

the diamond hidden within the boxes in the house?" They agreed it would hit the desert, not the diamond. He said: "I am the desert, with open soul: you are imprisoned with your own ideas in your boxes and veils."

In the Seven Valleys, there is the Valley of Knowledge. The "knowledge" here is the knowledge of God; this word can be misleading...in Persian it is "ma'arifat": understanding, recognition, knowledge. This Valley is so penetrating; with this knowledge the traveler sees "the end in the beginning", and finds in everything a wisdom. He "seeth war as peace, and findeth in death the secrets of everlasting life. With inward and outward eyes he witnesseth the mysteries of resurrection in the realms of creation and the souls of men, and with a pure heart apprehendeth the divine wisdom in the endless Manifestations of God. In the ocean he findeth a drop, in a drop he beholdeth the secrets of the sea." This is quite different from conventional knowledge.

A metaphor: a scholar is like a gardener. The gardener studies gardening & plants, works on the garden, etc. When the flowers grow, there are two types of gardeners: one attuned to nature, who feels the pleasure, and thanks God for the ability to raise it. The other type ignores the energy from the sun and soil, the capacity given to the seed, and feels that it all comes from his own productivity. One of the gardeners is selfish, the other selfless. In a Universal House of Justice letter on scholarship, we read that the emergence of the Bahá'í cause from obscurity and increasing attention of the public demands that we put an emphasis on Bahá'í scholarship, so we can deliver the Message clearly. ("The Universal House of Justice ... regards Bahá'í scholarship as of great potential importance for the development and consolidation of the Bahá'í community as it emerges from obscurity....", from a letter dated 3 January 1979 to participants in an academic seminar.) Teaching is linked to community development and plays an important role in consolidation.

We need to deepen on the Covenant, as it gives insight and inspiration as well as protection. The Tablets of the Divine Plan challenge the North American Bahá'ís to become apostles of Bahá'u'lláh, which requires not only determination, but also knowledge, patience, and humility. Don't discount covenant in examining scholarship.

A word of caution: The Bahá'í Faith is not against scholarship or scholars. The writings shower them with praise. What is scholarship? We don't want enemies of the faith to say we are anti-intellectual.

Definition of Materialistic scholarship: knowledge becomes a way, a liability. The individual seeks entitlement: a means for a name and fame. When that is challenged, the person becomes frustrated. The personality profile becomes self-satisfaction, and the ego very active; it dominates the person and humility, submission etc. are lost. `Abdu'l-Bahá speaks of the dual nature of

human beings. The higher nature effects high-quality behavior + characteristics. The lower nature is jealousy + selfishness. Some individuals may let the lower nature take over; materialistic scholars are power-oriented and have a dislike of authority, with liberty of thought. They think that they are indispensable, and merit special status, class, deserve special privileges. They emphasize personal freedom and don't believe in collective consciousness.

What should be our approach?

First is the knowledge of God, putting emphasis on the Bahá'í Faith and Bahá'u'lláh. Everything else comes next.

A deep knowledge of the Faith, and a strong desire to share it. Willingness to relate teachings to present-day concerns; make it relevant to today's ailments.

Should be quite aware of the Covenant. The International Teaching Centre warned the community that a scholar should not be in a special class with special privileges.

The purpose of education is to help the scholar to become a better servant, which is the highest expression of personality.

Universal House of Justice states there is no objection to expressing spiritual truth or logical ways or using the scientific method. We must avoid distortion of religious truth to conform to perceptions of society.

The impact of intuition and inspiration vs. intellectual knowledge. Mulla Husayn and Quddus had entirely different approaches. Mulla Husayn invited to the Bab's home, and started to question Bab's station. He took hours to be convinced. Do you see the signs of Islam in me? Mulla Husayn had nothing to say. Quddus came to Shiraz...didn't know where Qa'im was, but walking in the street saw Mulla Husayn, and said you are different. Mulla Husayn told him he was tired and should go and wash up. But Quddus responded: "No, you didn't answer! What has happened to you?" Once again Mulla Husayn told him he was tired. Quddus then saw a majestic figure, and asked Mulla Husayn "Who is that?" Mulla Husayn said, "I can't tell you about people in the street." Quddus knew it was the Qa'im. Mulla Husayn went to the Bab and told him what happened, and asked him what to do. The Bab said he called Quddus in the world of dreams, and when Quddus came to the presence of the Bab he was joyous. Mulla Husayn later said if the mosques taught me to recognize the Bab that way, I should burn them down, because my friend recognized him with no argument.

