

# Responding to Christian Concerns

Notes by Colin Dibdin for "Teaching & Learning from Christians, Yerrinbool, 1999



Teaching, and  
Learning from,  
Christians

## Responding to Christian Concerns

- 1. Overcoming blockages to dialogue**
- 2. Concerns about exclusiveness**
- 3. Concerns about doctrine**
- 4. Concerns about prophecy**
- 5. Concerns about the Bahá'í Faith itself**

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## Overcoming blockages to dialogue

**“...remove any  
apprehensions...”**

“When the friends sense receptivity to the Word of God, they should deliver the Message with wisdom. They must first try and remove any apprehensions in the people they teach.”

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Teaching: The Greatest Gift of God*, p.13)

“Souls are liable to estrangement. Such methods should be adopted that the estrangement should be first removed, then the Word will have effect.”

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Teaching: The Greatest Gift of God*, p.10)

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## Overcoming blockages to dialogue

### The sources of Christian concerns

Blockage	Solution
<b>Rational</b> (usually Biblically based objections)	Clear responses and proofs
<b>Emotional</b> (Fear of the other)	Friendship, empathy and looking for areas of clear agreement
<b>Spiritual</b> (Difficulty recognising the light in a new lamp)	Prayer, and a shared orientation towards God

#### Remember

- that rational responses alone are unlikely to be satisfactory if emotional and spiritual needs are not addressed.
- that your Christian dialogue-partner may not be satisfied with your response to their objections. Be prepared to listen and learn from them.



## Concerns about Exclusiveness

### 1. “Christ is the only way”

“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6)

“For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men...” (1 Tim 2:5)

(See also: Jn 3:16, Acts 4:12, 1 Cor 3:11, Hebrews 13:8)

#### A response:

Baha’is agree that Christ is the only way.

The Bible also says that Christ is the eternal Word of God. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God...” (John 1:1) Therefore this Divine Christ must have existed before the person of Jesus was born. The greatness of Jesus is because of this Divine station, which was bestowed on him by God so that all who knew him could gain eternal life.

Baha’is believe that the same Christ, and the same way to the Father, has been given by God to humanity in the person of Bahá’u’lláh.



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## Concerns about Exclusiveness

### 2. “Jesus is God, Baha’u’llah was just a man ”

“...it is not sufficient to acknowledge the DIVINITY of Christ. This is a snare! We must acknowledge the DEITY of Christ. He is God.” (Pastor John Saint)

“Jesus was resurrected, ascended to heaven and lives at the right hand of God. Bahá’u’lláh, on the other hand, lived and died in the usual way.” (comment made on an Internet newsgroup)

#### A response:

Baha’is believe, as Christians do, that Christ is God. “I and My Father are one.” (John 10:30)

The Bible also says that “...the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father...” (John 1:14)

Baha’is believe that the same glory can be seen in Baha’u’llah, and that Baha’u’llah, like Jesus, was more than a human personality who lived and died.

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## Concerns about Doctrine

### 1. “Baha’is don’t believe in original sin, or atonement by the blood of Christ.”

#### A response:

Baha’is do believe that we all have a lower nature (‘original’ in the sense that it was inherited from the first man, Adam) which tends to lead us away from God (to sin), and that we cannot be saved or redeemed (atoned for) except by the channels of God’s grace (sacrifice by the Manifestations of God, including Jesus’ death on the cross).

Invite the Christian to read Gleanings XXXVI: “Know thou that when the Son of Man yielded up His breath to God...”

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## Concerns about Doctrine

### 2. “Baha’is don’t believe that Jesus was bodily resurrected.”

#### A response:

Don’t make this an issue. Arguing that the resurrection wasn’t a physical event will give the impression that Baha’is are denying God’s power, denying the Gospel accounts and denying that Christ lives. Besides, maybe people did see Jesus after his death. Miracles do happen.

Ask the Christian to think about the ‘reality’ of Christ. We can know that Jesus still lives by His continuing influence and power.

Ask them also to consider that the New Testament often refers to the Christ’s followers as “the body of Christ”.

Invite the Christian to read Some Answered Questions section 23 “Therefore, we say that the meaning of Christ’s resurrection is as follows...”

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## Concerns about Doctrine

### 3. “Baha’is misread the Bible.”

“God wants to be understood, therefore scripture would not have an esoteric or ‘spiritual’ interpretation.” (Typical comment by conservative evangelical Christians)

#### A response:

True, God wants to be understood. Much of the Bible has a plain meaning. But if the literal interpretation leads to a conclusion which is contradictory to reason then few will accept or understand it anyway. Consider the implications of literally interpreting physical resurrection, ascension to ‘heaven’, stars falling to earth, eating Jesus’ flesh and blood in order to live forever, God becoming incarnate, etc.

