

Myth or Madness: The (Lost) Joy of Religion

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Introduction

Religion has become ever remote from modern sympathy, unattractive and unconvincing. As its light, heat and influence wane its position, once locally central, is now dynamically marginal; its rim farthest from the hub. Religion holds the deadest part of the universe, the lowest storey of the house the point at which all light, heat, and movement descending from a nobler sphere is dying into darkness, coldness and passivity. This makes for a drab age. In its place, Man, the soul of the world, with immense powers, rich like Midas but all he touches goes dead and cold. As the process prolongs itself it ensures that the loss of the old mythical imagination and the prophetic soul of the wide world will continue to be replaced with historians of science and practitioners of philosophy. These modern magicians assert human omnipotence while the venerable sense of human impotence never really leaves us bewailing our plight to feel encompassed. We yearn to awake from our sleeping sense by some *magia divina*. Our instincts continue to tell us that if we and Nature are all one surely there must be some nearer way to this unity, to a high and holy learning, than by quantum mechanics and relativity, some more direct way such as one who commands another who is in his power. A way that teaches us that we can rise above our corporeal and sensitive powers and in that state receive into ourselves the perfection of heaven and of the divine intelligences. Spirits obey perfected souls – an affirmation which even makes the resuscitation of the dead possible! In contemplating religious revival, however, we must be aware, and beware, of schematizing. We must not impose either on old things that have died out nor on the new things coming in a spurious unity. Meaning must be moving and truth must

always be aroma to the Light otherwise religion means as little to us as the atomic structure of water – a barren and profitless look into this other most valuable giver of life. The labor of the quest for God only weds us when chained to the cluster of fragrance, the hyacinth of reunion and the blissful rapture of the Messianic Spirit, enshrined in the beauty of the Rose. Religion must not be seen just to be true, but lofty, edifying and unifying. This is a unique aspect of discernment and the strongest lens with which to comprehend the unrestrained utility of true religion which adorns us with praiseworthy attributes and righteousness. Universal recognition of religion's transformative power, the magnificent cultivation of mind and heart, is apparent to all but the leaden.

The business of religion is to draw nigh unto God - the highest form of contemplation – and to enjoy communion with Him. To bring this unique ideal upon the life and thought of centuries demands the move to self-surrender, borne only by the law of love, via crucis, via lucis, the absolute condition of discipleship. Self-surrender is really a battle term - to give up all rights to a lord conqueror. The more we surrender the more we resemble the Lord. We only shine outside of self - an unsalable prescription of the beloved Master that '[w]e must release the kernel from the husk'. [Balyuzi, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 381]

Conversely, the more we conquer away from divinity, the more we darken liberty and with a sense of doom. In us worldlings, buried deep beneath the deposits of self, there is an instinct we cannot explain, the power of which we may attempt to ignore but which leads us, in spite of ourselves, to a moment of heroic decision - to offer our life as a ransom to others. In its purest and non dogmatic mode, this is self-surrender. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me."¹ If Creation is the original acte gratuit than self-surrender, we must readily accept, is the only right concession to be made, a sublime form of pre-litigation - settle before judgment day, as it were.

Should love, that systematic truth, ‘the holy hush of ancient sacrifice’², that which **oils the wheels of life, ‘the greatest of all living powers’ [Paris Talks 180], the highest law which allows for all things to mingle and meet in one spirit**, were somehow erased, human life would vanish. Our history is an ongoing meditation on this fact. Oftentimes difficult to follow or understand the mystery that provokes the many forms of love, it remains our most common possession and which gives our existence depth and wonder. Love even makes death wonderful. When Socrates, ‘the most distinguished of all philosophers’ [Tablets 146], told the young men gathered around him before his death, that philosophy is the practice of being dead he had something specific in mind. He was conveying the idea that as long as we judge things according to our senses, we shall never grasp the truth about them. In love’s immortal form the visible and the sensual have only a limited and passing share. To see it, we must die to the world and learn to live as if we were no longer alive. The proper use of meditation is to grasp the timeless order of things. When we think about love we are beyond death and become deathless ourselves. In the old chaos of love, whatever we see is extraordinary, wherever we look things are pretty wonderful. O, joy without end!

Short-lived, physical attraction is love’s pathetic transience but it is not to be scorned. Loving in a transient world is bootied by a twofold misery. The first is the suffering that comes with possessing enduringly that which is inevitably lost. And the second is despair, following closely from the first, the very notion that a future possibility of loss awaits us and any current pleasure is contaminated by fear. The desire to have (*appetitus habendi*) turns into a fear of losing (*metus amittendi*). But, mystifyingly, love’s misery becomes essential to its meaning. Personal relations begin and end, time flows to a final rest, but what becomes of love’s poignancy and passion were such temporal limits to be removed? Love would be demystified to the point of pathological emptiness and shuts the ancient path to contemplative transcendence. Without the additional sense of incommensurability between time and eternity love ceases to be what it is, just as science loses its meaning when we

subtract eternity from the notion of lawfulness that is the ruling principle of all inquiry. (Science is intelligible only if we think of it as moving toward and understanding of the world that rests on laws whose validity is timeless. The very idea of 'law' implies this). The law of love, therefore, is a function of our mortality – a surprising, not to say disappointing conclusion, perhaps, but not hopeless because while death may well bring love's moment to an end yet its pangs and motions have not been pointless.

While we try to understand and live with love in its finitude, it is in a world without limitation where we find its highest expression. All forms of natural ties, companionship, love of family, patriotic love, love of race, political affinity, even love of community, are limited, fraught with inherent interest, and therefore, uncertain.³ The perfect love, we are told, 'needs an unselfish instrument, absolutely freed from fetters of every kind.' [Paris Talks 37] and this **'... can only be achieved by the power of the Divine Spirit. No worldly power can accomplish the universal love.'** [Paris Talks 11] Divine love takes us back to the deeper appreciation of its all-comprehensive role and forward to the better comprehension of our own hearts. While all forms of other love do the things that plainly seem true, divine love again and again has said the thing that does not seem true but is. Divine love is convincing where it is least attractive – in its mystery.

The law of God which commands from the outside binds us to the moral responsibility of living by the law of love which spurs from the inside. Divine love harbors renunciation. All other forms of love are self-preservation, a short, fast moving shimmering embedded in our social and ethical structures.⁴ This does not show that Divine love is untenable but that we are stupid or wicked to have failed to apply this principle for not having passionately desired it. Divine love, simultaneously effulgent and enkindling,⁵ inspired splendid achievements in the past so why cannot it be renewed with ever brighter examples? The conversion of the enslaved human mind and the human spirit from the dehumanizing powers in all culture to this ideal is, as we shall see,

a victory both for the individual as well as for the collective life of the planet.⁶ The theological basis for liberation is the theology of reconciliation and love.

Love, by definition, is not a conservative creed and its radicality, its revolutionary potential, lies as much in the intimate sphere as well as in the outer sphere - dedication to a cause. Love contains both an ideological and a personal component. True love and true revolution are inseparable. On the spiritual plain, most especially, we must be revolutionary. That which comes closest to true stasis is subject to heroic efforts of will and selfless sacrifice.⁷ The panorama of residual love, the love of kin and country, fights to leave things as they are and we beat our wings in vain and in a void to maintain the status quo. This is crude and foolish as we are really leaving these open to a torrent of change.

The idealization of love is preserved on nothing less than change and revolution guided by a love for a cause, the true criterion for conversion to moral action - not conscience (a center haunted by moral ambivalence).⁸ The revolutionary path from truth to action is not just paved by love's ardor, as attested by our early Bahá'í history, its apotheosis, but, more importantly, asphalted upon moral values. If the locus and focus of a cause is moral authority, independent of human rationality, as in the will of God then the validity of moral values comes directly from the ultimate sovereign, our Creator.

