pampering the crowd. The Radiant Church of Sunrise, Arizona, features financial planning, athletic facilities and child care, marriage counseling and Krispy Kremes, but the messages are about “how to reach your professional goals, discipline your children and invest your money. If Oprah and Dr. Phil are doing it, why shouldn’t we?” (New York Times Magazine, March 27, 2005, p.33). One critic has it right: “American faith has met American culture—and culture has triumphed.”

THE MESSAGE TODAY

Most painful is the development in recent years of what is called the emergent church which consciously moves from any claims to absolute truth - it is not informational but primarily relational/missional, as if we needed to make a choice at that point. The leader of this very amorphous movement is Brian McLaren, author of numerous books and pastor of a church of 200 persons in the Baltimore/Washington DC area. This fast-growing movement is more than methodology going soft on the message. This is the message going amok from square one in an ostensible choice of experience over truth (a false dichotomy if there ever was one). They trumpet a new paradigm - belonging before believing. But how can you feel that you belong to Christ’s people if you do not belong to Christ? The irrelevancy of the TRUTH is demonstrated by their effort to destroy all of the certainties of the past. They want stories, not propositions, notwithstanding the fact that any meaning in a story will involve a proposition! But for these folk the old, old story may not be a true, true story.

What is so tragic is not only the rapid growth of these pernicious ideas throughout our country, but the degree to which McLaren and others are welcomed into churches, schools, seminaries, on magazine boards, etc. This crass dismissal of the past

is a disastrous debacle. My colleague at Trinity, Dr. D.A. Carson has written a very fair and incisive expose of this movement (Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church: Understanding a Movement and Its Implications, Zondervan, 2005). I strongly recommend this treatment to share with any known to us who are being seduced by these dangerous notions. But not only is the issue of the authority of Scripture under fire, but the substitutionary atonement of Christ is denied and the reality of hell rejected. Here we also see the veneration of Mary which is creeping into Protestantism. Here is also the denial of a personal devil. Carson clearly shows how McLaren and this movement have lost sight of Christianity and the Gospel (p181). Never was there a greater need for The Discerner and many of us feel great gratitude to the Lord that this critical instrument for the truth of the Word continues to be in good hands. It is ours “to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints” (Jude 3). These false prophets have “crept in among us” and they must be rebutted and routed.

“THE FOG OF SELF-ESTEEM” PART II

By Woody Bridell

(Part I framed the issue of self-esteem with philosophical, historical, and psychological considerations. In Part II, the author becomes exhortative and gets “down to brass tacks”, so to speak. Although Mr. Bridell is not a professional psychologist, he does “hit the nail on the head” with his scriptural and common sense approach. Editor)

PPsychology and Biblical truth need not always be on a collision course. A person who understands the Bible and is in right relationship with his/her Creator and Savior is probably one of the most well adjusted people a therapist is likely to meet. There are obvious contrasts between psychology and theology. Psychology is based on theory and experimentation; whereas theology is based on the Bible, which is, in fact, absolute truth. Absolute truth is something that is anathema to the psycho-therapist, and the secular world at large. If there is absolute truth, then everyone is responsible to know and live by it. This sounds like a mandate for Christian living to me. The secular world, however, has consciously chosen human experience as its criterium for truth. The secular psychologist theorizes that there must be another way, that is, the experimental way. The unregenerate psychologist claims to be in pursuit of truth, whereas the Christian says “I found it” - the inspired Word of God!

Self-esteem is man’s “Tower of Babel”. It is built by the will and intellect of humans for the purpose of producing psychological adrenalin to help conquer the obstacles of life, without any outside help. The truth about the human condition is that we all need outside help. We are helpless and hopeless without it. We have a sin problem, and no matter how we try to tell ourselves that it does not exist, it haunts us. No amount of intellectual bootstrapping can forgive sin. Forgiveness is “a gift from God, not of works, lest any man should boast” (Eph. 2:8,9).

We must never confuse spiritual boldness with self-esteem. Spiritual boldness is given only by the Holy Spirit for the purpose of ministry and witness (Acts 4:31). This boldness can only occur when a person is controlled by the Holy Spirit. When one is filled with the Spirit, he must be empty of self. John the Baptist said in John 3:30: “He must increase, but I must decrease”. Jesus said of

John that “there is no greater man born of woman”. Why?-because John had his priorities right.

Self-esteem militates against the Biblical principle of putting God first. Jesus states in Matt. 6:33: “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you”. Modern man spends too much time worrying about temporal things, what he wants to wear and eat. In this passage, God sets priorities. Self-esteem leads us to confidence in ourselves; in contrast, having an uncondemned heart gives us confidence in God. (I John 3:21). Self-esteem also goes against the order of God’s commandments which tell us that we should love God and others first and ourselves last. Matt 22:37-39 states that the two great commandments are: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it. Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself”. The order is God first, your neighbor second, and yourself last. It is natural to love ourselves, but we need to work at loving God and our neighbor first.

