The Reconciliation of Religion: First Steps towards an Ideal Society

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The Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, Bahá'u'lláh, wrote many books, tablets, and letters. Of all these, the most important is His *Kitab-i Aqdas*, the *Most Holy Book*, in which the Author gives the laws and ordinances that mankind needs at this juncture in its evolution and that will lead to a stable, decent, creative society in the future. His second most important book is the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, *Book of Certitude*, in which He gives the principles needed to bring about the reconciliation of the great religions of the world, religions that now suffer from internal dissension as well as external, often violent, conflicts between their followers.

In this article, I draw on principles gleaned from the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* about which we read the following passage from a writing of the great grandson of Bahá'u'lláh, Shoghi Effendi:

> Foremost among the priceless treasures cast forth from the billowing ocean of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation ranks the *Kitáb-i-Íqán (Book of Certitude)*, ... " "A model of Persian prose, ... this Book, ... occupies a position unequalled by any work in the Bahá'í literature, except the *Kitab-i Aqdas*, Bahá'u'lláh's *Most Holy Book*. ...
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> Well may it be claimed that of all the books revealed by the Author of the Bahá'í Revelation, this Book alone, by sweeping away the age-long barriers that have so insurmountably separated the great religions of the world, has laid down a *broad and unassailable foundation* for *the complete reconciliation of their followers. (Italics the author's*) [4]

The main theme then of this paper is twofold: firstly, I wish to show how the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* relates to the general issue of the reconciliation of the great Faiths of

the world) and how we might envisage its counsels to lead to an ideal, peaceful 21st century society and, secondly, to examine the nature of the contemporary religious crises taking place in the Islámic world and an approach to dealing effectively with them.

Note to the reader

In this article, I deal with Islám as an example that illustrates clearly the urgent need for reconciliation of religion and I suspect that most of the readers will be well aware of the often baffling events that are taking place in the Islámic world today. Given the strategic economics importance of some of the key Islámic nations, I feel that it is vitally important that we all, as much as we possibly can, understand the nature of this religion and why we witness such terrible events happening in its name. The Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith has called upon the Bahá'ís to know about its history and to read its holy book, the *Qur'ān*, with an objective eye. In a later section of this article, I try to give the reader enough information about Islám that he or she will have no difficulty in understanding the main arguments and give in the Bibliography references for those who wish to learn more. But, while the arguments given in this article were applied to the case of Islám, the principles they illustrate certainly will apply to other religions as well.

Extremist activities carried out in the name of Islám

In today's world, one witnesses horrific acts of an extreme nature being carried out in the name of religion, in particular, Islám. Such acts, which have distressed, shocked, and puzzled much of the non-Muslim world as well as moderate elements within that world, have been characterized by extreme physical violence, ranging from hostage taking, to suicide attacks on vulnerable civilian targets to horrifically repulsive acts of violence carried out against individuals and groups of individuals, in particular girls and women. These acts have been justified on a number of grounds that vary from place to place throughout the Islámic world: for some, such acts are necessary according to the teachings of Islám as they understand them, for others purely political goals seem to be the motivating factors, again for others it may be poverty and desperation that render the perpetuators amenable to extreme interpretations of their faith, and for some the motivations simply are not clear. In all of these cases, appeal has been made to interpretations

of the sacred book of the Muslims, the *Qur'ān*, and of other writings and traditions of the Faith (the *Ḥadīth*, and the *Sunnah*) to support the extreme actions being carried out.

In some cases, what are purported to be "true" Islámic states have been set up in which the secular government and religious authorities have been merged. At least one such government has adopted policies of rigid interpretations of Islámic law, the *sharî'ah*, in particular when applied to religious minorities such as the Bahá'ís who live under its jurisdiction.