The stirring accounts of the early faithful, (as Hannah Arendt would say, to begin at the beginning is an act of memory and gratitude), captured in storytelling genre in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Memorials to the Faithful, are short biographies recounted not to sanctify or to deify nor to enlist men and women in the immortal pantheon.⁹ They are written, not as an exercise in nostalgia or antiquarianism, but that we may cultivate the same religious instinct of our illustrious forbearers - to transform belief into an intercourse of compelling wonder. The champions of the Crimson Age saw what we dimly see today even though we tread their leavened soil, average earth elevated to the plains of heroes. A

community of others grounded not in a pre-existing reality but in a specific possibility – a possibility which is the most radical of all possibilities, a community of faith which demands not just in loving each other but a total response from each.

All this happens by obeying, *sine mora*.¹⁰ The inspiration of the faithful lies not in any array of mundane possibilities but in the untrodden region of unalloyed divine love. They showed an astonished world how to remove mountains by faith wedded to love. They personified the emblem: “He who made you demands the whole you.”¹¹ The greatness of these enraptured lovers of God lies precisely in the description itself – the greatness of what they loved – and it is this frenzy that gives birth to remarkable human powers and achievements which makes the life of these selfless consorts, these most beautiful of mortals, God enfranchised souls, exemplary suppliants, ‘recipients of heavenly grace’, ever more haunting.¹²

These early believers, small in number and dimly islanded, interpenetrated two worlds, one enabling, the other harshly inhibiting – the new, aborning community of the Greatest Name opposed to the fierce rule of an oppressive, unbelieving underworld. The early faithful were trampled, betrayed and faced tyranny from all sides and they had to outgrow these vicissitudes digging ever deeper roots of faith to resist fiercer tempests as the unrelenting ire and hatred of the local population reacted with even greater intensity. A brutal and lashing anomaly understood only by God but accepted by unfailing resignation and unshaken trust by these faithful admirers in the parched dust of battle. All this suggests that there is an alternative way of thinking about history that has a different structure from the idea of history as a stream of causes and effects, structures and events. Here is an account of what people thought and believed in a particular epoch; what they wanted to love; and what social and environmental conditions framed (or suppressed) their choices – illustrated vividly by the conversion of tens of thousands in Persia in the mid-nineteenth century which led to particular states of knowledge, belief, and agency. Is history composed of

objective causal relations that exist among recorded historical events and structures or is history an agglomeration of the actions and mental frameworks of individuals, high and low? One brilliant Christian apologist puts it best: "The greater part of the life actually lived in any century, any week, or any day consists of minute particulars and uncommunicated, even incommunicable, experiences which escape all record." [Lewis, *Literature*, 64]

Divine love is clearly not an idle affair. "To occupy oneself with God... is the one occupation of all occupations"¹³ and the law of love is not an abstract principle nor prone to personified abstractions but a moral force gravitating to a unified whole. Rediscovering our love for God and His creation is itself a preparation for social action and an indispensable stake in the conceptual framework for public discourse.¹⁴ The religion of love is not synonymous with the prodigy of austerity. We do not withdraw from the tents of the world so that angels draw nigh. Communion with God arises as much from ethical concerns as in the cloistered chorus of 'sursum corda, sursum corda' ['lift up your hearts'].¹⁵ This higher law of universal love is not subject-centered but object-centered. Self-surrender is not isolated, penitential abstinence. Our religion does not avoid the society of man to choose to live to God in secret. The audience chamber of God is not solitude but the tested enterprise of fellowship and the well-matured purpose of service. We only save ourselves by bringing ourselves together.

The philosophy of love is simultaneously both out of and engaged in the world and unfolds in a three-fold hierarchy - a reality (the mind of God), a revelation (the revealed Word of God) and *respublica*¹⁶ or commonweal, its finest fruit, collective conduct governed by the noblest rules and its associated social arrangements. In this ideal God commands, angels operate and man obeys. It is not the sad song of Gibbon's 'unhappy exiles from social life', but spiritual joy, God's creed inviting us to drink from the chalice of joy and bliss. (We are surely more ourselves when we bear on our faces somehow or other, a gladness of heaven that comes from no human source.). Truth impels us to joy.

A compulsive invitation to enormous sorrows and delights, the implications of universal love bear a philosophical stance and as such cannot be regarded as innocent.¹⁷ We each are a neighbor to the other and when the other is no longer a matter for moral concern, a barren world emerges where the impoverishment of one is the impoverishment of the other. Love is fulfilling of the law.¹⁸ By affirming the worth of our neighbor we are simultaneously affirming the value of ourselves.¹⁹ When I suffer it is misery, but when I suffer with another it is compassion.

There exists the challenge of how to behave so as to align our world of finite existence – our need to fend for ourselves and to satisfy our basic needs – with our status as spiritual beings. Unless I am happy I am unable to exercise my godlike power to love on anything like a significant scale. A life obsessed or preoccupied to the satisfaction of basic needs leaves little room for either science or morality. It follows that we should do what we can to improve the material circumstances of human life, so that there may be room for both desires – self satisfaction and self fulfillment.

The neighbor who is poor, hungry, dispossessed, and oppressed, hurts us and is a sufficient criterion for responsible action.²⁰ Our efforts are not guided by prevalent growth-based notions of insurance and risk-reduction. The evils of poverty and subjugation, these are not the hidden cause of quarrel but are bred in settings of civic conflict eliminated only by the diverse manifestations of universal love: harmony, social mediation and the building of a necessary and new identity of the oneness of humanity, ‘the pivot round which all the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh revolve’ and which ‘has its indirect manifestations in the gradual diffusion of the spirit of world solidarity which is spontaneously arising out of the welter of a disorganized society.’ [World Order 45].

In contemplating the idea of love, we are not only endorsing value-based approaches to the promise of peace but to the importance of human agency and emotional linkages in spiritual culture as a whole

to overcome the upheavals of modern society and to secure its emancipation from impending and recurring calamities.²¹ A case in point is Amartya Sen's welfare economics, where the governing rule should be that of moral sentiments assuming the vanguard of shaping economics and not profit maximization. "Economy is the basis of society. When the economy is stable, society develops. The ideal economy combines the spiritual and material, and the best commodities to trade in are sincerity and love."²²

In the physical (and social) sciences there reaches a point where the initial stage of wishing must be succeeded by a stage of hard and ruthless analysis. The problem here is that religion of love is always seen as never being able to emancipate itself from utopianism.²³ We face a fundamental antithesis - the antithesis of utopia and reality - but, the question arises: is not utopia rooted in reality? Mature thought combines utopia or an ideal purpose with observation and analysis. This is the impact of thinking upon wishing. But both must have their place. We cannot ignore what was and what is in contemplation of what should be nor may we scorn to deduce what should be from what was and what is so as to avoid despair and bewilderment in appreciating the transitions before us. The social issues referred to above is a function of thinking and to address them is to study a sequence of events which we are not powerless to influence or to alter and there comes a stage where realism is the necessary corrective to the exuberance of utopia and wishful thinking. "Wherever [we] find truth or reality, [we] must hold to it, forsaking, discarding all else; for outside of reality there is naught but superstition and imagination."²⁴ [Promulgation, 62].

