

Making new flowers to blossom:

The religious experience of Alessandro Bausani,
an early Italian scholar of the Bahá'í Faith

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Introduction

12 March 2008 is the twentieth anniversary of Alessandro Bausani's passing. His work as a scholar survives in the many writings he has left to posterity and in the style he has handed on to his disciples, many of whom have reached prominent positions in Islamic studies. Some have written significant papers on his personality and works as a great scholar. The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Italy commemorates the twentieth anniversary of his death, publishing a book dealing with a vital aspect of his personality and life: his religiosity. In this regard, Bausani is an exceptional personage because, in a time when most scholars have adopted a methodology that excludes the transcendent dimensions of life, he was able to harmonise his adherence to the criteria of science and his faith in God, which has always occupied a central position in his life. Elsa Scola Bausani used to say that her husband had been extraordinary because he could harmonise these two fundamental aspects of his personality. His faithfulness to science and devotion to the Bahá'í Faith did not cause an inner conflict for him, but they enriched one another. In this respect, Alessandro Bausani has set a noble standard for the new generations.

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Italy
Rome, 12 March 2008

If a believer takes good action, new
flowers will blossom on all the
planets.

– Alessandro Bausani

Religious experience has pervaded the fundamental stages of the life of Alessandro Bausani (1921-1988), the renowned Italian Islamicist whose impressive encyclopaedic work, characterised by a deep interest for religion and history, languages and literature, comprises *Persia religiosa, da Zarathustra a Baha'u'llah* (Milan, 1959), translated into English as *Religion in Iran* (New York, 2000), the only exhaustive Western book on the religious history of Persia, 'La letteratura neo-persiana [Neo-Persian Literature]', the most comprehensive Italian history of Neo-Persian literature, the little volume *The Persians*, translated into German in 1965 and into English in 1971, three books which in his short Preface of *I persiani* (the original version) he defined as his 'trptych' on Iranian culture (7), the best existing Italian translation of the Koran (Florence, 1955) and over 300 scholarly books and papers on the various subjects of his concern. Bausani has built his life around religion, unifying and harmonising the multifarious aspects of his activities around it and demonstrating, in his life and works, through his unique style, the eternal relevance of faith in God. This essay will illustrate Bausani's religious experience. Others, like Gianroberto Scarcia, Bianca Maria Scarcia Amoretti, and Adriano Valerio Rossi, have already begun to study his work as a great orientalist.

The years of his youth

His Catholic infancy and adolescence

Bausani told the Italian journalist Giuseppe Grieco about his life during an interview published in the 10 March 1979 issue of the Italian weekly magazine *Gente* [People]¹ and later in a book entitled *Il bisogno di Dio* [The Need of God]. He was born a Catholic. His mother ‘could not care less for God and religion’ (Bausani, quoted in Grieco 57). On the contrary, his father was an unfulfilled mystic and felt condemned to live in the wrong age’ (ibid.). He gave him ‘an austere, almost medieval, religious education’. He initiated him to the ‘stern Thomist Catholic dogmatism’ (Bausani, ‘Tagore’ 9 [1971]), which in the 1930s was a typical religious attitude among Italians close to the Catholic Church. This kind of religiosity implied the wholehearted acceptance of the infallibility of the Pope and of the Magisterium of the Church and, therefore, approved not only the dogmas taught by the Church but also its political choices in the last two centuries. Thus, Bausani’s ‘spiritual castle’ included ‘the great popes and the great emperors, but excluded the Italian Risorgimento [lit. Resurgence]’ (Bausani, quoted in Grieco 57), the ‘nineteenth-century movement for Italian unification that culminated in the establishment of the Kingdom of Italy in 1861’ (*Encyclopædia Britannica*: ‘Risorgimento’). In its nationalism, this movement was in contrast with Catholicism and its peculiar universalism. Bausani’s father also introduced him to the texts of Catholic spirituality, such as St Augustine’s Confessions, which he read when he was about 13. His education, the literature he read, and his inborn disposition brought him to choose ‘the convent . . . as his ideal home’, to dream of ‘gothic cathedrals, of a mystical relation with God, of a life equally divided between work

¹ Whenever Grieco will be quoted in this essay, the reference text will be ‘Da Cristo a Marx a Bahá’u’lláh [From Christ to Marx to Bahá’u’lláh]’, in *Gente*, vol.23, no.10 (10 March 1979), pp.52-8.

and prayer' and to conceive 'an old-fashioned idea of human values' (Bausani, quoted in Grieco 57).

In those early years, Bausani established the foundations of the idea of God that guided him throughout his life. His God was 'an entity and not a thing dissolved into other things' (Bausani, *Saggi* 498). He perceived Him mainly 'in sweetness, in silence' (ibid. 476), as 'an ancient and new Power, which is not noisy and violent, but is inwardly powerful, as It is described in the ancient Elias's theophany' (ibid. 227):

And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord. And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: And after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice. (3 King 19: 11-2)

Bausani liked so much the last words of these verses, a 'still small voice', that he used to quote them in their original language: '*qol dēmamah daqqah*' (Bausani, *Saggi* 227 [1970]). He also loved another Script expounding concepts similar to those of the Bible, that is, Koran 6:76-9:

And when the night overshadowed him, he beheld a star. 'This,' said he, 'is my Lord:' but when it set, he said, 'I love not gods which set.' And when he beheld the moon uprising, 'This,' said he, 'is my Lord:' but when it set, he said, 'Surely, if my Lord guide me not, I shall surely be of those who go astray.' And when he beheld the sun uprise, he said, 'This is my Lord; this is greatest.' But when it set, he said, 'O my people! I share not with you the guilt of joining gods with God; I turn my face to him who hath created the Heavens and the Earth, following the right religion: I am not one of those who add gods to God.

In 1955, he wrote that these verses express ‘the meanness of the things of the universe in the light of an inborn need of absolute Power and greatness’ and that this episode is ‘all pervaded . . . by an utterly humble and spontaneous adoration of Him Who never sets’ (‘Introduzione e commento’543n76ff.).

The same feelings are also reflected in some of his unpublished poems written between 1945 and 1955. In 1947, he wrote a ‘Litania antipanteistica [Antipanththeistic litany]’, which he describes in its subtitle as ‘A letter written as an answer to Nature that was angrily asking the Author why did he so seldom speak about her . . .’. This poem consists of eight strophes. The first seven begin with the words: ‘No / I cannot sing about you / Nature / because . . .’. In each strophe, he describes one reason that makes him see nature as a minimal and imperfect reality. At the end, he writes:

I can sing
only about Thee
O Heaven
Thou art so high . . .
. . . Thou seest
understandest
criest
and then,
so great,
Thou whisperest a chirping laugh.

In ‘Preghiera dell’idiota [The Idiot’s Prayer]’ (*Saggi* 508-9), written in 1947, he says:

Only
when at eve Thou comest to rest
at the windows of Thy sky
only then can I pray Thee
. . .
Let me come with Thee,

then,
and also when . . .
Thou leavest
over there
the envious beckon of the stars
to keep watch over a great void.

In 1979, as a mature man, he explained to Grieco (58): 'I perceive the . . . presence [of God] . . . mainly when I am happy. God is happiness, ineffable joy. Sadness and unhappiness belong to human beings'.

His idea of God was gradually enriched through his wide religious and literary studies, which enabled him to grasp the merits of the various perceptions of God that he had encountered. Thus he came to share 'the drunkenness of the absolute accentuation of the alluring depth of the abyss between man and God, the inebriation of the utter supremacy of God' and the 'ultimate voluptuousness of self-denial and God-affirmation, which directly arises from the accentuation of God's Lordship and the servant's absolute "dependence"' (Bausani, 'Aspects' 4), typical of the religiosity of Prophetic Judaism and of early Islam, a religiosity which in the 1950s he defined as 'absolutely transcendental theism' (*Saggi* 271). However, he also came to appreciate the unknowable God of 'pantheism or theopanism' (*ibid.*), typical of the Hindu religions, that 'neutral *sacred entity* (*quid numinosum*), present and scattered throughout the universe' (*ibid.* 380), 'from whose immense breath the whole world was born, which is, therefore, all divine' (*ibid.* 168). He perceived 'the throb of God in nature, in its humble things: his breath in the wind, his hands in the rustling leaves of the trees, his loving eye in all flowers' (*ibid.* 272). His relation with God was sometimes 'that between a servant and his Lord', sometimes 'that between a drunken lover and his Isolde' (*ibid.*). However, he usually preferred and adopted the relation with a 'God *with* us (not god = us), . . . appearing in more and

more luminous beauty in proportion to the growing capacities of humankind' (ibid. 274) typical of the Bahá'í Faith.

The firm spiritual foundations received from his father fed his 'incurably religious spirit' (Bausani, 'Tagore' 9) and enabled him to choose the best of Catholicism and of all the other institutional religions. In this respect, we agree with Gian Roberto Scarcia, his pupil and now Dean of the Department of Euro-Asiatic Studies at the University of Venice, who, during the celebration of the decennial of Bausani's passing in Venice said ('Quattro incursioni' 485):

Bausani's Catholicism will never be overemphasised in its etymological meaning, as the idea that belonging to a real community was and is the necessary, if not sufficient . . . prerequisite for a genuine and strong religious conscience. Not any community, but an orthodox community, since only orthodoxies are socially worthy to be preserved, through strenuous work in order to refine them from within, even at the cost of swallowing bitter pills and tears . . .

His disengagement from Catholicism

As was the case with many Italians of his generation, Bausani's inherited faith in Catholicism went through a crisis in the years of secondary school when he came in 'touch with philosophy' (Bausani, quoted in Grieco 57). At that time, he said, in Italy, 'Idealism was the fashion, in both its "fascist" version by Giovanni Gentile and its "liberal" version by Benedetto Croce' (ibid.). Giovanni Gentile (1875-1944) was a significant figure in Italian idealist philosophy. A politician, an educator (his reform of the Italian educational system lasted for more than fifty years) and an editor (he edited the celebrated *Enciclopedia Italiana*), he is sometimes called the 'philosopher of Fascism'. His 'actual idealism' shows the strong influence of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. Benedetto Croce (1866-1952) was a historian, a humanist, and a foremost philosopher. He was the founder of 'absolute historicism' and the

leader of ‘moderate’ opposition to Fascism. Bausani’s ‘exceptional teacher’ was Pilo Albertelli (1907-1944), a Crocean Catholic, active in the Catholic antifascist underground (Bausani, quoted in Grieco 57) and one of the 335 victims of the Fosse Ardeatine’s (Rome) Nazi slaughter. The Crocean teaching of Albertelli unwittingly undermined Bausani’s faith in Catholicism, from which he gradually drew away. Like many others, he, too, stopped believing in the many “‘impossible” things’ (Bausani, quoted in Grieco 57), which the Catholic Church, like other religious institutions, asked one to believe. In later days, he explained to Grieco that, in his opinion, Catholicism and the other ancient religions had initially taught a fruitful universal ecumenism but had later turned into ‘dry wells for all them who are thirsty of God’ (ibid.). They had become dry because they asked their followers to believe in a ‘body of dogmas and laws that today make no sense since they were prescribed for remote centuries and for a human-kind that has deeply changed’ (ibid. 58).

