

THE COUNTERFEIT DOCTRINES OF THE FALSE RELIGION OF MAN *

The eternal Religion of God is made up of two parts, the one being the fundamental, the spiritual, the essential teachings and ordinances, and the other being the secondary, the material, the accidental instructions and laws. This dual character of the divine Word was explained by 'Abdu'l-Baha on a number of occasions, and recorded in Utterances:18-19; SAQ:55-57; PUP:97-98,106,168,338-39,364-66,393,445. This truth was also affirmed by the Guardian (Shoghi Effendi) in a number of his letters, including in GTT:2,118,129. Separate studies are devoted to a) the two kinds of teachings and laws of the Religion of God; b)the essential teachings and ordinances; and c)the secondary teachings and ordinances of the Religion of God. The citation of examples of essential and secondary teachings and laws from the extant Scriptures associated with various Prophets would fill multiple volumes, and will surely be compiled in the future. An examination of the secondary teachings and laws of Baha'u'llah, those which are specific to this Age and Cycle, which pertain to the outward life of humankind at this time in its evolution, these also would comprise a lengthy volume. Here it is our intent to complement the study of the essential and secondary teachings and laws of the Religion of God but distinguishing it from the counterfeit religion of man. We will here examine references to modifications made and accretions added to the Law of God, which have attached themselves to all of the religions of the past, and which have altered their basic character, as attested by the Scriptures upon which they were founded. There may well be a close relationship between the secondary teachings of Religion and what 'Abdu'l-Baha calls the "counterfeit doctrines", which explains why the two are often conflated by religionists, closely linked by ecclesiastics, and have, in the case of some religions, become virtually indistinguishable one from the other due to the conversion of priestly commentary into scripture (as in the case of the Talmud, the Patristic literature of the Church, the standard tafsirs and schools of law (madhhabs) of Islam. In order to understand the Baha'i perspective on this subject, we will cite as many of the texts that address the "counterfeit doctrines" as possible.

As to the authenticity of the various Scriptures, please see the separate monograph on that subject, entitled THE AUTHENTICITY OF SCRIPTURES.

Chiefly in the Kitab-i-Iqan, Baha'u'llah states that there are very few intentional corruptions of actual scripture, and He explains why this is the case:

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“Were they to be questioned concerning those signs that must needs herald the revelation and rise of the sun of the Muḥammadan Dispensation, to which We have already referred, none of which have been literally fulfilled, and were it to be said to them: “Wherefore have ye rejected the claims advanced by Christians and the peoples of other faiths and regard them as infidels,” knowing not what answer to give, they will reply: “These Books have been corrupted and are not, and never have been, of God.” **Reflect: the words of the verses themselves eloquently testify to the truth that they are of God. A similar verse hath been also revealed in the Qur’án, were ye of them that comprehend. Verily I say, throughout all this period they have utterly failed to comprehend what is meant by corrupting the text.**

“Yea, in the writings and utterances of the Mirrors reflecting the sun of the Muḥammadan Dispensation mention hath been made of “Modification by the exalted beings” and “alteration by the disdainful.” Such passages, however, refer only to particular cases. Among them is the story of Ibn-i-Şúríyá. When the people of Khaybar asked the focal center of the Muḥammadan Revelation concerning the penalty of adultery committed between a married man and a married woman, Muḥammad answered and said: “The law of God is death by stoning.” Whereupon they protested saying: “No such law hath been revealed in the Pentateuch.” Muḥammad answered and said: “Whom do ye regard among your rabbis as being a recognized authority and having a sure knowledge of the truth?” They agreed upon Ibn-i-Şúríyá. Thereupon Muḥammad summoned him and said: “I adjure thee by God Who clove the sea for you, caused manna to descend upon you, and the cloud to overshadow you, Who delivered you from Pharaoh and his people, and exalted you above all human beings, to tell us what Moses hath decreed concerning adultery between a married man and a married woman.” He made reply: “O Muḥammad! death by stoning is the law.” Muḥammad observed: “Why is it then that this law is annulled and hath ceased to operate among the Jews?” He answered and said: “When Nebuchadnezzar delivered Jerusalem to the flames, and put the Jews to death, only a few survived. The divines of that age, considering the extremely limited number of the Jews, and the multitude of the Amalekites, took counsel together, and came to the conclusion that were they to enforce the law of the Pentateuch, every survivor who hath been delivered from the hand of Nebuchadnezzar would have to be put to death according to the verdict of the Book. Owing to such considerations, they totally repealed the

penalty of death.” Meanwhile Gabriel inspired Muḥammad’s illumined heart with these words: “They pervert the text of the Word of God.”

“This is one of the instances that have been referred to. Verily by “perverting” the text is not meant that which these foolish and abject souls have fancied, even as **some maintain that Jewish and Christian divines have effaced from the Book such verses as extol and magnify the countenance of Muḥammad, and instead thereof have inserted the contrary.** How utterly vain and false are these words! Can a man who believeth in a book, and deemeth it to be inspired by God, mutilate it? Moreover, the Pentateuch had been spread over the surface of the earth, and was not confined to Mecca and Medina, so that they could privily corrupt and pervert its text. Nay, rather, by corruption of the text is meant that in which all Muslim divines are engaged today, that is the interpretation of God’s holy Book in accordance with their idle imaginings and vain desires. And as the Jews, in the time of Muḥammad, interpreted those verses of the Pentateuch, that referred to His Manifestation, after their own fancy, and refused to be satisfied with His holy utterance, the charge of “perverting” the text was therefore pronounced against them. Likewise, it is clear, how in this day, the people of the Qur’án have perverted the text of God’s holy Book, concerning the signs of the expected Manifestation, and interpreted it according to their inclination and desires.

“In yet another instance, He saith: “A part of them heard the Word of God, and then, after they had understood it, distorted it, and knew that they did so.” This verse, too, doth indicate that the meaning of the Word of God hath been perverted, not that the actual words have been effaced. To the truth of this testify they that are sound of mind.

“Again in another instance, He saith: “Woe unto those who, with their own hands, transcribe the Book corruptly, and then say: ‘This is from God,’ that they may sell it for some mean price.” This verse was revealed with reference to the divines and leaders of the Jewish Faith. These divines, in order to please the rich, acquire worldly emoluments, and give vent to their envy and misbelief, wrote a number of treatises, refuting the claims of Muḥammad, supporting their arguments with such evidences as it would be improper to mention, and claimed that these arguments were derived from the text of the Pentateuch.

“The same may be witnessed today. Consider how abundant are the denunciations written by the foolish divines of this age against this most wondrous Cause! How vain their imaginings that

these calumnies are in conformity with the verses of God's sacred Book, and in consonance with the utterances of men of discernment!

“Our purpose in relating these things is to warn you that were they to maintain that those verses wherein the signs referred to in the Gospel are mentioned have been perverted, were they to reject them, and cling instead to other verses and traditions, you should know that their words were utter falsehood and sheer calumny. **Yea “corruption” of the text, in the sense We have referred to, hath been actually effected in particular instances.** A few of these We have mentioned, that it may become manifest to every discerning observer that unto a few untutored holy Men hath been given the mastery of human learning, so that the malevolent opposer may cease to contend that a certain verse doth indicate “corruption” of the text, and insinuate that We, through lack of knowledge, have made mention of such things. Moreover, most of the verses that indicate “corruption” of the text have been revealed with reference to the Jewish people, were ye to explore the isles of Qur'anic Revelation.