When reality refuses to conform to utopian prescriptions a problem of diagnosis emerges. We have either been too lazy to understand the vision or too self-centered to pursue it. Such incompetence is both intellectual and moral. We are not only ill-disposed to act but suffer from muddled thinking (our need for self-assertion interferes in belief-formation). It checks our ability to lose or transcend ourselves in order to learn something from minds different from our own. "The

essence of religion', we are told, 'is to testify unto that which the Lord hath revealed, and follow that which He hath ordained in His mighty Book.'" [Tablets, 155]. To translate this affirmation into action, to make operative the Divine Word we need to understand the Word and this brings us to an ancient problem: the problem of human fallibility in the act of decoding and understanding thoughts and conclusions reached in the text which is infallible. To cite a seventeenth century Oxford academic and one of the earliest defenders of modern empiricism: "Though everything said in the Text be infallibly true, yet the reader may be, nay cannot choose but be very fallible in the understanding of it."²⁵ The quality of transmission and reception is determined by our rational faculty but it is the destiny if not doom of the brightest and highest philosophers and prophets to be endlessly reinterpreted no matter how correct or simple their doctrines and still be blamed for the misuse made of their meaning by the reasoning of their followers. Maybe it is because their supporters are ambitious young men in a hurry eager to launch their own careers of scholarship and will ever rarely be Platonic readers, that is, capable of detaching themselves from all their desires and emotions and animated solely by the desire for truth. (The political process, too unfortunately, works as a powerful filter of ideas). Our human bias becomes accentuated in the presence of the Holy Text because it itself is not neutral implicitly assuming a particular conception of truth and demanding a particular approach of investigation coupled with servitude.²⁶ The holy dispensations, present and past, chart a plan outside the sphere of our personal motives, interests and talents. This already shakes us punished as we are by inchoate and unfulfilled human goals. The veil of ignorance is heavy and constitutes a distinct, nonfoundational, option. We need something else to fully comprehend a 'divinely ordained and subtle Reality, this sign of revelation of the All-Abiding, All-Glorious God...' [Gleanings, 163] We must be conscious and accepting of the limitation of our human capacity to know the pinnacle of understanding. A confession of helplessness is required on our part, in itself the acme of human understanding and the fruit of mature contemplation. The emotive, loving and believing aspect of learning, that is, placing faith

in authority before, but not excluding, rational understanding precedes all other phases of learning and ensures that what is taught is assimilated, guarded and cherished, akin to the ancient Greek concept, *nous*, whereby we seek truth while attracted and guided by mysticism, a capacity that is the basis of reason.²⁷ The highest service of the teacher is to acquaint the seeker with his or her true feelings which are so easily put away in our need to manipulate our workaday world. Before translating God's love into social reality, or, to put it in another way, for devotional verse to be written convincingly in discursive prose, we must do as we want to feel rather than how we should feel.

"Only when the lamp of search, of earnest striving, of longing desire, of passionate devotion, of fervid love, of rapture, and ecstasy, is kindled within the seeker's heart, and the breeze of His loving-kindness is wafted upon his soul, will the darkness of error be dispelled, the mists of doubts and misgivings be dissipated, and the lights of knowledge and certitude envelop his being." [Gleanings 268]. In this Dispensation we are blessed in that Providence has favored mankind in such a way so as to assure us that if we reason rightly we shall also act rightly. Such reassurance is based on an incontrovertible promise: "We who have been enlightened by the new Revelation have the sacred Word to assure us, a Divine Plan to guide us, a history of valor to encourage us. Let us therefore take heart not only from the Word we treasure, but also from the deeds of heroism and sacrifice which even today shine resplendent..." [Ridván Message 153]

Our love affair with God cannot be an affair just of reasoning, but of experience. Communicating divine truth to people who have scarcely felt the grace of a devoted life is akin to attempting to explain the nature and beauty of colors to a blind man. And more: how are we to cope with the omnipresent lures of reason's language, its transitory and deceptive character already made difficult by the fact that the process of belief-formation is itself subject to powerful sub-rational undercurrents? But "...if we be loiterers, if we fail to play our part

surely others will be called upon to take up our task as ministers to the crying needs of this afflicted world.”²⁸

Intellectual Sturm und Drang

‘God’s greatest gift to man is that of intellect’ [Paris Talks 42], and the ‘rational faculty’ is a ‘sign’ of the ‘sovereign Lord’ (Gleanings 164). ‘To promote knowledge is...an inescapable duty imposed on every one of the friends of God.’ [Selections 97] ‘Quick-witted and keen of intellect are the faithful’, is how ‘Abdu’l-Bahá depicts us. [Selections 315] What knowledge does to us as individuals is the personal ideal of knowledge, what it does to civilization that is the social ideal of knowledge, but in either case, independently of scope and importance, knowledge brings human meaning and sets us free ‘to promote the unity and tranquility of mankind, to give enlightenment and civilization to the people, to produce love in all.... and to bring about the universal peace.’ [Paris Talks 43] But we cannot bend the world to our intelligence and risk defying the injunctions of love. We are all aware of how the power of intellect has been used both for the advancement of civilization as much as its demise and such an awareness seems to congregate in anxieties over the lives and works of scholars and leaders of thought.²⁹ A leader of thought must be the moral conscience of his society, a role occupied through the deployment of individual knowledge to the benefit of society. This is the classic engagement which early thinkers of the Enlightenment even encouraged and venerated.³⁰

Our Bahá’í World may reflect some of the features of the culture and socio-political organization of the day but the rich intellectual tradition that it has inherited cannot be stiffened by excessive systematization. Our Writings are of such a wide intellectual range, thematic grandeur and breadth of vision that any tincture of wills and passions can easily generate false dichotomies and systems for man always believes more readily that which he prefers. “For the mind of man is far from the nature of a clear and equal glass, wherein the beams of things should reflect

according to their true incidence; nay, it is rather like an enchanted glass, full of superstition and imposture..."³¹ We are pushed to the art of rhetoric for its sake alone and not conceiving it as it should be conceived, namely, as *ars disserandi* or arts of discourse."The duty and office of rhetoric is to apply reason to imagination for the better moving of the will."³² In today's world, our minds are practically formed by rule and line. Complexity everywhere is presented in statistics, metric modeling and the tabular form. Imagination, which sees eternity in men and women, seems out of place from the curious mind submissive to the norm of rationality which only sees men and women as data and dots, having learned of their existence only as abstract statistics.

Any decorative literary language is anathema, subversive, the enemy of political economy and science.³³

But scientific writing can never be at the exclusion of the emotional and spiritual colouring of the events otherwise our emotionless approach makes our space airless. As observers we survey, scrutinize but also relive it. The best histories are those that are works of imaginative insight in art as well as of science. We may be fascinated by the subtleties of society's progress and the flexibility with which these adjust to strategy but we should not be overwhelmed by such discoveries as we tend to magnify the experience out of its real proportion and to the exclusion of everything else. We must view any social scene not just with human data but with the detachment of one who stands **au delà de la mêlée** - to venture into the arena but remain aloof from its internal bickering, provide inquiry with understanding and a unique search for facts and trends, the trees and the wood as it were.

Our ancestors, in revival's climate and charged emotional atmosphere of Persia and its mass enthusiasms were seen to behave as **revolutionaries**.³⁴ **Today, however, the hallowed ground of building readied by heroic and spontaneous sacrifice depends now on order and stewardship to succeed. Our conduct must be seen to be as that of reformer. We cannot be imbued sufficiently with raison**

d'être when we overly emphasize the ethos of **raison d'état**. Our new Bahá'í culture carries its own self-justification and, yet, the accumulated habits and traditions of decades, formed and consolidated in the course of over a century and a half, persist and continue to color the thought even of the fairest student of the process. Our mind oscillates to discover the faultless balance between the factors making for the continuity and the discontinuity of methods.³⁵

Mathematization of the world and its empirical attributes can never be a substitute for love. Appealing to simple arithmetic to solve our problems erases the complex mysteries of human motivation. Our desires and preferences are not exogenous, simply given, but shaped by social arrangements and varying deprived circumstances. Without love, complexity is deformed and life becomes its own tomb, not just as a burial ground for all that we hold precious, but in perpetuating a perverse lifelessness. So soon as the power of love dies, 'man becomes the living sepulcher of himself, and what yet survives is the mere husk of what once he was.' [Shelley, Essay on Love]. Without love, we lose the capacity to worship. Adoration's space is assailed by the consequences of a loveless world – suffering, injustice and oppression, not unchangeable but socially contingent upon kindness and benevolence. Without love there is no imagination, that sacrament which opens life to the sweetest spells, providing graced occasions of encounter between humanity and God. What endures imagination provides, the discovery of a life sufficiently heroic, both wordly ('weltlich') and of the spirit ('geistlich'). "We shall understand our present, and perhaps even our future, the better if we can succeed, by an effort of historical imagination, in reconstructing that long-lost state of mind for which.... love...was a natural mode of expression."³⁶ Excessive definition in religion destroys the imaginative wonder of belief, that fierce pleasure in things being themselves and which sets us free. Love does not share life's suspicion of deathliness. The state of loving is not the same as the state of living. What we call life may scarcely be worth the living; what we call love is always fulfilling. While the former includes having one's limb full of movement and seeing the light of the sun, love helps