Self-esteem can interfere with the prayer life of the born again Christian. If we feel that we can solve our own problems, then there is no urgency to pray. Prayer and especially answered prayer increase our faith and confidence in God (I John 5:14). Many Christians suffer needlessly because they have confidence in the wrong person or persons, and so they simply do not pray to God. James says: “Ye have not, because ye ask not” (James 4:4).

Self-esteem is a theory, not a fact. Robert White commented that “the theory cannot be tested experimentally”, therefore it remains a theory. Unlike true scientists who correctly identify their initial findings as theories and wait for more proof, the rogue philosophers of self-esteem have taken the next precipitous step, and now teach it as fact. The problem is that self-esteem has been so widely publicized, that the lie has been accepted and then taught to others. This is no less true in the Christian community than the secular world. Christians around the world have bought into this pagan theory, and have accepted it without a whimper. As the old saying goes, “for evil to triumph, it is only necessary for good men to do nothing”- well, in this case, the Christian community did not respond. I think it is partly because people just did not understand much about philosophy, and did not have enough knowledge of the Bible to defend its truths. Self-esteem has gained such a head of steam that publishers were reluctant to print any contrary opinions. The other problem is that Christian psychologists went along with

the idea of self-esteem, and so the Christian community only heard one side of the issue. Dr. James Dobson of Focus on the Family, with a large sphere of influence, is an example of modern Christian thinking on self-esteem. I personally have listened to many of Dr. Dobson's broadcasts, and have often been blessed, but I think he has erred on this subject. His thesis is that a child with low self-esteem is scarred for life with a victim mentality.

No matter how you color it, this errant view erodes personal responsibility. The Bible teaches us that we do have personal responsibility, especially for our sin. That is why God established the law. The law compares our actions to a perfect standard, and concludes that we are indeed sinners by nature and have fallen short of God's glory.(see Rom. Chap. 3) This leaves us in desperate need of a Savior; and, even as Christians, makes us more conscious of our sin. The more conscious we become of sin, the more likely we are to confess it and be restored to fellowship (1. John 1:9; Proverbs 28:13).

One of the strongest Bible mandates against self-esteem is found in Romans 12:3: "For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God dealt to every man the measure of faith". This is a clear warning against high and lofty egotistic thoughts. It documents that you are not thinking soberly when you think too highly of yourself. It also infers that God has given us a measure of faith so that we do not have to rely on ourselves.

Self-esteem, reduced to its simplest form, is pride. There are many Scriptures that strongly oppose self-esteem, and pride. I offer the following short list for your consideration: Proverbs 16:18; Proverbs 29:23; Ezekiel 28:17; I Timothy 3:6; I John 2:16; I Corinthians 5:6; 9:16; II Corinthians 12:5; II Peter 2:8; and Romans 12:16.

COMPONENTS OF THE HUMAN CORE

The core problem with self-esteem is the problem of the human core. To some this may sound like double speak, but a study of the human core will delineate what self-esteem is really all about. There are two types of human cores: the ego-centric and the Christo-centric. It is not difficult to discern which core from which self-esteem emerges. The human core can be camouflaged, but its true colors will eventually come to light, and when these colors are exposed, the mystery of a person's true character is revealed. That, in and of itself, is very telling, but wait till we see some of the

natural results that exude from such a core.

We can look at some of the more obvious things that show up, like self-sufficiency, self-interest, self-help, self-reliance, self-control, self-esteem, self-fulfillment, self-evaluation, self-confidence and self-trust. Some of these seem quite innocuous, but are they really? The fact that they all begin with the word “self” should send up a red flag. The above words describe a very introverted, self-made person. He is a person who shouts to the whole world: “I not only did it my way, but I did it by myself”. In his own mind, this person has reached a level of total independence, but it is all an illusion or self-delusion. The more someone believes this lie, the farther he is from the truth.

The next level down this vortex of ego-centrism is more serious than the first. It is described in such words as: selfishness, self-absorbed, arrogance, self-centered, self-consciousness, self-willed, self-importance, self-seeking, self-governing, and self-advancement. A person at this level tends to shut other people out of his life since he concludes that he does not need any one but himself to be satisfied. It is evident that a person at this level has usually started to develop a neurosis. Psalms 39:5 warns that “every man at his best state is altogether vanity”. When we become completely enthralled with ourselves, we are at less than our best state. This condition can leave us quite isolated and lonely.