The years of his spiritual quest

Bausani said to Grieco (57) that since his spiritual ‘initiation’ came from his father, it was ‘virile and deep and therefore . . . destined to endure’. Thus, even when Bausani was in a state of crisis with Catholicism, he always believed that religion is ‘such an important thing that you cannot be neutral towards it. In front of religion, there are but two choices: . . . either you accept it, or you fight it, as a superstition, sorcery’ (ibid. 52). In 1977, he expressed (*Saggi* 54) his regret and surprise because ‘*scientists*, who should be *seekers* par excellence’, had stopped their search

at the tradition where they were born and did not investigate whether that tradition, whose ritualism, metaphysical elucubrations, and shrivelled and stiffened theoretical precepts were the origin of the antireligious vocation of modern science, could be

possibly overcome, whether revelation itself could be possibly subject to evolution.

In those years, the young Bausani was disappointed with Catholicism's dogmas and rites. As a result, he produced a fascinating work, a translation of the Gospel of St Matthew into the modern Roman dialect, entitled *La Bbona Notizzia* [The Good News]. When it was completed, this translation was considered almost blasphemous and thus remained unpublished for about forty years. It was published posthumously in 1992 by a group of Bahá'í private publishers (Gruppo Editoriale Insieme). He explained the reasons for his translation ('Introduction 10-1):

If the books called Gospels . . . made such a good impression on the simple-minded people of their times with their sloppy and colourless language, and if Jesus' sayings conquered so many individuals in his vulgar and dull dialect . . . might not be – I thought malignantly – the present effect of the Gospels primarily due to their haughty speech, to their Latin, their Diodati's good Italian or their mighty Luther's German? A supreme attempt was thus necessary: denuding the Gospels from those encrustations intended to change them into what they did not want to be, a sacred and solemn book.

At that time, those which Bausani later called 'exotic sects' (*Saggi* 355), the religions of the Far East (Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism), were not yet fashionable in Italy. However, should they have been, they would not have attracted him. In 1971, he described his first impressions of Rabindranath Tagore, when, as a 10-11 years old boy, he read his *Post Office* as 'something beautiful, sweet, but also anxiously frightening and fascinating at the same time, as well as something immature, childish, frail' ('Tagore' 9). In the pantheistic religiousness of the Hindu world, 'so much appreciated by certain modern liberals' (Bausani, *Saggi* 274), he recognised the bedrock of the depreciable Indian castes. Its 'pensive

suavity' appeared to him as mostly transformed into a 'fruitless resignation' (ibid. 16). Even the "pure" and primitive "agricultural socialism" (ibid.) became in his eyes, as in those of Karl Marx, whom he quotes (ibid. 16), a "barbarian egotism which, concentrating on some miserable patch of land, had quietly witnessed the ruin of empires, the perpetration of unspeakable cruelties, the massacre of the population of large towns" (Marx, 'The British Rule' 132). Later, he explained his aversion to that kind of religiosity. In 1982, he wrote (ibid. 20-1) that the Hindu and Buddhist theories of reincarnation, whereby 'if Mr X starved, he is to be blamed, that is, the actions which he performed in his previous rebirths', are 'pessimistic and, after all, reactionary'. He also remarked (ibid. 362) that

if today in Europe and the West we have a (relatively) more just society than they have in modern India, where hundreds of thousands of people starve every day, we . . . also [are indebted] to our medieval monks, or some of them. On the contrary, Indian fakirs, escaping into nirvana, did not influence their society otherwise than in a consolatory way.

Moreover, to those who in the 1980s stated that 'all Eastern – both Hindu and Buddhist – philosophies deal with the inner self, with liberation . . . they offer a space', and thus they respond to 'the mentality of the youth . . . who are unsatisfied with society' and wish for 'their own space', Bausani answered: if the youth 'wish for an inner liberation, is not this space also available in Christian mysticism? I think that they turn to an allegedly "more permissive East" only because of their confused dopefiend-sexual-pseudo-anarchist tendencies' (*Saggi* 365). However, above all, Bausani thought that the modern Western adepts of the religions of the Far East were 'looking for a personal salvation and purification, a liberation to be personally experienced' (*Saggi* 367). On the contrary, he was interested in a 'divine policy for the unification and sanctification of human society' (ibid.). 'Whoever wants his soul

to be saved', he said, 'can well turn to any traditional religion However, whoever wants to give a divine organisation to the present world . . . cannot use the elementary instruments of religious sociology offered by previous religions in an embryonic form' (ibid. 367-8).

Bausani was interested neither in 'mysticism in its mainly esoteric and personalist-individualist aspects' (*Saggi* 103) nor in 'occultism, as it is generally intended, that is, as a spirituality *superior* to religion, and not as a pure science of paranormal psychology' (ibid. 392). He always considered both of them 'as a danger for religious life in two respects: in the field of *individual* ethics' because they lead people into 'self-conceit, a major "sin" in religious life, and in the field of *social* ethics' because they inevitably lead people 'to emphasise the *personal*, individualistic, aspects of religion, creating theoretical, pseudo-scientific *dogmas* and thus, conflicts' (ibid.).

Neither was he interested in those 'scientific theories which "should lead" to God, to spirituality, etc.' because, in his opinion, 'scientific theories do not lead to God'; on the contrary, they lead to a 'false god, the god of the eternal paganism, and not to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the legislator God, the *ethical* Sovereign of the universe' (Bausani, *Saggi* 208). He thought that science and religion deal with two different objects. Science describes material reality and uses its discoveries to create technological instruments for man to use. Religion teaches how human beings should behave in the world and, thus, how best they can use the fruits of science. If the roles of religion and science are not well understood, wrong anthropomorphic ideas of God are born, as was the case with Christianity.

He was also suspicious of modern rationalism, 'which charges religious people with *irrationalism*' (Bausani, *Saggi* 208). He remarked that many of those who make this charge 'cannot dominate their own most elementary (in the first place sexual) passions . . . substitute God with human beings (be they Mao or Hitler

or Stalin or whoever)' (ibid.). They surrender to 'human, exceedingly human illusions' (ibid.). Moreover 'this modern world that claims to be rational' well deserves the following words by the Persian-born poet 'Urfi (d.1591), who lived his entire life in India: "If your mind does not surrender to the Mirage, do not boast of your rationality: it rather depends on the fact that your thirst is not enough"' (ibid. 208-9).

His earliest religious interests outside Catholicism turned, in the first place, towards Protestantism and, then, towards the theologians of the 'death of God'. However, both of them disappointed him. They appeared to him, he later explained to Grieco (57), as a 'diminished and shattered Catholicism'. He was attracted towards an 'ecumenical, universal faith, in the broadest sense of the word' (ibid.). Moreover, he did not appreciate the Protestant idea that you are saved through your faith in theological dogmas, independently of your deeds. He preferred the concept of the 'good praxis': that you are saved through your deeds (Scarcia, "Quattro incursioni" 491). He was moreover convinced that 'modern society cannot be satisfied with a doctrine that focuses all its values upon the individual. The time of individualism, as represented in the religious field mainly by the great Protestant Reformation and in the political field by Liberalism', he wrote. 'has expired' (*Saggi* 96).

Immediately after the Second World War, he conceived the idea 'that a Christian revolution could be made in the Marxist universe' (Bausani, quoted in Grieco 57) and 'looked for that yearning after the Kingdom of God . . . which [he] did not find in the Catholic social programs' in a revolutionary party ('Congresso' 3). Therefore, he joined Franco Rodano (1920-1983), the founder of the Christian Left and the leader of the Communist Catholics, 'and his companions, in the group of Catholic Communists' (Bausani, quoted in Grieco 57), a decision that filled with dismay the heart of his strongly Catholic father. After two years, he realised that a compromise between Marxist atheism and Catholic theism

was impossible and that ‘a Christian revolution in the Marxist universe’ was impossible (ibid. 214). ‘This has been my last disillusionment’, he said to Grieco (ibid.). Thus, since, in his opinion, ‘without God, any revolution is bound to fail’, in 1946, he broke away from Communism ‘quietly . . . [without] arguments, or open conflicts’ (ibid. 57).

However, he continued to support the Italian Communists, and thus when, on 1st July 1949, the Congregation of the Holy Office² emanated its famous decree known as ‘excommunication of the Communists’, which gave an affirmative answer to the question ‘Do Christians who profess the materialistic and anti-Christian Communist doctrine, and who defend and promote it, incur *ipso facto* [immediately] the excommunication reserved to the Holy See, as apostates of the Catholic faith?’, he published, on the issue of 16 July 1949 of the leftist Italian newspaper *Il Paese*, an article entitled ‘An excommunicated writes’. In this article, he declared that he was ‘proud of having been, albeit undeservedly, numbered by the Roman Curia in the same group whose part Savonarola, Giordano Bruno Galilei, etc. had been’.