To those familiar with the history of Islám and consequently are well aware of the tolerant nature of that Faith in its so-called "Golden Age" [i] and of the enormous intellectual, scientific, medical, agricultural, architectural and philosophical achievements of Islám, the fruits of which, transmitted to Europe, helped pull western Europe out the Dark Ages into the Renaissance. At one time, the city of Baghdad was a shining example of an advanced and brillant civilization, at its time, far ahead of any city in Europe. Muslim scientists invented algebra, performed difficult mathematical calculations in astronomy, Muslim physicians set the medical standards that were adopted by the Europeans and used until the advent of modern western medicine, their architects created buildings of magnificent beauty, some of which are extant today, in Muslim Spain, the streets of Cordova were lit at night while Paris was essentially a city of hovels and darkness. Many other examples could be given [2, 10]. But, in looking at the Islámic world of today, we see that there is an alarming disconnect between the Islámic world of the Golden Age and the one of today. The extremist acts of today carried out by Muslims appear to have no relation to that earlier, highly advanced civilization and seem to many of us virtually inexplicable. Worse yet, there seems to be no way one can "reason" with the extremists: they are merely considered to be "fanatics" and appear to have no clear rational for their actions.

However, it would be a grave error to think that there is no intelligent, cohesive ideology underlying extremist activities. I shall look briefly at the origins of extremist ideologies and suggest, again based in part on the principles given in the Kitáb-i-Íqán, an approach to reconciling these ideologies with the needs for a peaceful, non-violent world.

1. Introduction

In this paper, we shall examine ways by which reconciliation between the various religions of the world may be attained. At the present, we all are witnesses of horrible religious strife, often extremely violent, always divisive and costly in terms of human lives lost or seriously damaged. In some cases, the strife is between factions of one religion, in others it is between the followers of two different religions, and in some cases it is the result of internal dissensions between among the followers of a given religion, often giving rise to additional warring factions. While we all witness such strife taking place with increasing force and are appalled at the extreme interpretations that followers of a given religious ideology give to the teachings of their faith, we sense all the same that in these same teachings there is much truth and counsels for man to be able to live a happy, peaceful and productive life. Therefore, we ask ourselves "what went wrong?" That is, the original teachings contain much that is clearly praiseworthy and helpful to man, yet today they are not seen in that light. To the contrary, charismatic or influential individuals interpret these teachings in extremist ways and attract souls that respond to their viewpoints. Many times the followers are young, educated, but disaffected followers, at others they may be ignorant workers or farmers, or they may be unemployed youth in the modern cities, and so on. Poverty and desperate living conditions may form a background to the appeal of these individuals. How may we address those who have accepted such extremist ideologies in order to bring about a constructive reconciliation with progressive principles that shall allow them to live together in peace?

It is clear then that the advancement of society and the establishment of an enduring world peace depend upon the reconciliation of the world's great religions, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islám, Christianity, Judaism and others and, in particular, reconciliation of Islám with the other religions of the world and within itself, that is, among the diverse opposing sects that are exercising a toxic effect upon society in general. Some effective approach is needed to bring about a permanent and healthy reconciliation of these religions that will promote and help sustain world peace and progressive programs for the advancement of mankind.

As for reconciliation, the Prophet Founders of the world's religions have always given guidelines for human conduct that promote unity among their followers. Bahá'u'lláh took this one step further by giving in His *Kitáb-i-Íqán* a methodology for bringing about a true reconciliation between religions, using as examples from Islám, Christianity, and other religions to illustrate the principles He enunciates. This methodology may be extended to other religions: the details will change, but the principles remain the same.

Therefore, we shall examine the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* and the principles mentioned and show how they are vital and necessary today.

To illustrate applications of thee principles to contemporary events, we shall look at the religious problems in the Islámic world of today. The reason for this is so that we my appreciate the deep and deadly dilemma in which the Islámic world finds itself today, a dilemma which finds deadly expression in that actions of Islámic extremists who are responsible for the kinds of problems mentioned in the preceding paragraphs.

2. Preparatory Comments

Before I examine the methodology derived from the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, I wish to make two comments that are relevant to the main ideas of this paper. The first concerns the role of religion in society, the second gives a brief review of salient facts of Islám.

The role of religion in society
Unfortunately, the word "religion" has taken on today a pejorative meaning. In the popular press, television programs, and current literature it is often the object of scorn and derision and the general public, while often paying lip service to it, in practice ignores the laws and exhortations of religion. This we all witness in the appalling decay in sexual mores, in the disregard for marriage, in values of personal conduct, and so on.