“We have also heard a number of the foolish of the earth assert that the genuine text of the heavenly Gospel doth not exist amongst the Christians, that it hath ascended unto heaven. How grievously they have erred! How oblivious of the fact that such a statement imputeth the gravest injustice and tyranny to a gracious and loving Providence! How could God, when once the Day-star of the beauty of Jesus had disappeared from the sight of His people, and ascended unto the fourth heaven, cause His holy Book, His most great testimony amongst His creatures, to disappear also? What would be left to that people to cling to from the setting of the day-star of Jesus until the rise of the sun of the Muḥammadan Dispensation? What law could be their stay and guide? How could such people be made the victims of the avenging wrath of God, the omnipotent Avenger? How could they be afflicted with the scourge of chastisement by the heavenly King? Above all, how could the flow of the grace of the All-Bountiful be stayed? How could the ocean of His tender mercies be stilled? We take refuge with God, from that which His creatures have fancied about Him! Exalted is He above their comprehension!”
(Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Íqán, pp. 84-90)

As for the interpretation of Scripture and the traditions which have been developed over time through the interaction and selection of human interpretations, we will first consider Baha'u'llah's views on the subject:

"It is incumbent on these servants that they cleanse the heart [dil]- which is the wellspring of divine treasures - from every marking, and that they turn away from imitation [taqlid], which is following the traces [athAr] of their forefathers and sires, and shut the door of friendliness

and enmity upon all the people of the earth." (*Baha'u'llah, "Haft Vadi," in Persian: "Athar-I-Qalam-I-'Ala," volume III, pp. 96-97; in English: "Seven Valleys," p. 5)*)

"O My Brother, journey upon these planes in the spirit of search, not in blind imitation. A true wayfarer will not be kept back by the bludgeon of words nor debarred by the warning of allusions." (*Baha'u'llah, The Seven Valleys, p. 24*)

"Know assuredly that just as thou firmly believest that the Word of God, exalted be His glory, endureth forever, thou must, likewise, believe with undoubting faith that its meaning can never be exhausted. They who are its appointed interpreters, they whose hearts are the repositories of its secrets, are, however, the only ones who can comprehend its manifold wisdom. Whoso, while reading the Sacred Scriptures, is tempted to choose therefrom whatever may suit him with which to challenge the authority of the Representative of God among men, is, indeed, as one dead, though to outward seeming he may walk and converse with his neighbors, and share with them their food and their drink.

"Oh, would that the world could believe Me! Were all the things that lie enshrined within the heart of Bahá, and which the Lord, His God, the Lord of all names, hath taught Him, to be unveiled to mankind, every man on earth would be dumbfounded.

"How great the multitude of truths which the garment of words can never contain! How vast the number of such verities as no expression can adequately describe, whose significance can never be unfolded, and to which not even the remotest allusions can be made! How manifold are the truths which must remain unuttered until the appointed time is come! Even as it hath been said: "Not everything that a man knoweth can be disclosed, nor can everything that he can disclose be regarded as timely, nor can every timely utterance be considered as suited to the capacity of those who hear it."

"Of these truths some can be disclosed only to the extent of the capacity of the repositories of the light of Our knowledge, and the recipients of Our hidden grace. We beseech God to strengthen thee with His power, and enable thee to recognize Him Who is the Source of all knowledge, that thou mayest detach thyself from all human learning, for, "what would it profit any man to strive after learning when he hath already found and recognized Him Who is the Object of all knowledge?" Cleave to the Root of Knowledge, and to Him Who is the Fountain thereof, that thou mayest find thyself independent of all who claim to be well versed in human learning, and whose claim no clear proof, nor the testimony of any enlightening book, can support." (*Baha'u'llah, Gleanings:LXXXIX*)

"In like manner, endeavour to comprehend the meaning of the 'changing of the earth.' **Know thou, that upon whatever hearts the bountiful showers of mercy, raining from the 'heaven' of divine Revelation, have fallen, the earth of those hearts hath verily been changed into the earth**

of divine knowledge and wisdom [ilm va hikmat ilahiyyih]. What myrtles of unity hath the soil of their hearts produced! What blossoms of true knowledge [ilm] and wisdom [hikmat] hath their illumined bosoms yielded! Were the earth of their hearts to remain unchanged, how could such souls who have not been taught one letter, have seen no teacher, and entered no school, utter such words and display such knowledge [ilm] as none can apprehend? Methinks they have been moulded from the clay of infinite knowledge [ilm], and kneaded with the water of divine wisdom [hikmat ilahi]. Therefore, hath it been said: 'Knowledge is a light which God casteth into the heart of whomsoever He willeth.' It is this kind of knowledge [ilm] which is and hath ever been praiseworthy, and not the limited knowledge that hath sprung forth from veiled and obscured minds. This limited knowledge they even stealthily borrow one from the other, and vainly pride themselves therein!

"Would that the hearts of men could be cleansed from these man-made limitations and obscure thought imposed upon them! haply they may be illumined by the light of the Sun of true knowledge [ilm], and comprehend the mysteries of divine wisdom [hikmat ilahi]." (*Baha'u'llah, "Kitab-i-Iqan," pp. 46-47*)

"Know verily that Knowledge is of two kinds: **Divine** and **Satanic**. **The one welleteth out from the fountain of divine inspiration;** the other is but a reflection of vain and obscure thoughts. **The source of the former is God Himself;** the motive-force of the latter the whisperings of selfish desire. **The one is guided by the principle: "Fear ye God; God will teach you;"** the other is but a confirmation of the truth: "Knowledge is the most grievous veil between man and his Creator." The former bringeth forth the fruit of patience, of longing desire, of true understanding, and love; whilst the latter can yield naught but arrogance, vainglory and conceit. **From the sayings of those Masters of holy utterance, Who have expounded the meaning of true knowledge, the odour of these dark teachings, which have obscured the world, can in no wise be detected.** The tree of such teachings can yield no result except iniquity and rebellion, and beareth no fruit but hatred and envy. Its fruit is deadly poison; its shadow a consuming fire. How well hath it been said: "Cling unto the robe of the Desire of thy heart, and put thou away all shame; bid the worldly wise be gone, however great their name."

"The heart must needs therefore be cleansed from the idle sayings of men, and sanctified from every earthly affection, so that it may discover the hidden meaning of divine inspiration, and become the treasury of the mysteries of divine knowledge. Thus hath it been said: "He that treadeth the snow-white Path, and followeth in the footsteps of the Crimson Pillar, shall never attain unto his abode unless his hands are empty of those worldly things cherished by men." This is the prime requisite of whosoever treadeth this path. Ponder thereon, that, with eyes unveiled, thou mayest perceive the truth of these words." (*Baha'u'llah, "Kitab-i-Iqan," pp. 69-70*)

“Dear friend! Now when the light of God’s everlasting Morn is breaking; when the radiance of His holy words: “God is the light of the heavens and of the earth” is shedding illumination upon all mankind; when the inviolability of His tabernacle is being proclaimed by His sacred utterance: “God hath willed to perfect His light;” and the Hand of omnipotence, bearing His testimony: “In His grasp He holdeth the kingdom of all things,” is being outstretched unto all the peoples and kindreds of the earth; it behooveth us to gird up the loins of endeavour, that haply, by the grace and bounty of God, we may enter the celestial City: “Verily, we are God’s,” and abide within the exalted habitation: “And unto Him we do return.” **It is incumbent upon thee, by the permission of God, to cleanse the eye of thine heart from the things of the world, that thou mayest realize the infinitude of divine knowledge, and mayest behold Truth so clearly that thou wilt need no proof to demonstrate His reality, nor any evidence to bear witness unto His testimony.**” (*Bahá’u’lláh, "The Kitáb-i-Íqán", pp. 90-91*)

"Consider, how can he that faileth in the day of God's Revelation to attain unto the grace of the 'Divine Presence' and to recognize His Manifestation, be justly called learned [‘alim?], though he may have spent aeons in the pursuit of knowledge, and acquired all the limited and material learning of men? It is surely evident that he can in no wise be regarded as possessed of true knowledge [‘ilm]. Whereas, the most unlettered of all men, if he be honoured with this supreme distinction, he verily is accounted as one of those divinely-learned men whose knowledge [‘ilm] is of God; for such a man hath attained the acme of knowledge [‘ilm], and hath reached the furthestmost summit of learning." (*Baha'u'llah, "Kitab-i-Iqan," pp. 145-146*)