us while even being in the dark and motionless. The lovelorn (‘áshiq’) sitting still is preferable to the agitated shrill of the sagacious (‘áqil’). (A timid attempt by the author to translate provisionally a line from one of Bahá’u’lláh’s prayer in Persian ‘áshiq-eh neshasteh beh as áqil-eh moteharek’). It is this multitudinous character of love which means that encapsulating figures for it is extraordinarily hard to do. Life, contrary to love, needs a theoretical framework to assimilate experience and phenomena, some reasoned system; love in itself is conclusive. Life is being, love is becoming. Love is the organizing principle of all human striving and gives all movements shape and direction. Life without love transforms itself into chaos, but with selfless love it is cosmos, a world that is ordered and intelligible and wholly suffused with the real presence of the eternal and the divine, what Weber calls an ‘enchanted garden’. The gifts of life are motivated by exchange, acting horizontally, while real gifts are acts of love, man’s vertical gratitude toward God. Life pulls us downward, love cannot resist the gravitational upward pull to salvation. Life is full of crosses preventing the homecoming, love is the comforting cross we share to look forward to a homecoming. We try in nihilistic despair to red divinize the world through the extended wings of science, art and politics. Love is the more plausible theology for such a project to succeed possessing a resilience which makes it immune to external argument.

Without the free play of the soul, mental creativity and license, things become ‘grotesque, eccentric, fail of their full returns’, as Whitman said.³⁷ If there be an anthem to resonate in the ‘vale of soul-making’, that internalization of a personal authority and a dictum to guide us through and beyond it, then surely it must carry something special to make the word God and everything associated with it meaningful, motivating and life giving. Just as we are born into authority and community, we are also born into myth and may, if blessed, become a part of it. In our societies, we are surrounded by the worried well who are guided solely by relentless ambition, aching envy and despairing disappointment. Words like soul and love are nothing to us if they do not represent a resigned and conscious acquiescence. We are all tethered to

the deformities of our individual points of view but by desiring what is perfectly good even though we don't quite know what it is and are unable to do what we would, we are part of the Divine power against evil, 'widening the skirts of light and making the struggle with darkness narrower' – timeless words from English novelist George Eliot set in a fictitious Midlands town in 1872. To succeed in this crusade we need a cosmic backdrop, a religious worldview, a grand narrative of meaning to give our life meaning as well. Alongside our 'administrative machinery' [Directives 2], we are also always in need of a freedom to experience the full impact of life and unfold our full potential in harmony with the Unknowable Essence and in submission to the reality of the universe as it is. In this Dispensation, sacred myths are freed to be donned as necessary in our collective and individual spiritual development and to nourish our awe as to the inner silent landscapes of the heart as well as to the outer vistas that roar on the other side of silence.

Myth has been variously referred to as 'public dreams'³⁸, 'the collective unconscious'³⁹, 'translucence of the Eternal through and in the Temporal'⁴⁰ and which has a profound deathless influence on our lives, us who live out its symbols and clothe them in meaning through our experiences. Is there any other way to explain the crusade which galvanized our Heroic Age and the miraculous, unprecedented story events which surrounded our dawn-breakers so explosively charged with archetypal and generic significance that their enduring consequences and abiding influence show us to this day how the new will to rid the life we planned so as to have the life that is waiting for us is alive and may be retold and authored anew? These myths do not belong just to us but to be shared so that society as a whole may survive and conserved in subsequent cultures. Not projections of infantile or regressive fantasies, nor cemeteries of moribund metaphors and lost connections, much less the hinterland of allusion, myths are a timeless spring for action. Not limited just to the novelistic or dramaturgical disclosure of secret episodes located in the past, myth is the internalized blueprint, the skeletal or structural armature around which our community is molded. The charge of the indomitable Mullá Husayn

at Shaykh Tabarsí is not a piece of archaic, primitive, outrageous disease of glorified dissimulated language but an essential part of the inherited code of our culture showing how the literary redeployment and reassertion of a mythical figure in the past may yet endow us with the supernatural powers we have lost and use such inspiration, in our current period of unprecedented torrential change, to slip the surly bonds of earth on wings of our own manufacture and match the valiant acts of our epic hero in his quest-journey for unrevealed knowledge. While the world exists, so does the great past. It is not what Mullá Husayn accomplished as a martyr which makes him great but because of faith and courage manifested in such a deed. It is an ancient myth the importance of knowing names because it becomes possible to partake of the power and the qualities of such names.

By being called the ‘spiritual descendents of the dawn-breakers’ [Advent 7], we consciously or subconsciously partake of their power and drama. As such, myth is not a ‘mistress of fancy’ but, a summoner of powerful emotions, at once discomforting as intriguing.⁴¹ True myth has the power to revive us, to serve as an anamnesis (ἀνάμνησις), that is, to return to right reason.⁴² We cannot succeed if we half believe myth best able to attend to trembling hearts rather than to aspiring bones.

Storytelling and literary imagining are not opposed to rational argument but can provide essential ingredients which are missing in public discourse. I emphasize the term ingredient because the empathetic imaginative power of making should never substitute rule-governed moral reasoning. We need institutions to protect the insights of compassionate imagination and which can free us to discuss compassion and mercy, the role of love and emotions in public discourse, what is involved in imagining the situation of someone different from oneself alone and to expand our conception of ourselves so as not to lose the relationship between the literary imagination and utilitarian reasoning with its indispensable technical investigations.⁴³ The philosophy of wonder standing on its own is not only inadequate, but can lead into senseless mysticism; imagination alone does not reach us to divine

reality but sends us into the depths of paganism. We must, however, retain (rediscover) faith in imagination to continue to shape us, keep us, create us – for good or ill. Service and the free play of the imagination are the one and same thing. To quote British author Doris Lessing in her acceptance speech of the 2007 Nobel Prize for Literature: “It is our stories that will recreate us, when we are torn, hurt, even destroyed. It is... the myth-maker, that is our phoenix, that represents us at our best, and at our most creative.”⁴⁴ As builders gazing at a new world order, we have the obligation to construct a humanistic and multivalued conception of public rationality and public reasoning in general and not be allowed to be overwhelmed of standard economic and scientific paradigms to define our spiritual destiny which seem so reductive and lacking in human complexity. Life is painting a picture not doing a sum and we sit down before the picture in order to have something done to us, not that we may do things to it.

The conviction of this truth is not to punish with a foreign code to conscience but to emancipate the holders of conscience. It must not be defiled by *politeia* (πολιτεία) and its in-built tendency to accept custom and to encourage uninspired contentment with things as they are.⁴⁵ The sons of Zion should not battle with the sons of Olympus.⁴⁶ When we embrace religion we are not immune to tormenting it with unannounced slumps of agitation and compromise. This is the exhausted past with no element of life within it. An exodus of despair sets in when the basis of union is no longer myth, that story which starts with an empty cosmos, but externalities, positive or negative, which soundlessly operate on our substance as instruments of pragmatism disallowing a freedom of ‘everything that is’.⁴⁷ This causes religion to become lightweight, alienable, and too uncertainly alive. To prevent this from happening, the structure of the interaction between the text and its imagined readers should be such so as to invite the seeker to see how the mutable features of society and circumstance bear on the realization of shared hopes and desires. The appreciation of myth and assessing what we read becomes ethically viable only in the sense that constructed in this way the act of deepening our understanding of the tenets of a

new Dispensation demands both critical immersion and conducting ‘meaningful and distinctive conversations’⁴⁸, comparing what one has read both with one’s own unfolding experience and with the response and arguments of other readers. Reading in this way, combining one’s own absorbed imagining with periods of more detached (and interactive) critical scrutiny, and not particularized vision, we begin to see why we might find in it an activity well-suited to public discourse.⁴⁹ The mental world of wonder, mystery, and humor should always govern us and permeate our beings – an antidote to prevailing materialism and misguided idealism and the bed of sanity in a mad world. The difficulty is to imagine in all its bareness this mental world that existed before our coming to wipe out all that makes for unhealthy food for both modern sentimentality and modern cynicism.