The spirit that animated him in supporting those who ‘began to Christianly cooperate for the realisation of a socialist society, although they looked ahead’ (‘Lettera’) was that he was looking more ‘ahead’ than his Marxist companions, that is, he was waiting for a further day when the renewal of the hearts would have realised the Kingdom of God on earth. He adhered to the Communist party ‘for about two years (to 1946)’ (‘Letter to Dr Giachery’) as a neo-communist and withdrew from it because of the ‘greater

² The Holy Office is ‘the Roman congregation established in connection with the Inquisition . . . in 1542 as the final court of appeal in trials of heresy . . . [and in] 1965 reformed . . . and changed . . . [into] “The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith”’ (*The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions* 438).

emphasis of the materialistic ideological aspects of that party' (ibid.), which he disliked. After withdrawing from Communism, he still considered the Communist movement 'one of Italy's strongest spiritual trends' (ibid.). He said that in its ranks, he had found 'some of the most honest, clean people, even in certain instances "secular saints"' (ibid.). Nevertheless, he supported it 'with a certain pain' because he saw its 'flaws' (ibid.), for example, brutality. As early as 1948, he described it 'as providentially necessary as the Roman Empire (despite its being a-Christian or even sometimes anti-Christian) for the diffusion, into a pre-existent lifeless skeleton, of the lymph of Christianity' ('Il mondo moderno'). In conclusion, Bausani saw it as a 'lesser evil', which he was choosing because he wanted to avoid what he saw in those days as the 'hypocritical and pseudo-spiritualist corruption' of the capitalist powers and because 'anything, even atheism . . . is better than exploiting religion to conceal dirty personal interests' ('Letter to Dr Giachery'). He always proclaimed himself Christian and progressive, defending his '*objective* religious faith, in the Kingdom beyond this world' (see 'Socialisti e Cristiani' 7). His real hope was that the "material body" of society might have been vivified by the "few but burning believing cells"' (ibid.). What he admired in his Communist friends was their idealistic search for justice, which he described as a 'certain form of spirituality, bent to achieving such highly humanitarian goals as, for example, social justice, equality before the law and the production, etc.' (Saggi 238). In 1971, during a lecture in Rome on the issue 'The Bahá'ís and the topical interest of dialogue', he stated: 'In my opinion today. . . superstition is not only the dogma of the Assumption of Mary, body and soul, into heaven, but also the myth of the "dictatorship of the proletariat" and the myth of the free capitalistic initiative' (7). The present writer heard him saying in the Seventies that the world was divided into two parts: one part preferred justice rather than freedom, and the other preferred

freedom rather than justice. What he thought about the absence of freedom in the Communist countries may be deduced from the fact that in some of his papers, he put Hitler and Stalin at the same level (see *Saggi* 83, 208).

Having abandoned the communist party, he remained aloof from the Church, which he considered the promoter of a ‘reactionary and totalitarian party’ (*‘Oltre il moderatismo’* 5). In 1949, he wrote: ‘Although I meditate every day upon a passage of the Gospel, however, for evident reasons, my conscience has forbidden me to call myself a “Catholic”’ (*‘Mosè o Faraone?’* 1). In the meantime, he undertook a ‘controversy of spirituality against dusty conformism’ (*Scarcia, “Quattro incursioni”* 485). Therefore, in 1948, he criticised ‘clericalism’, that is,

the mental attitude of them who, in front of the living God of the Gospel, contaminate him with the pseudo-gods of abstract philosophies . . . the mental attitude of them who, in front of the divine command ‘change yourselves’, ‘renew yourselves’, which is the essence of Christ’s early preaching, translate it into the formula: ‘repent’ (which is only one of its aspects) and into a stifling and corrupting education. (*‘Oltre il moderatismo’* 5)

In 1951, he also wrote that the ‘Bible . . . does not present us with verities (be they scientific, or historical, or absolute religious and moral verities), but it creates spiritual realities’, and therefore he saw himself as one of ‘them who do not discuss passages and personages of the Bible, but are themselves personages of the eternal Bible’ (*‘Bibbia e Verità’* 3).

However, after he abandoned the Catholic Church, he did not follow in the footsteps of many others, whose quest was satisfied

with imperfect and unequal means: either a general scepticism. . . [or] a ‘generic hope’ that something may happen in the future; or acquiescence, in the persuasion that, failing all else, a new interpretation of one’s traditional belief may be sufficient, an

interpretation that sometimes is not even accepted by religious authorities. (Bausani, 'Idee Bahá'í' 2)

In those years, he felt a great need for a Divine renewal. The renewal of the world to which he was ready to devote his life was not the renewal of the economy, society, politics or the Churches. He was hoping for an authentic religious renewal. He explained his ideas in two papers: 'Il ritorno di Cristo [The return of Christ]' (*La Luce*, 30 November 1948) and 'Presupposti di una riforma religiosa [Prerequisites for a Religious Reformation]' (*La Luce*, 30 April 1949). In these papers, he defended the need for a renewed love for God.

In 1948, he first met the Bahá'í Faith through Philip Amalfi Marangella. Marangella (1895-1974) was an Italian American Bahá'í teacher and pioneer (see 'In memoriam' 525-7) who came to Italy in 1947 and returned to the United States in 1948. During that year in Italy, he frequented the University of Rome in search of people receptive to the Bahá'í message. Bausani has often manifested his gratitude, esteem and affection for this man. Marangella introduced him to Dr Ugo Giachery (1996-1989), a future Hand of the Cause of God (see 'In memoriam' 779),³ with whom he discussed the Bahá'í Faith at length until he finally accepted it on 8 April 1950, when Marangella was already back home. While he was debating the Faith with Dr Giachery and the Bahá'ís of Rome, he also met a young and radiant soul, Elsa Scola, recently enrolled in the Bahá'í fold, who was eager to learn Persian so that she might read the Bahá'í Writings in their original language. That young lady would become his devoted and loving spouse for 38 years and the faithful preserver of his memories until her last day.

³ The Hands of the Cause of God are a number of Bahá'ís appointed by Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi with the specific duties of protecting and teaching the Bahá'í Faith.

A short inner struggle

When Bausani met Marangella in 1948, he knew only a little historical information about the Bábí-Bahá'í Faith. He used to say that he had immediately admired the Báb because of His revolutionary personality. We may perceive just a hint of the process he went through in those few months through an unpublished letter dated 1st March 1950 addressed to Dr Giachery. The original letter has not yet been discovered. Elsa Scola Bausani gave a copy of the rough copy of this letter to Ms. Laura Marcheschi, a Bahá'í student who wrote in 2002-2003 a thesis in history entitled 'Alessandro Bausani: l'incontro con la Fede bahá'í [Alessandro Bausani: his encounter with the Bahá'í Faith]'. Ms. Marcheschi has given it to the Archives of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Italy. We do not yet know whether Dr Giachery wrote a letter to answer him. In his letter, Bausani expresses a few doubts.

First, he objected that the Bahá'í milieu was an upper-class and snob milieu and complained that he had never met, in Dr Giachery's apartment in the elegant Parioli quarter of Rome, a 'beggar, a workman, one of those people who followed Jesus in His wandering through Galilee'. In his opinion, 'no religious reformation is possible in the present Italian political situation without the contribution of the people, the masses, "the little ones" as Jesus said'. In those years, the earliest Bahá'ís in Europe were attracted to the Faith by Persian and American pioneers who mostly belonged to an intellectually and economically privileged minority—the time for the diffusion of the Bahá'í Faith among the masses of the world had not yet come.

Second, Bausani, who in 1948 had written his paper 'Oltre il moderatismo contro il clericalismo [Beyond moderatism against clericalism]', was weary of the Catholic hierarchies. In that paper, he wrote that the modern 'Pontifical State' was 'much more dangerous and frightening today, because . . . it aims at dominating,

through the clerical parties of the various countries, the government not only of a single state but of all the states' (ibid. 5). He also disliked the static Theism of Islam and Judaism, from which, he wrote in 1948 ('Opera corruttrice della religiosità'), 'God has disappeared, leaving but the Book (Koran, Torah, etc.)'. Therefore, initially, he had a few problems understanding the Bahá'í Faith's institutional aspects. He wrote:

I know . . . that the whole 'institutional' aspect is a school of humility. However, the danger of legalism remains. This danger is especially perceived by a person like me, who has just come out from a Church in which such legalism has come close to Pharisaism. There are in the Aqdás,⁴ I think, many precise 'canonical' dispositions of which I do not feel any need. Before entering a faith, one should know what commitment he should accept. Therefore, I would like you to explain the value of the 'laws' as religious regulations for the Bahá'ís. I understand – perhaps – their practical utility, but I think one should not unduly dwell upon them . . . If too much importance is ascribed to the organisation, one risks changing Bahá'ism into one of the many religions rather than 'the' Religion.

At the end of the letter, he added on this issue:

May I still be a Bahá'í if I behave according to the kernel of the Bahá'í teachings while ascribing secondary importance to the legal prescriptions, which are, I should say, a secondary part of all the Faiths, besides not necessarily being all words of God? . . . May I, in a word, remain in the Faith while placing my God-enlightened conscience before any order or legal disposition that does not come from God Himself?

Bausani had not yet seemingly realised that all binding laws and regulations of the Bahá'í Faith have a divine origin, and therefore,

⁴ The Kitáb-i-Aqdas is Bahá'u'lláh's book comprising the laws of the Bahá'í Faith ('Akká, 1873).

the followers of the Bahá'í Faith are not exposed to this dilemma. The Bahá'ís laws are either directly revealed by Bahá'u'lláh Himself or prescribed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, the two authorised Interpreters of Bahá'í Scriptures, or ruled by the Universal House of Justice, the supreme infallible governing institution founded in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. Bausani's masterly essay 'Sviluppi istituzionali della religione bahá'í [Institutional developments of the Bahá'í religion]', delivered as a lecture at the International Congress of History of Religion, Rome, 17-23 April 1955 (see *Atti* 447-50 and Bausani, *Saggi* 444-64), demonstrates that he very soon realised and appreciated this aspect of the Bahá'í Faith, a Faith about which he wrote in his letter to Dr Giachery: 'I never felt as close to God as now that I am in touch with the Bahá'í spirituality'.

In his letter, he also wrote:

May I . . . without adhering to a political party, vote according to my conscience? . . . May I support those political, social, etc. movements that I conscientiously perceive as not contradicting my Faith? . . . an absolute abstention from politics (my political activity is not only very scanty, but almost inexistent, but it is a matter of principle) seems wrong to me while acting against one's conscience is against the kernel of the teachings of all the Prophets.

We will later see that he satisfactorily answered this question when he discovered that being a Bahá'í implies abstaining from partisan politics but also means 'working at the service of humankind within the framework of the organisation founded by the Manifestation for our age' (*Saggi* 37).

Bausani must have solved these doubts very soon because he enrolled in the Bahá'í Faith only 39 days after writing this letter. Because of his early-acquired inner certitude, Bausani only experienced the painful drama of certain contemporary Bahá'í

intellectuals for a very short time. After his enrolment in the Bahá'í Faith, he never perceived a dramatic contradiction between the freedom of his intellectual life and the religious imperatives of his Bahá'í life: the duty of obeying the Institutions, the reviewing process, the contrast between his intellectual and spiritual stature and the naivety of many of the Bahá'ís around him, the need to obey 'seemingly strange orders' that, as he wrote as early as in 1953 (*Saggi* 499) may have been given by the 'Master'. He never dramatically perceived the contempt of some of his peers towards the Faith that he loved, to which he opposed his good-natured irony. There were no evident signs of those dramas in his behaviour that his closer Bahá'í friends may have witnessed. His writings express an abiding assurance and serenity. His secret was that he always remained faithful to and assured in his first choice, and the light shed on his intellectual life by this faithfulness and certitude was such as to dispel the darkness of doubts. Besides, he said to Grieco (57) that he did not belong 'to that intellectual elite who, I could not say whether in good or bad faith, believe to be the salt of the earth, to represent the world with its problems and its anguishes'. He thought to be more similar to simple people, workmen and peasants, who are untouched by the doubts and sophistries of the so-called "thinkers" (ibid.).

