

Revamping Religion for Humanity Without Borders

Given the record of violence and corruption, friends say, do we need another religion? This is a question that I sometimes get asked when people realize that the Bahá'í Faith is a relatively young, independent religion. We don't need another set of competing truths or, or as some say, competing falsehoods.

What we do need, however, is an updated concept of religion itself, to help navigate the reality of refugees, terrorism, rampant inequality and mass confusion about how to create unity and build a future.

A common assumption regarding traditional religion is of self-contained silos, each with a founder, its own set of beliefs and possibly its own God. This is not only destructive to unity, it's also fundamentally untrue.

For quite some time there's existed the notion that "other" religions may be valid, may contain truth, may come from the same Creator. The slow work of dialogue and increased familiarization with traditions other than our own has already been going on for over a century, if dated from the first World's Parliament of Religions of 1893. Some have even gone so far as to advocate the concept of pluralism, which sees religions as many paths leading to the same peak.

As positive as these changes are, they're still based on a competitive model. There's an alternative to this model, called progressive revelation. Religion is seen as one continuous unfoldment throughout history, the education of humanity in progressive stages, with each major faith complementing rather than contradicting the others.

This permission to believe in the essential unity of humanity was what first drew me to the [Bahá'í Faith](#). The premise is simple: there have been many revelations but only one religion, like chapters of a book. Each one reaffirms basic spiritual principles and adds new practices and ways of structuring society suited to the circumstances of the times.

Every teacher, from early childhood educator to university professor, knows that the basics are the most important elements of education, forming the foundation of all knowledge added incrementally over time. Similarly, essential spiritual truths are the basics of all belief systems. They remain the same, repeated and increasingly elucidated without ever being outdated.

Basic virtues and values such as kindness, integrity and equality have formed the common ground for religious belief (and the basis for our concept of human rights) whenever the world's faiths have appeared. Compilations of [universal spiritual principles](#) and comparative anthologies of sacred texts give insight into a global ethic stemming from this common heritage.

The superstructure of religious practice gradually built around these foundations followed the social teachings and laws set out by each new faith, suited to the age in which they were revealed. Great civilizations were built, flourished and matured, following natural cycles.

Of course, reform and renewal are as necessary in religion as they are in any living organism. Corruption and distortion of the truth over time will never cease, as long as there is something to be gained by them. Revelations bringing renewal will also never cease, as long as human beings need the wisdom of sacred teachings to guide our individual and collective lives.

An awareness of the essential unity of the world's sacred teachings is crucial to seeing humanity as one and its peoples as equal. It's time to move beyond the competitive concept of religion to one of a continuum, recognizing that our common spiritual heritage has had diverse manifestations throughout history.

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