Conclusion

We cannot comprehend religion in advance of its living and skepticism, an omnipresent dangerous modernist idea, erodes our attempts at living. We, quite simply, vanish. Modernism and its process of secularization – testing religion for its reasonableness - beginning with the Renaissance and continuing through the Industrial Revolution, is problematic. While we may use rational resources and utilitarian philosophy to defend our vision of what civilization might be and society ought to be, joy and gaiety of spirit in experiencing our finite beings progressing towards an ever more complete embrace of the world eternal and re-enchantment, is lost, a blight for which we were not born for.⁵⁰ Joy in and of itself is a boon with “[g]aiety transfiguring all that dread.” [Yeats, *Lapis Lazuli*]. Augmenting the importance of the scientific method to recover our sense of belonging actually encourages a sense of homelessness. The tradition of belief becomes estranged and replaced by an awkward process of initiation into a new culture. Alienation grows, not to be seen as a token of intellectual’s serene majesty but its own self-annihilation because while it touches us, religion cannot be touched. Its relation with itself is central to our understanding

of it. Religion only flourishes on that which we are and feel and this makes its terms, in essence, difficult to define. Only religion reveals the fundamental issues of human existence, the deep significance of life, the universe of human experience. This makes religion everything. To think in more precise or scientific terms, to shape out new philosophies or to perfect the old by experiment is fraught with danger.⁵¹ The danger in mutation is that we lose all apprehension, perceptory or intellectual, and this makes for religion's appeal to end.⁵² Religion becomes a haven for casual niceties and oddities, enacting satisfying little dramas, supplying transcripts for momentary bliss and flashes of insight, now reduced ignobly and falsely to liturgical nurgatory, however beguiling. But the solution is not abandoning religion – ‘...by no political alchemy is it possible to make a golden society out of leaden individuals.’ [Esslemont 43] - nor is it to be found in the debate of spirit versus form, or in the strength of the immaterial as opposed to radicalized materialist philosophy, or testing scientific thinking with poetic practice, but in how to perpetuate religion's vitality both as life-giver behind the dynamic production of life from moment to moment as well as protector and shield from ‘the gay livery of the world’ [Gleanings XCVI]. The purpose of religion is not just to narrate but aesthetically to enact the world. This does not mean that we should disengage from science altogether. On the contrary, the same conception of God that holds the key to a correct understanding of human happiness is essential to the advancement of science. The knowledge that science strives to secure is the essence of the happiness we seek. We are instigated to “[s]tudy the sciences, acquire more and more knowledge.” [Paris Talks, 11] as ‘[t]he man of science is perceiving and endowed with vision... attentive, alive.’ [Promulgation, 50] A right theology is crucial to both pursuits. There can be no sharp distinction between the two overarching knowledge systems. Our power and activity increase with our understanding of the world and both science and religion, surely, constitute the highway to happiness, if not happiness itself, the joyful movement from a lower level of reality to a higher one, an inherently spiritual and ethical enterprise. This articulates both science and religion as a more nuanced version of each other, both mutually disclosing, ‘indissolubly welded

and joined in reality' [Promulgation 175]. While every natural science has its nomothetic side, it also has another half of a very different kind. Scientific knowledge has not lessened the need for mythical frameworks in life, nor has it robbed us of a cosmology that inspires awe and reverence. This is not to evade definition but to show how perception should be and where the basis for true understanding really lies, as captured in the cryptic phrase, 'the school of God'.⁵³ There is no gap between God and the world. This paradoxical notion of simultaneous separateness and unity, myth and method, science and religion, is true and real, best captured by the words of St. Paul 'Utraque unum' ('Both and One') - that which differentiates us also affirms our oneness — our materiality is our spirituality.

The divinity of the world is its intelligibility. Our understanding of the world will not stop at any particular point, but must go on increasing forever, which is the equivalent to saying the world is intelligible, not merely in certain ways, or within certain limits, but infinitely so, however little of it we understand at any given moment. Modern science also refuses to acknowledge that there are any limits to our understanding of the world. It demands that every explanation be probed and tested until a better one is found that explains its predecessor's limits and by doing so transcends them, a process without end.

Utopia is synonymous with a mental state of desperation, always recovering for lost time, and a feverish pursuit of routes. This easily makes us intolerant of each other because the high flights and hopes of some are confronted by deep depressions of disillusionment of others and this obstructs understanding. Reality is the contrary — it does not antagonize with exact obedience but unifies around agonizing choices of how to proceed and interpret correctly guidance from a central authority. To worship a single agenda really makes us unproductive because the mind that does not change cannot make change. It also makes us inconsistent with the principle of unity in diversity which evokes everyone's admiration because it facilitates us to build communities and not overthrow them.

“The heaven of true understanding shineth resplendent with the light of two luminaries: tolerance and righteousness.”[Tablets 170]

Far from declaring a greater renaissance – ‘the revolt of the soul against the intellect’ (to borrow from Yeats) - our observations here should not be seen as mocking the task of adducing proofs, but to be interpreted to mean that there is no perspective to life outside of religion and its promised fruit, nascent spirituality. Any understanding of reality proffered by physics, at once certain and unfathomable, can only be provisional and subjected to circumscribed, experimental, objective scrutiny central to scientific investigation.⁵⁴ Religion assists science to conquer the material investigation of the world and bring it into subjection to the spirit and not subjugation. Religion can never be relegated to the inferior position to become the enemy when science exploits it by the tyranny of exactitude and imposes subservience to the smothering demands of linearity, cause and effect. Ironically, the cognitive deficit we suffer by losing religion and forfeiting wonder is also abhorrent to science, almost by definition.⁵⁵ Religion is a comprehensive body of doctrine, science has yet to unite its miscellaneous systems but this does not turn these two stainless mirrors of forms and images of existing things into deadly rivals. Religion is not a purveyor of ancient prophecy nor is science the sole commentator of current events. The genuine social importance of each means that none can outlive the other and the limitless intelligibility of the universe shall forever depend on the net of laws of both science and religion to capture its unique formulation: the whole of the world at any given moment is the cause of the world at the next. ⁵⁶ Mystery is to be respected, scientism (and not science) to be rejected, and the importance of play and wonder heightened.

Myth and method are uncuttable, guiding us to touch religion without touching, a fluent medium (method) binding us to an elusive object (myth). These ultimate congruent species of value – the one aesthetic and the other instrumental – must be shown to be apparent in all fields of service. We live in the tensions of the divine and the human, the temporal and the eternal, in a permanent state of in-between or

metaxy.⁵⁷ We must learn to walk in such pairs to experience the religious objective not as object whose vanishing is the price of their visibility but as an invisible present and motivating force in our lives. We rejoice precisely because the unresolved ambivalence between myth's subject and method's object sustains wonder. But we must also live in a reality that harmonizes the human quality of adventurousness and expansion with humility, resignation and yes, even loss of liberty: a higher trust threatening free will, a central authority to discipline spontaneous emotion, an order regulating modern freedom. This anomalous and suspicious pair will assuredly assist us to regain higher ground, stanch our tears, halt our fall into indeterminacy or negation and recover us from the entanglement that began from the moment of its disavowal.⁵⁸