The next descending level of self-esteem includes some of the following words/concepts: pride, self-determination, arrogance, self-gratification, narcissism, self-righteous, ego-mania, self-love, conceit, self-obsession, anger, bad attitude, self-doubt, prejudice, and even racism. Some of these words require further explanation. Self-doubt occurs when a person has tried everything he knows about self-esteem and yet has failed. The state of this person is worse than when he began his self-esteem therapy. The person who reaches this level is in a state of deep depression. He has obeyed all the laws of self-esteem, and has even gone so far as to worship self (self-love); but the more bound to himself he becomes, the more unsure he becomes, and self-doubt rules his thoughts and emotions. His mental state becomes unstable and his attitude does a one eighty as thoughts of prejudice, and even racism, emerge. One of the results of self-esteem is arrogance which is the first step toward racism. In some cases there is such a dichotomy of thought that a person becomes manic and suicidal. James 1:8 says that “a double minded man is unstable in all his ways”.

Ego-centrism is not beneficial for the Christian. His confidence

should be in Christ alone, and so his life should be Christo-centric. Phil. 1:6 declares: “Being confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ”. It is evident from this passage that our confidence comes from an outside source, Jesus Christ. It is also clear how long He will perform this good work in us. It is from the moment we accept Him as our Savior until the day He returns for us. Romans 8:4 warns us that we “should not walk after the flesh, but after the Spirit”. Philippians 3:3 makes it very plain that we should “worship God in the Spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh”. When we do this, everything takes on a new perspective, and our lives have a divine order. This is not to say that the Spirit-controlled Christian will never have problems; but when problems do come, we have an external resource that sees the beginning from the end. This gives our faith a resting place, allowing God to lead us and answer our prayers.

CONCLUSION

Psychologists have long contended that self-esteem is couched in human emotions. This is not the best human resource for good life decisions. Emotions are more easily manipulated than any part of our being, making us vulnerable to any event that reaches our emotional core. It is from this source that feelings emerge. Making decisions based on feelings is as unpredictable as Russian roulette. Feelings sometimes change faster than the weather in Minnesota. The decisions of today could be countermanded tomorrow, depending on how one feels at any given time. The logical product in all of this is utter confusion. Think for a moment with me and answer this burning question: Who is the author of confusion? He is none other than Satan. And what is his character? He is the great deceiver. Believers beware!

Christians and non-Christians alike have been duped by this false teaching on self-esteem. Satan himself has authored it and fed it as a subliminal potion to everyone who thinks he is the master of his own destiny. Why? Satan’s plan is to do anything that will disconnect us from the acknowledgement and worship of God. He has been at it since the Garden of Eden, and will continue till he is thrown into hell. His plan is to take as many with him as possible and so he uses self-esteem to convince people that he is a god unto himself. Romans 1:25 reinforces this truth, Paul writes: “Who (They) changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped the creature more than the Creator, Who is blessed forevermore”. Human idolatry occurs every day and self-esteem has paved the way.

Psychology has concluded that the answer to most human problems is self-esteem, and so they have established a number of resources such as education, counsel, support groups, private coaching, E-Therapy, chat rooms, seminars, private tutoring, and none other than the feel good store. This is nothing less than a man-made mental massage. It may make you feel better for a short period of time, but it offers no contentment or direction, and leaves you ultimately bewildered.

The Bible tells us that we should make decisions based on the Word of God via the agency of the Holy Spirit. Psalm 119:105 says “Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path”. Jesus said, “When He (the Holy Spirit) is come He will lead you into all truth” (John 16:13). The world is looking for truth in all the wrong places, and that is why they come to the wrong conclusions, since they are not “spiritually discerned”. Christians have a wonderful helpmeet, the Holy Spirit. He opens the eyes of our spiritual understanding. He will only lead you where God wants you to go. Proverbs 3:5,6 sums it up best: “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your paths”. Self-esteem says that truth is all about us, but Jesus said, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life” (John 14:6).

SOURCES: “Self-Esteem”, Editor; Justin Healey, Spinney Press; “History of Self-Esteem”, DLT, 1999/Webnotes; “Happiness is an Inside Job”, Steven Wilson, Christian advice.net; “Filling the World with Self-Esteem”, Steven Ward, Canadian Journal of Sociology.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Woody Bridell is originally from a small town in northern Minnesota. He received his post-secondary education at Pillsbury Baptist Bible College in Owatonna, MN and Central Baptist Theological Seminary of Minneapolis, MN. He has three grown children and three grandchildren. He is retired from Qwest Communications, after thirty two years, and is currently a Sales Engineer for a small Telecommunications Company in a Minneapolis suburb. He is busy with church work as an Adult Sunday School Teacher, Song Leader, Missions Committee Chairman and Choir Director.

THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH: EXCHANGING DARKNESS FOR LIGHT

By Steve Lagoon

“**W**oe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter” (Isaiah 5:20). After an extensive study, the above words of Isaiah the prophet seem to me a most appropriate description of Baha’i religion.

This may seem a most harsh way to begin a treatment of a faith that prides itself on its commitment to peace, unity, and the love of God. It is certainly true that many of the goals and principles of Baháism are noble, and that its adherents are sincere people.