Yet, we tend to forget what religion is really all about. The origins of the word "religion" itself gives us a clue, namely, from Latin, "religio," the "binding together," the "tying together" of human beings, specially of their inmost real selves, their souls. And we notice that all the great religions in their early days did just that: they bound souls together in united communities that were, for a period of time at least, communities that promote the advancing of civilization, of decent moral values, and the exaltation of the station of man. Over time, however, the practice of these great religions moved away from the light of their Founders and deteriorated, becoming corrupt, fanatical, and violent, far from the spirit and intentions of their Founders.

I take this opportunity to note a distinction in the way western society and eastern societies view religion. In Japanese (and Chinese) the word for religion is shuukyou (Japanese) (zongjiao in Chinese),   , and it is interesting to note the meanings of the Chinese characters used for the concept of religion: The first,   ,carries the implication of "building with an altar," hence "shrine," and therefore, by extension "religion." But the second,   , meaning "teach," has as components   crossed sticks over a child next to a hand holding a whip. meaning "strike, coerce, cause to do," with a strong implication that learning must be forced upon the child with severe discipline [9].   Thus, it would seem that "religion" in eastern eyes may be associated with temples or shrines wherein (spiritual) learning is reinforced with severe discipline more that with creation of communities united by a common belief.

Modern society has become highly secular and materialistic with the result that man's seemingly innate desire for some sort of transcendental experience has led to a number of substitutes for religion, for example, extreme sports, political activity, addictions of all sorts, "green" causes, and so on. Some of these activities have intrinsic value, but those involved may make of them a belief system that dominates their lives and distorts their behaviours and their relations to those around them. Religious extremism may be viewed as a distortion of religion in which the believers limit their view of the universe to a perverted misunderstanding of the principles of their faith and close their minds to other interpretations and to attempts to reconcile their beliefs with those of others.

If we examine carefully the early histories of the great religions, we may infer that "true" religion will be that faith that will instead lead to a healthy set of moral values, a progressive attitude towards the development of society, to tolerance of other faiths, to the promotion of the welfare of all, in short, to a healthy, creative, tolerant and ever-progressing civilization, one in which there are mechanisms for reconciling and dealing effectively with opposing views, and in which the illnesses of prejudice of all forms will have been eliminated.

For a thought provoking and highly relevant discussion of the points made in the preceding paragraphs, I refer the reader to the recent paper of Peter Khan [12]. Unfortunately, I only read this paper after having sketched out the main ideas of this section but the points he raises are highly relevant here.

On Islám (Note 1)

In this article, I cannot do justice to the long and checkered history of Islám and of the peoples who adopted it as their faith. For this purpose, I refer the reader to any of a number of excellent sources that are available today, including the works of Balyuzi [2]. Gail [7] *(Note 2)*, Hitti [10] and the rather nice Wikipedia article [x]. I would issue a *caveat*, however. Some contemporary writings on *Islám* are written by westerners with a heavy biais against that faith and should be approached with care. Also, some writings by Muslim authors may, their enthusiasm for their religion, be overly biaised in favour of it. The references I give are, to the best of my knowledge, objective and reliable.

For now, suffice it say that in the sixth century C.E., in the Arabian city of Mecca, was born a man, Muhammad, who arose and declared Himself a Messenger and a Prophet of God. He was recognized at first only by a select few. He and his early followers were subjected to harsh persecutions and fled from Mecca to Medina, where the faith continued to grow. Eventually, his opponents were subdued and He entered in triumph into Mecca and destroyed the idols in the famous Ka'bah in that city. This place he made the center to which all Muslims turn in their prayers. During His life he revealed what is the Holy Book of the Muslims, the *Qur'ān*, a collection of chapters called *surahs*. These were later collated and standardized and today all Muslims throughout the world refer to the same holy book. Upon His passing, there