2. The New Role of Scholars in Bahá'í Society by John Hatcher

1. The Concept of the Divine

The first thing to notice is that a Bahá'í scholar's "Bahá'íness" is never separate from them. Essential to the Bahá'í scholar is the concept of the "Divine". Nothing you can discuss or study in the physical world can be separated from the Divine; the physical world is an outer expression of the spiritual world. Example: when you drop an object to the floor, if you don't

understand gravity you can make up strange explanations for its behavior. It is no less specious when our scholars attribute development of the Faith to the "ripeness of the time".

Example from a Bahá'í scholar's book:

The Bab's abilities and acquaintance with general knowledge of his time. His knowledge of tafsir was not as Sufi as one would expect. At the same time He began to realize His divine mission. If Mulla Husayn had not met him his course would have been very different. His interpretation of events were forced into the definition of the Shaykhi prophecies. [quotation from Resurrection and Renewal by Abbas Amanat]

This is not heresy; it is bad scholarship, because it cannot accept that an unseen force may have been operating. Why does he not state this? Because he would be laughed at!

Quote from Universal House of Justice compilation on scholarship:

The principal concern of the House of Justice is over a methodological bias and discordant tone which seem to inform the work of certain of the authors. The impression given is that, in attempting to achieve what they understand to be academic objectivity, they have inadvertently cast the Faith into a mould which is essentially foreign to its nature, taking no account of the spiritual forces which Bahá'ís see as its foundation. Presumably the justification offered for this approach would be that most scholars of comparative religion are essentially concerned with discernable phenomena, observable events and practical affairs and are used to treating their subject from a western, if not a Christian, viewpoint. This approach, although understandable, is quite impossible for a Bahá'í, for it ignores the fact that our world-view includes the spiritual dimension as an indispensable component for consistency and coherence, and it does not beseem a Bahá'í to write ... about his Faith as if he looked upon it from the norm of humanism or materialism.

In other words, we are presented in such articles with the spectacle of Bahá'ís trying to write as if they were non-Bahá'ís.

How do you explain the origin of the Bahá'í faith without getting into the God stuff?

To describe history without describing the forces behind it is like describing a falling object without describing gravity.

Note that it is not that _scholarship_ is evil and bad...scholarship is learning, and learning is good.

This first section was on the pervasive nature of the Divine. A Bahá'í would do well to talk about this not because it's a polemic, but because it's true.

Bahá'u'lláh, in the Lawh-i-Hikmat mentions that all of the thinkers of the

past

presume that progress derives from singular great individuals. On page 144: "The sages aforesaid acquired their knowledge from the Prophets, inasmuch as the latter were the Exponents of divine philosophy and the Revealers of heavenly mysteries." Would you assert this in a history of philosophy?

Page 146: "Verily, the philosophers have not denied the Ancient of Days."

Page 147: "Plato...acknowledged his belief in God and in His signs which pervade all that hath been and shall be.... These men who stand out as leaders of the people and are pre-eminent among them, one and all acknowledged their belief in the immortal Being Who holdeth in His grasp the reins of all sciences.... Balinus...surpassed everyone else in the diffusion of arts and sciences and soared unto the loftiest heights of humility and supplication. Give ear unto that which he hath said, entreating the All-Possessing, the Most Exalted: `I stand in the presence of my Lord, extolling His gifts and bounties and praising Him with that wherewith He praiseth His Own Self, that I may become a source of blessing and guidance unto such men as acknowledge my words.' And further he saith: `O Lord! Thou art God and no God is there but Thee."