Nonetheless, the overall teachings of Baháism are antithetical to biblical Christianity. Virtually every important teaching of Christianity is denied by Baháism. Therefore, Christians need to be aware of this growing threat to the souls of mankind, and how to defend the truth against deceptions of the Baha’i religion.

Background information

The Baha’i faith publishes an introductory magazine which provides much helpful background information including the following:

“The Baha’i Faith is today among the fastest-growing religions. With more than five million followers, who reside in virtually every nation on earth, it is the second-most widespread faith, surpassing every religion but Christianity in its geographic reach.” (*The Baha’is: A Profile of the Baha’i Faith and its Worldwide Community* [magazine format]. Baha’i International Community, Baha’i World Centre, Haifa, Israel, 2005, p. 5, hereafter:Profile).

Some basic Baha’i principles:

- The Oneness of humankind
- The equality of women and men
- Full racial integration
- Economic justice

- Universal education
- The harmony of science and religion
- The adoption of a universal auxiliary Language
- The creation of a world commonwealth of nations that will keep peace through collective security

Other important beliefs are:

- That there is only one God
- That all of the world's religions represent one changeless, eternal faith
- That the purpose of life on earth is to develop ourselves spiritually, in preparation for an everlasting existence; hereafter: Profile, (Back cover).

The foregoing information is from "The Baha'is: A Profile of the Baha'i Faith and its Worldwide Community"[magazine format]. Baha'i International Community, Baha'i World Centre, Haifa, Israel, 2005.

Historical Roots of Bahaiism

John Boykin gives a good summary of the beginnings of Bahaiism:

"The Baha'i Faith developed in the nineteenth century in Iran, then known as Persia. It is named after its prophet, Baha'u'llah, whose title in Arabic means 'Glory of God.' Like most Iranians for the past 1300 years, its founders and early converts were all Shi'ite Muslims. Of the twelve men Shi'ites recognize as legitimate successors to Muhammad, the last was Imam Mahdi. A recluse, Imam Mahdi communicated with his followers through spokesman called Babs ('gates'). Ever since communication from him ceased in A.D. 941, devout Shi'ites have awaited his return as a conquering messiah.

In 1844 a twenty-four-year-old Persian wool merchant took the title Bab [Mirza' Ali Muhammad 1819-1850] and began to preach . . . [and] claimed to be a prophet greater than Muhammad. . . Muslim leaders. . . soon locked him in jail, where he spent most of his six-year ministry. The Bab's followers, called Babis, staged several insurrections, mainly in 1848-50. The Persian government suppressed the Babi uprisings with unbridled cruelty. Finally, in an effort to kill the movement at its source, they executed the Bab in 1850.

After his death the Babi community turned for spiritual leadership to twenty-year-old Subh-i-Ezel [Mirza Yahya], whom the Bab had named as his successor. Subh-i-Ezel was poorly suited for leadership, so practical administrative responsibilities fell to his older half-brother, Baha'u'llah [Mirza Husayn 'Ali 1817-1892]. . . The Bab had taught that a prophet even greater than himself would one day appear. In 1863 Baha'u'llah declared that he was that prophet. Most Babis accepted Baha'u'llah's claim and shifted their devotion from the Bab to him. They became known as Baha'is. The rest, unable to reconcile Baha'u'llah's claim with the Bab's appointment of Subh-i-Ezel as his successor, remained loyal to Subh-i-Ezel. The two factions clashed violently in 1868, the civil authorities intervened. They sent Subh-i-Ezel to a prison in Cyprus and Baha'u'llah to a prison at Akka, now in Israel. Every word Baha'u'llah uttered was scrupulously recorded. He dictated over one hundred books and tablets. His book of laws, the Kitab-I-Aqdas ('Most Holy Book'), is considered his 'most weighty and sacred' work. . . Baha'u'llah had appointed his eldest son, Abdu'l Baha [Abbass Effendi 1844-1921], to succeed him. Though he did not claim to be a manifestation of God like his father, he did assume sole authority to interpret Baha'u'llah's teachings. He claimed infallibility for his interpretations. . . Abdu'l-Baha was primarily responsible for spreading the Baha'i faith outside the Middle East. He died in 1921, leaving his Oxford-educated grandson, Shoghi Effendi [1897-1957], as Guardian of the Faith. Shoghi Effendi died in 1957 and, in violation of Baha'i law, left no will. He had no appointed successor. Six years later the first Baha'i universal House of Justice was elected. Among Baha'is this nine-person board is held to be infallible and governs Baha'i affairs today from their world headquarters in Haifa, Israel" (John Boykin, *The Baha'i Faith in A Guide to Cults & New Religions* (Ronald Enroth Ed.). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1983, pp. 26-27, hereafter:"Boykin").

Will the real manifestation please stand up!