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NOTES

- 1 Gospel of Matthew 16:24 [KJV]
- 2 From the poem Sunday Morning, by Wallace Stevens, in his book of poetry Harmonium published in 1923.
- 3 Refer to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's talk in Paris, October 24th, 1911.
- 4 No other word in our vocabulary has created so many striking and globally itinerant conventions, etched so many compelling plotlines, provided such limitless imaginative space in which to articulate and contemplate the myriad forms of human emotions of affection, passion, and idealism as love. A sickness unto death or an exhilarating rebirth of the soul, such is its pre-eminence in human thought and feeling across historical, geographic, and linguistic contexts that there is no limit to love's many possible meanings in our own lives and those of others. With so many strains in its meaning and construction across so many traditions it is not surprising to find valiant efforts to write the definitive narrative. Refer, for example, to Irving Singer's monumental three volume series published between 1984 and 1987, entitled 'The Nature of Love', 1,300 pages exploring the vast expressions and theories of love from ancient times to the present. He especially saw love as a 'saving remnant, a viable and realistic conception of what is humanly possible'. It is wise to dismiss the confusing, diversely assorted modern notions of love as these without exception lean towards ambiguity and disagreement. It is in the Bible and Greek philosophy, however, where we see stem the dominant themes of love, one divine and the rest, shades of the residual. For example, what we call (a) affection, is both *storgē* (στοργή) and a giving, loyal, reciprocal love of others, kin or friend or *philia* (φιλία); (b) there is a side to love which is passion or attraction, *éros* (ἔρως), the possessive, all-consuming love of beauty, and (c) the love of compassion, *agapē* (ἀγάπη), the **transcendental, all-embracing, selfless love, the closest to unconditional love. The limitations of these residual loves is that all - familiar, conjugal, or brotherly love (a-c), are natural loves, and, therefore, volatile and not self-sufficient. They bestow great importance to an object to ensure a good life but they are not the highest object. They also need external assistance for expression, reduced to human bondage and prone to self-preservation or self-aggrandizement or both. Universal love, God's infinite love, is unnatural in this sense. God is not just the highest object, making for human plenitude and the more complete life, but is (a) absent of intention i.e. 'unselfish' and (b) not limited to material ties. "... perfect love... can only be achieved by the power of the Divine Spirit. No worldly power can accomplish the universal love."** [Paris Talks, 11]

- 5 'Effulgent' is used here to communicate the love that flows from God to man, and 'enkindling' to refer to the love that flows from man to God, adapted from 'Abdu'l-Bahá's four way typology of love. Refer to Paris Talks, UK Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1972, page 180.
- 6 Conversion here has none of its modern evangelical significance but connotes simultaneously the uncontaminated ideal of renunciation to the world as it does reception into a world renewed.
- 7 Self has been created for one purpose only - to be abdicated and self-sacrifice is synonymous with human development, meaningfulness and security. Psychologists tell us that "...sacrifice... serves far more effectively than short-term impulsive pleasure at keeping suffering at bay." Jordan B. Peterson, clinical psychologist, in his book, *12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos*, Random House, Canada, 2018, p. 174. But how does one answer the question that sacrifices of the highest quality are not rewarded? Isn't God happy? It makes empty and futile the debate of how good might the best possible future be if the highest sacrifice could be made effective. What is the greatest possible sacrifice for the greatest possible good? The lamentation from Calvary continues to echo through the ages: "...Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? [Gospel of Matthew 27:46 KJV] God requires not just sacrifice but the sacrifice of precisely what is loved best because God conferred upon man the 'gift of guidance, and in thankfulness for this great gift certain deeds must emanate from him' [Promulgation, 236]. We must make universal love the ground of morality. 'Abdu'l-Bahá many times reminds us that when we sacrifice self we break away from imperfection and this opens the way to ideal union and happy relationships.
- 8 The apostle Paul forewarned against the working of the law in conscience or rational agents alone: "Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;" Romans 2:15 (KJV). The scholar John Rawls, on the other hand, contends the view that moral truth cannot be metaphysical. It could only be political. Our need for objectivity is practical, that is, it arises in contexts in which people disagree about what to value and need to reach an agreement about what to do. This, of course, gives rise to a host of problems and strongly implies the need for general terms or universals to act as a referee. To reason about and among individuals depends not only on abstractive (as distinct from intuitive) cognition, the deferential apprehension of an antecedent and independent order of some kind, (are our thoughts really faithful representations of the extramental world they depict?) but on the priority of will over reason. Kant's heroic attempt to establish the authority of human reason by transcendental means still relies on the inventive power in

the human soul whose very spontaneity makes it as mysterious and hence as unintelligible as God's creation of the world.

- 9 For an inspiring incursion into this unique piece of Bahá'í literature, refer to the very original article 'Emblems of Faithfulness: Pluralism in Meaning and Beauty in the Ordinary', by Helen Cheng and Catherine Nash published in the *Journal of Bahá'í Studies* 25.3, 2015. Moojan Momen provides an additional descent into the highly innovative aspect of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's book in a paper entitled *Memorials of the Faithful: The Democratization of Saint-hood*, published in *Lights of Irfan* 17, 2016. In the same publication we find *Memorials of the Faithful: The Virtues of Inner and Outer Transformation*, by Marlene Koswan, who shows how the protagonists of the book exemplified character, manners and conduct. *The Dawn-Breakers: Nabil's Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahá'í Revelation*, USBPT, 1932 edition, one of Shoghi Effendi's earliest translations 'which deserves to be counted as a classic among epic narratives in the English tongue' [Rabbani, Pearl] surely stands alone as a historical masterpiece which chronicles in over 600 pages a 'rehearsing [of] the beginnings of the Baha'i Revelation and of preserving the remembrance of the deeds of its early champions.' *The Chronicle of Nabil*, the original manuscript of the author Muhammad-i-Zarandi (1831–1892), titled *Nabil-i-Azam*, stands unique in historiography in that the door of contemporary information on the early adherents of the Babi and Bahá'í Faiths having been forever closed making the careful collection of witness accounts of the heroic disciples up to and until 1892 priceless. We are informed by the *Guardian* that "...parts of the manuscript were reviewed and approved, some by Bahá'u'lláh, others by 'Abdu'l-Bahá", hence its invaluable authenticity.
- 10 'It is much safer to obey than to govern', said wisely once by a German theologian of the late Medieval period, Thomas à Kempis, and probable author of *Imitatio Christi* (*Imitation of Christ*), a devotional book that, with the exception of the Bible, has been considered the most influential work in Christian literature. Cited in Herbert B. Workman, *The Evolution of the Monastic Ideal*, London, 1912, p.69. 'Abdu'l-Bahá uses obedience as a measuring-rod with which to measure the love of His followers, quoted in *The Diary of Juliet Thompson*, first written or published in 1947.
- 11 St. Augustine, quoted in *Love and Saint Augustine* by Hannah Arendt, reprint University of Chicago, Chicago, 1996, page 99.
- 12 A modern account of the constancy of the Bahá'ís in Iran and their unquenchable unconquerable spirit of resilience can be found in the edited transcript of Dr. Firaydoun Javaheri's address at the 42nd Annual Conference of the Association for Bahá'í Studies "Constructive Resilience", published in *JBS*, Vol:28 N°4 Winter 2018.

- 13 Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, the 12th Century French abbot and a major leader in the reform of Benedictine monasticism, quoted in Herbert B. Workman, *The Evolution of the Monastic Ideal*, London, 1912, p.345
- 14 The “framework for action” is a term that has been applied repeatedly during the past two decades (1996–2018) of plans conceived and implemented by the Universal House of Justice and refers to our effort to be conscious of the concepts, methods, practices, and instruments required to undertake an organic process capable of responding to an organic objective. But we can only understand the components of the framework of action if, by an effort of the historical imagination, we succeed in reconstructing that long-lost state of mind for which love, unity, and fellowship become a natural mode of expression. “O ye friends! Fellowship, fellowship! Love, love! Unity, unity!—so that the power of the Bahá’í Cause may appear and become manifest in the world of existence.” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, p.54
- 15 The response to this refrain is ‘Habemos ad dominum’
[We have to the Lord’]
- 16 Latinate or Greek terminology is used deliberately to direct the reader away from the conventional connotations of equivalent English words contaminated by modern discourse.
- 17 We are not suggesting here a political or ethical interpretation to the philosophy of love by inferring for example, that nonviolence is a plausible method for transforming conflict and building societies of peace. After all, at the core of nonviolence is the recognition that we all have a shared human identity and that life is valuable in and of itself. Although nonviolent approaches are several, they can never be espoused as an alternative course of action for two crucial aspects, both contrary to the Bahá’í principle of non-interference in political affairs: (a) their ability to defy authority to reverse the effect of repression, and (b) their ability to undermine and sever the source of support and power of the opponent. Both of these characteristics - defiance and overt power struggle – are shunned in the Bahá’í Faith. The principle of political non-involvement categorically means ‘to sacrifice...political pursuits and affiliations’. Equally relevant is the idea that we cannot change faulty systems by being involved in them; ‘on the contrary they will destroy us.’ http://bahai-library.com/khan_political_noninvolvement_obedience. This does not mean that Bahá’ís refrain from engaging in practical activities for social wellbeing. But the question inevitably arises: is not shaping social reality in itself a political act? In our social relations evidently there is a positive expression of power on the level of the individual but actions only survive on collective volition, not on warring factions, on patterns of collaboration and not patterns of conflict, on engaging governmental and wwpromises. Humanity as a whole will forge the