The Bible itself says that its meanings should be spiritually discerned:

1 Cor 2:13-14 “This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.”

See also John 6:51-63

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## Concerns about Prophecy

### 1. “Baha’u’llah could be a false prophet.”

“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.” (Matt 7:15-20)

#### **A response:**

Yes, we need to beware of false prophets. Jesus tells us how to test them:

“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits...by their fruits you will know them.” (Matt 7:15-20)

Invite the Christian to examine the ‘fruits’ of the ‘tree’ of Baha’u’llah.

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## Concerns about Prophecy

### 2. “Baha’u’llah could be the antichrist.”

“... every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.” (1 John 4:2-3)

#### **A response:**

Yes, the Bible warns us about the antichrist. However the same passage also tells how recognise it:

“This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.” (1 John 4:2-3)

The Baha’i writings not only acknowledge Jesus Christ, but refer to Him as The Messiah, The Son of God, The Lord Christ, The Lord of all Being, The Lord of the visible and invisible, The Spirit of God, The Essence of Being, That Essence of Detachment, The Word of God, That peerless Beauty, The Revealer of the unseen Beauty and The Daystar of the heaven of divine Revelation.

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## Concerns about Prophecy

### 3. “Prophecy has not been fulfilled”

Christ foretold certain signs which would accompany his return. These prophecies have not been fulfilled, therefore Baha’u’llah cannot be the return of Christ.

#### **A response:**

Prophecy is a big subject, and ultimately not convincing by itself. It’s a bit like sitting in a sealed room trying to calculate whether or not the sun has risen. Wouldn’t it be easier to open the window and have a look?

However if both you and your partner in dialogue are interested in prophecy then a good place to start is with the Gospel of Matthew Ch.24, and Bahá’u’lláh’s commentary on Matt. 24, in the Kitab-i-Iqan.

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## Concerns about Prophecy

### 4. “Prophecy is irrelevant”

“No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard! Be alert. You do not know when that time will come.”(Mark 13:32-33)

Although the return of Christ is an important Christian doctrine, most churches are wary of attempts to define this event in too much detail. In general they are content to know that “every eye will see him”(Rev 1:7)

#### **A response:**

There is some truth in the idea that the details of prophecy are irrelevant. Making predictions based on prophecy has led to disappointments. The real value of prophecy is that Christians are already expecting the return of Christ.

Often Bahá’u’lláh’s claim to be the return of Christ will be dismissed simply because Christians fully expect to know of the event as soon as it happens. Invite your dialogue partner to consider the meaning of Revelation 1:7 “Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him...”. Don’t clouds obscure the view? Did every person who saw Christ recognise him?

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Responding to  
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## Concerns about the Bahá'í Faith

### 1. “Is Bahá'í a cult?”

#### A response:

No. It is recognised as an independent world religion, and, according to the leading anti-cult organisation in the United Kingdom (Family Actions Information & Rescue) it lacks the characteristics of a cult.

See also “The Good Tree: Distinguishing the Baha'i Faith From Destructive Cults” by Stephen Vaccaro, which identifies 5 defining characteristics of a destructive cult: 1) a leader demanding total authority, 2) the use of ‘controlling’ techniques, 3) social and physical isolation, 4) extreme or fanatical behaviour, and 5) secrecy and deception.

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## Concerns about the Bahá'í Faith

### 2. “Is Bahá'í a syncretism?”

#### A response:

A syncretism is an attempted union or reconciliation of diverse or opposite tenets or practices.

Christians often use the term in a negative way because they believe that the Baha'i teachings are a human effort at creating an artificial unity, and that we deliberately overlook obvious important differences between religions.

Bahá'ís believe religions are one because they originate from God.

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# Concerns about the Bahá'í Faith

### 3. “Is Bahá'í a sect of Islam?”

#### **A response:**

There are some similarities between the 2 religions, and the Bahá'í Faith historically comes from an Islamic background.

However a closer look at the Baha'i Faith demonstrates that it is an original and independent religion.

Also, if Bahá'ís were regarded as part of Islam then they would probably not be persecuted in Iran.

Nevertheless Baha'is believe that Islam has been largely misunderstood in the West, and hope that some of the prejudices held against it will be overcome.

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### Conclusion

The number of possible concerns about the Bahá'í Faith is probably unlimited. This session has only briefly looked at a few of them.

The important thing is for both the Christian and the Baha'i to seek the truth, not just to defend personal viewpoints. Baha'u'llah wrote that “Every person who in some degree turneth towards the truth can himself later comprehend most of what he seeketh.”

Remember never to let your dialogue get bogged down in arguments. ‘Abdu'l-Bahá said that “love and fellowship are the foundation” of consultation.

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