Boykin correctly pointed out that the Bab had appointed Mirza Yahya as his successor. Baha'u'llah essentially stole control of the movement from his brother, despite the fact that the Bab, the very manifestation of God (in their view) had appointed Mirza Yahya. The Baha'i explanation of this is as ingenious as it is sinister. They claim that the Bab only appointed Mirza

Yahya publicly as a rouse or cover for Baha'u'llah. That is, the Bab actually appointed Baha'u'llah as his successor, but publicly put forward Mirza Yahya in the event of persecution. Wilson states it thus:

“We have seen that Subh-i-Azal, the half-brother of Baha'u'llah, was appointed by the Bab as his successor. According to Abdul Baha, this appointment was a dishonest subterfuge on the part of Baha, arranged by him through secret correspondence with the Bab, in order that Baha might be relieved of danger and persecution and be protected from interference. . . This account shows the low ideas of honour and truthfulness in the minds of Baha and Abdul Baha” (Wilson, p. 204).

Wilson (Wilson, p. 204) also quoted from Abul Fazl's account of the same event in his book 'Baha'i Proofs,' p. 52, in which Fazl “states the position of the “Traveler's Narrative”:

“The Bab and Baha Ullah, after consulting together, made Azal appear as the Bab's successor. In this manner they preserved Baha Ullah from interference.”

Fazl's testimony is important because he is quoted as an authority in Baha'i literature. For example, see J.E. Esslemont, *Baha'u'llah and the New Era*. Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Books, 1923, Revised edition 1970, 1976, 1978 edition, p. 113, hereafter:Esslemont).

Another authority that Wilson quotes (Wilson, p. 204-205) is Professor Edward G. Browne who is frequently quoted in Baha'i literature, particularly because of his description of a meeting he had with Baha'u'llah, and his friendship with Abdul-Baha. For example, see “The Baha'is: A Profile of the Baha'i Faith and its Worldwide Community”[magazine format]. Baha'i International Community, Baha'i World Centre; Haifa, Israel, 2005, pp. 21, 57.

Wilson's note quoting Professor Browne is thus:

“The Baha'is are impaled on the other horn of the dilemma also, for, as Professor Browne says ('Mirza Jani [s History]', p. xxxiii.) “The difficulty lies in the fact that Subh-i-Azal consistently refused to recognize Baha's claim, so that the Baha'i is driven to make the assumption that the Bab, who is acknowledged to be divinely inspired and gifted with divine knowledge and prescience, deliberately chose to succeed him one who was destined to be the ‘point of darkness,’

or chief opponent, of ‘Him whom God should manifest’” (Wilson, 204).

There are problems as a result of the foregoing. First, it shows that Baha’u’llah’s half-brother, Mirza Yahya rather than Baha’u’llah was the one chosen by the Bab to be his successor. Also, it shows that Baha’u’llah was dishonest, a strange activity for a manifestation of God. Finally, whenever, we read Baha’i literature that quotes the Bab as speaking of “Him who God will manifest,” it is not Baha’u’llah whom he had in mind.

Incidentally, the same Professor Browne that is regularly appealed to as a source by Baha’is, reported about the regular use of opium by the early Baha’is:

“All present were Babis (Baha’is) and we sat sipping our tea and whiffing opium. We sat talking late and smoking opium. The wildest ascriptions of deity to Baha were made when intoxicated with wine and opium” (Wilson, p. 215).

What do Baha’is believe?

At this point, we will do well to compare the beliefs of the Baha’i religion with those of biblical Christianity. We begin by looking at the doctrine of Scripture and authority.

Scripture and Authority

For the Christian, the Bible (Old and New Testament) is the only authoritative Scripture. Christians do not recognize the holy books of other religions, and reject the idea that they are inspired of God.

Baha’is claim to accept the holy books of all the major religions of the world. They assert that each book was the authoritative Scripture for its era, but that all of them are superceded by the Scriptures of the Baha’is. These Scriptures are most fully seen in the writings of Baha’u’llah. Further, Abdul-Baha is believed to be the inspired interpreter of the works of Baha’u’llah. Finally, the authority for Baha’is moved from Abdul-Baha to his grandson Shoghi Effendi, who had the title of the “Guardian of the Faith.” After the death of Shoghi Effendi in 1957, it would be six years until the Universal House of Justice was established. Baha’is believe the Universal House of Justice is infallible in its official pronouncements.

Immediately, three major problems strike the mind of a Christian. One, we cannot accept the untenable notion that God would inspire such divergent ideas in different holy books

(Monotheism/polytheism). Two, we cannot accept any ideas that contradicts what God has already revealed in the Bible (Jesus is Almighty God in the Bible/ Jesus is not Almighty God for Baha'is). Third, we cannot believe that Baha'is prophets are inspired of God when they contradict each other (Polygamy accepted and practiced by Baha'u'llah/ Polygamy condemned by Abdul-Baha). Let us look at each of these a bit closer.