was confusion about the naming of a successor. He apparently indicated that his son-in-law, Ali, should be in charge of the community. But, for some reason, what He stated was not clearly grasped by those present and one of his followers, later destined to be a "caliph," stated that the Qur'ān was sufficient and that there was no need to worry. As a consequence, upon His death, immediately there arose a conflict about the succession and a democratic process usual among the Arab tribes of the day resulted in the naming of another of His followers as the first of what would be four "righteous caliphs." Ali was finally able to become caliph as the last of the four. After that, the Umayyad family established a caliphate, the system of rule under the caliph, that lasted until it was overthrown and another family, the Abbasid, established a caliphate that endured until the 12-th century and witnessed some of the most brillant accomplishments of Islám. The empire had spread from, in the West, Spain, across north Africa, Arabia, most of what is now Turkey, through the Middle East and eastward into northern India, having conquered much of the Byzantine Christian and the Persian empires. The old Umayyad capital was moved from Damascus to the specially built the city of Baghdad, which became renown as centre of outstanding cultural, scientific, industrial, and literary excellence. The arts, sciences, and philosophy flourished under the Abbasids who saw that the old Greek scientific, mathematical, and philosophical treatises, the works of Aristotle, Euclides, etc, were translated into Arabic and became part and parcel on that culture and the foundation for some f the greatest mathematicians, physicians, astronomers, and other scientists of the pre-modern era, such as Avicenna, Averroes, and many others. These latter later influenced the Christian Europeans who adopted the work of the Arabic scientists and philosophers. Contact with the Muslims in Spain and with the Islámic civilizations of the Holy Land during the Crusades helped lift Europe into the Renaissance and the beginnings of modern European civilization. Earlier in this paper, I made reference to the Golden Age of Islám and would encourage the reader to learn about the numerous positive contributions Islám made to western civilization. These cannot be underestimated.

However, during all this a serious flaw marred this civilization. The lack of an authoritative successor, specially of an authoritative interpreter of the Qur'ān and of the Teachings of Muhammad in general, there arose two main sects of Islám, namely the partisans of Ali, who came to be called the "Shi'ah's" and those who

favoured the traditional Arab style of deciding leadership, the "Sunnis." Also, there were numerous other sects and divisions, even in these two major branches. What is today's Iran, parts of Iraq and a few other areas became Shi'ah strongholds, whereas the rest of the Islámic empire became dominantly Sunni as we see today. The Shi'ah community lost the last of the successors, called Imam, in the 12-th century. His historical fate is not know, but, according to Shi'ah thinking, he went into some form of hiding, some sort of mystical state perhaps, and is thus called the "Hidden Imam." The return of this Hidden Imam is a reference to the Manifestation of the Bab and of Baha'u'llah. For more information about this subject, I refer you to Momen' excellent book on Shi'ah Islám [14].

The point is, that interpretations of the Qur'ān and the teachings could be made by almost anyone with the right credentials and charisma. As time moved on, the number of differing schools of thought increased, often with violent conflict between the member of these schools. There were calls for returning to the original "pure" version of Islám. The scholar, ibn Taymiyyah, 1263-1328 C.E. [v], had enormous influence on all those interested in this idea. I mention him specifically since many Islámic fundamentalists in recent times base their ideologies upon his ideas.

Fundamentalists in every group seem to have in common a desire to return to the original state of their religion that they perceive to be the one and only "pure" example of how things are supposed to be. We notice this phenomenon of fundamentalism in all religions, Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, as well as Islám. Fundamentalists are not necessarily violent, destructive groups or people. Indeed, they can be quite sincere, devoted and gentle people, merely anxious to practice their faith in the manner in which they think the Founders intended.

Unfortunately, there are fundamentalists who go one step further: they consider it their sacred duty to insure that their beliefs prevail and they interpret the writings of the faith in such a way that any means to achieve their goals are justified. Such means included the killing of non-believers, acts of violence they think will advance their cause, and other such extreme activities.

So it is with Islámic extremists: they sincerely believe they are entirely justified in

carrying out the horrific acts of violence the world has witnessed over the last few decades. They get their ideologies from charismatic individuals who interpret the Qur'ān and the teachings of Muhammad in general as they wish and, where the teachings are not explicit, fill in the gaps with their own teachings. I will spare the reader from all the details in this matter. There is much written about Islámic extremist groups. Our interest is not so much with specific groups, but rather with the finding approaches to dealing with extremists and showing that there are other ways they may interpret the Qur'ān that will lead to an eventual laying down of arms and a return to peaceful, progressive behaviour. I deal with this subject in detail in another paper [5].