"We noticed that he had enumerated some twenty or more sciences [‘ulum], the knowledge of which he considered to be essential for the comprehension of the mystery of the 'Mi'raj'. We gathered from his statements that unless a man be deeply versed in them all, he can never attain to a proper understanding of this transcendent and exalted theme. Among the specified sciences [‘ulum] were the science of metaphysical abstractions, of alchemy, and natural magic. Such vain and discarded learnings, this man hath regarded as the pre-requisites of the understanding of the sacred and abiding mysteries of divine knowledge [‘ilm ilahi]." (*Baha'u'llah, "Kitab-i-Iqan," p. 186*)

"How can the knowledge of these sciences [‘ulum], which are so contemptible in the eyes of the truly learned, be regarded as essential to the apprehension of the mysteries of the 'Mi'raj,' whilst the Lord of the 'Mi'raj' Himself was never burdened with a single letter of these limited and obscure learnings, and never defiled His radiant heart with any of these fanciful illusions? How truly hath He said: 'All human attainment moveth upon a lame ass, whilst Truth, riding upon the wind, darteth across space.' By the righteousness of God! Whoso desireth to fathom the mystery of this 'Mi'raj,' and craveth a drop from this ocean, if the mirror of his heart

be already obscured by the dust of these learnings, he must needs cleanse and purify it ere the light of this mystery can be reflected therein.

"In this day, they that are submerged beneath the ocean of ancient Knowledge [ilm], and dwell within the ark of divine wisdom [hikmat ilahi], forbid the people such idle pursuits."
(Baha'u'llah, "Kitab-i-Iqan," p. 187)

"Wherefore, O my friend, it behooveth Us to exert the highest endeavour to attain unto that City, and, by the grace of God and His loving-kindness, rend asunder the "veils of glory"; so that, with inflexible steadfastness, we may sacrifice our drooping souls in the path of the New Beloved. We should with tearful eyes, fervently and repeatedly, implore Him to grant us the favour of that grace. That city is none other than the Word of God revealed in every age and dispensation. In the days of Moses it was the Pentateuch; in the days of Jesus the Gospel; in the days of Muḥammad the Messenger of God the Qur'án; in this day the Bayán; and **in the dispensation of Him Whom God will make manifest His own Book — the Book unto which all the Books of former Dispensations must needs be referred, the Book which standeth amongst them all transcendent and supreme.** In these cities spiritual sustenance is bountifully provided, and incorruptible delights have been ordained. The food they bestow is the bread of heaven, and the Spirit they impart is God's imperishable blessing. Upon detached souls they bestow the gift of Unity, enrich the destitute, and offer the cup of knowledge unto them who wander in the wilderness of ignorance. All the guidance, the blessings, the learning, the understanding, the faith, and certitude, conferred upon all that is in heaven and on earth, are hidden and treasured within these Cities." *(Bahá'u'lláh, "The Kitáb-i-Íqán", 200)*

"Heed not the idle contention of those who maintain that the Book and verses thereof can never be a testimony unto the common people, inasmuch as they neither grasp their meaning nor appreciate their value. And yet, the unfailing testimony of God to both the East and the West is none other than the Qur'án. Were it beyond the comprehension of men, how could it have been declared as a universal testimony unto all people? If their contention be true, none would therefore be required, nor would it be necessary for them to know God, inasmuch as the knowledge of the divine Being transcendeth the knowledge of His Book, and the common people would not possess the capacity to comprehend it.

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“We entreat the learned men of the Bayán not to follow in such ways, not to inflict, at the time of Mustagháth, upon Him Who is the divine Essence, the heavenly Light, the absolute Eternity, the Beginning and the End of the Manifestations of the Invisible, that which hath been inflicted in this day. We beg them not to depend upon their intellect, their comprehension and learning, nor to contend with the Revealer of celestial and infinite knowledge. And yet, notwithstanding all these admonitions, We perceive that a one-eyed man, who himself is the chief of the people, is arising with the utmost malevolence against Us. We foresee that in every city people will arise to suppress the Blessed Beauty, that the companions of that Lord of being and ultimate Desire of all men will flee from the face of the oppressor and seek refuge from him in the wilderness, whilst others will resign themselves and, with absolute detachment, will sacrifice their lives in His path. Methinks We can discern one who is reputed for such devoutness and piety that men deem it an obligation to obey him, and to whose command they consider it necessary to submit, who will arise to assail the very root of the divine Tree, and endeavor to the uttermost of his power to resist and oppose Him. Such is the way of the people!

“We fain would hope that the people of the Bayán will be enlightened, will soar in the realm of the spirit and abide therein, will discern the Truth, and recognize with the eye of insight dissembling falsehood. In these days, however, such odors of jealousy are diffused, that—I swear by the Educator of all beings, visible and invisible—from the beginning of the foundation of the world—though it hath no beginning—until the present day, such malice, envy, and hate have in no wise appeared, nor will they ever be witnessed in the future. For a number of people who have never inhaled the fragrance of justice, have raised the standard of sedition, and have leagued themselves against Us. On every side We witness the menace of their spears, and in all directions We recognize the shafts of their arrows. This, although We have never gloried in any thing, nor did We seek preference over any soul. To everyone We have been a most kindly companion, a most forbearing and affectionate friend. In the company of the poor We have sought their fellowship, and amidst the exalted and learned We have been submissive and resigned. I swear by God, the one true God! grievous as have been the woes and sufferings which the hand of the enemy and the people of the Book inflicted upon Us, yet all these fade into utter nothingness when compared with that which hath befallen Us at the hand of those who profess to be Our friends.” (*Baha'u'llah, "Kitab-i-Iqan," pp. 248ff*)

“It is evident unto thee that the Birds of Heaven and Doves of Eternity speak a twofold language. One language, the outward language, is devoid of allusions, is unconcealed and unveiled; that it may be a guiding lamp and a beaconing light whereby wayfarers may attain

the heights of holiness, and seekers may advance into the realm of eternal reunion. Such are the unveiled traditions and the evident verses already mentioned. The other language is veiled and concealed, so that whatever lieth hidden in the heart of the malevolent may be made manifest and their innermost being be disclosed. Thus hath Şádiq, son of Muḥammad, spoken: "God verily will test them and sift them." This is the divine standard, this is the Touchstone of God, wherewith He proveth His servants. **None apprehendeth the meaning of these utterances except them whose hearts are assured, whose souls have found favour with God, and whose minds are detached from all else but Him. In such utterances, the literal meaning, as generally understood by the people, is not what hath been intended.** Thus it is recorded: "Every knowledge hath seventy meanings, of which one only is known amongst the people. And when the Qá'im shall arise, **He shall reveal unto men all that which remaineth.**" He also saith: "**We speak one word, and by it we intend one and seventy meanings; each one of these meanings we can explain.**"

"These things We mention only that the people may not be dismayed because of certain traditions and utterances, which have not yet been literally fulfilled, that they may rather attribute their perplexity to their own lack of understanding, and not to the non-fulfilment of the promises in the traditions, inasmuch as the meaning intended by the Imáms of the Faith is not known by this people, as evidenced by the traditions themselves. The people, therefore, must not allow such utterances to deprive them of the divine bounties, but should rather **seek enlightenment from them who are the recognized Expounders thereof, so that the hidden mysteries may be unravelled, and be made manifest unto them.**" (*Bahá'u'lláh, "The Kitáb-i-Íqán", pp. 283-284*)

"Is it He Who is truly unconstrained, as ye imply when ye say that He doeth what He pleaseth and shall not be asked of His doings, or is it ye who wield such power, and who merely make such assertions out of blind imitation, as did your forebears at the appearance of every other Messenger of God?" (*Baha'u'llah, Suriy-i-Haykal, in The Summons of the Lord of Hosts, p. 30*)

"Tear asunder, in My Name, the veils that have grievously blinded your vision, and, through the power born of your belief in the unity of God, scatter the idols of vain imitation." (*Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, LXXV, p. 142*)

"Some, deluded by their idle fancies, have conceived all created things as associates and partners of God, and imagined themselves to be the exponents of His unity. By Him Who is the one true God! Such men have been, and will continue to remain, the victims of blind imitation, and are to be numbered with them that have restricted and limited the conception of God."