Bausani acquired this certitude when he was very young (1951), not yet the learned man he later became. He could do this because – as he says – the firm spiritual foundations received from his father fed his 'incurably religious spirit' and enabled him to choose the best of his religious tradition and live his Christianity as 'an active expectation of a Kingdom of God' ('Lettera'). His great intelligence was a great help first in this choice and later in his steadfastness, not a challenge or an obstacle, as we can infer from so many statements he wrote. Since he had such a deep spiritual understanding – the fruit of both his 'incurably religious spirit' and his knowledge of the Bahá'í Writings – and he was so

intelligent and curious, his learning grew within him as a great help, and not as an obstacle, in his spiritual life. Mrs Bausani writes that the ‘exceptional character’ of Bausani as a Bahá’í was ‘in the wholeness of his life as a Bahá’í and as a scientist: these two aspects of his personality are not independent of one another, they are strictly interconnected’ (‘Discorso’).



Rome, 27 October 1951. His marriage.

Reasons for his conversion to the Bahá'í Faith

Bausani drew away from Catholicism but did not lose faith in God or forsake his thirst for truth, his Christianity as 'an active expectation of a Kingdom of God' ('Lettera'). On the contrary, in 1947, he wrote ('I terrori di Dio' 170) that 'the Devil . . . is the infinite Neutrality, the soft and all-pervading deafness of the Half-light'. However, he had no confidence in man, whom he considered as a 'hopeless thing . . . that becomes valuable only when he is added to God, Who created him' (Bausani, quoted in Grieco 52). 'Human beings all together', he explained later, 'are many zeros. They acquire a value only if we put them after number one, i.e., God' (ibid. 55). Therefore, he still felt a great need for God because he thought (*Saggi* 347) that

our intelligence enlightens the relation between means and ends. However, mere thought cannot explain the meaning of the ultimate and fundamental purposes. Explaining those purposes and those fundamental values and firmly connecting them to our emotional lives seems to be the essential role religion should play in human social life.

He was also convinced that, despite what many of his contemporaries believed, 'humankind will *always* need a divine guidance, a Prophet, or better, a "Manifestation". This Manifestation should not reveal a science, but *laws*' (ibid. 324). Therefore, in 'his eagerness of a modern messianic immanence' (Scarcia, 'Quattro incursioni' 485), he began to search 'in a new faith' (Bausani, quoted in Grieco 57) for what he did not find in Catholicism.

Bausani himself offers, in a paper written in 1981 (see *Saggi* 75-88, see also ibid. 339-55), a key to understanding which aspects of the Bahá'í Faith were most appealing to him. In this paper, he explains ideas that, according to the testimony of Mrs Bausani and of Bahá'í Italian friends who were familiar

with him, he had matured very early in his Bahá'í life. He describes the 'modern crisis' as 'an excessively radical and absolute, intellectualistic separation between Matter and Spirit . . . a "volatilisation" of the Spirit' (ibid. 75-6). He then suggests 'to theoretically "invent", as if we were in a laboratory . . . a religion' that may solve that crisis. He concludes that 'we would discover (at least I have discovered and I propose it to you) something very similar to the Bahá'í Faith' (ibid. 82). Finally, he explains the various features of the 'Religion' fit to the modern world (ibid. 82-3):

a. First, it should be a 'religion'. Up to now, no one has ever discovered in the world a surrogate for Religion, having religion's really 'atomic' energy. The atheists themselves, wherever they have been more successful, that is, in Russian and Chinese organised Communism, have established something that has the same, at least psychological, if not theological, features as a religion.

b. In traditional religions, the apples of discord have always been, in theory, *dogmas* and, in practice, *rites/sacraments*. A unifying religion should not have new dogmas and sacraments . . .

c. This does not mean that this religion should be deprived of any sacral, numinous, 'symbolical' charge and should not have any *organisation*. The same conditions created by modern technology have created a situation where no individual, deprived of an organisation, can have an audience. We should thus have a world centre (in the light of the universalistic aims that such a movement should have) and local, perfectly functioning bodies without any discrimination.

d. This 'religion' . . . should not indeed remain a religion *of the heart and of personal salvation* that delegates the visible organisation of the world to, at best, agnostic parties. On the contrary, it should substitute all the other organisations that

have proved themselves sectorial and incapable of solving the most urgent problems of humankind, which are *universal* today. Therefore, this religion will be a sort of theocracy. However, since . . . there are neither dogmas nor sacraments nor a specialised class to administer them (priests), it will not be a priestly theocracy but a secular theo-democracy.

e. I will better explain theo-democracy (a term which should be comprehensible for the recent Italian political tradition, for example, for a Mazzinian). *Demo* implies an organisation founded upon the congregational/elective principle. However, supreme power and authority remain – as in tradition – high. In this regard, the modern illusion (which has paradoxically created the various Hitlers and Stalins) that any value comes from the bottom should be redressed. This is the meaning of ‘theo-’ in theo-democracy.

The Bahá’í Faith is a religion

The first quality that seemingly attracted him towards the Bahá’í Faith is that it is a religion with its ‘truly “atomic” energy’. A passage by Bahá’u’lláh which he read in an old compilation of Bahá’í Writings so much impressed him that he translated it into Italian (*Saggi* 280-1, see *Bahá’í Scriptures* 248).

Say: O friend! Sleep with your face turned to the Friend, and rest in bed in the thought of the loved One. From flowers inhale the fragrance of the beloved One, and in every fire see the light of the desired One. I swear by the life of the Friend, that if thou smellst the garment of Joseph and enterest the Egypt of the love of God, thou wilt become the mother of all the chosen ones! Then exert thyself in love with thy soul and enter the abode of the beloved One with thy heart. Abandon grief for the world to its people and give no heed to the limited days of this world; be seated on the immortal, everlasting throne, be clad in a divine raiment, drink the wine of love from the cup of the beloved One,

become ablaze with the light of love, and sew the robe of love! This is that matter which shall never change! Know thou, therefore, that in every age and dispensation all Divine Ordinances are changed and transformed according to the requirements of the time, except the law of love, which, like unto a fountain, flows always and is never overtaken by change. This is of the wonderful mysteries which God has mentioned for His servants! Verily, He is the merciful, the compassionate!

This passage inspired in him the following touching words on his newly-found Faith:

In this age of hate, which so many signs encourage all those who believe in the Christian sacred scriptures, as we do, to identify with the times of the *end*, the ancient and virginally fresh voice of God has sounded once more. This voice calls us, as it always did, but with greater urgency today, to *unity*. This voice, especially today, requests us not to be moved by miserable national banners and hymns but by the sweet melody of the Oneness of God, symbolised by the oneness of the world. In a time when the various Padri Lombardis⁵ of all religions call each other *snakes* and try to convert pagans who sometimes are more sincerely religious than they are, the Voice of the Eternal calls us again to go over to his high window over the world and to see things in a true light, from the perspective of God and not from the earth. In a time when religions, whenever they still have value, have become a refuge for fearful souls that are searching for a heaven in the air because they were not able to create it through their humble

⁵ Riccardo Lombardi (1908-1979), a Jesuit and a journalist, known as ‘God’s microphone’, greatly admired by Pius XII and thus well-known during his pontificate, defended a greater Catholic presence in the Italian political and cultural world. He was set aside by John XXIII and Paul VI and passed away in total obscurity.

work on earth, the Voice of the Beloved calls us to create, in oneness, a paradise in this old world. (*Saggi* 281)

The Bahá'í Faith has no human-made sacraments, dogmas, and rites

The second quality seems to be that the Bahá'í Faith is characterised by a total '*absence of sacraments and dogmas*' (ibid. 278) and rites. Bausani needed God, but the God of the ancient religions did not satisfy him. He sought Him in "“a pure state”", whereas the ancient religions 'together with God, offer other things as codified by tradition and use' (Bausani, quoted in Grieco 57). 'For the Bahá'is', he later wrote (*Saggi* 408), 'the essence of religion is faith in a God, the Unknowable Essence, who manifests himself in personalities that must not be followed as philosophers or scientists, but as givers of laws of ethic and holiness. Whatever may be added creates fanaticism and violence'. In this regard, he liked very much the following words uttered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Paris on 12 November 1911 (*Paris Talks* 149, no.44, para.18):

weigh carefully in the balance of reason and science everything that is presented to you as religion. If it passes this test, then accept it, for it is truth! If, however, it does not so conform, then reject it, for it is ignorance.

The Bahá'í Faith has an organisation

The third quality that attracted him towards the Bahá'í Faiths seems to be that it has a 'sacral, numinous, “symbolical” charge' as well as an '*organisation*'. The Bahá'í Faith combines, Bausani wrote, 'two, seemingly contradictory, aspects: *enthusiasm* (faith) and the concept of the *relativity of religious truth*' (*Saggi* 252). It is a 'religion with its martyrs and shrines', 'it has very simple doctrines, it has no dogmas and sacraments', and it is also endowed

with ‘an organisation, perceived as God-given, for the unification of the whole world’ (ibid. 32). In other words, the Bahá’í Faith is a ‘both historicist and institutional religion . . . a unique phenomenon in the panorama of living religions’ (ibid. 33). And it presented him with a model of the future in the form of a ‘great design, a kind of “divine constitution” of the future universal state’ (ibid. 349).

This concept used to be an object of his reflections. He wrote: ‘Although it provides the general guidance and the power that Einstein called “emotional”, required to realise those directives, it leaves human beings free to fashion all together its details’ (*Saggi* 349). Later, he explained that the Bahá’í Faith has a threefold aspect: ‘Evolution in *time*, unity in the *present instant*, and a supernatural *power* that explains the former and empowers humankind to realise the latter’ (ibid. 253). Bausani also wrote that it ‘could be defined in three words: a *progressive and unitary faith*’ (‘La Fede Bahá’í’). Moreover, he suggested (*Saggi* 163-4) that the Bahá’í doctrines should be viewed in a threefold perspective: ‘Unity, to be realised in the immediate future, in a definite direction that excludes other directions, under the guidance, not of a human being, but of God (who has already guided the evolution of history and humankind in the past)’. In one of his talks (ibid. 138-9), he suggested that the Bahá’í Faith may offer a solution to the problems of the world, a solution

that without wholly denying, as the Oriental pantheists suggest, the accomplishments of a substantially positive and fruitful evolution of Time and History (merit of Europe) will give back to that which the ancient Zoroastrian texts called the ‘limited’ Time, the tension and the vibration of that absolute and ‘Unlimited Time’ that the same ancient Iranian texts conceived as an ‘Archangel’.