How can we believe the Baha'i claim that the Scriptures and beliefs of all the major religions of the world are in essential agreement? I reproduce a chart from Francis Beckwith to illustrate this:

“God and the Major World Religious Leaders

MosesGod is personal, .strict, uncompromising monotheism

KrishnaPolytheistic, but ultimately pantheistic and impersonal.

ZoroasterTwo Supreme Beings; philosophical dualism

Buddha.....God is not relevant; essentially agnostic.

ConfuciusPolytheistic.

Jesus Christ...God is personal, able to beget a Son; strict, uncompromising monotheism.”

(Francis Beckwith, *Baha'i*. Minneapolis, MN. Bethany House Publishers, 1985, p. 17, hereafter:Beckwith).

Beckwith summed up the chart by saying:

“Though Shoghi Effendi has said that the manifestations disagree on ‘non-essential aspects of their doctrine,’ it would stretch credibility to the limit to suppose that the nature of God is one of these non-essential aspects. God cannot be impersonal, personal; transcendent, polytheistic; pantheistic. monotheistic; able to beget, not able to beget; relevant, and irrelevant all at the same time” (Beckwith, p. 18).

Shoghi Effendi represents the idea that all religions are essentially the same:

“The fundamental principle enunciated by Bahá'u'lláh, the followers of His Faith firmly believe, is that religious truth is not absolute but relative, that Divine Revelation is a continuous and progressive process, that all the great religions of the world 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 only in the nonessential aspects of their doctrines, and that their missions represent successive stages in the spiritual evolution of human society” (Shoghi Effendi, “The Faith of Bahá’u’lláh” in *World Order*, Vol. 7, No. 2 1972-73, p. 7).

Beckwith’s chart shows the impossibility that “all the great religions of the world are divine in origin, that their basic principles are in complete harmony.” It is grossly unfair for Baha’i apologists to reinterpret the world’s religions in such a way as to make it appear there is basic agreement among them. This is done by denying the essential teachings that are unique to each faith. This is clearly done with Christianity, in that all its most important teachings are denied by Baha’is. It is sheer dishonesty to say that the world’s religions “differ only in the nonessential aspects of their doctrines.” How can what a religion teaches about God or salvation be rendered “a nonessential aspect”?

The Baha’i Faith and other religions

While on the surface Baha’is are open and accepting of other religion, in reality, and ultimately, they are the very opposite. Baha’is believe that Baha’u’llah is the only messenger for today, and that all other religions have been superceded by Bahaism.

“In order to find truth . . . an open mind is essential . . . that we imagine ourselves to be right and everybody else wrong is the greatest obstacle in the path to unity” (Universal Peace: More than an End to War).

It is difficult to understand how Baha’is can make the above statement when they believe they are the only true religion on the face of the planet!

God

In Theology proper, for the Christian, there is only one God asserting a strong monotheism. The Baha’i faith also asserts monotheism. It strongly denies the existence of more than one God. Yet, this God is not well defined. Wilson’s description is to the point:

“The teaching of Bahaism regarding God is hard to grasp, because it oscillates between Theism and Pantheism” (Wilson, 88).

Wilson's charge seems well founded. Baháism teaches that the Holy Spirit is a separate entity from God, yet is "itself" eternal. Further, it teaches that all of "creation," the universe itself is eternal, in that it is forever proceeding from God.

Esslemont relates:

"Bahá'u'lláh 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 . . . Abdul-Bahá says . . . this endless universe, had no beginning" (Esslemont, 208-209).

Since Baháism affirms the eternality of the universe, it is forced into two possible conclusions. One, that the universe is a part of God (pantheism). If the charge of pantheism is denied, then you are left with the idea that the universe is a separate entity from God that nonetheless is eternal (some sort of dualism).

Similar to Islam, from which it sprang, Baháism believes that God is unknowable, and can only be known indirectly through his manifestations. While Bahá'ís reverence Bahá'u'lláh as the manifestation of God for this age, they do not worship him. Worship belongs to God alone.

Christianity teaches that God can be known, and in fact, salvation depends upon knowing him. John 17: 3 says: "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." Martin sums up the Bahá'í attitude about God:

"For the average Bahá'í God is an impersonal force, a being devoid of personality" (Martin, Walter R. *The Rise of the Cults*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan, 1955, 1957 edition, p. 119, hereafter: Martin, *Rise of Cults*)

The Trinity

Christians believe in the doctrine of the Trinity. The Bible affirms that while there is only one God, he exists in a tri-personal way. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are each distinct personalities in relation to each other, yet share the nature and essence of the one being of God.

Bahá'ís reject the Trinity. In Walter Martin's classic work "Kingdom of the Cults", he relates an interview with a Bahá'í teacher. I will quote the exchange relating to the Trinity:

“Question: Do you in Baháism believe in the Holy Trinity?
Answer: If by the Trinity you mean the Christian concept that the three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, are all the one God, the answer is no. . . We cannot accept the idea that God is both three and one and find this foreign to the Bible which Christianity claims as its source” (Martin, Walter R. *The Kingdom of the Cults*. Minneapolis, MN.: Bethany House Publishers, 1965, 1985 edition, p. 273-274, hereafter:Martin, Kingdom).