(*Baha'u'llah, "Gleanings, LXXXIV:166*)

"People for the most part delight in superstitions. They regard a single drop of the sea of delusion as preferable to an ocean of certitude. By holding fast unto names they deprive themselves of the inner reality and by clinging to vain imaginings they are kept back from the Dayspring of heavenly signs. God grant [that] you may be graciously aided under all conditions to shatter the idols of superstition and to tear away the veils of the imaginations of men. Authority lieth in the grasp of God, the Fountainhead of revelation and inspiration and the Lord of the Day of Resurrection." (*Baha'u'llah, "Kalimat-i-Firdawsiiyyih," TB:58*)

In His book on divine civilization and in one of His Tablets, 'Abdu'l-Baha warns us that blind imitation of tradition is a root cause of our problems:

"O People of Persia! Open your eyes! Pay heed! Release yourselves from this blind following of the bigots, this senseless imitation which is the principal reason why men fall away into paths of ignorance and degradation. See the true state of things." (*Abdu'l-Baha, The Secret of Divine Civilization, p. 104*)

"And the breeding-ground of all these tragedies is prejudice: prejudice of race and nation, of religion, of political opinion; and the root cause of prejudice is blind imitation of the past—imitation in religion, in racial attitudes, in national bias, in politics. So long as this aping of the past persisteth, just so long will the foundations of the social order be blown to the four winds, just so long will humanity be continually exposed to direst peril." (*Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha, p. 247*)

"...blind imitation of the past will stunt the mind. But once every soul inquireth into truth, society will be freed from the darkness of continually repeating the past." (*Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha, p. 248*)

In the years 1904-1906, Laura Clifford Barney, a prominent American believer, visited 'Abdu'l-Baha in the Holy Land. She asked Him many questions, carefully transcribed his answers, and, after submitting these notes for His corrections, published the collection, simultaneously in Persian and in English translation, under the title "Some Answered Questions." In one of those talks, 'Abdu'l-Baha elaborates on this subject:

"These divine qualities, these eternal commandments, will never be abolished; nay, they will last and will be established for ever and ever. These virtues of humanity will be renewed in each of the different cycles; for at the end of every cycle the spiritual Law of God, that is to say the human virtues, disappears, and only the form subsists.

"Thus among the Jews, at the end of the cycle of Moses which coincides with the Christian manifestation, the Law of God disappeared, only a form without spirit remaining. The Holy of Holies departed from amongst them; but the outer court of Jerusalem--which is the expression used for the form of the religion--fell into the hands of the Gentiles. In the same way the fundamental principles of the religion of Christ, which are the greatest virtues of humanity, have disappeared, and its form has remained in the hands of the clergy and the priests. Likewise the foundation of the religion of Muhammad has disappeared, but its form remains in the hands of the official Ulama." (SAQ:XI:56)

In public and private addresses alike, 'Abdu'l-Baha returned repeatedly to this theme during his trips to Europe and North America, in 1911, 1912-1913. These are found, in English translations, in volumes entitled "Paris Talks," "Abdu'l-Baha on Divine Philosophy," "Abdu'l-Baha in London" and "The Promulgation of Universal Peace:

"All these divisions we see on all sides, all these disputes and opposition, are caused because men cling to ritual and outward observances, and forget the simple, underlying truth. It is the outward practices of religion that are so different, and it is they that cause disputes and enmity--while the reality is always the same, and one...

"Doctors of religion were instituted to bring spiritual healing to the peoples and to be the cause of unity among the nations. If they become the cause of division they had better not exist! A remedy is given to cure a disease, but if it only succeeds in aggravating the complaint, it is better to leave it alone. If religion is only to be a cause of disunion it had better not exist." (*Abdu'l-Baha, Khitabat, pp. 216-219; "Paris Talks," pp. 120-121*)

"The Prophets and Manifestations of God bring always the same teaching; at first men cling to the Truth but after a time they disfigure it. The Truth is distorted by man-made outward forms and material laws. The veil of substance and worldliness is drawn across the reality of Truth...Each time God sends a Great One to us we are given new life, but the Truth each Manifestation brings is the same. The Truth never changes but man's vision changes.

It is dulled and confused by the complication of outward forms.

"The Truth is easy to understand although the outward forms in which it is expressed bewilder the intelligence. As men grow they see the futility of man-made forms and despise them. Therefore many leave the churches, because the latter often emphasize the external only." (*Abdu'l-Baha in London, p. 57*)

"Some referred to the teaching of Buddha. 'Abdu'l-Bahá said: The real teaching of Buddha is the same as the teaching of Jesus Christ. The teachings of all the Prophets are the same in character. Now men have changed the teaching. If you look at the present practice of the Buddhist religion,

you will see that there is little of the Reality left. Many worship idols although their teaching forbids it." (*Abdu'l-Baha in London, p. 63*)

"The teaching of Buddha was like a young and beautiful child, and now it has become as an old and decrepit man. Like the aged man it cannot see, it cannot hear, it cannot remember anything." (*Abdu'l-Baha in London, p. 63*)

"Consider the laws of the Old Testament: the Jews do not follow Moses as their example nor keep his commands. So it is with many other religions." (*Abdu'l-Baha in London, p. 63*)

"No man should follow blindly his ancestors and forefathers. Nay, each must see with his own eyes, hear with his own ears and investigate independently in order that he may find the truth. The religion of forefathers and ancestors is based upon blind imitation. Man should investigate reality." (*Abdu'l-Baha on Divine Philosophy, p. 25*)

"All the existing nations had a divine foundation of truth or reality originally, which was intended to be conducive to the unity and accord of mankind, but the light of that reality gradually became obscured. The darkness of superstitions and imitations came and took its place, binding the world of humanity in the chains and fetters of ignorance. Enmity arose among men, increasing to such an extent that nation strove against nation in hatred and violence. War has been a religious and political human heritage.

"Now it is enough! We must investigate reality. We must put away these superstitions...

"The foundations of the divine religions are one. If we investigate these foundations, we discover much ground for agreement, but if we consider the imitations of forms and ancestral beliefs, we find points of disagreement and division; for these imitations differ, while the sources and foundations are one and the same. That is to say, the fundamentals are conducive to unity, but imitations are the cause of disunion and dismemberment. Whoever is lacking in love for humanity or manifests hatred and bigotry toward any part of it violates the foundation and source of his own belief and is holding to forms and imitations." (*Abdu'l-Baha, Khitabat, pp. 336-342; "The Promulgation of Universal Peace," pp. 39-40,41*)

"Although the divine teachings are truth and reality, yet with the passage of time thick clouds envelop and obscure them. These clouds are imitations and superstitions; they are not the fundamentals. Then the Sun of Truth, the Word of God, arises again, shines forth once more in the glory of its power and disperses the enveloping darkness.

"For a long time the divine precepts of the effulgent Word were obscured by clouds of superstition and error until Baha'u'llah appeared upon the horizon of humanity, rent the

shadows, scattered the clouds and revealed anew the foundations of the teachings of God." (*Abdu'l-Baha, Khitabat, pp. 357-360; "The Promulgation of Universal Peace," p. 62*)

"Just as these mists and vapors conceal the phenomenal sun, so human imaginations obscure the Sun of Truth...the Sun of Truth becomes veiled and hidden by the superstitions and imaginations of human minds...

"When the mists and darkness of superstition and prejudice are dispersed, all will see the Sun aright and alike. Then will all nations become one in radiance.