According to Bausani, any religiosity must have a form. For this reason, he loved the Bahá'í Administrative Order, 'the structure of Bahá'í institutions, conceived by Bahá'u'lláh, formally established by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His Will and Testament, and expanded during the guardianship of Shoghi Effendi' (Momen, *Basic Bahá'í Dictionary* 9). He loved it as soon as he understood it as the ideal form, the perfect channel through which the spiritual energies brought by the Manifestation of God may be conveyed to the grassroots and society may be sanctified. Bausani thought that accepting the Bahá'í Administrative Order is an indispensable part of the spiritual progress of individuals and the progress of society and that whoever turns his back on that Order is deprived of this possibility. Bausani 'was a member of the National Spiritual Assembly of Italy and Switzerland during all its existence [1953-1961], then was a member of the National Spiritual Assembly of Italy from 1964 to 1984' ('In Memoriam' 896).⁶ Scarcia ('Quattro incursioni' 485), as has been said, remarked that according to Bausani, 'only orthodoxies are socially worthy of being preserved through a strenuous work to refine them from within, even at the cost of swallowing bitter pills and tears'. However, for Bausani, participating in the Bahá'í Administrative Order did not mean 'swallowing bitter pills and tears', but it was the right sacrifice he welcomed because he wanted to assist in the creation of a better world. When all obey the same law, individual specificities remain untouched. At the same time, all are equal and united in obedience to that law: Einstein 'on the same level as the "savage" of New Guinea' (Bausani, *Saggi* 222). This goal of unity makes the Bahá'í laws sacred:

⁶ A National Spiritual Assembly is the governing body of a national Bahá'í community.

Sacred is not an intellectual quality; it is not knowing previously unknown mysteries and thus acting through mysteriosophic and sacramental rites; sacred is *that which God wants us to do*; it is the law of God and the supreme purpose of this law, in our age, is *the spiritual and material* (political and administrative) *unification of humankind*. (ibid.)

In the 1950s, Bausani wrote (*Saggi* 275) that the Bahá'í Faith upholds religious oneness 'in an original way', and it cannot be

confused with those vague promulgations of a purely humanistic and philosophical character, usually made by peoples who never had a real devotional experience in a positive religion, made in other words by peoples who uphold the oneness of religions because they believe in none. The Bahá'ís are . . . for the oneness of religions . . . because they believe in all of them . . . for the Bahá'ís, all religions are true, but all are *past*.

This was the kernel of Bausani's friendly diatribe with Aldo Capitini (1899-1968), professor of pedagogy at the University of Perugia, an imitator of the Mahatma Gandhi, the founder of the non-violent movement in Italy, where he is famous as the founder of the March for peace of Assisi, defined by Bausani as a 'religious-lay philosopher-poet' (*Saggi* 407 [1980]). Capitini upheld religiosity, even in its abstract and personal forms, whereas Bausani said that religiosity must have a form. His example to his friend was that 'the beauty of the rose comes from its shape, for instance, the limits of its petals. Without that form, the beauty of the rose would not exist'.⁷

⁷ Elsa Scola Bausani, 5 March 2002, personal conversation.

The Bahá'í Faith sanctifies society through a divine world order

The fourth quality that seemingly attracted him is that the Bahá'í Faith is not only a 'religion of *the heart and personal salvation*' but is also capable 'of solving the most urgent problems of humankind, that are today *universal*'. He perceived 'the issue of [personal] sanctification . . . as a religious problem', but he also thought 'the need to be even wider, *beyond* that need which, in any case, should be met' (Bausani, *Saggi* 346), since he thought that 'the immortal values of Christianity, which laid the foundation of individual sanctification (as Buddhism did in another part of the world, which was then unknown), cannot be socialised through addition. A new dimension of social sanctity is necessary' (ibid. 335). In other words, 'if we only arithmetically add up many St Francis from Assisi or St Teresa from Avila, we will not solve the problems of the modern world, which are not the same as those of the times when Christianity was born and *won*' (ibid. 346). He was convinced, therefore, that 'the main "religious" interest is *not* personal salvation, but the realisation of a *divine world order*' (ibid. 87). As he summarised this concept, 'Christianity says: sanctify your souls . . . the Bahá'í Faith says: sanctify humankind' (ibid. 335).

He was also convinced that the modern concept of ethics, the 'ethical autonomy of individual conscience', did not produce 'any practical, visible, social result. In modern Europe, wars and wild outbreaks of social passions are more frightening than before the proclamation of that principle' (Bausani, *Saggi* 189). He thought that ethics cannot '*have materialistic or utilitarian foundations*'. He believed 'the essential task of religion' 'is not to formulate dogmas and suggest rites' but to provide a divine moral code (ibid. 344). He was thus looking for a faith that would teach 'not much what we should know, as what we should do to sanctify ourselves

and society' (ibid. 491). Thus, he came very soon to agree with the Bahá'í concept that 'the moral absolute is "obeying to the teachings of the Lord" and not . . . [achieving] an ethical autonomy of individual consciences' (ibid. 188-9).

Finally, Bausani was looking for 'the perfect mystic way . . . the union of the *humanitarian, pacifist, progressive content* . . . shared by so many purely humanistic modern trends, *with* the obedience to the One Who made Himself as nothing so that He may dispense the bounty of the Word of God to each and all human beings' (Bausani, *Saggi* 479). In Bahá'u'lláh's Seven Valleys, he met a passage (39-40) that sounded very important to his ears:

In all these journeys the traveller must stray not the breadth of a hair from the "Law," for this is indeed the secret of the "Path" and the fruit of the Tree of "Truth"; and in all these stages he must cling to the robe of obedience to the commandments, and hold fast to the cord of shunning all forbidden things, that he may be nourished from the cup of the Law and informed of the mysteries of Truth.

He used to explain (*Saggi* 437) these words in the sense that 'the *Law* which for certain mystics is the outward shell', is, for Bahá'u'lláh,

the quintessence of the mystic way (that is, of rites and mystic meditations) and the fruit of *Reality*, that becomes manifest only through the observance of the *Law*. In short, making the highest meditation . . . does not mean, as in certain kinds of mysticism, to become estranged from the world, but to work 'politically' to create a new world.

In this sense, Bausani ascribed a sacral value to the acts of the Bahá'í Administrative Order. He wrote, for instance, that the Bahá'í sacred acts, the 'central "rite" of the Bahá'í Faith . .

. is: “consultation and the election of the administrative bodies of the Faith” (ibid. 219, see 466-7).

His idea of a Bahá’í theo-democracy

The fifth quality is that which he calls the ‘theo-democracy’ of the Bahá’í Faith, whose meaning he has explained in the above-quoted passage. A few years before (1949 ca.), he had defended ‘the eternal dynamism of Christian dualism’ (‘Socialisti e Cristiani’ 7). He added: ‘Only where there is a “two”, a realistic and distinct “two”, the World and the Kingdom, there is movement; where there is but “one”, even if it is dialectical, there is stagnation’ (ibid.). The combination of ‘an organisation founded upon the congregational/elective principle’ and a ‘supreme force’, an ‘*authority*’ coming from on High, typical of the Bahá’í Faith seemed to him perfect to correct ‘the modern illusion (an illusion that has paradoxically created the various Hitler and Stalin) that any *Value* comes from *the bottom*’.

Other aspects

Besides these fundamental qualities, a study of his writings reveals at least five other aspects of the Bahá’í Faith that must have attracted him: the concept of the oneness of religions, the idea of the oneness of the Prophets, the concept of the oneness of the peoples, the idea of the historicity of religion and the concept of spiritual joy.

The oneness of religion

Bausani sought a religion that would be ‘both new and ancient’. It should be ancient because ‘as an eternal law’ and ‘in its substance’ could only be a ‘return to the source of all religiosity’. It should be new because it should bring ‘new dispositions adapted to our age, which is an age of oneness and unification’ (Bausani, *Saggi* 280 [1955 ca.]). Therefore, the following words by Bahá’u’lláh, ‘This

is the changeless Faith of God, eternal in the past, eternal in the future' (Kitab-i-Aqdas 85, para.182), satisfy one of his most significant expectations. The issue will be discussed in more detail in the following pages.

The oneness of the prophets

Bausani sought a religion to teach that 'all the prophets occupy the same station, all of them are seated on the same throne' (Bausani, *Saggi* 303). And the Bahá'í Faith upholds 'the oneness of the eternal *logos*, of the eternal Christ, whom the . . . Bahá'is also . . . [are] willing to consider as . . . one beside whom there is no salvation, but who becomes manifest in different times and places', and teaches that 'Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Muḥammad, the Báb, Buddha, Zoroaster said the same thing, they conjugated the imperative of but one verb: to love' (ibid. 263-4). Bausani quoted a verse by the Báb: 'Everything belongeth unto Him and is fashioned by Him. All besides Him are His creatures' (*Selections* 158). And then he added (*Saggi* 305):

Christians will interpret those *Hims* and that *His* as Christ, Bahá'is as Bahá'u'lláh, Muslims as Muḥammad, Buddhists as Buddha and the generations of the future millennia as one of the still unknown personages who will come and manifest the Logos. The real innovation of the Bahá'í Faith is the firm belief that whoever behaves in this way is right, and whoever behaves in this way only towards his own '*Him*' is wrong.

The oneness of the peoples

Bausani had never been a 'nationalist, a racist, in short, he . . . [had] never been bound to a lesser fatherland' (Bausani, quoted in Grieco 52). His fatherland had always been the world, his 'neighbour. . . the whole of humankind' (ibid. 55). Therefore, he was looking for an ecumenical faith, a faith that is universal in the truest sense of the word. Thus, he appreciated that the Bahá'í doctrines 'have a twofold aspect. On the one hand, they confirm the

fundamental ethical doctrines of all religions; on the other, they provide those doctrines with the worldwide dimension of several modern principles intended as religious doctrines' (Bausani, *Saggi* 31 [1982]).