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- basis of a new world order. The ‘modern politics’, a term used by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, is founded on peace with Bahá’ís reaching out to create unity and love and not revolting overboard with competing ideas of change and social transformation.
- 18 Book of Romans 13:8 [KJV] “...for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.”
 - 19 There exists an intersection here of ‘caritas’ understood to mean neighbourly love and Augustine’s quaestio “What is the relevance of the neighbour?” when we are in God’s presence isolated from all things mundane.
 - 20 Poverty is not itself the criterion nor is oppression for this would leave the rich and the oppressor without a criterion for moral self-reflection and repentance.
 - 21 See the Statement from the Bahá’í International Community entitled ‘Religious Values and the Measurement of Poverty and Prosperity’ presented in Johannesburg, South Africa, 12th January, 1999. Also refer to the article by Professor Ruerd Ruben calling for a greater and more mature relationship between religion studies and development studies, in “Can Religion Contribute to Development? The Road from ‘Truth to ‘Trust.’” https://brill.com/abstract/journals/exch/40/3/article-p225_2.xml
 - 22 Quoted in the **The Art of Peace** by Morihei Ueshiba. The irony is that economics in its origins used to be considered a moral science and not a natural science i.e. ‘it employs introspection and judgments of value’ [John Maynard Keynes]. Harmony of interests is considered a solid rational basis for morality. However, as history has shown, once industrial capitalism and the class system had become recognized structures of society, the doctrine of the harmony of interests acquired a distorted significance whereby a dominant group asserts its predominance by claiming the identity of its interests equal to those of the community as a whole. Today’s theories seek to explain the behavior of economic agents through self-interested, rational, and egoistic motives divorced from ethical considerations and moral reasoning. In the omnipresent confrontation of markets, moral values seem to deteriorate at the point of disappearing altogether. But this seems counter-intuitive. Is it not the laissez-faire school of political economy that popularized the very notion of the harmony of interests, whereby the individual promotes the interests of the community for the very reason that those interests were identical with his own? We can question the sincerity of Mr. Henry Ford when he wrote in 1930 ‘that anything which is economically right is also morally right. There can be no conflict between good economics and good morals’ quoted in E.H. Carr’s *The Twenty Years’ Crisis, 1919-1939*, pages 43-44, but he voiced a prevailing current of accepted thought at the time which stated that men do the greatest service to the public when they are thinking of nothing but their own gain. Modern economics, however, cannot dismiss ethics in favor of a narrow focus on self-interest. All human actions do not have a calculus of maximizing. We

- give blood out of a sense of civic duty and in many other social situations, the idea of compensation even feels as bribery. Refer to *Licence to Be Bad: How Economics Corrupted Us*, by Jonathan Aldred, Allen Lane, 2019.
- 23 Such scepticism attacks all fields and a good rebuttal is forcibly provided by E.H. Carr with regard to political science, for example, in his landmark opus, *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919-1939*, page 9: "For while the transmutation of lead into gold would be no nearer if everyone in the world passionately desired it, it is undeniable that if everyone really desired a 'world-state' or 'collective security'...it would be easily attained; and the student of international politics may be forgiven if he begins by supposing that his task is to make everyone desire it."
- 24 For the sake of clarity the term realism and reality are not the same. Realism is a thesis, a school of educational thought; reality refers to a state or quality of being. The doctrine of realism, metaphysical or scientific, aims at the inquiry of observable and non-observable realities of the world's constituents.
- 25 John Locke (1632-1704), quoted in *Beliefs in Action: Economic Philosophy and Social Change*, by Eduardo Giannetti da Fonseca, CUP, Cambridge, 1991, page 192.
- 26 Paul Lample, in his thought provoking book, *Revelation & Social Reality: Learning to Translate What is Written into Reality*, Palabra, Florida, 2009 provides an excellent and detailed analysis of the dichotomy - rational certainty vis-à-vis spiritual certitude - in the Section entitled 'Human Rationality and the Bahá'í Teachings', pages 174-186.
- 27 An achievable state of mind best exemplified by the preeminent Bahá'í scholar Mirza Abu'l-Fada'il (1844-1914), who has been heard to comment "that when he first read the *Iqan* [the Book of Certitude], as a non-believer, its deep meaning remained obscure to him, but when he read it afterward as a believer it was the key that unlocked all the holy Scriptures of the past." Cited in *Summon Up Remembrance*, by Marzieh Gail, page 113.
- 28 Shoghi Effendi, letter dated, September 24th, 1924, quoted in 'Unfolding Destiny: The Messages from the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith to the Bahá'í Community of the British Isles', BPT, 1981, p.27
- 29 I hesitate to use the term 'public intellectual', this 'vestigial organ of modernity', in the Bahá'í context because it assumes a political and ideological dimension. The ordinary public vacillates between seeing the intellectual as "unusually sensitive to the sacred [with] an uncommon reflectiveness about the nature of the universe and the rules which govern their society" (Edward Shills

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- (Intellectuals and the Powers, 1974, p. 3), or “the industrial technician, the political economist, the organizer of a new culture and a new law” (Antonio Gramsci), both are quoted in the article by Maria Laura Bettencourt Pires, ‘Public intellectuals – past, present and future’, published in *Comunicação & Cultura*, n.º 7, 2009.
- 30 Voltaire, for example, in his article “L’homme de lettres” (*Dictionnaire philosophique*, published 1764), espouses engagement and shuns “the scholastic obscurantism of decadent universities and academies.” Quoted in *Public Intellectuals – An Endangered Species*, Ed. A. Etzioni & A. Bowditch, Rowman & Littlefield, Oxford, 2006, p 158.
 - 31 Bacon, from his 1605 book, *Advancement of Learning*, quoted in *Beliefs in Action: Economic Philosophy and Social Change*, by Eduardo Giannetti da Fonseca, CUP, Cambridge, 1991, page 154.
 - 32 Bacon’s rhetorical principle is a good reminder of how words are ultimately about arousing imagination (or emotion) as a mechanism for influencing behavior (“the will”), whether by intent or effect.
 - 33 “First, it will be said that literary imagination is unscientific and subversive of scientific social thought. Second, it will be said that it is irrational in its commitment to the emotions. Third, it will be charged that it has nothing to do with the impartiality and universality that we associate with law and public judgment.” Martha C. Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1995, p.4
 - 34 The emphasis is one of perception as fair-minded observers never viewed the Bab and His followers as ‘revolutionary’ or engaging in ‘anarchical conspiracy’.
 - 35 The ideal of a stationary state reads like a lyric cry and squanders the most precious thing there is, the spirit. This cannot mean that only the individual agent knows what his or her needs are, nor can it mean enforcing a re-education to help enhance our moral or aesthetic capabilities which can be ‘wooden and awkward’ (a phrase used by Mr. Paul Lample in his talk at the 32nd annual conference of the Association for Bahá’í Studies – North America 29 August to 1 September 2008). But guidance from the top is indispensable (a) to give official scope to experiments designed to permit the practice of new and essential skills but also (b) address the problem of initiative and efficient use of existing resources which can only be genuinely solved from below. “The periodic re-evaluation of the effectiveness of the teaching work is an essential factor in promoting the growth of every community.” [Universal House of Justice Message, July 30th 1987]
 - 36 C.S. Lewis, “The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition”, *Galaxy*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1958, page 1.