"Inasmuch as these clouds and human vapors of superstition hide the light of the spiritual Sun, we must put forth our utmost endeavor to dispel them." (*PUP:78,79*)

"The purpose of this is to show that the holy Manifestations of God, the divine Prophets, are the first Teachers of the human race. They are universal Educators, and the fundamental principles they have laid down are the causes and factors of the advancement of nations. Forms and imitations which creep in afterward are not conducive to that progress. On the contrary, these are destroyers of human foundations established by the heavenly Educators. These are clouds which obscure the Sun of Reality...

"Bahá'u'lláh has revoiced and reestablished the quintessence of the teachings of all the Prophets, setting aside the accessories and purifying religion from human interpretation." (*PUP:86*)

"In brief, every one of the divine religions contains essential ordinances, which are not subject to change, and material ordinances, which are abrogated according to the exigencies of time. But the people of the world have forsaken the divine teachings and followed forms and imitations of truth. Inasmuch as these human interpretations and superstitions differ, dissensions and bigotry have arisen, and strife and warfare have prevailed." (*PUP:106*)

"Inasmuch as all are founded upon one reality which is love and unity, the wars and dissensions which have characterized the history of religion have been due to imitations and superstitions which arise afterward. Religion is reality, and reality is one. The fundamentals of the religion of God are, therefore, one in reality. There is neither difference nor change in the fundamentals. Variance is caused by blind imitations, prejudices and adherence to forms which appear later; and inasmuch as these differ, discord and strife result." (*Abdu'l-Baha, Khitabat, pp. 363-374; "The Promulgation of Universal Peace," p. 118*)

"But inasmuch as religions are submerged in dogmatic imitations, forsaking the original foundations, and as imitations differ widely, therefore, the religions are divergent and antagonistic. These imitations may be likened to clouds which obscure the sunrise; but reality is the sun...

"Now the people of religion have lost sight of the essential reality of the spiritual springtime. They have held tenaciously to ancestral forms and imitations, and because of this there is variance, strife and altercation among them. Therefore, they must now abandon these imitations and seek the foundation of the divine teachings..." (*PUP:126,127*)

"It is evident that no vital results are now forthcoming from the customs, institutions and standpoints of the past. In view of this, shall blind imitations of ancestral forms and theological interpretations continue to guide and control the religious life and spiritual development of humanity today? Shall man, gifted with the power of reason, unthinkingly follow and adhere to dogma, creeds and hereditary beliefs which will not bear the analysis of reason in this century of effulgent reality?" (*Abdu'l-Baha, Khitabat, pp. 389-394; "The Promulgation of Universal Peace," pp. 140-141*)

"Gradually these heavenly teachings and foundations of reality have been beclouded by human interpretations and dogmatic imitations of ancestral beliefs..."

"Inasmuch as human interpretations and blind imitations differ widely, religious strife and disagreement have arisen among mankind, the light of true religion has been extinguished and the unity of the world of humanity destroyed..."

"The nations and religions are steeped in blind and bigoted imitations. A man is a Jew because his father was a Jew. The Muslim follows implicitly the footsteps of his ancestors in belief and observance. The Buddhist is true to his heredity as a Buddhist. That is to say, they profess religious belief blindly and without investigation, making unity and agreement impossible." (*Ibid., p. 141*)

"For example, we mention Abraham and Moses. By this mention we do not mean the limitation implied in the mere names but intend the virtues which these names embody. When we say Abraham, we mean thereby a manifestation of divine guidance, a center of human virtues, a source of heavenly bestowals to mankind, a dawning point of divine inspiration and perfections. These perfections and graces are not limited to names and boundaries. When we find these virtues, qualities and attributes in any personality, we recognize the same reality shining from within and bow in acknowledgment of the Abrahamic perfections. Similarly, we acknowledge and adore the beauty of Moses. Some souls were lovers of the name Abraham, loving the lantern instead of the light, and when they saw this same light shining from another lantern, they were so attached to the former lantern that they did not recognize its later appearance and illumination. Therefore, those who were attached and held tenaciously to the name Abraham were deprived when the Abrahamic virtues reappeared in Moses. Similarly, the Jews were believers in Moses, awaiting the coming of the Messiah. The virtues and perfections of Moses became apparent in Jesus Christ most effulgently, but the Jews held to the name Moses, not adoring the virtues and perfections manifest in Him. Had they been adoring these virtues and

seeking these perfections, they would assuredly have believed in Jesus Christ when the same virtues and perfections shone in Him. If we are lovers of the light, we adore it in whatever lamp it may become manifest, but if we love the lamp itself and the light is transferred to another lamp, we will neither accept nor sanction it. Therefore, we must follow and adore the virtues revealed in the Messengers of God—whether in Abraham, Moses, Jesus or other Prophets—but we must not adhere to and adore the lamp. We must recognize the sun, no matter from what dawning point it may shine forth, be it Mosaic, Abrahamic or any personal point of orientation whatever, for we are lovers of sunlight and not of orientation. We are lovers of illumination and not of lamps and candles. We are seekers for water, no matter from what rock it may gush forth. We are in need of fruit in whatsoever orchard it may be ripened. We long for rain; it matters not which cloud pours it down. We must not be fettered. If we renounce these fetters, we shall agree, for all are seekers of reality. The counterfeit or imitation of true religion has adulterated human belief, and the foundations have been lost sight of. The variance of these imitations has produced enmity and strife, war and bloodshed. Now the glorious and brilliant twentieth century has dawned, and the divine bounty is radiating universally. The Sun of Truth is shining forth in intense enkindlement. This is, verily, the century when these imitations must be forsaken, superstitions abandoned and God alone worshiped. We must look at the reality of the Prophets and Their teachings in order that we may agree. (*Abdu'l-Baha, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, pp. 152-153*)

“Irreligion has conquered religion. The cause of the chaotic condition lies in the differences among the religions and finds its origin in the animosity and hatred existing between sects and denominations. The materialists have availed themselves of this dissension amongst the religions and are constantly attacking them, intending to uproot the tree of divine planting. Owing to strife and contention among themselves, the religions are being weakened and vanquished. If a commander is at variance with his army in the execution of military tactics, there is no doubt he will be defeated by the enemy. Today the religions are at variance; enmity, strife and recrimination prevail among them; they refuse to associate; nay, rather, if necessary they shed each other’s blood. Read history and record to see what dreadful events have happened in the name of religion. For instance, the Hebrew prophets were sent to announce Christ, but unfortunately the Talmud and its superstitions veiled Him so completely that they crucified their promised Messiah. Had they renounced the talmudic traditions and investigated the reality of the religion of Moses, they would have become believers in Christ. Blind adherence to forms and imitations of ancestral beliefs deprived them of their messianic bounty. They were not refreshed by the downpouring rain of mercy, nor were they illumined by the rays of the Sun of Truth.

“Imitation destroys the foundation of religion, extinguishes the spirituality of the human world, transforms heavenly illumination into darkness and deprives man of the knowledge of God. It

is the cause of the victory of materialism and infidelity over religion; it is the denial of Divinity and the law of revelation; it refuses Prophethood and rejects the Kingdom of God. When materialists subject imitations to the intellectual analysis of reason, they find them to be mere superstitions; therefore, they deny religion. For instance, the Jews have ideas as to the purity and impurity of religion, but when you subject these ideas to scientific scrutiny, they are found to be without foundation.

