

never conceive, and how can the mind be forced to believe a thing which it cannot conceive?" (Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p.115)

In general terms, I would, therefore, define Bahá'í apologetics as the application of reason to explicate and, thereby, teach the Bahá'í Writings

in such a way as to reveal their rational foundations and character, to show that faith in Bahá'u'lláh's revelation is a reasonable response to the problems of the contemporary world, and to defend the Bahá'í Faith against attacks on its principles, teachings and practices.

In other words, the first task of a apologetics is the rational demonstration of the reasonability of the truths God has revealed through Bahá'u'lláh, i.e. to show to the greatest degree possible the rational basis for belief in Bahá'u'lláh's dispensation and that commitment to Bahá'u'lláh's Dispensation is a rational and adequate choice in the 21st Century.

3.1) A rational apologetics does not do away with faith or with the need for personal, existential choices and commitment. Rather, it prepares the intellectual ground from which faith and other personal ways of knowing can grow and flourish. It puts our spiritual life on a rational basis without limiting it to the powers of human reason.

3.1) In this regard the first goal of apologetics is faith i.e. to clear away undue intellectual obstacles to faith and prepare people for the existential moment at which they may choose to receive or submit themselves to the spirit of faith.

3.2) However, as Abdu'l-Bahá writes: "First we must speak of the logical proofs, afterward the spiritual proofs." (Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p.197).

3.3) Apologetics must show that faith is not blind belief but is the culmination of the full exercise of humankind's essential nature as "the rational soul". (Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p.15, which identifies the rational soul and the "human reality.")

The second task of a rational apologetics is protection, i.e. to protect the Faith by ensuring that its history, practices, organization, teachings, goals and modus operandi are understood and portrayed accurately and reasonably and do not become the victims of foes and factions.

4.1) In this regard, the second goal of apologetics is justice, i.e. accuracy and fairness in presentation and assessment of the Faith in the contemporary world.

4.1.2) This function is best carried out by (a) assessing whether or not the information used is factually correct and complete; (b) examining and, if

necessary, challenging, the validity of implicit assumptions and underlying Weltanschauungen; (c) revealing biases and hidden agendas in the misuse of language, imagery and propaganda and rhetorical devices; (d) examining the methodologies of gathering, assessing and evaluating data and (e) examining the logical validity of arguments made.

The third task of a rational apologetics is relevance, i.e., apologetics must use Bahá'u'lláh's revelation (a) to provide rational and positive answers to the great questions that have always haunted human beings and (b) to explicate the Writings anew as humankind makes advances in various fields. Apologetics must ever devise new ways of explicating the truths revealed by Bahá'u'lláh.

5.1) In this regard the task of a rational apologetics is pedagogical, i.e. effective teaching. The Bahá'í Faith must be shown to have personal and social relevance to times in which we live

5.2) Individuals have always asked certain question for which humans need answers to live up to their best potential: the problem of evil; the origin of the universe; the nature of reality; God' our human nature and identity; survival after death; fate and destiny; miracles; guilt, sin and expiation; the self and other and so on.

5.3) Societies have always had to wrestle with certain questions necessary to peace, order and good government: the balance of powers between individuals and society; the nature of social good; the purpose of government; the legitimacy of rule; the nature and limits of national sovereignty and so on.

An effective apologetics must build on rationality because the laws of reason are what God has chosen to reveal throughout creation as well as in the rational soul which is the essence of man. These laws are also universally followed in the practice of daily life even if they are not always accepted at the verbalized theoretical level. Thus, rationality forms the broadest possible base on which to build a Bahá'í apologetics.

6.1) While there are, undoubtedly, other ways to approach apologetics, we must remember that truth is one. (See Paris Talks, 121, 128, 129; Promulgation of Universal Peace, 63, 454; Abdu'l-Bahá in London, 62, 67,92)

6.2) Therefore, all approaches to Bahá'í apologetics will be united insofar as they must demonstrate the truth and acceptability of the same divinely revealed Teachings and authoritative interpretations.

6.2.1) In other words, all approaches to apologetics are different paths up the same mountain and are, therefore, ultimately reconcilable with each other as complementary and compatible in a rational way. Because truth is one, there can be, ultimately, no conflict between different approaches to apologetics.

6.3) We must not be misled by Abdu'l-Bahá's distinction between logical and spiritual proofs. These two types of proof are not opposed to each other. Even

the spiritual proofs presented by Abdu'l-Bahá use reason to advance their arguments. The two differ on the nature of the premises used

6.3.1) The difference is that spiritual proofs (theology) begin with revealed truth and works deductively to explicate what such truth implies for our lives, whereas apologetics, which begins from the acceptance of the laws of reason as God chose to reveal them through creation and, by the science of reasoning, works *to* the truths revealed by the Manifestations of God. .

6.3.2) Apologetics differs from theology insofar as in theology, the descending arc, works *from* revelation and apologetics, the ascending arc, works *to* revelation.

I believe that the strongest foundation on which to base - but not limit - a specifically Bahá'í apologetics is the philosophy explicitly embedded in the Writings. This philosophy is compatible with the tradition is built on the work of Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, St. Thomas Aquinas and Avicenna and which is still growing today.

7.1) This suggestion is based on the fact that the Writings make full use of this philosophical tradition as seen, for example, in the terminology used - essence, act, potency, form, matter, rational soul, existence, final, formal, material and efficient causes, existence. It is also present in the emanationist metaphysics and the use of many of the arguments found in the Writings which were originally developed in this tradition.

7.2) Because this long tradition is intellectually robust, (2500 years old and still very much alive), is capable of further development in the modern world, is based on common human experience, and, is highly flexible and adaptable, it serves as a strong basis for a modern Bahá'í apologetics able to meet the intellectual challenges of the foreseeable future.

Apologetics is reasonable, and can, therefore, be a *science* because it follows the laws of logic and reason that God has made manifest in creation and which are universally used by all practicing scientists.

8.1) It is not an experimental / predictive science, but, like paleontology, anatomy, applied mathematics and cosmology among others, it is a descriptive / hermeneutical science whose statements can be tested for adequacy in describing observed phenomena.

Because it is reasonable, apologetics knows the proper uses and limits of unaided reason; it neither exaggerates nor unduly limits the power of human reason left to its own resources.

9.1) Like the Bahá'í Writings, my vision of a Bahá'í apologetics espouses a moderate rationalism, i.e. it realizes that reason can know some things with certainty (not all things as extreme rationalists believe; nor nothing as skeptics claim) and that there is a point at which the intellect requires the

light of faith to function and to advance to higher levels of understanding.

9.2.1) In this moderate rationalist/realist world-view, reason requires the assistance of the Holy Spirit to achieve its full natural and supernatural capabilities.

9.2.2) Apologetics is also scholarship because it can and should use the techniques of scholarship in its quest to understand, present and defend the Faith.

However, on the grounds of rational analysis, apologetics rejects the materialist assumptions of much contemporary scholarship and, on the basis of rational demonstration, accepts the existence of other non-material aspects of reality, as well as a Creator who plays a role in cosmic evolution.

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