After around 1200 C.E., specially after the Mongol sack of Baghdad in 1258 C.E., the empire (already quite fragmented) declined further with the creation of a number of Islámic groups, and the eventual creation of the powerful Ottoman empire, which itself deteriorated, being overthrown by the Young Turks in the early 20-th century. In the 18-th, 19-th, and early 20-th centuries, the European colonialist powers divided up the African Near and Middle Eastern regions among themselves, creating the Middle East as we now know it and imposing upon its peoples western ideas about democracy, societal norms and behaviours and so on. From the colonies emerged westernized states, many with overbearing and brutal leaders. This resulted in high levels of resentment on the part of the Muslim populations in habiting those regions, specially the poorer and less well-educated classes. The intellectuals and members of the educated classes often led schizoid existences: tempted by the western values and material advantages but appalled at what had happened to their own society, some were able to integrate the western ideas into their lives while maintaining a healthy attitude towards their backgrounds. Others, however, although highly educated in the west and from well-to-do families, remained ill at ease and not able really to accept western values. The latter are the ones who tend to be attracted to the charisma of extremist leaders. It is for this reason, for example, that the young men responsible for the horrible air attack on buildings in a major city in the United States all were highly educated and intelligent professionals from middle and upper class families.

The point I wish to make in this section is that for an ideal society in the 21-st

century, the theme of this conference, we must find ways to reconcile the great religions of the world, in particular, Islám. Today, the Islámic world is in dangerous turmoil and we cannot predict what might happen there in the near future. There simply are too many factors. Certainly one of the main disruptive factors is Islámic extremism and I personally feel that it is urgent we, as a society as a whole, learn how effectively to deal with it. Therefore, the next section, while in it I outline the major points made in the Kitab-i Iqan for the reconciliation of religion, as a first application I have in mind Islám and how the extremist ideologies may be answered. It is my hope that soon we shall find constructive ways to stop the shedding of blood. As a Japanese friend and colleague of mine, Professor Takao Fukuchi, once said, *"The killing must stop* [6].*"*

It is my sincere hope that in the not-too-distant future, representatives of the various extremists groups will agree to meet around a table of consultation to work out more means to cease the violence and killing and to establish binding peace agreements and adopt peaceful, cooperative, and progressive programs for their followers. It is my fear that, if this be not done, then there would remain naught but brutal military solutions the implementations of which would create horrible and long-lasting suffering.

3. The Kitáb-i-Íqán – Towards a Methodology of Reconciliation

To summarize the nature of the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, I can do no better than to continue with extracts from the passage from Shoghi Effendi cited at the beginning of this paper [4]. I have slightly reformatted the quotes and italicized certain portions for purposes of this paper:

Within a compass of two hundred pages it
1- proclaims unequivocally the existence and oneness of a personal God, unknowable, inaccessible, the source of all Revelation, eternal, omniscient, omnipresent and almighty;
2- asserts the relativity of religious truth and the continuity of Divine Revelation;

3- affirms the unity of the Prophets, the universality of their Message, the identity of their fundamental teachings, the sanctity of their scriptures, and the twofold character of their stations;

4- denounces the blindness and perversity of the divines and doctors of every age;

5- cites and elucidates the allegorical passages of the New Testament, the abstruse verses of the Qur'án, and the cryptic Muḥammadan traditions which have bred those age-long misunderstandings, doubts and animosities that have sundered and kept apart the followers of the world's leading religious systems;

6- enumerates the essential prerequisites for the attainment by every true seeker of the object of his quest;

7- prophesies the world-wide triumph of the Revelation promised to the people of the Bayán; upholds the purity and innocence of the Virgin Mary;

8- glorifies the Imáms of the Faith of Muḥammad;

9- celebrates the martyrdom, and lauds the spiritual sovereignty, of the Imám Ḥusayn;

10- unfolds the meaning of such symbolic terms as "Return," "Resurrection," "Seal of the Prophets" and "Day of Judgment";

11- adumbrates and distinguishes between the three stages of Divine Revelation; and

12- expatiates, in glowing terms, upon the glories and wonders of the "City of God," renewed, at fixed intervals, by the dispensation of Providence, for the guidance, the benefit and salvation of all mankind.

Well may it be claimed that of all the books revealed by the Author of the Bahá'í Revelation, *this Book alone*, by sweeping away the age-long barriers that have so insurmountably separated the great religions of the world, *has laid down a broad and unassailable*

foundation for the complete and permanent reconciliation of their followers. (Italics and numbering the author's).