The historicity of religions

Bausani did not want a religion that would imprison 'history either into a concluded line of prophets (Islam and Judaism) or in a single Man-God, who reveals everything once for all (Christianity), with a consequent historical end of the world' (Bausani, *Saggi* 386). He did not want a religion that would thus be deprived 'of the enormous possibilities afforded . . . by the concepts of evolution and history' (ibid.). He was looking 'for an actual and real religious form' (Bausani, quoted in Greco 29), that 'while accepting the most certain data of historical science . . . it would be able to reconcile history and transcendence, "science" and religion' (Bausani, *Saggi* 304), 'God and the World' (Bausani, quoted in Greco 29). Thus, he concluded that among the existent religions, the Bahá'í Faith alone 'historicises religious truth' (Bausani, *Saggi* 493) and 'admits that other, still wider, cycles will come after its historical cycle, and that after Bahá'u'lláh other prophets will come' (Bausani, quoted in Greco 32). The Bahá'í Faith alone 'explicitly declares that "*religious truth is not absolute, but relative*", that is . . . attempts a previously unrealised conciliation between history and religion' (ibid.). In those years (1950), he wrote in this regard (*Saggi* 73-4):

Such a cyclical and progressive conception of the divine Manifestations, typical of Christian and Muslim Gnosticism, but now purged from paganising theosophisms, . . . may be philosophically considered as a conciliation and a solution of the eternal dilemma between a historicism whereby nothing is fixed, and a religiousness, whereby whatever does not pertain to a certain age, person, Church or community is mistaken. According to the Bahá'ís, God is still with us; He is still the 'Immanú-el'. He is the Eternal Christ

who did not forsake – according to his promise – his disciples and fulfils his words, ‘I am with you always, even unto the end of the world’.

The concept of spiritual joy

Last but not least, his quest was directed towards a living and joyous faith because, he wrote in the 1950s, ‘religion is not a mortuary or funereal thing . . . it is a source of unexhausted joy since only a happy person can be socially useful’ (Bausani, *Saggi* 479). And Bahá’u’lláh says: ‘Let not the happenings of the world sadden you. I swear by God! The sea of joy yearneth to attain your presence, for every good thing hath been created for you, and will, according to the needs of the times, be revealed unto you’ (quoted in Shoghi Effendi, *Advent* 82).

His ideas of religion and spirituality

What embracing the Bahá'í Faith meant for Bausani

For Bausani, embracing the Bahá'í Faith did not mean abjuring Catholicism. He saw the Bahá'í Faith as the fulfilment of all religions. Christians find in it “the return of Christ” . . . a return of “his qualities”, he explained to Grieco (58), ‘and not . . . a reincarnation’. Muslims ‘find the fulfilment of all the promises of the Mahdi (the Well-Guided) . . . Buddhists and Hindus find in Bahá'u'lláh the fulfilment of the ultimate promises of their religions’ (ibid.). In 1975, he wrote: (*Saggi* 332):

‘Being converted to Bahá'ism’ does not mean . . . accepting a new religious tradition, and “abjuring” one’s tradition . . . It instead means recognizing in one’s tradition “reasons” that lead one to understand that his tradition is not definitive’.

In one of his earliest Bahá'í talks pronounced during a Ridván Feast,⁸ he said: ‘And those among us who were born in the Christian Faith will perceive a greater attachment to Christ, the Eternal Logos, who, despite our deafness, does not stop talking to human beings, the Emmanuel’ (ibid. 479-80).

Therefore, for him, becoming a Bahá'í meant understanding how so many different religions may be the same thing. A Bahá'í, he said, looks at religions as he looks at a beautiful painting, that is, from the outside, from the side of the painter, that is, from the side of God who made them all. In the 1950s, he wrote (*Saggi* 276-7) that ‘*going outside of the painting* does not mean *repudiating the painting* to which one belonged: on the contrary, it means seeing it better and loving it more. Much less it means repudiating

⁸ Ridván, lit. paradise, is the greatest Bahá'í festivity. It lasts 12 days, from 21 April to 2 May, and celebrates the anniversary of the Declaration of the Mission of Bahá'u'lláh in Baghdad in 1863.

those divine revealers who stayed outside the painting and painted it over long centuries'. In Sunni Islam, he later explained (ibid. 324), God is separated from human beings, 'and divine bounties rain from the former to the latter'. In Christianity, 'there is but one point in common between God and Man in the person of Christ'. The Bahá'í Faith, on its part,

admits an Eternal *logos*, which Buddhists may call, if they want to, . . . the 'Eternal Buddha', Christians the 'Eternal Christ', Muslims the 'Eternal Muḥammad'. In fact, eternal *logos* is a non-historical reality becoming manifest in this or that historical personality, and such continuing revelation of the Divine has no end in time.

However, being a Bahá'í does not only mean 'believing in all the Divine Manifestations that came and will come after one another and gave but *one* essential law, the law of love, and many particular laws befitting the needs of the different times' (Bausani, *Saggi* 36-7). Since the Bahá'í Faith offers a 'standard through which modern society may be judged and a new one may be "directionally" built' (ibid. 348), being a Bahá'í also means 'working at the service of humankind within the framework of the organisation founded by the Manifestation for our age . . . Thus, being a Bahá'í implies neither mystical meditations, nor violent contestations of an old rotting order, but the effort of building the structure of a new Order' (ibid. 37). While so doing, the Bahá'ís, Bausani wrote, do not participate to the partisan politics that find favour today in the world, they 'silently work everywhere in the world to create an organisational web that will visibly incarnate . . . [their] principles and leave the old authorities, *to whom they scrupulously obey*, to pursue the road of their frantic, relentless decline to the end' (ibid. 225).

What being religious meant for Bausani

Bausani wrote (see *Saggi* 205, 247, 248, 498) that in the modern world, ‘*there are as many religions as believers*’ (ibid. 247) since faith has been changed into ‘opinion and everyone believes . . . in the most convenient God’ (ibid. 248). However, he did not approve of this attitude because ‘if this can be acceptable from the individual point of view, it is not good at all in the social perspective – for in society Religion . . . represents . . . the only effective cohesive power’ (ibid.). Neither did he approve of the opinion of them who ‘deny the need . . . of a Master, and, at best, state that a modern God should be an anonymous God, the Other One, our neighbour: all are “Masters”’ (ibid. 498). He also disagreed with them who ‘follow with docility and absolute confidence a spiritual master . . . the pope, for example, or some learned mujtahid, or a rabbi’ (ibid.). Finally, Bausani refused the idea of them who follow ‘such human masters, as “duces”, führers etc. with a barbarian faithfulness’ (ibid.). He believed that we need an institutional religion, and, as has been said, he was not satisfied with the existing ones. He knew, moreover, that ‘the Reformation [of religion] can be performed only by God, and God can make himself heard only through the Man-God . . . the Prophet . . . the Sign of the Divine Unity’ (ibid.). He acknowledged, though, the ‘upsetting possibility that . . . [the new Prophet] may manifest himself as the hidden King of the *Thousands and One Nights*’ (ibid. 205). Bausani here refers to a *cliché* of Islamic mysticism. Tradition speaks of a king who used to go out at night in disguise to see whether someone would recognise him, although he presented himself in disguise. In the typical metaphoric language of the mystics, the king is a symbol of God, Who presents Himself to human beings in the most different aspects to test their capacities of inner perception. Therefore, being religious at that time meant he acquired the

qualities that would enable him to recognise the ‘hidden King’ he was looking for.

When someone told him that a historical personage, that is, Bahá’u’lláh, was the ‘hidden King’ he was looking for, he likely summoned up certain qualities already rooted in his heart, some of which may have been the following ones, which he hinted at in his writings. Bausani would often quote a Persian poet who says: ‘We must have a king-recognising eye so as to recognise the king in every dress, even in the dress of a beggar’ (‘Reflections’ 4). In 1953, a few years after his enrolment as a Bahá’í, he commented upon this verse in one of his talks as follows (*Saggi* 501):

If the eye must recognise the king even in a servant’s dress, it must be exceptionally pure and familiar with those little tics, . . . with those little unimportant peculiar gestures that enable us to recognise a person even after many years of remoteness. Yes, recognising the nervous tics, the minor peculiarities of God’s smile!

He developed this concept in a speech he delivered in February 1983 in Montreal during a meeting of the Association of Bahá’í Studies, later published as the first paper in the very first issue of the *Journal of Bahá’í Studies* (1988-1989). He said (‘Reflections’ 3) that ‘a king-recognizing eye’ is born from a ‘preliminary cleansing of the heart’ which may be attained through ‘order, moderation, obedience and humility’. These qualities are indispensable so that the ‘dynamic power of changing the world’, that is, the power of religious faith, may be bestowed by God upon a human being.

Order

Bausani ascribed great importance to order to foster a fruitful society. He justified in the name of order the restrictions imposed by all religions on the use of sex. He said to the present writer that he willingly accepted the idea of chastity, as total abstinence from any

sexual relation outside of a lawful marriage between a man and a woman and as total faithfulness to one's spouse, because he was aware that this attitude implied the preservation of social order.

Moderation

Bausani's moderation is well described in the 'Introduction', signed by the National Spiritual Assembly of Italy, to his *Saggi sulla Fede Bahá'í* [Essays on the Bahá'í Faith], a collection of 44 essays and three poems, published in 1991 by the Casa Editrice Bahá'í (the Italian Bahá'í Publishing Trust):

His nature inclined to smooth out any divergence, to soften any excess, but not undoubtedly ready to renounce observing reality and exposing its results, has invested his vision of life with a unique positive connotation in a generous effort of exposing, with no intemperance, ingrained prejudices, of showing – through the instrumentality of an enlightened intellect – the new ways towards unity and peace, always inspired by a typically Bahá'í faith in the perennial divine renewal of civilisation.

Alessandro Bausani accomplished all this with the best Western intellectuals' language and the disenchanted style of the greatest exponents of the millenary European culture. This ancient legacy . . . was expressed in him as a subtle irony, sometimes towards himself – as though he saw himself as that strange personage he knew many saw in him – sometimes towards the others, about whose opinions of secular intellectuals – so deeply-rooted as to come close to prejudice often – Bausani never wrote words too stern, while he was contrasting his vision of a new dawning civilisation with the relative pessimism of some of them. (3-4)

Obedience

As has been seen, he appreciated the value of obedience to a divinely revealed law as a unifying agent that put all individuals, be they genius or simple and uneducated persons, on the same level:

Einstein ‘on the same level as the “savage” of New Guinea’ (Bausani, *Saggi* 222), he wrote, and this levelling was also a great lesson of humbleness. However, he also knew obedience as surrender to the Divine teacher, as the mystical detachment from the self, the only means to obtain personal sanctification.

