

Religious Prejudices

'Abdu'l-Bahá

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The basis of the teaching of Bahá'u'lláh is the **Unity of Mankind**, and His greatest desire was that love and goodwill should live in the heart of men.

As He exhorted the people to do away with strife and discord, so I wish to explain to you the principal reason of the unrest among nations. The chief cause is the misrepresentation of religion by the religious leaders and teachers. They teach their followers to believe that their own form of religion is the only one pleasing to God, and that followers of any other persuasion are condemned by the All-Loving Father and deprived of His Mercy and Grace. Hence arise among [pg 46] the peoples, disapproval, contempt, disputes and hatred. If these religious prejudices could be swept away, the nations would soon enjoy peace and concord.

I was once at Tiberias where the Jews have a Temple. I was staying in a house just opposite the Temple, and there I saw and heard a Rabbi speaking to his congregation of Jews, and he spoke thus:

“O Jews, you are in truth the people of God! All other races and religions are of the devil. God has created you the descendants of Abraham, and He has showered His blessings upon you. Unto you God sent Moses, Jacob and Joseph, and many other great prophets. These prophets, one and all, were of your race.”

“It was for you that God broke the power of Pharaoh and caused the Red Sea to dry up; to you also He sent manna from above to be your food, and out of the stony rock did He give you water to quench your thirst. You are indeed the chosen people of God, you are above all the races of the earth! Therefore, all other races are abhorrent to God, and condemned by Him. In truth you will govern and subdue the world, and all men shall become your slaves.”



ORIGINAL



AUDIO

“Do not profane yourselves by consorting with people who are not of your own religion, make not friends of such men.”

When the Rabbi had finished his eloquent discourse, his hearers were filled with joy and satisfaction. It is impossible to describe to you their happiness!

Alas! It is misguided ones like these who are the cause of division and hatred upon earth. Today there are millions of people who still worship idols, and the [pg 47] great religions of the world are at war among themselves. For 1,300 years, Christians and Mussulmans have been quarrelling, when with very little effort their differences and disputes could be overcome and peace and harmony could exist between them and the world could be at rest!

In the Qur’án we read that Muḥammad spoke to his followers, saying:

“Why do you not believe in Christ, and in the Gospel? Why will you not accept Moses and the Prophets, for surely the Bible is the Book of God? In truth, Moses was a sublime Prophet, and Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit. He came to the world through the Power of God, born of the Holy Spirit and of the blessed Virgin Mary. Mary, His mother, was a saint from Heaven. She passed her days in the Temple at prayer and food was sent to her from above. Her father, Zacharias, came to her and asked her from whence the food came, and Mary made answer, “From on high.” Surely God made Mary to be exalted above all other women.”

This is what Muḥammad taught His people concerning Jesus and Moses, and He reproached them for their lack of faith in these great Teachers, and taught them the lessons of truth and tolerance. Muḥammad was sent from God to work among a people as savage and uncivilized as the wild beasts. They were quite devoid of understanding, nor had they any feelings of love, sympathy and pity. Women were so degraded and despised that a man could bury his daughter alive, and he had as many wives to be his slaves as he chose. [pg 48]

Among these half animal people Muḥammad was sent with His divine Message. He taught the people that idol worship was wrong, but that they should reverence Christ, Moses and the Prophets. Under His influence they became a more enlightened and civilized people and arose from the degraded state in which He found them. Was not this a good work, and worthy of all praise, respect and love?

Look at the Gospel of the Lord Christ and see how glorious it is! Yet even today men fail to understand its priceless beauty, and misinterpret its words of wisdom.

Christ forbade war! When the disciple Peter, thinking to defend his Lord, cut off the ear of the servant of the High Priest, Christ said to him: “Put up thy sword into the sheath.”¹

¹ St John xviii, 11.

Yet, in spite of the direct command of the Lord they profess to serve — men still dispute, make war, and kill one another, and His counsels and teaching seem quite forgotten.

But do not therefore attribute to the Masters and Prophets the evil deeds of their followers. If the priests, teachers and people, lead lives which are contrary to the religion they profess to follow, is that the fault of Christ or the other Teachers?

The people of Islám were taught to realize how Jesus came from God and was born of the Spirit, and that He must be glorified of all men. Moses was a prophet of God, and revealed in His day and for the people to whom He was sent, the Book of God.

Muḥammad recognized the sublime grandeur of [pg 49] Christ and the greatness of Moses and the prophets. If only the whole world would acknowledge the greatness of Muḥammad and all the Heaven-sent Teachers, strife and discord would soon vanish from the face of the earth, and God's Kingdom would come among men.

The people of Islám who glorify Christ are not humiliated by so doing.

Christ was the Prophet of the Christians, Moses of the Jews — why should not the followers of each prophet recognize and honour the other prophets also? If men could only learn the lesson of mutual tolerance, understanding, and brotherly love, the unity of the world would soon be an established fact.

Bahá'u'lláh spent His life teaching this lesson of Love and Unity. Let us then put away from us all prejudice and intolerance, and strive with all our hearts and souls to bring about understanding and unity between Christians and Mussulmans.

