

# **A Baha'i Duty: Defending the Essence of All Religions**

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Recently I revisited this profound quote from the writings of Baha'u'llah, and this time it penetrated my soul and made me clearly see what is happening all around us in every part of the world:

**The vitality of men's belief in God is dying out in every land; nothing short of His wholesome medicine can ever restore it. The corrosion of ungodliness is eating into the vitals of human society; what else but the Elixir of His potent Revelation can cleanse and revive it?**

Here, in two sentences, Baha'u'llah diagnoses humanity's primary problem and suggests the remedy.

This quote stirred my soul and made me think there has to be something I can do. After all, when the Creator, through the voice of His messenger, laments "**The vitality of men's belief in God is dying out in every land,**" it makes me realize that humanity's peace and salvation is in God's hands – and in our hands, too.

We need to retain the great spiritual laws taught by all Faiths – while, at the same time, adjusting the social laws inspired by those religions to the needs of the time, as Abdu'l-Baha recommended in a speech he gave in Chicago in 1912:

**... the divine law has two distinct aspects or functions: one the essential or fundamental, the other the material or accidental. The first aspect of the revealed religion of God is that which concerns the ethical development and spiritual progress of mankind, the awakening of potential human susceptibilities and the descent of divine bestowals. These ordinances are changeless, essential, eternal. The second function of the divine religion deals with material conditions, the laws of human intercourse and social regulation. These are subject to change and transformation in accordance with the time, place and conditions.**

In recent times, I've found myself defending Islam from the criticisms of Muslims themselves – those who feel fed up with the mullahs and the fanaticism of some other Muslims, and who no longer want anything to do with Islam as a result. Mounting that defense has proven to be a difficult task, since most people cannot or will not differentiate the actions of mullahs from Islam's inherent spirituality and its essential teachings.

By the same token, I have defended Christianity from Christians who want nothing more to do with the priests and other Christians who have damaged the image of Christianity with their actions.

All of this has made me more determined to counsel disheartened Muslims, Christians, and followers of other religions, urging them not to "throw the baby out with the bathwater." That's

where the rejection of religion generally comes from, in my experience – people cast doubt on the spiritual laws of their Faiths, when they simply need to re-examine the social laws inspired by their religions, which are subject to change.

So the spread of irreligiousness today has added another role to the principal aim of the Baha'i Faith, which is to work towards achieving the oneness of humanity. Since the magnetism of religion is losing power and becoming more irrelevant in the eyes of the world, Baha'is defend each religion's essence and the sacredness of the Holy Books and their authors – because, as Baha'u'llah wrote, all religions are one:

**Know thou assuredly that the essence of all the Prophets of God is one and the same. Their unity is absolute. God, the Creator, saith: There is no distinction whatsoever among the Bearers of My Message. They all have but one purpose; their secret is the same secret. To prefer one in honor to another, to exalt certain ones above the rest, is in no wise to be permitted. Every true Prophet hath regarded His Message as fundamentally the same as the Revelation of every other Prophet gone before Him.**

Baha'is defend the spirituality of all of the great religions. If it is not protected, or denied and belittled, then discussing the progression of religions becomes impossible.

In his summary statement about the Baha'i teachings to the nascent United Nations in 1947, Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Baha'i Faith, explained:

**The fundamental principle enunciated by Baha'u'llah, the followers of His Faith firmly believe, is that Religious truth is not absolute but relative, that Divine Revelation is a continuous and progressive process, that all the great religions of the world are divine in origin, that their basic principles are in complete harmony, that their aims and purposes are one and the same, that their teachings are but facets of one truth, that their functions are complementary, that they differ only in the non-essential aspects of their doctrines and that their missions represent successive stages in the spiritual evolution of human society.**

Humanity needs to face the unprecedented crises of today with all of its spiritual tools at the ready, and its future rests on the degree of the unification of all countries and of all religions. Sadly, the pure water of the messages of spiritual healing has been combined with so many impurities that it no longer possesses all of its original healing qualities.

What the world needs today is not the destruction of all things sacred and moral in the name of freedom of speech and action. That sense of the sacred is the cause of our salvation – and it stems originally from the holy books of all religions.

Baha'is believe that to defend those spiritual values and the origin of those teachings in all religions is our moral duty. Since all Faiths are essentially one, they're all part of our Faith. As I maintain friendships with people of all different Faiths, I try to make sure that they are aware of my respect for their prophets, their messengers, and their holy writings. As Abdu'l-Baha wrote:

**The divine religions must be the cause of oneness among men, and the means of unity and love; they must promulgate universal peace, free man from every prejudice, bestow joy and gladness, exercise kindness to all men and do away with every difference and distinction.**