

True Religion

Explaining Religion to Sceptics

Issues for Discourse with Youth

Bahá'í Discourse - Religion

Religion

While perhaps 80% of the world population has some religious belief, in Western materialist society, religion is out of fashion, if not rejected as dangerous superstition. Many young people, whose parents rejected religion in their youth, know nothing about religion except what they see in the news about terrorists and religious conflicts. What kind of discourse can show that religion, particularly the Bahá'í Faith, may be worth investigating?

Purpose of Religion

The fundamental purpose animating the Faith of God and His Religion is to safeguard the interests and promote the unity of the human race, and to foster the spirit of love and fellowship amongst men. Suffer it not to become a source of dissension and discord, of hate and enmity.

Purpose of Religion

This is the straight Path, the fixed and immovable foundation. Whatsoever is raised on this foundation, the changes and chances of the world can never impair its strength, nor will the revolution of countless centuries undermine its structure.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings CX*)

Purpose of Religion

...religion must be the source of fellowship, the cause of unity and the nearness of God to man. If it rouses hatred and strife, it is evident that absence of religion is preferable and an irreligious man better than one who professes it. According to the divine Will and intention religion should be the cause of love and agreement, a bond to unify all mankind, for it is a message of peace and goodwill to man from God.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Promulgation of Universal Peace, §63, p.181)

The Secret of Divine Civilization

When 'Abdu'l-Bahá was a young man, Bahá'u'lláh asked him to write a book for Persia inviting them to become a modern nation, inspired by the Bahá'í teachings but not mentioning the Faith directly. The result was *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, first published in 1875.



True Religion

It is certain that the greatest of instrumentalities for achieving the advancement and the glory of man, the supreme agency for the enlightenment and the redemption of the world, is love and fellowship and unity among all the members of the human race. Nothing can be effected in the world, not even conceivably, without unity and agreement, and the perfect means for engendering fellowship and union is true religion.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, 1875)

It is true that there are foolish individuals who have never properly examined the fundamentals of the Divine religions, who have taken as their criterion the behavior of a few religious hypocrites and measured all religious persons by that yardstick, and have on this account concluded that religions are an obstacle to progress, a divisive factor and a cause of malevolence and enmity among peoples.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, The Secret of Divine Civilization, 1875)

They have not even observed this much, that the principles of the Divine religions can hardly be evaluated by the acts of those who only claim to follow them. For every excellent thing, peerless though it may be, can still be diverted to the wrong ends.

*(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, 1875)*

A lighted lamp in the hands of an ignorant child or of the blind will not dispel the surrounding darkness nor light up the house—it will set both the bearer and the house on fire. Can we, in such an instance, blame the lamp? No, by the Lord God! To the seeing, a lamp is a guide and will show him his path; but it is a disaster to the blind.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, [The Secret of Divine Civilization](#), 1875)

Among those who have repudiated religious faith was the Frenchman, Voltaire, who wrote a great number of books attacking the religions, works which are no better than children's playthings.

*(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, 1875)*

This individual, taking as his criterion the omissions and commissions of the Pope, the head of the Roman Catholic religion, and the intrigues and quarrels of the spiritual leaders of Christendom, opened his mouth and caviled at the Spirit of God (Jesus).

*(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, 1875)*

In the unsoundness of his reasoning, he failed to grasp the true significance of the sacred Scriptures, took exception to certain portions of the revealed Texts and dwelt on the difficulties involved.

*(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, 1875)*

All the peoples of Europe, notwithstanding their vaunted civilization, sink and drown in this terrifying sea of passion and desire, and this is why all the phenomena of their culture come to nothing. Let no one wonder at this statement or deplore it.

*(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, 1875)*

The primary purpose, the basic objective, in laying down powerful laws and setting up great principles and institutions dealing with every aspect of civilization, is human happiness; and human happiness consists only in drawing closer to the Threshold of Almighty God, and in securing the peace and well-being of every individual member, high and low alike, of the human race; and the supreme agencies for accomplishing these two objectives are the excellent qualities with which humanity has been endowed.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, [The Secret of Divine Civilization](#), 1875)

A superficial culture, unsupported by a cultivated morality, is as “a confused medley of dreams,” and external lustre without inner perfection is “like a vapor in the desert which the thirsty dreameth to be water.” For results which would win the good pleasure of God and secure the peace and well-being of man, could never be fully achieved in a merely external civilization.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, The Secret of Divine Civilization, 1875)

The peoples of Europe have not advanced to the higher planes of moral civilization, as their opinions and behavior clearly demonstrate.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, The Secret of Divine Civilization, 1875)

...the purpose being to determine conclusively whether religion is the very basis and root-principle of culture and civilization, or whether as Voltaire and his like suppose, it defeats all social progress, well-being and peace.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, The Secret of Divine Civilization, 1875)

Our purpose is to show how true religion promotes the civilization and honor, the prosperity and prestige, the learning and advancement of a people once abject, enslaved and ignorant, and how, when it falls into the hands of religious leaders who are foolish and fanatical, it is diverted to the wrong ends, until this greatest of splendors turns into blackest night.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, [The Secret of Divine Civilization](#), 1875)

One of the principal reasons why people of other religions have shunned and failed to become converted to the Faith of God is fanaticism and unreasoning religious zeal.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, The Secret of Divine Civilization, 1875)

Sincerity is the foundation-stone of faith. That is, a religious individual must disregard his personal desires and seek in whatever way he can wholeheartedly to serve the public interest; and it is impossible for a human being to turn aside from his own selfish advantages and sacrifice his own good for the good of the community except through true religious faith.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, The Secret of Divine Civilization, 1875)

For self-love is kneaded into the very clay of man, and it is not possible that, without any hope of a substantial reward, he should neglect his own present material good.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, The Secret of Divine Civilization, 1875)