Page 151: Bahá'u'lláh says a true philosophers would never deny God: "We are quit of those ignorant ones who fondly imagine that Wisdom is to give vent to one's idle imaginings and to repudiate God, the Lord of all men."

2. The Concept of Authority

In the Bahá'í Faith the concept of infallibility says there are two types: essential + conferred.

The Manifestations of God have the essential one from birth. They are pre-existent, knowledgeable of all. Note, however, that infallible does not equal authoritative. `Abdu'l-Bahá says infallible means "without error".

Conferred infallibility does not mean it is less so. You can't be less infallible! So if we attribute ideas to Shoghi Effendi because of environment, Oxford, the Middle East, forget it. And `Abdu'l-Bahá wrote well about evolution etc.; how did He know this? `Abdu'l-Bahá's answer: "I know what I need to know." The Hands of the Cause have recounted stories of the Guardian saying what it felt like to experience infallibility. Leroy Ioas said the Guardian would get facts about a situation and then get a feeling "which no power on earth can shake."

How do we accept infallibility of an institution like the Universal House of Justice elected by a fallible populace? How do you deduce the infallibility of the Universal House of Justice? Answer: you don't, because it is an unseen force that works that way. It is "infused with divine assistance"; that's what makes it infallible.

Quoting an e-mail letter by a Bahá'í scholar dated 3 May 1996:
I therefore hereby declare and state that I am not any longer a Bahá'í,

that I do not believe that the Bahá'í administration in its current form is divinely inspired or guided. And since I accept, as well, that Bahá'u'lláh did create these institutions and gave us to understand that they would in fact receive divine guidance, I renounce belief in him as the Manifestation of God for this day.

The individual has wonderful credentials...what's the problem in this reasoning? Answer: it is illogical, because if you accept Bahá'u'lláh, then "He doeth what He willeth" and His promise is: "I will perplex you". If you judge the infallibility of an institution by its decisions, this is backwards. It presumes that the individual is infallible and can make such a judgment!

The logic should go like this: first establish Bahá'u'lláh is who He says He is; after that you do not question `Abdu'l-Bahá's infallibility. Without the links of the Covenant it all comes crashing down.

Please note that we are not to worship mysteries; we should try to unravel them and try to understand them.

Faith is a process of investigation to corroborate Bahá'u'lláh's claim. We can test it: "when I read the Writings, am I changed?" Look for confirmation of this; it is an unending process.

Think of an arch in an old European building: if you remove one stone from the arch it comes crashing down. The Covenant is like that. Nevertheless, things come up, e.g. Women on the House of Justice, and we don't know the answer. This is Faith of a more traditional sort; we know there is an explanation, because `Abdu'l-Bahá told us so.

The mistake of the scholar's letter is that he no longer has sufficient faith. Note, however, that none of us is without the possibility of losing that faith, and it is gut-wrenching. A story: on pilgrimage in 1972, one thing Dr. Hatcher couldn't understand was how could someone be a Covenant-Breaker. On the third day, the group went to Bahjí, and seeing Bahá'u'lláh's bed, he thought, "What a small man!". His faith was tested by Bahá'u'lláh's being a small man. He could accept Bahá'u'lláh's word, but how much more difficult must it have been for those of His children who broke the Covenant if He was your father. He ran out of the room and into the hall, but at that moment, a pioneer from Transvaal appeared, one from Norway, a worker at the World Centre came out, and then he realized they had only come to serve and be close to Bahá'u'lláh; there was no external influence in 100 years to accomplish this. It had spread all over the world with no ulterior motive, with nothing to gain. That feeling of lost faith was short, but horrible; he thought to himself, "So that's what it's like." It evoked Milton, in Paradise Lost, where Satan says, in effect: "I know I would be happy back in heaven, but I'm not going to do it; I'll destroy

Eden." Goethe said cynicism is the only sin.