- 37 Religious texts may criticize imagination: “for the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth” [Genesis 8:21 KJV] yet the same texts are interpreted to provide for a positive imagination that facilitates a dialogue between the human and the divine. Coleridge identifies Logos as the communicative intellect in God and man and the ultimate power of making. Refer to the contributing article by James Engell, Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Harvard University, in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry & Poetics*, 4th edition, 2012, pp 666-674.
- 38 Proposed by Joseph Campbell who researched extensively the study of comparative mythology. His widest popular recognition followed his collaboration on the PBS series, *The Power of Myth*, which was first broadcast in 1988, the year following his death. The series discusses mythological, religious, and psychological archetypes. A book, *The Power of Myth*, containing expanded transcripts of their conversations, was released shortly after the original broadcast.
- 39 A term coined by the Swiss psychiatrist Carl G. Jung, or ‘kollektives Unbewusstes’ in German, referring to structures of the unconscious mind shared among human beings. The theory of myth developed by the father of analytical psychology is one of the few that answers fully the subject matter, origin, and function of myth. Refer to his work, in collaboration with C. Kerényi, *Essays on a Science of Mythology*, published in 1949.
- 40 Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834), leader of the British Romantic movement. He uses the word ‘symbol’ rather than ‘myth’ in his 1816 *Statesman’s Manual*. Symbol is conceived as an expression of unity between the representative and semantic function of language. Myth and symbol are interchangeable in that both refer to a ‘structure of significance’ whose power over collective intelligence, purpose and behavior is strong. Myths operate as mediating symbols.
- 41 We use the magical figure of Mullá Husayn, as we can countless others such as the audacity of the village girl, Zaynab, during the Zanzibar upheaval or the 17-year old Mona who was hanged with nine other Bahá’í women in June 1983, precisely to underpin the fact that ‘bios theoretikos’ or contemplative thinking, cannot stand alone as an essential human activity but must follow or be followed by other principal human activities, such as willing and judging, essential roles that lead to action. Hannah Arendt expands bios theoretikos into these other mental faculties to show that contemplation and actualization through action are inseparable. It is precisely in the enactment of the ethical excellences that contemplation is immortalized. Action becomes not an end, the telos, but rather the beginning, undertaking new ventures whose outcome or end cannot be foreseen and whose standard is courage, daring to embark on something new and unpredictable. Augustine’s dictum is Arendt’s start-off ‘Initium ut esset creatus est homo, “man was created so that a beginning be” in

order that entirely new undertakings and ventures could come about in the historical human world.

- 42 As spiritual beings, we are guided in our thought and action by a special gift from our Creator, who has seen fit to implant in our souls the deeper truth of the nature of the world, and special guidance about how we are to act in it. We must discover this inner truth, and adhere to it in the face of the often-distracting course of our experience. Perception and inquiry remind us of what is innate in us. The doctrine of anamnesis is not without its historical controversies, however. Refer to Jerry Samet's article, "The Historical Controversies Surrounding Innateness", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2019 Edition. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/innateness-history/>.
- 43 To quote from a letter written on behalf of the Guardian: "Just as the muscles enable the body to carry out the will of the individual, all Assemblies and committees must enable the believers to carry... the love of Bahá'u'lláh..." Directives p. 2
- 44 Quoted in 'The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry & Poetics', 4th edition, 2012, p. 674.
- 45 The body of doctrines and practices that form the fundamental organizing principle of a state (its constitution or 'politeia') have a built-in tendency for self-protective stratagems and the conduct of its associated defined arrangements of offices, functions, and jurisdictions oftentimes engendering sufficient mistrust so as to exact confrontation with a community's own thoughts and intentions.
- 46 Implied to mean that seekers of heavenly thoughts, inhabitants of a cramped hill in Mount Zion, are not in battle with the dwellers of the first fiery scientists of Western civilization, as epitomized by Greece's towering Mount Olympus.
- 47 These three words, 'everything that is', readily describe the Greek term 'cosmos'.
- 48 As early as 2001, the Universal House of Justice encourages the Bahá'ís to engage and seek opportunities to meet individuals "... who are willing to engage in meaningful conversation, exploring spiritual realities and learning more and more about the Faith." Letter dated, 3rd of June, 2001, written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Union of Myanmar.
- 49 By looking into lives that are not ours, we avoid the personal bias which can misinterpret information. Martha C. Nussbaum: "... ideally the process of reading must be completed by a conversation among readers." Quoted in her book, *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1995, p. 75. Such empathetic participation and external assessment are crucial in determining the degree of compassion it is rational for a person

to have. We see this principle in the new approach to Bahá'í culture, 'to help the believers draw upon the Writings as a guide for action, while avoiding both an inflexible literalism intent upon "finding the one right answer" and an unfocused subjectivism that indulges in a prolonged exchange of personal views on "what the quotation means to me".' Mr. Paul Lample, *Revelation & Social Reality: Learning to Translate What is Written into Reality*, Palabra, Florida, 2009, pp 81-82.

- 50 Utilitarian thinking, a product of the nineteenth century, continues to dominate Western thought, with its tendency to aggregate human beings, to overlook individual differences, and to reduce the mysteries and complexities of human motivation to mathematically predictable elements of self-interest. To conceive order through the greatest good for the greatest number, or through a balance of enlightened self-interest and the pursuit of economic profit, has proven at variance with the disorder and human suffering precipitated by the Industrial Revolution. Voegelin pithily remarks: "The substance of order moved down in the ontological scale from God, through reason, pragmatic intellect, usefulness, production forces, and racial determinants, to biological drives." Quoted in Dr. Paulette Kidder's 2004 article *The Eclipse of Transcendence in Dickens' Hard Times*, and may be obtained at the site <https://sites01.lsu.edu/faculty/voegelin/wp-content/uploads/sites/80/2015/09/Kidder2004.pdf>.
- 51 "The tendency to narrow the field of human experience to the area of reason, science, and pragmatic action, the tendency to overvalue this area in relation to the bios theoretikos and the life of the spirit, the tendency to make it the exclusive preoccupation of man, the tendency to make it socially preponderant through economic pressure in the so-called free societies and through violence in totalitarian communities- all these tendencies are part of a cultural process that is dominated by a flight of magic imagination..." Voegelin (*ibid.*)
- 52 In fact, from a religious point of view apprehension is placed in between the intellectual and the sensible, its purpose being to see the good in the relation between perception and existence.
- 53 Cited in *The Four Valleys of Bahá'u'lláh* and which could be interpreted to mean human learning to understand the non-human, grammar's rules to guide us to renunciation..
- 54 The exotic new theories in physics today – string theory, loop quantum gravity, and the like – share the common ambition of seeking to explain features of the universe that quantum physics and modern astrophysics place beyond the explanatory reach of physical science. Does this not suggest a new religious cosmology?

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- 55 The Latin *apprehensio*, from which the English term is derived, was employed by late medieval logicians, as the three fundamental operations of the scientific mind: apprehension, judgement and ratiocination.
- 56 This is in reference to Laplace's 'demon' in classical mechanics as the canonical articulation of scientific determinism which has played a vital role in statistical thermodynamics, quoted in 'Confessions of a Born-Again Pagan' by Anthony T. Kronman, Yale University Press, 2016, page 765. "In this sense, modern physics is committed to the principle of sufficient reason and to the proposition, which this principle implies, that the world is infinitely intelligible, while conceding...that our finitude prevents us from ever exhausting its intelligibility completely." (ibid. pp 615-616)
- 57 The Greek term *metaxy* (μεταξύ) denotes the middle, the intermediate, the in-between or the center.
- 58 For a bold and imaginative attempt in searching for a mythological landscape and substance in the Bahá'í Faith, refer to the article by William P. Collins, *Sacred Mythology and the Bahá'í Faith*, JBS, Vol:2, N°4, 1990.