Humbleness

In one of his Bahá’í lessons, he said humbleness is only given to him who knows that ‘one may become aware of being *perfectly guided* by God, only when one obeys his commandments’ (*Saggi* 392). Moreover, as we may evince from an early talk he delivered for the celebration of Ridván, he well knew that the Manifestations of God ‘teach that humility ought to reach self-denial, that if the worm does not die, the “angelic butterfly” already versified by Dante [see ‘Purgatory’ 10:124-6] cannot be born’ (ibid. 477).

Joy

Once he recognised Bahá’u’lláh as his ‘hidden King’, he felt that he had partially grasped an early fruit of spirituality, i.e., ‘joy’ (Bausani, *Saggi* 479). And he thought that this sentiment was ‘the first provision for the long journey on the way towards spiritual perfection; a way that – differently from what all modern secular spiritualists maintain – . . . passes through the obedience to the Manifestation of our age’ (ibid.).

The temptation of pride

In the presence of the newly found divine Master, he felt relatively safe ‘from the subtler remaining temptation, after all the others have been overcome – the temptation of “I am good, and the others are not” . . . In fact, when one obeys a spiritual Master, one will never be sure to be good, since the Master can also give seemingly strange orders’ (ibid. 499).

A daily commitment

As early as 1953, he recognised the great responsibility for responding to the call raised by Bahá'u'lláh. 'Which heavy responsibility', he said (ibid. 501), 'and which great danger of still subtler temptations! . . . he who has responded to . . . [that] call is supposed to have passed through a process of inner cleansing similar to that of Moses, to have swooned away, to be dead to the world'.⁹ He had well understood that a new journey had begun for him. Having recognised the station of Bahá'u'lláh was only the beginning of a process, which is described in a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, on 6 October 1954: 'When a person becomes a Bahá'í, actually what takes place is that the seed of the spirit starts to grow . . . in the human soul' (quoted in 'Living the Life' 24, no.1334). Therefore, in those days, for Bausani, being religious meant exerting all his efforts to obey the laws of the Manifestation of God so that he might acquire capacities that would empower him to realise God's purposes for humankind on earth.

His curiosity and his spiritual quest

While treading this spiritual way, Bausani was assisted by one of his innate qualities, curiosity. Since he was curious, he never discarded the ideas presented to him without examining them. This is also one of the most important prerequisites of a true seeker on

⁹ He alludes to the Koranic verse: 'And when Moses came at our set time and his Lord spake with him, he said, "O Lord, shew thyself to me, that I may look upon thee", He said, "Thou shalt not see Me; but look towards the mount, and if it abide firm in its place, then shalt thou see Me". And when God manifested Himself to the mountain he turned it to dust! and Moses fell in a swoon. And when he came to himself, he said, "Glory be to thee! To thee do I turn in penitence, and I am the first of them that believe". He said, "O Moses! thee above all men have I chosen by my commissions, and by my speaking to thee. Take therefore what I have brought thee, and be one of those who render thanks"' (Koran 7: 139-41).

the spiritual path. Consequently, he always recommended intellectual, besides spiritual search to all Bahá'ís as well, and set specific, precise directions for their search ('Idée Bahá'í' 1):

It is essential. . . for a Bahá'í . . . besides studying in the first place the writings of his Faith, to deepen in parallel in some other human discipline, of his choice . . . Studying only human disciplines without taking care of the holy writings yields no fruit, but also concentrating only on the sacred writings, while ignoring their resonance on the modern world, leads to stagnation. In truth, the first Bahá'í principle, that of search after Truth, which seems fulfilled through the discovery of the Faith, providentially continues in searching how religious Truth . . . may be adapted to the scientific, cultural, political, social conditions of the present world. This 'search' is always open.

And he was always consistent with his persuasions.

His personal and social goals

In his spiritual journey, Bausani pursued two kinds of goals: personal and social goals. The former are intimate; they defy any description in their most profound aspects because they are subjective. Nonetheless, their ineffability does not make them less important. In a letter he wrote to his father on 9 August 1949, he wrote (quoted in 'Alessandro Bausani: una breve biografia' 12):

What a poor religion is that one which replaces the union with the Lord, who is the creator of the heavens and the earth and therefore does not care much of human canons . . . with a dogmatic outward law to be subscribed . . . Only his word remains for ever: his [the Lord's] human word is not a doctrine, but a call to action . . . Woe to us if we do not follow *that* word!

This sentence summarises the essence of Bausani's faith, as well as the nature of faith as described by Bahá'u'lláh in the first verse of His Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the mother-book of the Bahá'í Dispensation:

The first duty prescribed by God for His servants is the recognition of Him Who is the Dayspring of His Revelation and the Fountain of His laws, Who representeth the Godhead in both the Kingdom of His Cause and the world of creation. Whoso achieveth this duty hath attained unto all good; and whoso is deprived thereof hath gone astray, though he be the author of every righteous deed. . . . It behoves everyone who reacheth this most sublime station, this summit of transcendent glory, . . . to observe every ordinance of Him Who is the Desire of the World. These twin duties are inseparable. Neither is acceptable without the other. Thus hath it been decreed by Him Who is the Source of Divine inspiration. (19, para.1)

On the one hand, ‘the union with the Lord’ (Bausani, quoted in ‘Alessandro Bausani: una breve biografia’ 12), on the other, obedience to His Word. The former is the inner or mystical aspect, and the latter is the social aspect. Spirituality is born from the union of these ‘twin duties’ prescribed ‘by God for His servants’ (Bahá’u’lláh, Kitáb-i-Aqdas 19, para.1). The former duty, when disjoined from the latter, is conducive to the fruitless subjectivity of pseudo-mysticism. The latter duty, by itself, is conducive to the limiting worldliness of ideologies. Bausani kept himself far from both, although he was ‘an incurably religious spirit’ (Bausani, ‘Tagore’ 9). He was deeply conversant with Islam, specifically with Sufism, familiar with religions, and a lover of literature and their poetical symbols. All this could have drawn him towards an abstract and fruitless path, which nonetheless may satisfy the seductive deceptions of the self: the expansion of will, the aesthetic charm of symbols, the illusions of a superior genius who feels authorised by his value to keep away from the trustworthy source of human progress, that is, the daily efforts of a life joyously spent under the banners of the Word of God.

He maintained, as has been seen, that ‘God does not reveal his qualities, but his *will* through a sequence of human personages

called “Prophets”, or better “Manifestations of God” (Bausani, *Saggi* 36). Therefore, religion was undoubtedly for him, as Shoghi Effendi explained through his secretary in a letter written on his behalf on 8 December 1935, ‘that mystic feeling that unites man with God’ (‘Importance of Prayer’ 238). Bausani was also especially interested in religion as the bearer ‘of an *ethical-religious energy* for realising the divine plan *in this specific stage* of human evolution’ (Bausani, *Saggi* 103). ‘Religion’, he said, ‘does not deal with complicated cognitive, Gnostic elucubrations, about how God or the world beyond are’ (ibid. 471). It is a ‘true spiritual force, possessing a real strength to change the world’ (Bausani, ‘Reflections’ 2) to establish “absolute unity in diversity” (ibid. 3).

Spirituality, therefore, did not appear to him as a mere capacity of praying and meditating, dissociated from the capacity of acting, nor as a strict adherence to norms of behaviour, divorced from any participation in the life of other, perhaps less rigid, human beings. He wrote: ‘For Bahá’ís, the term “spiritual” has a clear and positive value. It means that spirit has power, that spirit flies not away from matter, but instead has the power to change matter’ (‘Reflections’ 2). Moreover, as it has been said, he also added that the power of the spirit ‘of changing the world is bestowed by God upon mankind . . . only after a preliminary cleansing of the heart’, that may be achieved through four instruments ‘order, moderation, obedience, and humility’ (ibid. 3). Therefore being spiritual means doing valuable things for others with purity of intention. Today, it means explicitly serving the cause of the oneness of humankind. This is true faith.

Bausani repeatedly stressed this practical aspect of religion. He seldom dwelt upon the pure mystical elements of the Bahá’í Faith, as significant as they are. We may wonder whether his attitude did not reflect his effort as an intellectual, a lover of beauty, and an admirer of mystical kinds of literature of the Middle East. As an intellectual, Bausani was drawn by his profession and

vocation to live on the abstract plane of words and intellectuality. Thus, he wanted to balance his life, reminding himself and others that it is necessary to perform practical deeds so that no one may be satisfied with plays on words or theoretical meditations, as deep as they may be. If the writer is allowed to recount an anecdote of his early friendship with Bausani, the following appears as proper. I work as a medical doctor. However, I always loved languages, literature, and religions, mainly in their mystical aspects. Once, in my green years, I foolishly complained because I did not follow my literary vocation in the name of a scientific profession. Bausani lovingly, but very seriously, observed that my profession gave me a great privilege. I could theorise whenever I wished, only for pleasure, but my profession constantly offered me great opportunities to practice spirituality as a professional requirement. A literary profession could have obliged me to theorise as a professional requirement, at the risk that I could forget to practice spirituality only for my pleasure. I never forgot his lesson.

Faith and academic studies

For Bausani, the way of Bahá'í militancy and academic career coincided. He enrolled in the Bahá'í Faith on 8 April 1950, when he was 29 and just beginning his academic career. He had been a Persian Language and Literature lecturer at the University of Rome since 1944. He qualified for university teaching only in 1954. In 1956, he obtained the Persian Language and Literature chair at the University Oriental Institute of Naples. The Universal House of Justice praised him in a cable addressed to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Italy on 15 March 1988, immediately after his passing, for his 'academic recognition which he used unstintingly for service Cause lending it authority and prestige world of learning' (quoted in 'In memoriam' 896). The Continental

Board of Counsellors in Europe, a high-rank Bahá'í institution,¹⁰ mentioned in a message it addressed to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís in Italy on 23 March 1988 'his intellectual integrity . . . his fervent wish to promote universal understanding . . . his way of explaining and defending the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh', and praised him for "having inspired the . . . [Italian] Bahá'í community for tens of years, and given a high standard to the rising generations' ('Letter').

Bausani was deeply aware of the fact that intellectual integrity implied him to pursue his academic efforts without ever forgetting his religious belonging – a belonging which was perfectly defined in his eyes by the following words by Shoghi Effendi (*Bahá'í Administration* 90):

Full recognition of the station of the Forerunner, the Author, and the True Exemplar of the Bahá'í Cause, as set forth in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Testament; unreserved acceptance of, and submission to, whatsoever has been revealed by their Pen; loyal and steadfast adherence to every clause of our Beloved's sacred Will; and close association with the spirit as well as the form of the present day Bahá'í administration throughout the world.