Bahá'u'lláh states two contradictory things. If people are saying things against the Faith and you don't know what to do, He says: "If any man were to arise to defend, in his writings, the Cause of God against its assailants, such a man, however inconsiderable his share, shall be so honored in the world to come that the Concourse on high would envy his glory." (Gleanings CLIV). But on the other hand, He says, "Time and again have We admonished Our beloved ones to avoid, nay to flee from, anything whatsoever from which the odor of mischief can be detected." (Gleanings XLIII). There are two kinds of questions a child may ask: "Where did I come from?", and "Do I have to go to bed now?". The second one is rhetorical; we should flee from the odor of mischief. The role of a scholar is that of a servant to servants, which is the highest position one can achieve. Scholarship is not only valuable; it is essential, as long as a scholar doesn't try to think for us or be like a cadre of divines.

3. Note and questions

Concluding Note from Barbara Markert:

There is a parallel of material wealth and intelligence. It is easy to be seduced, and think you are better. The same is true of physical beauty and strength. It is fine to enjoy beauty, fitness, and intelligence, but it should all be to serve the Faith. The pursuit of scholarship should be with a pure heart. That's when we can be useful scholars. It's easy to be led astray, so constant vigilance required.

We must look for the odor of mischief, and pray for protection. Parents must raise their children with this knowledge. `Abdu'l-Bahá says it is incumbent upon Bahá'í children to surpass other children because they have been cradled in the grace of God. ("Thou didst ask as to the education of children. Those children who, sheltered by the Blessed Tree, have set foot upon the world, those who are cradled in the Faith and are nurtured at the breast of grace -- such must from the beginning receive spiritual training directly from their mothers.") Bahá'í people should be known all over the world, and acquire sciences and arts. We need to be balanced spiritually, mentally, and physically. We are powerless; the power comes from God.

Patti Tomarelli: What about schools, reform, etc. What do we do?

Hatcher: There is no good answer. I home school my kids. School should reinforce what is taught at home; his parents could make assumptions that society is trying to reinforce those values. The reason the Bahá'í child must learn faster is because we know the framework. How to protect children against society when society should reinforce good morals? Answer: we must build our own society. This is the heart of 4-yr plan...don't wait for the need before building up our institutions...build them now. There is no solution in present-day society; we must create it.

Ghadirian: I agree, there is no easy solution. We are in a special period of

transition, and there is a wisdom in it. Children in this environment raised strong will be strong later. Institutes are working all over the world; example: Mexico has a long waiting list of people to participate in institute.

Markert: some Bahá'í schools are having Bahá'í youth academies...there are high standards of learning. This is the chance to deepen in the fundamental verities of the Faith.

Diane Brandon: question about the e-mail lists Talisman and Talisman2. Is anyone monitoring this?

Ghadirian: the whole Talisman process was monitored closely...if there is anything that needs to be said concerning the community, we'll let you know.

Patricia Harmsen: about hermeneutics; what are the parameters of knowledge of faith? What are the boundaries?

Hatcher: I'm not sure what you mean.

Harmsen: There are inaccurate interpretations made, sounding authoritative.

Hatcher: there is a distinction between studying writings which you are obliged to do. Bahá'u'lláh says:

O My servants! My holy, My divinely ordained Revelation may be likened unto an ocean in whose depths are concealed innumerable pearls of great price, of surpassing luster. It is the duty of every seeker to bestir himself and strive to attain the shores of this ocean, so that he may, in proportion to the eagerness of his search and the efforts he hath exerted, partake of such benefits as have been pre-ordained in God's irrevocable and hidden Tablets. (Gleanings CLIII)

Don't be afraid of interpretations or reading others. There are only two authoritative ones: `Abdu'l-Bahá + Guardian. Does this answer your question?

Harmsen: What about the individual rights + freedoms letter?

Hatcher: What line of reasoning are you afraid of? Your own writings or those of others? The Íqan says every verse has 70+1 meanings; this necessarily means there is no single interpretation. Scholarship is not the enemy; BAD scholarship is: ad hominem attacks, no recognition of the Divine, presumes to be authoritative. It is a law of the Faith not to read the writings of Covenant-breakers. To non-Bahá'ís this seems constricting. A scholar might say, "What could they know that I don't?", and approach their writings, to find out that yes, they are mindless. This explained the actions of Mirza Muhammad-`Ali: it is the act of disobedience which crosses the line. Then you are exposed to the disease of cynicism. Scholarship is not the enemy, and interpretation is not the enemy. If someone is trying to deliberately undermine the Faith, that's different. But in just analyzing a passage, join in! Don't be afraid. The Covenant provides logical links between Bahá'u'lláh and what you've discovered.