In a brochure called “Christianity and the Baha’i Faith”, we find the following:

“What about the Trinity? Baha’is believe that ‘the essential oneness of Father, Son and Spirit had many meanings and constitutes the foundation of Christianity . . . Here is one way to understand the Trinity: The Bible compares God to the astronomical sun, and Christ to its reflected image. The Holy Spirit, in this analogy, is the light shining in and through the mirror. Thus the Trinity means the Father is the Divine Essence, the Holy Spirit is the Divine Light, and Christ is the Divine Reflection. From one point of view, these three are the same; from another, they are distinct” (*Christianity and the Baha’i Faith: Frequently Asked Questions*. Knoxville, TN: Stonehaven Press, 1999, hereafter:Christianity).

For those who complain about the difficulty in understanding the Trinity, this explanation does not seem an improvement. Further, it is a complete redefinition which bears no resemblance to the biblical teaching concerning the nature of God.

The very fact that Baha’is deny that Jesus is Almighty God illustrates their rejection of the Trinity.

The Manifestations

In order to understand Baha’i teaching on the Godhead, it is necessary to understand their view of the ‘Manifestations,’ which they define as follows:

“The Manifestations represent a level of existence intermediate between God and humanity” (From “Baha’i Topics, ‘Who Are the Prophets?’ At <http://info.bahai.org/article-1-4-0-3.html>) “The great prophets of God are his chosen Messengers, who appear in every age. The Manifestations of God are not God descended to earth but are perfect reflections of his attributes, just as a mirror reflects the sun but is

not the sun itself. *All the Manifestations have the same spirit*, although their outward forms are different, and they manifest different attributes of God relevant to the needs and circumstances of the age in which they appear. They differ only in the intensity of their revelation and the comparative potency of their light. The Baha'i writings identify several Manifestations, among them, Abraham, Noah, Buddha, Zoroaster, Moses, Christ, Muhammad, the Bab and Baha'u'llah" (*Baha'u'llah*. Mona Vale NSW, Australia.: Baha'i Publications Australia, 1991, p. 80, hereafter:Baha'u'llah).

Important in the above quote is that "*All the Manifestations have the same spirit.*" This raises the question; what is this spirit? Is it personal? If so, how could both Baha'u'llah and the Bab, who lived at the same time, both be this same person? If this "spirit" is impersonal, then how can it be maintained that Baha'u'llah is the same person or the return of Jesus Christ?

In their tract, "The Glory of Christ," Bahaism states:

"In terms of human identity, these mirrors are distinct, having different human bodies and souls. But they are the same divine spirit, for they manifest the one eternal Christ" (*The Glory of Christ: A Baha'i Testimony*. Knoxville, TN.: Stonehaven Press, 1997).

Again, if all the manifestations are "the same divine spirit." how could both the Bab and Baha'u'llah, who were contemporaries both, be that one person?

"The Manifestation then is not simply an ordinary person whom God chooses at some point in His natural lifetime to be His messenger. Rather, the Manifestation is a special Being, having a unique relationship to God and sent by Him from the spiritual world as an instrument of divine revelation. Even though the individual soul of the Manifestation had a phenomenal beginning, it nevertheless existed in the spiritual world prior to physical birth in this life. The immortal souls of ordinary men, on the other hand, have no such preexistence, but come into existence at the moment of human conception. Of the preexistence of the souls of the Manifestations, 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.” (“Baha’i Topics: Who Are the Prophets?”
At <http://info.bahai.org/article-1-4-0-3.html>).

From this passage, we further see that the Baha’is teach that the manifestations pre-existed their life on earth. So we wonder; did this spirit leave Muhammad, dwell in “the spiritual world,” then enter into Baha’u’llah (who was born two years before the Bab), and then at the Bab’s birth split into two ‘persons’? The Baha’i view of the manifestations is simply incoherent.

Jesus Christ

As has already been alluded to, Bahatism rejects the biblical teaching that Jesus Christ is Almighty God. Instead Bahatism teaches that Jesus was a manifestation of God. These manifestations (Moses, Muhammad, Baha’u’llah) are not Almighty God, but rather are human beings in whom the Holy Spirit dwells in, in a unique way.

Further, Bahatism teaches that Baha’u’llah is the return of Jesus Christ.

