

Reviews/Critiques/Reseñas

BEYOND THE CLASH OF RELIGIONS, THE EMERGENCE OF A NEW PARADIGM

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Udo Schaefer is one of the earliest European Bahá'í scholars. *Die Grundlagen der Verwaltungsordnung der Bahá'í*, his 1957 doctoral dissertation in the University of Heidelberg's Faculty of Law, compares the Bahá'í Administrative order to Canon law and Protestant Church law. While working as a chief public prosecutor and judge, he pursued studies in many different disciplines in order to further his capacity as a Bahá'í scholar. Since his 1988 retirement, he has dedicated himself to Bahá'í studies, specifically developing an approach to Bahá'í theology and ethics. *Beyond the Clash of Religions, The Emergence of a New Paradigm* is one of his contributions to the field of Bahá'í theology.

The book is in fact two independent essays: "Time of the End or a New Era?" and "On the Diversity and Unity of Religions." Although originally published in German (*Heilsgeschichte und Paradigmenwechsel. Zwei Beiträge zur Bahá'í Theologie*, Zero Palm Press, 1992), and first translated into French (*L'Histoire du Salut et Changement de Paradigme, Deux Contributions à la Théologie Bahá'íe*, Association d'Études Bahá'íes, Europe francophone, Genève, 1993), the English edition is a substantial revision of these other versions. The two essays are introductions to the Bahá'í concepts of salvation and the unity of religions written for academics and university educated readers. Zero Palm Press, the publisher, is new among Bahá'í publishing houses. It also produces editions of Bahá'í scripture in Persian, such as Bahá'u'lláh's *Kitáb-i-Badí'*.

The first piece, "Time of the End or a New Era?," is an attempt to answer the various "end of history" essays that have appeared in the United States and Germany over the last six years. It also addresses the rising preoccupation Westerners have with "the apocalypse," be it ecological, nuclear, or other. It is an introduction to the Bahá'í Faith for those who are confused or uncertain about the rapid changes occurring in the world and who do not or did not understand the reason for the rise in the hippie/counterculture/New Age movements. Whereas those who were and are involved in these movements might not completely recognize themselves in his description, Dr. Schaefer's analyses certainly accurately reflect the view of many who observed these protest movements from the outside. The primary goal of this essay is to compare and contrast the New Age salvation paradigm with that of the Bahá'í Faith. Dr. Schaefer explains that although there are certain similarities between the two, the Bahá'í Faith is clearly part of the Judaic-Christian-Islamic religious tradition, and one's salvation requires turning toward Bahá'u'lláh's revelation and submitting to the new covenant Bahá'u'lláh established, at the heart of which are new laws. Individual and community salvation is achieved by molding one's life to these laws and the new ethics they establish.

Since this is an introductory essay, Dr. Schaefer does not have the space to elaborate on certain of his articulated premises. For instance, on page 26 he states that "the global crisis originated in the Copernican transformation of European thinking in the 17th century, a transformation which was epitomized by men such as Galileo Galilei, Isaac Newton, Francis Bacon and, in particular, René Descartes." It would have been interesting if he had had the opportunity to discuss the parallel view that previous to this period in European history the Church had in fact discredited itself and that this was the reason for the change in thinking among certain prominent Europeans which ultimately led to the current global crisis. A second example can be found on page 28. One hopes that Dr. Schaefer will at some point be able to explicate fully his reasoning behind the statement that the majority of people in the industrialized West have become indifferent to religion. Can this be said for the United States, for instance? A last example is on page 35. Protest movements against rationality existed well before "the hippie movement" (as he implies on page 36 with a quotation from Blaise Pascal), but there is unfortunately no space for him to analyze them. Thus he starts the discussion of "New Offers of Salvation" with the hippie movement. Of course if he had gone into more depth on these three examples, then this would have been a book instead of an introductory essay.

The second piece, "On the Diversity and Unity of Religions," is as thought provoking as the first. It is a theological study of the nature of religions, their similarities and differences. As this is also an introductory essay, Dr. Schaefer emphasizes those religions he has specialized in over the last forty years—Christianity, Islam, and the Bahá'í Faith. He primarily discusses the concept of a paradigm shift to unity; the diversity of religions; the absoluteness and relativity of religious claims to truth; the concepts of the uniqueness, finality, and exclusivity of revelation; intolerance shown by followers of religions; promoters of tolerance among the religions; the role of comparative religious studies in promoting tolerance and intolerance; the essential unity of religions; and progressive revelation as a new paradigm. This last topic is the most important part of the essay. Dr. Schaefer analyzes certain basic doctrines of Bahá'í theology, such as the nature of God, the nature of the Manifestations of God, and the concept of revelation.

The essays are reasonably well translated. There are few problems of awkwardness due to their being translated from the German, such as mistranslated words or erroneous punctuation, capitalization, and hyphenation. The editing was also acceptably done. There are few typographical errors. There is an index of names and a general index which are useful. English-language readers might find Dr. Schaefer's gender-exclusive language disturbing; however, it should be understood that in German-speaking countries there is no serious movement to render language gender-inclusive. There is not even an understanding of why such a movement might exist.

Dr. Schaefer's works are dense and well referenced. They are worth reading, if nothing else, for the references to German academic work. Fortunately, he uses footnotes as opposed to endnotes, which makes them easy to study without detracting from reading the text. These essays have been well

received by German, French, and British theologians, such as Prof. Dr. Johannes Lähnemann of the University of Erlangen/Nürnberg and Rev. Marcus Braybrooke, director of the International Interfaith Centre, Oxford. One can certainly look forward to Zero Palm Press's translations of other works by Dr. Schaefer, such as his forthcoming *On the Ethics of Smoking, A Contribution to Bahá'í Ethics*, a work that will certainly promote spirited discussions.

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