For completeness, I kept in this list, all the points made by Shoghi Effendi. However, for present purposes, I wish to emphasize issues relating specifically to points 2 -5 and 10. To cover all these pints would entail a detailed and deep study of the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*.

Briefly, in this Book, Baha'u'llah points out the main causes of religious dissension, namely the mindless adhering to traditions, the insistence on literal interpretations of the verses of the Holy Books, the failure to recognize the progressive nature of religion, the corruption and greed of the priests, among others. In addition He stresses the need for the true seeker of truth to be pure and detached in his search and warns of the danger of the emotions of love and hate. He also insists that the true seeker must accept the truth when he encounters it and, having accepted it, not question it further. Moreover he warns us that if we say we believe, we must be ready to be tested in our beliefs.

We see then an outline of a methodology for reconciliation. We must forget the interpretations of the priests and we must look for metaphorical interpretations of the Holy Scriptures of the religions we are examining. In this book, Baha'u'llah applies this methodology to passages from the Bible, the Qur'ān, and to statements of some of the Shi'ah imams. It is not possible for me to work out an example in this paper, but I invite the reader to look at the Book himself, for example, at the passages wherein Baha'u'llah talks about the return of Christ or the passages wherein He explains the symbolism of terms like the "sky," the "moon," or the "sun." We have to show that the fundamental principles taught by all the great religions, all the great Prophets, are essentially the same and that while such things as the laws revealed by them may differ as functions of the requirements of the age, yet the essence of these religions is the same.

A major difficulty in applying this methodology, is the lack of authentic writings of the Founders, except in the case of Islám. The Qur'ān is, outside of the Baha'i writings, the most authenticate holy book of the past. We simply cannot state clearly what the exact teachings of the earlier Prophets were given that they apparently were

not written down at the time of revelation but only recorded later by their followers. Therefore, we must seek to discover as much as we can what the earlier Prophets said or may have said, judging from the behaviours of their followers. Clearly, in the future, scholars and men of religion must meet and with open minds examine these issues and, with the example given by Baha'u'llah seek out the truth and accept the teachings of others and no longer oppose other beliefs. In my opinion, while this sounds like a formidable task, in fact it may be easier than it appears. We already notice many common points between, say, basic Christian beliefs and Buddhist ones, and between those and Baha'i beliefs.

The case of Islámic extremists poses its unique challenges, but the basic principles outlined above still apply. In this case, we must take care to retrace the origins of the extremist ideologies to interpretations made over the years by various priests and scholars.   In many cases, this means starting with the scholar ibn Taymiyyah to whom reference was made earlier and whose ideas were seminal in the development of Islámic fundamentalism (which, as I have mentioned earlier, is not necessarily the same as extremism). I can give examples of this, but they are tedious. The important points to retain here are that, in examining the process by which extremist ideologies developed, the continued accretion to the teachings of Islám of the opinions and theories of certain charismatic individuals, some motivated by genuine concern for their faith, others for political of other reasons, we can, step by step, retrace the development of an extremist ideology, showing how it may have evolved differently and in a peaceful, constructive way. For those who may understand the language, and forgive me for using a technical concept from my technical field of work, for a given ideology, we retrace the decision tree corresponding to its evolution, re-examining each decision node carefully to show that that the decisions taken at that node may have been very different, leading to a new branch of the tree with different implications for the future.

4. Conclusion

I hope the reader will forgive me for the lengthy preparatory part of this article. In my haste to make the main points in this article, I have deliberately omitted a great

deal, in particular any mention of Islámic law,the *shari'ah* [8], which today is becoming of great importance in western countries as Muslim immigrants attempt to allow it to be accepted instead of the law of the land. With a glance at the references cited, however, the interested reader may readily fill in the major gaps - indeed, it is vitally important that we all understand more deeply the Muslim world and appreciate the genuine religious concerns of its inhabitants. For a better understanding of the situation in the world of today, I would guide the reader to references 3, 15 – 20, and to the Web sites given after the Bibliography. Having said this, it was important to give enough background information fully to appreciate the simplicity and elegance of the methodology used by Baha'u'llah in the Kitáb-i-Íqán. We notice that while "simple," the methodology is far reaching in its implications and not necessarily that easy to apply in concrete cases. But, it serves as a clear guide to solving one of the burning problems of our age, namely that of the highly divisive and toxic religious views that have spawned hatred and division amidst the sons of man and led to acts of unspeakable horror. In my opinion, this is one of the major tasks we face if we truly wish to have an "ideal" society. As my colleague, Professor Fukuchi said, "the killing must stop." If I have convinced the reader of the urgency of the twin issues of the reconciliation of religion in general and a deeper understanding of Islám and state of the Islámic world, then I shall be greatly   gratified.

