

From the Editor's Desk

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SCHOLARSHIP AND THE BAHÁ'Í VISION OF REALITY

Scholarship can be usefully defined as the study of reality. It is too early in the evolution of the Bahá'í Faith to think that we can accurately define "Bahá'í scholarship," nor would it be appropriate to designate a discrete group of individuals as "Bahá'í scholars." All Bahá'ís are urged to become "students" of the Bahá'í teachings, texts, and history. Furthermore, the discourses within and among virtually every field of study are of equal interest to Bahá'ís and non-Bahá'ís alike.

But perhaps we can make a few general observations that might prove helpful in examining the effect of how understanding the various aspects of reality in contemporary fields of study can be enhanced when approached from a Bahá'í perspective. And doubtless the most obvious advantage that a Bahá'í orientation to the study of reality offers is the belief that reality consists of at least two dimensions—the physical and the metaphysical. Of equal importance is the related Bahá'í proposition that these two dimensions interact, and that they do so with an exacting reciprocity. When combined, these two theories may be considered by many as a radical departure from

most contemporary materialist- and relativist-based scholarship.

Also relevant when discussing scholarship from a Bahá'í point of view is the further proposition that the metaphysical dimension is primary in this relationship—that physical reality is purposefully devised by the Creator to mimic the attributes and powers of the metaphysical realm. Allied to this premise is a foundational Bahá'í thesis that the explicit purpose of the physical dimensions is practical spiritual training in preparation for our birth into the next stage of our existence in the realm of the spirit, though such a view does not diminish the inherent value of fashioning an "ever-advancing civilization," the motivating force behind which is spiritual principles.

The tremendous challenge for Bahá'í scholars is thus quite clear—how to assess the effects of this reciprocal relationship at the heart of reality and apply the results of such study to their respective fields of expertise without forcing religious dogma into the examination of what non-Bahá'í scholars often believe to be a strictly material universe governed by laws that concern exclusively physical interactions.

It is in such a context that the scholars who are Bahá'ís must risk disdain or, worse, being ignored if they choose to apply these Bahá'í perspectives to their research and published work. Assuming such work would be accepted by journals in their respective fields, they run the further risk of being categorized as dogmatic rather

than academic, as chauvinistic rather than objective. Such responses might call into question the purely logical methodology of such studies, even if the logic of the discourse is sound.

This issue of the journal is particularly strong in demonstrating how scholars who happen to be Bahá'ís can introduce methods for assessing and sometimes reconceptualizing traditional approaches to their respective academic fields by considering them through a Bahá'í lens that allows them to present innovative insights into the major discourses in their fields of endeavor. By doing so, these authors are making significant headway in bridging the ultimately needless gap between science and religion that for too long has deterred advancement in the underlying verities that in time must emerge in virtually every area of study.

The first of these articles is by Layli Maria Miron, whose field is Rhetoric and Composition. In "Laura Barney's Discipleship to 'Abdu'l-Bahá: Tracing a Theological Flow from the Middle East to the United States, 1900–1916," Miron focuses not so much on the biography of this important figure (who is responsible for the crucial questions and answers in *Some Answered Questions*), but rather on how Barney employed 'Abdu'l-Bahá's teachings to influence social discourse as she taught the Bahá'í Faith in Europe and the United States. At the heart of Miron's study is an examination of how Barney effected what Miron describes as a "transnational channel of theological

knowledge," which one can discern in evaluating the particular forms of rhetoric Barney utilizes in her writing and teaching.

The second article, Gregory Dahl's "New Directions for Economics," also employs a Bahá'í lens to examine how a foundational principle in the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh regarding eliminating the extremes between poverty and wealth has become of increasing global concern. He notes how guidance from the Universal House of Justice in recent years has inspired the Bahá'í community to become involved in the field of economics. For example, Dahl states that there is a confluence of guidance from the House of Justice regarding the need for local communities to be concerned with economic justice and the emerging openness of the profession of economics to "new directions of thought and research." This openness, Dahl observes, was confirmed in part by the demonstrated failure of macroeconomic models in the global recession that followed on the heels of the financial crisis of 2007–08, whereas the application of Bahá'í principles as manifested in microeconomic models demonstrates "the potential for useful contributions both by professional economists inspired by the Bahá'í teachings and by individuals and communities generating knowledge about how spiritual principles can be applied to economic life."

Next, psychiatrist Lyndsay-Rose Dykema's article "Thankful in Adversity: Using Bahá'í Writings and

Benefit Finding to Enhance Understanding and Application of Mental Health Recovery Principles” explicitly applies Bahá’í principles and methodologies to the field of mental health. Specializing in the treatment of individuals with schizophrenia-spectrum disorders, Dykema examines a mental health recovery model that can be constructed by discerning and applying appropriate salutatory spiritual principles to the recovery process. In particular, Dykema examines the applicability of the Bahá’í concept that adversity is virtually essential to most personal growth. She then observes how one can elucidate and apply this same principle of “benefit finding” both to understanding mental health recovery and to expediting this struggle for the patient to work toward “meaningful functional goals.”

We have placed the poem “Gratitude” by Sholeh Wolpé immediately before Dykema’s article because the theme of the poem is so apt to what follows.

We also are pleased to have the first contribution to the journal by Korean poet Therese Young Kim. “Arirang Lament” is inspired by a Korean folk-song, “Arirang,” beloved in both North and the South Korea—the same song that was sung at the opening of the 2018 Winter Olympics. “Arirang Lament” is sublimely touching and cryptic. In that sense, I find in its presentation a similar artistic effect as that of the cover art by Otto Donald Rogers. Titled “Wave Landscape,” Rogers’s painting demonstrates—as

so much of his work does—an evocative yet refined cleanness of style. An abstract painter and sculptor who has attained international repute, Rogers has often noted that much of his work reflects both the Bahá’í notion of unity in diversity and his reflections on the sweeping landscapes of rural Saskatchewan, where he was raised.

In conclusion, then, throughout this issue I think we can find important evidence of how studies of reality (especially the human reality) pursued with a Bahá’í perspective can begin to establish the logical validity of foundational Bahá’í postulates in every field. Of course, first the scholar or artist must possess the daring to venture into this synthesis of physical and metaphysical aspects of existence. Certainly, the recently released work *Religion and Public Discourse in an Age of Transition: Reflections on Bahá’í Practice and Thought* published by Wilfrid Laurier University Press (2018) demonstrates beautifully that scholarly rigor combined with a knowledge of Bahá’í study can contribute significantly to the advancement of the overall knowledge in every arena of scholarly endeavor.