Charles Cooper: about Dr. Hatcher's presentation, I observed a dichotomous framework for faith. Is there a concept of God or faith that is not?

Hatcher: it is not really a dichotomy; they are two aspects of the same thing.

There is the logical foundation of belief, and leap of faith. If you accept `Abdu'l-Bahá is the Perfect Exemplar because Bahá'u'lláh said so, you did investigate the truth of it. If you investigate this issue later, it is confirmed.

Cooper: but different cultures have different systems of logic. The dichotomous one thinks everything is black/white, hot/cold etc. Perhaps this Western dichotomous mindset prevents people from accepting the Faith?

Hatcher: when I became a Bahá'í there was a distinction: were you a "heart Bahá'í" or "head Bahá'í"? How did you come to join the Faith? Well, it doesn't

matter how you got here. Some people will never need to analyze it; they had a dream or vision. The Dawn-Breakers didn't have the Sacred Writings to go on.

Eugene Andrews: I wanted to point out that Bahá'u'lláh said that the essence of Faith is "fewness of words and abundance of deeds".

Arash Abizadeh: about Dr. Hatcher's concept of the Divine in explanations of history. What role does it play? Example: for me, the Martyrdom of the Bab, since childhood, has had great meaning, because it meant the Bab could not be stopped. This is a different way of looking from asking natural scientist to explain what happened.

Hatcher: such a scientist would be forced to answer what caused the violation of law of probability to make 750 bullets cut the ropes, and not the people. The most plausible answer is that it was a force: a spiritual force.

Abizadeh: so a non-theological social history is not possible?

Hatcher: No, it's possible, but it's not complete. Newton asked about movement of the apple from the tree. Amanat's work is useful for its listing of events, but when he delves into explaining why it happened and he ignores the Bab's own explanation, he is limiting himself.

How do we avoid being mindlessly theological? Bahá'u'lláh says here's what happens in the Iqan: the people rejected Hud. Why? Because of the divines, who didn't understand poetic language. Bahá'u'lláh then gives 100 pages of explanation of how to interpret. Dr. Hatcher's brother's synthesizing of pure math and faith is so wonderful, because it proves the presence of the Divine Force. You don't have to be mindless; Bahá'u'lláh gave you the basis of knowledge. You don't need to justify the Faith.

METADATA

Views13461 views since posted 1997; last edit 2012;

previous at archive.org.../scholarship_authority_reflections;

URLs changed in 2010, see archive.org.../bahai-library.org

Language

English

Permission

author

Share

Shortlink: bahai-library.com/362

Citation: ris/362

select Collection:

Archives

Articles

Articles-unpublished

Audio

Bibliographies

BIC

Biographies

Books

Chronologies

Compilations

Compilations-NSA

Compilations-personal

Documents

East-asia

Encyclopedia

Essays

Etc

Excerpts

Fiction

Glossaries

Guardian

Histories

Introductory

Letters

Maps

Music

Newspapers

NSA-documents

NSA-letters

Personal

Pilgrims

Poetry

Presentations

Resources

Reviews

Scripts

Software

Statistics

Study

Talks

Theses

Transcripts

Translations

[UHJ-documents](#)

[UHJ-letters](#)

[Video](#)

[Visual](#)

[Writings](#)

[home](#)

[sitemap](#)

[series](#)

[chronology](#)

[search:](#)

[author](#)

[title](#)

[date](#)

[tags](#)

[adv. search](#)

[languages](#)

[inventory](#)

[bibliography](#)

[abbreviations](#)

[links](#)

[about](#)

[contact](#)

[RSS](#)

[new](#)

— Role of the Scholar: Scholarship and the Covenant (Used by permission of the curator)