That individual, however, who puts his faith in God and believes in the words of God—because he is promised and certain of a plentiful reward in the next life, and because worldly benefits as compared to the abiding joy and glory of future planes of existence are nothing to him—will for the sake of God abandon his own peace and profit and will freely consecrate his heart and soul to the common good.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, The Secret of Divine Civilization, 1875)

If a soul of his own accord advances toward God he will be accepted at the Threshold of Oneness, for such a one is free of personal considerations, of greed and selfish interests, and he has taken refuge within the sheltering protection of his Lord. He will become known among men as trustworthy and truthful, temperate and scrupulous, high-minded and loyal, incorruptible and God-fearing.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, The Secret of Divine Civilization, 1875)

In this way the primary purpose in revealing the Divine Law—which is to bring about happiness in the after life and civilization and the refinement of character in this—will be realized.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, The Secret of Divine Civilization, 1875)

'Abdu'l-Bahá
with Laura
Dreyfus-Barney,
Hippolyte
Dreyfus and
Shoghi Effendi



Youth and Religion

What can control youth and save it from the pitfalls of the crass materialism of the age is the power of a genuine, constructive and living Faith such as the one revealed to the world by Bahá'u'lláh. Religion, as in the past, is still the world's sole hope, but not that form of religion which our ecclesiastical leaders strive vainly to preach.

(on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 17 April 1936 to an individual believer, published in "Bahá'í News" 104 (December 1936), p. 1; compilation on Youth §32)

Youth and Religion

Divorced from true religion, morals lose their effectiveness and cease to guide and control man's individual and social life. But when true religion is combined with true ethics, then moral progress becomes a possibility and not a mere ideal. The need of our modern youth is for such a type of ethics founded on pure religious faith. Not until these two are rightly combined and brought into full action can there be any hope for the future of the race.

(on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 17 April 1936 to an individual believer, published in "Bahá'í News" 104 (December 1936), p. 1; compilation on Youth §32)

Marginalization of Religion

Over a century ago, Bahá'u'lláh, Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, warned against the inevitable spiritual and moral aridity that would emerge from the marginalization of religion. *"In truth,"* He wrote, *"religion is a radiant light and an impregnable stronghold for the protection and welfare of the peoples of the world ... Should the lamp of religion be obscured, chaos and confusion will ensue, and the lights of fairness and justice, of tranquillity and peace cease to shine."* (*Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 125)

(Bahá'í International Community, *Overcoming Corruption and Safeguarding Integrity in Public Institutions: A Bahá'í Perspective*, 2001)

Religion

Social advancement, we know, arises from the ideals and shared beliefs that weld society together. Meaningful social change results as much from the development of qualities and attitudes that foster constructive patterns of human interaction as from the acquisition of technical capacities.

(Bahá'í International Community, [Overcoming Corruption and Safeguarding Integrity in Public Institutions: A Bahá'í Perspective](#), 2001)

Religion

True prosperity - a well-being founded on peace, cooperation, altruism, dignity, rectitude of conduct and justice - flows from the light of spiritual awareness and virtue as well as from material discovery and progress.

(Bahá'í International Community, [Overcoming Corruption and Safeguarding Integrity in Public Institutions: A Bahá'í Perspective](#), 2001)

Religion

To distinguish the vital characteristics of religion from the distortions that falsely pose in its name is challenging. Yet, religion is an indispensable source of knowledge and motivation - a wellspring of values, insights, and energy without which social cohesion and collective action are difficult if not impossible to achieve.

(Bahá'í International Community, [Overcoming Corruption and Safeguarding Integrity in Public Institutions: A Bahá'í Perspective](#), 2001)

Religion

Through the teachings and moral guidance of religion, great segments of humanity have learned to discipline their baser propensities and to develop qualities that conduce to social order and cultural advancement.

(Bahá'í International Community, [Overcoming Corruption and Safeguarding Integrity in Public Institutions: A Bahá'í Perspective](#), 2001)

Religion

Such qualities as trustworthiness, compassion, forbearance, fidelity, generosity, humility, courage, and willingness to sacrifice for the common good have constituted the invisible yet essential foundations of progressive community life. Religion provides the bricks and mortar of society - the ethical precepts and vision that unite people into communities and that give tangible direction and meaning to individual and collective existence.

(Bahá'í International Community, [Overcoming Corruption and Safeguarding Integrity in Public Institutions: A Bahá'í Perspective](#), 2001)

Religion

The set of capacities necessary for building up the social, economic, and moral fabric of society depends upon the resources of both mind and spirit. The civilizing virtues of honesty, duty and loyalty so central to human progress are cultivated by the language of the heart and the voice of conscience.... To draw upon the spiritual roots of motivation that lie at the heart of human identity and purpose is to tap the one impulse that can ensure genuine social transformation.

(Bahá'í International Community, [Overcoming Corruption and Safeguarding Integrity in Public Institutions: A Bahá'í Perspective](#), 2001)

Shrine of
Bahá'u'lláh



True Religion

O My servants! My holy, My divinely ordained Revelation may be likened unto an ocean in whose depths are concealed innumerable pearls of great price, of surpassing luster. It is the duty of every seeker to bestir himself and strive to attain the shores of this ocean, so that he may, in proportion to the eagerness of his search and the efforts he hath exerted, partake of such benefits as have been pre-ordained in God's irrevocable and hidden Tablets.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 326)

True Religion

This most great, this fathomless and surging Ocean is near, astonishingly near, unto you. Behold it is closer to you than your life-vein! Swift as the twinkling of an eye ye can, if ye but wish it, reach and partake of this imperishable favor, this God-given grace, this incorruptible gift, this most potent and unspeakably glorious bounty.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 326)