:Is it impossible for us to receive the infinite bounties of God? Is it impossible to attain the virtues of the spiritual world because we are not living in the time of Moses, the period of the prophets or the era of Christ? Those were spiritual cycles. Can we not develop spiritually because we are far from them and are living in a materialistic age? The God of Moses and Jesus is able to bestow the same favors, nay, greater favors upon His people in this day. For example, in past ages He bestowed reason, intelligence and understanding upon His servants. Can we say He is not able to confer His bounties in this century? Would it be just if He sent Moses for the guidance of past nations and entirely neglected those living now? Could it be possible that this present period has been deprived of divine bounties while past ages of tyranny and barbarism received an inexhaustible portion of them? The same merciful God Who bestowed His favors in the past has opened the doors of His Kingdom to us. The rays of His sun are shining; the breath of the Holy Spirit is quickening. That omniscient God still assists and confirms us, illumines our hearts, gladdens our souls and perfumes our nostrils with the fragrances of holiness. Divine wisdom and providence have encircled all and spread the heavenly table before us. We must take a bountiful share of this generous favor." *(PUP:161-162)*

"He established harmony and agreement among the various peoples of religious beliefs, denominations, sects and cults by freeing them from the fetters of past imitations and superstitions, leading them to the very foundation of the divine religions...there is no doubt that if the world of the Occident should abandon dogmas of the past, turn away from empty imitations and superstitions, investigate the reality of the divine religions, holding fast to the example of Jesus Christ, acting in accordance with the teachings of God and becoming unified with the Orient, an eternal happiness and felicity would be attained." *(PUP:165)*

"The religions of God have the same foundation, but the dogmas appearing later have differed." *(PUP:168)*

"Man must leave imitation and seek reality. The contemporaneous religious beliefs differ because of their allegiance to dogma. It is necessary, therefore, to abandon imitations and seek their fundamental reality." *(PUP:169)*

"Certain forms and imitations have gradually arisen. As these vary, they cause differences among religionists. If we set aside these imitations and seek the fundamental reality underlying our beliefs, we reach a basis of agreement because it is one and not multiple...If statements and teachings of religion are found to be unreasonable [makhAlif 'aql bAshad] and contrary to science [makhAlif 'ilm bAshad], they are outcomes of superstition and imagination. [An vaham mahD]. Innumerable doctrines and beliefs of this character have arisen in the past ages. Consider the superstitions and mythology of the Romans, Greeks and Egyptians; all were contrary to religion [diin] and science [ilm]. It is now evident that the beliefs of these nations were superstitions, but in those times they held to them most tenaciously. For example, one of the many Egyptian idols was to those people an authenticated miracle, whereas in reality it was a piece of stone. As science [ilm] could not sanction the miraculous origin and nature of a piece of rock, the belief in its must have been superstition. It is now evident that it is superstition. Therefore, we must cast aside such beliefs and investigate reality [tahrri haqiqat]. That which is found to be real and conformable to reason must be accepted, and whatever science [ilm] and reason [aql] cannot support must be rejected as imitation [taqAliid] and not reality [haqiqat niist]. Then differences of belief will disappear. All will become as one family, one people, and the same susceptibility to the divine bounty and education will be witnessed among mankind." (*Abdu'l-Baha, Khitarat, pp. 439-440; "The Promulgation of Universal Peace," pp. 175-176*)

"For example, Jesus Christ--may my spirit be a sacrifice unto Him!--laid the foundation of eternal reality, but after His departure many sects and divisions appeared in Christianity. What was the cause of this? There is no doubt that they originated in dogmatic imitations, for the foundations of Christ were reality itself, in which no divergence exists. When imitations appeared, sects and denominations were formed.

"If Christians of all denominations and divisions should investigate reality, the foundations of Christ will unite them. No enmity or hatred will remain, for they will all be under the one guidance of reality itself. Likewise, in the wider field if all the existing religious systems will turn away from ancestral imitations and investigate reality, seeking the real meanings of the Holy Books, they will unite and agree upon the same foundation, reality itself. As long as they follow counterfeit doctrines or imitations instead of reality, animosity and discord will exist and increase." (PUP:198)

"Now inasmuch as the Jews were submerged in the sea of ancestral imitations, they could not comprehend the meaning of these prophecies. All the words of the prophets were fulfilled, but because the Jews held tenaciously to hereditary interpretations, they did not understand the inner meanings of the Holy Bible; therefore, they denied Jesus Christ, the Messiah." (PUP:199)

"Consider to what a remarkable extent the spirituality of people has become overcome by materialism so that spiritual susceptibility seems to have vanished, divine civilization become decadent, and guidance and knowledge of God no longer remain. All are submerged in the sea of materialism. Although some attend churches and temples of worship and devotion, it is in accordance with the traditions and imitations of their fathers and not for the investigation of reality. For it is evident they have not found reality and are not engaged in its adoration. They are holding to certain imitations which have descended to them from their fathers and ancestors. They have become accustomed to passing a certain length of time in temple worship and conforming to imitations and ceremonies. The proof of this is that the son of every Jewish father becomes a Jew and not a Christian; the son of every Muslim becomes a follower of Islam; the son of every Christian proves to be a Christian; the son of every Zoroastrian is a Zoroastrian, etc. Therefore, religious faith and belief is merely a remnant of blind imitations which have descended through fathers and ancestors. Because this man's father was Jew, he considers himself a Jew. Not that he has investigated reality and proved satisfactorily to himself that Judaism is right--nay, rather, he is aware that his forefathers have followed this course; therefore, he has held to it himself.

"The purpose of this is to explain that the darkness of imitations encompasses the world. Every nation is holding to its traditional religious forms. The light of reality is obscured. Were these various nations to investigate reality, there is no doubt they would attain to it. As reality is one, all nations would then become as one nation. So long as they adhere to various imitations and are deprived of reality, strife and warfare will continue and rancor and sedition prevail." (*Abdu'l-Baha, Khitabat, pp. 464-472; "The Promulgation of Universal Peace," pp. 221-222*)

"The enmity and strife of nations, therefore, are due to religious imitations and not to the reality which underlies the teachings of the Prophets." (*PUP:222*)

"Still another cause of disagreement and dissension has been the formation of religious sects and denominations...If we abandon hearsay and investigate the reality and inner significance of the heavenly teachings, we will find the same foundation of love for humanity. The purport is that religion is intended to be the cause of unity, love and fellowship and not discord, enmity and estrangement. Man has forsaken the foundation of divine religion and adhered to blind imitations. Each nation has clung to its own imitations, and because these are at variance, warfare, bloodshed and destruction of the foundation of humanity have resulted. True religion is based upon love and agreement. Baha'u'llah has said, "If religion and faith are the causes of enmity and sedition, it is far better to be nonreligious, and the absence of religion would be preferable; for we desire religion to be the cause of amity and fellowship. If enmity and hatred exist, irreligion is preferable." Therefore, the removal of this dissension has been specialized in Baha'u'llah, for religion is the divine remedy for human antagonism and discord. But when we

make the remedy the cause of the disease, it would be better to do without the remedy."
(PUP:231,232)

"Discord has arisen among Their followers, who have lost sight of reality [haqiqat] and hold fast to imitations [taqAliid]. If imitations [taqAliid] be done away with and the radiant shining reality [haqiqat] dawn in the souls of men, love and unity must prevail." (PUP:234)

"...When that Sun of Reality with its divine bestowal, its heavenly glow and effulgence transferred to the Messianic point of rising, the Jews denied its appearance in Jesus, for they were not worshipers of the Sun itself but adored its rising in Moses. Had they been worshipers of the Sun of Reality, they would have turned to Christ instead of denying Him as the Messiah.

"What was the reason of this deprivation? It was simply because they were imitating fathers and ancestors in forms of belief instead of turning toward the Sun of Divinity. For this reason they were deprived of the bounty which dawned in the Messianic dayspring. Holding tenaciously to the former dawning point, they still remain in this position of deprivation. Consider the people and nations of the earth today and observe this same tenacious allegiance to ancestral belief. He whose father was a Zoroastrian is a Zoroastrian. He whose father was a Buddhist remains a Buddhist. The son of a Muslim continues a Muslim, and so on throughout. Why is this? Because they are slaves and captives of mere imitation. They have not investigated the reality of religion and arrived at its fundamentals and conclusions. The Jew, for instance, has not proved the validity of Moses by investigating reality. He is a Jew because his father was a Jew. He imitates the forms and belief of his fathers and ancestors. There is no thought or mention of reality. And so it is with the other peoples of religion. This is the purpose of our statement that they worship the dawning point rather than the Sun of Reality itself.