Notes

n1 - We must note some terminological niceties: the word *Islámic* is generally used in reference to a nation that has adopted *Islám* as its religion whereas *muslim* (sometimes written *moslem*) refers to a person professing the faith of *Islám*. This convention is not universally adaopted, but it is, in my opinion, the most respectful.

n2 - Marzieh Gail (1908 – 1993) was an early American Baha'i woman scholar, sometmes known as the "patron saint of Baha'i women scholars," who translated a number of the Writings from their original Persian and Arabic into English. Please note her biography on the "Bahaikipedia" site at *bahaikipedia.org/**Marzieh_Gail*** and her obituary on the online Baha'i Library site, at http://bahai-library.com/?file=chen_marzieh_gail_obituary. Her *Six Lessons on Islám* [ ] mentioned in this article is an excellent introduction to Islám.

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17. Silva, Daniel, *The Secret Servant*, Signet, New York, 2007.

18. Taherzadeh, Adib, *The Covenant of Bahā'u'llāh*, George Ronald Press, 1992, pp. 157-158.

19. Universal House of Justice, *Ridvan Message 2008*, Baha'i World Centre, Haifa.

20. Yusuf 'Ali 'Abdullāh, *The Holy Qur'ān – Text, Translation and Commentary*, McGregor & Werner, Inc, U.S.A., 1946.

Web-Based Notes and References (links valid as of 2009-07-24.)

i. *Golden Age of Islám*: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islámic_Golden_Age. Note: The author must note that some feel that it is to view that period in history through rose-tinted glasses. While there were great achievements made in that time frame, 7th to 13th centuries C.E, it was also a period in which there were violent conflicts and unrest. Also, while some feel that the Mongol invasions brought an end to the flowering if Islámic scientific and intellectual activities, we now know that this is not true and that there were pockets within the Islámic world where such activities continued to develop and flourish but remained, unfortunately, virtually unknown in the Western world.

ii. *Islámic Terrorism*: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islámist_terrorism (version dated 2009.05.24) Note: It is with a certain reluctance that the author includes this document in the references for this paper. However, in spite of its problematical title, the document gives much useful information relevant to the theme of this paper. But he apologizes in advance to those who may find the title offensive: clearly it is a reference to those groups in the Islámic world who are resorting to violent tactics for their respective causes, and not to the generality of Muslims who do not associate themselves with such.

iii. *Peace Watch, Causes of Islámic Extremism*, United States Institute of Peace, http:www.usip.org/peacewatch/2002/6/extremism.html. June 2002. Note: Again, this reference is included with the same reservations as in (ii) above.

iv. *Aspects of Religion*: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Practices_of_the_Religion, (no date). Note: this page is redirected from "Aspects of Religion," and gives for Twelver Shî'i Islám a convenient summary of ten Practices of the Religion (Furū al-Dīn)   or practices that every believer must perform.

v. *Ibn Taymiyyah*: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ibn_Taymiya. Note: this is an overview of ibn Taymiyyah among several available on the Web.

vi. *Innovation* or *bid'ah* is a reference to innovation in religion and is a major bone of convention between conservative or fundamentalist Muslims and the progressive practitioners of the faith.

vii. *Abd-al-Wahhāb*: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muhammad_ibn_Abd-al-Wahhab. Note: this is an excellent overview of Abd-al-Wahhāb.

viii. *Wahhābism*: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wahhabi. Note: An excellent adjunct to the preceding reference.

ix. *Wahhabism and Wahhabi Islám: How Wahhabi Islám Differs from Sunni, Shia Islám*: http://atheism.about.com/od/Islámicsects/a/wahhabi.htm. Note: Another reasonably objective overview of *Wahhābism*.

x. *Islám*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islám. This is a nice overview of Islám for the interested reader.