“Christ once more is knocking at the doors of our hearts . . . Baha’is believe the new name of Christ is Baha’u’llah . . . He fulfills Christ’s own promise to return . . . He is the return of the one spiritual Christ—that pre-existent Word or Logos who is the same ‘the same yesterday, and today, and forever . . . Baha’is are in reality Christians of the second coming” (Secret of the Second Coming: Christ’s Glorious Return, Knoxville, TN.: Stonehaven Press, 1998, hereafter: ‘Secret’)

The Bible clearly refuted this notion. The book of Acts leaves us this record:

“After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. ‘Men of Galilee,’ they said, ‘why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven’” (Acts 1:9-11).

The prophet Zechariah gives more detail on Christ’s return:

“Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights in the day of battle. On that day his feet will

stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south” (Zechariah 14:3-4).

Jesus ascended to heaven in the same physical body in which he walked the earth, and it is that resurrected body he now has in heaven, and is the one he will return in. The real Jesus will have the marks of the nail prints in his hands and feet.

Jesus himself said:

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me, that you also may be where I am” (John 14:1-3).

Jesus did not say, “I will return in the form of another,” or “I will send another in my name.” He said, “I will come back.” He warned that others would falsely claim to be him, but that we should not be tricked by them:

“At that time if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘There he is!’ do not believe it. For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect—if that were possible. See, I have told you ahead of time.

“So if anyone tells you, ‘There he is, out in the desert,’ do not go out; or, ‘Here he is, in the inner rooms,’ do not believe it. For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man” (Matthew 24:23-27).

In his Olivet Discourse, Jesus went on to outline the events of his coming which include the judgment of the nations and the setting up of his kingdom over the earth (Matthew 25:31-46).

Why should I believe the blasphemous claim that Baha’u’llah is Christ? The real Jesus had a miraculous birth, healed the sick, walked on the water, and raised the dead. Baha’u’llah did none of these. Above all, Jesus predicted his own resurrection. Baha’u’llah is dead and buried; Jesus Christ rose from the dead and ever lives!

Christ's Resurrection

Not only does Baháism reject the deity of Christ, but it also denies his bodily resurrection from the dead. Esslemont relates:

“An important part of the Bab’s teaching is His explanation of the terms Resurrection . . . By the resurrection is meant, He said, the appearance of a new manifestation of the Sun of Truth. The raising of the dead means the spiritual awakening of those who are asleep in the graves of ignorance” (Esslemont, 34).

A recent tract addresses the resurrection of Christ:

“Do Baha’is believe Christ rose from the dead? Yes, most definitely. Baha’i texts describe Jesus as ‘risen from the dead’ (SWA 162); as the ‘risen Christ’ (MA 255) whose disciples ‘saw Christ living, helping and protecting them’ (SAQ 1067) after His physical form ‘was crucified and vanished’ (TAB 193). Resurrection is thus ‘the consciousness that came to His disciples, grieving over His death, of His living reality; it was not a physical thing but a spiritual realization . . . This figurative language means that the Risen Christ, though not physical, is both more real and infinitely more powerful than any material entity . . . Many Bible verses show, however, that Christ relinquished His earthly body after the days of His flesh; (Heb. 5:7), and that—though able at will to resume one—He now customarily manifests Himself in other ways” (Christianity).

The foregoing makes clear the Baha’i rejection of the true and biblical resurrection of Christ. It also shows some dishonesty, in that they begin by claiming to affirm the resurrection of Jesus Christ, but then proceed to redefine the meaning of resurrection to a cultic understanding.

At this point it must be emphasized that this denial of the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ strikes at the heart of the Christian faith. Baha’is may claim that they support the essential teachings of the Christian faith, but its denial of the resurrection of Christ displays the hollowness of that claim.

It would be like a doctor saying to a patient, “I will not touch any essential part of your body, I am only going to remove your brain and heart!” Indeed, the resurrection from the dead of Jesus Christ is at the heart of Christianity. The apostle Paul put it this way:

“And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins” (1 Corinthians 15:17).

Holy Spirit

For Christians, the Holy Spirit is Almighty God, the third person of the Trinity. But Bahaism defines the Holy Spirit as:

“The Entity that acts as an intermediary between God and his manifestations. This link is similar to the rays of the sun by which energy is transmitted to the planets” (Baha’u’llah, 78).

So, for Bahaism, the Holy Spirit is some kind of “entity” between God and mankind that the manifestations of God possess rather than God himself. In the New Testament, the Holy Spirit is a separate person from the Word (Jesus). Baha’i writings seem to equate the two and deny their distinct personalities.

For instance, Abdul Baha stated:

“When Christ appeared, twenty centuries ago, although the Jews were eagerly awaiting his coming . . . yet when the Sun of Truth dawned, they denied Him . . . and eventually crucified that divine Spirit, the Word of God” (Esslemont, J. E. *Baha’u’llah and the New Era*. Wilmette, IL: Baha’i Books, 1923, Revised edition 1970, 1976, 1978 edition, p. 19).

So Bahaism rejects the Biblical truth that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are each distinct person within the Godhead, and replaces it with vague and confusing ideas.

Part II follows in next edition.

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