"If in the day of Jesus Christ the Jews had forsaken imitation and investigated reality, they would assuredly have believed in and accepted Him, for the Messianic effulgence was far greater than the Mosaic. The Sun of Reality, when it appeared from the dawning point of Christ, was as the midsummer sun in brilliancy and beauty.

"Now, therefore, we must be admonished and realize that mere imitation of fathers and ancestors is fruitless. Nay, rather, we must exert ourselves to the utmost in investigating and turning toward the Sun of Reality, no matter from what dayspring or dawning point it may appear. The phenomenal sun is one sun. If tomorrow it should rise in the West, it is the same sun. We cannot say, "This is not the sun because it has appeared in the West." For East and West are but earthly and imaginary directions. In the station of the sun there is neither East nor West. It is ever shining from its place in the heavens. In the focal point of the solar circle there is no rising, no setting. Therefore, sunrise and sunset have relation to earthly observation and not to the luminary itself. Nay, rather, night in the solar orb is inconceivable. In that center of effulgence, constant light and illumination prevail. Its risings and settings are, therefore, only

apparent and not actual. They have relation to our earthly point of view. We could not consider it the sun if there were a cessation of its light, heat and splendor. To do so would be equivalent to calling a black stone a diamond. This would be meaningless. If a man is a miser and you call him generous, it will produce no change in him." (*PUP:273ff*)

"The greatest cause of bereavement and disheartening in the world of humanity is ignorance based upon blind imitation." (*PUP:291*)

"We conclude, therefore, that the foundation of the religions of God is one foundation. Notwithstanding this, certain forms and imitations have been persistently adhered to which have nothing to do with the foundation of the teachings of the Prophets of God. As these imitations are various and different, contention and strife prevail among the people of religious beliefs, and the foundation of the religion of God has become obscured. Like beasts of prey, men are warring and killing each other, destroying cities and homes, devastating countries and kingdoms." (*Abdu'l-Baha, Khitabat, pp. 527-535; "The Promulgation of Universal Peace," p. 297*)

"The cause of bloodshed and battle, strife and hatred throughout the past has been either religious, racial, patriotic or political prejudice. Therefore, the world of humanity has ever been in torment. These prejudices are more pronounced in the Orient, where freedom is restricted. In the nineteenth century the nations of the East were restless and in a state of inner commotion. The darkness of imitations and forms had enveloped religious belief. The people of religions were in constant warfare, filled with enmity, hatred and bitterness...Religion and divine teachings are like unto a remedy. A remedy must produce the condition of health. If it occasions sickness, it is wiser and better to have no remedy whatever. This is the significance of the statement that if religion becomes the cause of warfare and bloodshed, irreligion and the absence of religion are preferable among mankind.

"Baha'u'llah has declared that religion must be in accord with science and reason [din bAyad maTAbiq 'ilm va 'aql bAshad]. If it does not correspond with scientific principles [maTAbiq 'ilm] and the processes of reason [va 'aql], it is superstition [AvHAM ast]. For God has endowed us with faculties by which we may comprehend the realities of things [haqA'iq ishyA'], contemplate reality [haqiqat] itself. If religion is opposed to reason ['aql] and science ['ilm], faith is impossible; and when faith and confidence in the divine religion are not manifest in the heart [qalb], there can be no spiritual attainment." (*Abdu'l-Baha, Khatirat, p. 530; "The Promulgation of Universal Peace," pp. 298-299*)

"But humanity, having forsaken the one essential and fundamental reality which underlies the religion of God, and holding blindly to imitations of ancestral forms and

interpretations of belief, is separated and divided in the strife, contention and bigotry of various sects and religious factions...

"First, man must independently investigate reality, for the disagreements and dissensions which afflict and affect humanity primarily proceed from imitations of ancestral beliefs and adherences to hereditary forms of worship. These imitations are accidental and without sanction in the Holy Books. They are the outcomes of human interpretations and teachings which have arisen, gradually obscuring the real light of divine meaning and causing men to differ and dissent." *(PUP:314)*

"If the religious beliefs of mankind are contrary to science and opposed to reason, they are none other than superstitions and without divine authority, for the Lord God has endowed man with the faculty of reason in order that through its exercise he may arrive at the verities of existence. Reason is the discoverer of the realities of things, and that which conflicts with its conclusions is the product of human fancy and imagination." *(PUP:316)*

"Inasmuch as great differences and divergencies of denominational belief had arisen throughout the past, every man with a new idea attributing it to God, Baha'u'llah desired that there should not be any ground or reason for disagreement among the Baha'is. Therefore, with His own pen He wrote the Book of His Covenant..." *(PUP:322-323)*

"People speak of Divinity, but the ideas and beliefs they have of Divinity are, in reality, superstition...Divinity is not what is set forth in dogmas and sermons of the church. Ordinarily when the word Divinity is mentioned, it is associated in the minds of the hearers with certain formulas and doctrines, whereas it essentially means the wisdom and knowledge of God, the effulgence of the Sun of Truth, the revelation of reality and divine philosophy." *(PUP:326)*

"In divine questions we must not depend entirely upon the heritage of tradition and former human experience; nay, rather, we must exercise reason, analyze and logically examine the facts presented so that confidence will be inspired and faith attained. Then and only then the reality of things will be revealed to us...Forms must be set aside and renounced; reality must be sought. We must discover for ourselves where and what reality is. In religious beliefs nations and peoples today are imitators of ancestors and forefathers. If a man's father was a Christian, he himself is a Christian; a Buddhist is the son of a Buddhist, a Zoroastrian of a Zoroastrian. A gentile or an idolator follows the religious footsteps of his father and ancestry. This is absolute imitation. The requirement in this day is that man must independently and impartially investigate every form of reality." *(PUP:327)*

"Therefore, by adherence to these temporary laws, blindly following and imitating ancestral forms, difference and divergence have arisen among followers of the various religions, resulting in disunion, strife and hatred. Blind imitations and dogmatic observances are conducive to alienation and disagreement; they lead to bloodshed and destruction of the foundations of humanity. Therefore, the religionists of the world must lay aside these imitations and investigate the essential foundation or reality itself, which is not subject to change or transformation. This is the divine means of agreement and unification...So long as man persists in his adherence to ancestral forms and imitation of obsolete ceremonials, denying higher revelations of the divine light in the world, strife and contention will destroy the purpose of religion and make love and fellowship impossible." (*PUP:339*)

"He announced that the fundamental basis of all religion is one, that the essence of religion is human fellowship and that the differences in belief which exist are due to dogmatic interpretation and blind imitations which are at variance with the foundations established by the Prophets of God...According to His teachings if religious belief proves to be the cause of discord and dissension, its absence would be preferable; for religion was intended to be the divine remedy and panacea for the ailments of humanity, the healing balm for the wounds of mankind. If its misapprehension and defilement have brought about warfare and bloodshed instead of remedy and cure, the world would be better under irreligious conditions." (*Abdu'l-Baha, Khitabat, p. 579; "The Promulgation of Universal Peace," p. 354*)

"The laws and institutes of former governments cannot be current today, for legislation must be in conformity with the needs and requirements of the body politic at this time.

"This has been the case also with the religious teachings so long set forth in the temples and churches, because they are not based upon the fundamental principles of the religions of God. In other words, the foundation of the divine religions had become obscured and nonessentials of form and ceremony were adhered to--that is, the kernel of religion had apparently disappeared, and only the shell remained." (*"The Promulgation of Universal Peace," pp. 378-379*)

"Whence this conflict and strife? The real underlying cause is lack of religious unity and association, for in each of the great religions we find superstition, blind imitation of creeds, and theological formulas adhered to instead of the divine fundamentals, causing difference and divergence among mankind instead of agreement and fellowship. Consequently, strife, hatred and warfare have arisen, based upon this divergence and separation." (*Abdu'l-Baha, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 393*)

"For the foundation of the divine religions is one foundation. This is the oneness of revelation or teaching. But, alas, we have turned away from that foundation, holding tenaciously to various

dogmatic forms and blind imitation of ancestral beliefs. This is the real cause of enmity, hatred and bloodshed in the world—the reason of alienation and estrangement among mankind." (*Abdu'l-Baha, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 407*)

"First among the great principles revealed by Him is that of the investigation of reality. The meanings is that every individual member of humankind is exhorted and commanded to set aside superstitious beliefs, traditions and blind imitation of ancestral forms in religion and investigate reality for himself." (*PUP:433*)

"In past centuries the nations of the world have imagined that the law of God demanded blind imitation of ancestral forms of belief and worship. For example, the Jews were captives of hereditary racial religious observances. The Muslims, likewise, have been held in the bondage of traditionary forms and ceremonials. The Christians also have been implicit followers of ancient tradition and hereditary teaching. At the same time the basic foundation of the religion of God, which was ever the principle of love, unity and the fellowship of humanity, has been forsaken and cast aside, each religious system holding tenaciously to imitations of ancestral forms as the supreme essential. Therefore, hatred and hostility have appeared in the world instead of the divine fruitage of unity and love. By reason of this it has been impossible for the followers of religion to meet together in fellowship and agreement. Even contact and communication have been considered contaminating, and the outcome has been a condition of complete alienation and mutual bigotry. There has been no investigation of the essential underlying basis of reality. One whose father was a Jew invariably proved to be a Jew, a Muslim was born of a Muslim, a Buddhist was a Buddhist because of the faith of his father before him, and so on. In brief, religion was a heritage descending from father to son, ancestry to posterity, without investigation of the fundamental reality; consequently, all religionists were veiled, obscured and at variance." (*PUP:443*)

"Individually and collectively man is proving and penetrating into the reality of outer and inner conditions. Therefore, it has come to pass that we are renouncing all that savors of blind imitation, and impartially and independently investigating truth. Let us understand what constitutes the reality of the divine religions. If a Christian sets aside traditionary forms and blind imitation of ceremonials and investigates the reality of the Gospels, he will discover that the foundation principles of the teachings of Christ were mercy, love, fellowship, benevolence, altruism, the resplendence or radiance of divine bestowals, acquisition of the breaths of the Holy Spirit and oneness with God. Furthermore, he will learn that Christ declared that the Father "maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." The meaning of this declaration is that the mercy of God encircles all mankind, that not a single individual is deprived of the mercy of God, and no soul is denied the resplendent

bestowals of God. The whole human race is submerged in the sea of the mercy of the Lord, and we are all the sheep of the one divine Shepherd. Whatever shortcomings exist among us must be remedied. For example, those who are ignorant must be educated so that they may become wise; the sick must be treated until they recover; those who are immature must be trained in order to reach maturity; those asleep must be awakened. All this must be accomplished through love and not through hatred and hostility. Furthermore, Jesus Christ, referring to the prophecy of Isaiah, spoke of those who having eyes, see not, having ears, hear not, having hearts, understand not; yet they were to be healed. Therefore, it is evident that the bounties of Christ transformed the eye which was blind into a seeing one, rendered the ear which was formerly deaf, attentive, and made the hard, callous heart tender and sensitive. In other words, the meaning is that although the people possess external eyes, yet the insight, or perception, of the soul is blind; although the outer ear hears, the spiritual hearing is deaf; although they possess conscious hearts, they are without illumination; and the bounties of Christ save souls from these conditions. It is evident, then, that the manifestation of the Messiah was synonymous with universal mercy. His providence was universal, and His teachings were for all. His lights were not restricted to a few. Every Christ came to the world of mankind. Therefore, we must investigate the foundation of divine religion, discover its reality, reestablish it and spread its message throughout the world so that it may become the source of illumination and enlightenment to mankind, the spiritually dead become alive, the spiritually blind receive sight and those who are inattentive to God become awakened." *(PUP:444)*

"But the followers of the divine religions have turned away from the principles and ordinances which are essential and unchanging in the Word of God, forsaking those fundamental realities which have to do with the life of the human world, the eternal life--such as the love of God, faith in God, philanthropy, knowledge, spiritual perception, divine guidance--holding these to be contingent and nonessential while wrangling and disagreeing over such questions as whether divorce is lawful or unlawful, or whether this or that observance of a minor law is orthodox and true. The Jews consider divorce lawful; the Catholic Christians deem it unlawful; the outcome is discord and hostility between them. If they would investigate the one fundamental reality underlying the laws revealed by Moses and Christ, this condition of hatred and misunderstanding would be dispelled and divine unity prevail." *(PUP:445)*

"...no man should blindly follow his ancestors and forefathers. Nay, each must see with his own eyes, hear with his own ears and investigate the truth himself in order that he may follow the truth instead of blind acquiescence and imitation of ancestral beliefs." *(PUP:454)*

"When the devotees of religion cast aside their dogmas and ritualism, the unification of religion will be in sight, and the realities of the holy books will become unveiled. In these days

misunderstandings are rife, but when these misunderstandings and blind imitations are relinquished, the sun of reality shall dawn...

"Should you speak to a Jew about the medium or channel between God and man, without referring to any particular name or person, he would say, "Yes, this is right, but I say the name of this mediator is Moses." If you give the exposition of this divine philosophy to the followers of each religion they will agree with you in the abstract, but they will stick to the names of their own prophets, and arise in contention and strife over these names. The Jew believes in Christ, though he knows it not, and is quibbling over the mere name. "There have been wars and rumours of war amongst the people of the world for many thousand years; much innocent blood has been shed, many kingdoms and empires have been laid waste... His Holiness the Christ did not sacrifice his life so that the people might believe the doctrine that he is the word of God; nay, rather he gave his life so that he might bestow the consciousness of eternal life to the world of humanity. That is why he said, "Jesus, the son of man, is come to give life to the world."

"This reality has been forgotten by the people, and the doctrine of the father, son and holy spirit has been substituted. The original foundation has been lost sight of. Christ said, "If one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also." Is there any relation between this commandment and bloody events taking place today?

"The religious differences between the Catholics and Protestants have caused a deluge of bloodshed. What relation have these events with the statement of Christ when he addressed Peter: "Put thy sword into the scabbard [sheath]"? When we hold fast to the foundations of the religions of God, differences will be dispelled." (*Abdu'l-Baha, Khitabat, pp. 737-747; "Abdu'l-Baha on Divine Philosophy," Chapter V*)

The Guardian (Shoghi Effendi) also distinguished between the essential, the secondary and the man-made ordinances of religion, as in this letter:

"The Faith standing identified with the name of Baha'u'llah disclaims any intention to belittle any of the Prophets gone before Him, to whittle down any of their teachings, to obscure, however slightly, the radiance of their Revelations, to oust them from the hearts of their followers, to abrogate the fundamentals of their doctrines, to discard any of their revealed Books, or to suppress the legitimate aspirations of their adherents. Repudiating the claim of any religion to be the final revelation of God to man, disclaiming finality for His own Revelation, Baha'u'llah inculcates the basic principle of the relativity of religious truth, the continuity of Divine Revelation, the progressiveness of religious experience. His aim is to widen the basis of all revealed religions and to unravel the mysteries of their scriptures. He insists on the unqualified recognition of the unity of their purpose, restates the eternal verities they enshrine, co-ordinates their functions, distinguishes the essential and the authentic from the non-

essential and spurious in their teachings, separates the God-given truths from the priest-prompted superstitions, and on this as a basis proclaims the possibility, and even prophesies the inevitability, of their unification, and the consummation of their highest hopes. (*Shoghi Effendi, letter dated 28 March, 1941, entitled, "The Promised Day is Come," p. 112; reprinted in GTT:118*)

Supplementary sources:

Baha'i World Faith, p. 25,226,227,238,239, 250,251,256,286

Note: This compilation and commentary were completed by Peter Terry in 1999, and revised in 2018 and reformatted in 2022.