Two of Bausani's statements seem particularly meaningful in this regard. The first one is: 'According to the Bahá'í Faith, a good action is, of course, always a good action, but a good action performed by a believer has a special creative force' ('Reflections' 6). Bausani explained the reason for this privilege of the believer, which, he wrote (*ibid.* 6), 'may sound horrifying to modern ears':

¹⁰ Bausani explains that the 'Continental Counsellors' are part of 'the sacral-docent pyramid' and they are 'charged with galvanizing the energies of the believers in their specific continent', however 'they have no legislative and administrative authority and obey, as any other believer, to the decisions of their assemblies' ('Bahā'ī, Bahā'ismo' 221).

We are not ourselves the creators of values. Values flow through us from the central force of the universe. If we direct ourselves towards that centre, if we choose the exact channel through which that force is flowing, it is clear that every action (value) we personally create becomes infinitely multiplied by the creative power. In other words, if a nonbeliever does a good action, this produces a force (and I do not deny that this is a positive one too) whose radius of action is limited by the real, but partial, energy of that particular man or particular manmade doctrine. But if a believer does a good action, new flowers blossom on all the planets; new wonderful portals open in the whole of the universe.

The second meaningful statement is quoted by Scarcia ('Quattro incursioni' 491). This paradoxical statement by Bausani, which seems to be 'an apology of the Inquisition' relates to Catholicism, but *mutatis mutandis* [the necessary changes having been made] relates to any religion:

'If one believes that God accepted to be crucified for our salvation on a precise historical date, this truth is so overwhelming that we cannot do otherwise than oblige everyone to accept it. Otherwise, what is our love for our neighbour that makes us say: if he wants to go astray, let him be?' (ibid.)

Deeply convinced that he had such a privilege and met such 'an overwhelming truth', he did not spare his efforts to use his capacities and fame to teach and defend the teachings and standards of his Faith. Of course, he always did it in the Bahá'í way: with full respect for the freedom of choice of his interlocutors, without imposing unwanted explanations, and without unduly insisting on his views when they were not welcome.

Unavoidably, his belonging to a minority Faith raised at least a few perplexities. In those years, the Bahá'í Faith had not yet been publicised through the latest persecutions of its followers in Iran, the beauty of its Terraces and gardens in the Holy Land, its Lotus

Temple in New Delhi, or its active involvement in the Millennium meetings organised by the UN. Bausani acknowledged this obscurity which surrounded in those years the Bahá'í Faith and expressed his disappointment. In 1980, he wrote (*Saggi* 104-5):

One of the sentences we more often hear in Italy from those who, as learned and intellectual as they may be, hear about the Bahá'í Faith is: 'Why doesn't anyone know you?' or 'It must be an obscure Eastern sect . . . Who ever heard about it!' and similar things. In our country, even intellectuals are ready to formulate benign judgments only on that which they already know, and if a movement is unknown (for them), they look at it with suspicion, as one who sits in front of a strange food . . . I continue to see, in great and small encyclopaedias, the Bahá'í Faith, even now defined as a 'Muslim sect', even by authoritative journalists.

A few months later, in 1981 (*Saggi* 356), he deplored the 'small amount of interest towards a genuine religious attitude' among Italian journalists and writers and their persuasion that 'the only serious [religious phenomenon], even when they do not believe in it, is Christianity' (*ibid.* 356). Then he added that 'this is perhaps the reason why a religious movement, as the Bahá'í Faith, although it is almost ignored and misrepresented by modern press, is confusedly perceived as *awkward* by most people, be they believers in only one definitive religion, or atheistic: because it demonstrates that the capacity of being religious like the earliest Christians used to be, . . . is still alive' (*ibid.* 358-9). This ignorance of the Faith is manifest, for example, in the interview with Grieco, who begins his description of his meeting with Bausani with these words (52): 'he welcomes me with an ambiguous smile, combining the slightly ironical detachment of the scholar and the "compassion" of the believer towards the outsider who does not enjoy the priceless wealth of a faith, through which he has achieved the light of truth'. Later on, when Bausani tells him that he is a Bahá'í,

Grieco puts in a ‘What?’ of wonderment, and then he adds: ‘I beg your pardon, is it not, by chance, one of those numerous exotic sects that today are rife in the world?’ (ibid. 58). Still in 1988, Guido Ceronetti, an Italian sarcastic chronicler of cultural and social events, essayist and poet, announced Bausani’s passing in *La Stampa*, a leading Italian newspaper, with the following words (3):

Who knows through which ways Bausani arrived to accept and become a transmitter of Bahaism? Such a syncretistic, 19th-century, outdated, rather kitsch religion! Monotheism and progressivism, a half-revealed and half-scientific God. Bright intelligence and irony are two qualities of Bausani. I do not see them in a Bahai company . . . Secrets of the souls! Perhaps, love for a persecuted people who sought his support.

However, in those same days, Francesco Gabrieli (1904-1996), a famous Italian Arabist and Islamist, and also one of Bausani’s teachers, writes (3): ‘The scientist Bausani did not hesitate to make himself known as a man of faith, an enlightened, pacific and persecuted faith’. In 1992, Sabatino Moscati (1923-1997), an archaeologist who specialised in Punic and Phoenician culture, acknowledged his ‘sensitivity’, or rather his ‘living and direct participation to the religious phenomenon, as demonstrated by his adherence to Bahaism’ (‘In memoria’ 198). In the same year, Vincenzo Poggi S.J., emeritus professor of History of the Near East at the Pontificio Istituto Orientale in Rome, wrote that ‘Alessandro Bausani’s spiritual evolution from the Catholic milieu to Islamic tendencies, and then to his adherence to the Bahā’ī religion, may be the result of an . . . unconditioned search after truth, “wherever I will find it”’ (‘Preti a colloquio’ 206). In 1995, the secularistic Alfonso Maria Di Nola (1926-1997), a well-known scholar of folklore and historian of religions, wrote that

Bausani’s great inner wealth, wherein the cognitive aspects were never separated from the awareness of the human condition and the

destinies of human beings, also explains his late [sic] adhesion to the Bahá'í movement. It was not a questionable response to sectarian curiosities or a will to discover marginal movements in the European and Middle-Eastern religious panoramas . . . He thought that Bahá'ism, with its threefold root in Judaism, Islam, and Christianity, emphasises, in a qualifying form, a monotheism that in other religions was tainted with ethnicism and the officiality of institutionalised forms. He liked Bahá'ism mainly in its universalism founded upon the message of love preached by Abbas Effendi from Haifa: religion is an issue of love and harmony among human beings. This explains his often-misunderstood pragmatic missionary commitment, which brought him to work in the Bahá'í Italian community actively and to write on *Opinioni Bahá'í*, the missionary periodical of the movement and in terms quite different from the rigour with which he had often spoken about that movement . . .' ('Testimonianze' XX)

In response to this attitude of mixed indifference and veiled hostility, in 1980, Bausani wrote a paper entitled 'La Fede Bahá'í: setta sconosciuta? [The Bahá'í Faith, an unknown sect?]' (*Saggi* 104-16) with the intention 'of showing to them who still say that the Bahá'í Faith is unknown in Italy and who seemingly imply that this "unknown entity" is not reliable, that their idea is completely inaccurate and depends, I beg their pardon, simply from their ignorance' (ibid. 116). However, in another paper he also wrote (ibid. 276-7):

We should not be too stern with them on whose lips a smile comes when they hear a 'strange name', a new name for an old thing. Bahá'u'lláh Himself said, in front of many theories, names, and philosophies: 'O Lord, deliver us from the sea of names!'

As to the unavoidable resentment towards him by a part of the Islamic world, deeply hostile to the Bahá'í Faith, Bausani never alluded to this fact in his writings. According to Gabrieli, a

sincere admirer of the best Islam as Bausani was, ‘its brutish refusal and the violent persecutions of the official Islam’ must have been for him a reason of ‘delusion and bitterness’, a ‘*punctum dolens* [sore point]’, which Gabrieli supposes may have moderated ‘the pro-Islamic tendencies of this Western free spirit’ (‘Profilo’ X). However, this hypothesis does not seem to correspond to reality. If pro-Islamism is intended to be a sincere admiration for Islam, beyond any political connotation of this word, Bausani always remained a pro-Islamist. In 1979, just in the climax of the persecution against the Iranian Bahá’ís by the Islamic Regime, he wrote a short essay entitled ‘Breve storia dei pregiudizi antiislamici in Europa [A short history of anti-Islamic prejudices in Europe]’. In this essay, he ascribes all anti-Islamic prejudice in the Old Continent to ‘two factors, greediness and ignorance’ (40). He suggests that they could be solved by adopting a method coming from that same Islam which Europe so sternly criticises’ (ibidem):

A verse by a famous Muslim Indian poet, Asadullah Ghalib, deceased in 1869, conveys, in a few concise words, the one possible method to avoid the emersion and the growth of religious prejudices, that is, the idea that religious truth, which claims to be transcendent, is inaccessible to human beings so that human verities, and religious verities themselves, can only have a directional value, they cannot have an idolatrous value of sanctity: . . . ‘The object of our adoration is beyond the reach of perception. Therefore, for the true wise persons, the *qibla*¹¹ is not a sanctuary but a compass and points to something!’.

However, also in the case of the Islamic world, he was as frank and candid in defending his Bahá’í ideas as he was with the Catholic world: that is, those religions are both excellent, and both of them

¹¹ *Qibla* is an Arabic word denoting the direction towards which believers turn during their canonical prayers. The Muslim *qibla* is the Sanctuary in Mecca.

have offered a precious contribution to the development of civilisation, but both of them are incapable of solving the problems of the modern world, which needs something different and new.



Rome, Lincei Academy, 16 June 1976. With President Leone, when Bausani was awarded the National Prize of the Italian President.

Alessandro Bausani, an Italian pioneer of Bahá'í Studies

In his great interest in religious studies, Bausani could not fail to study his Faith as a scholar. In this endeavour, he was indeed a pioneer. The Bahá'í scholar Moojan Momen writes ('Modern Western'):

After the death of E.G. Browne in 1926, the scholarly study of the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths lapsed in the academic institutions of the West . . . Among the Bahá'ís also there was little scholarly activity, the only exceptions being Alessandro Bausani in Italy and Adelbert Mühlischlegel and Hermann Grossmann in Germany. The needs of the Bahá'í community dictated that the majority of the literature which it published, apart from scripture, was either introductory or polemical in nature.

Bausani was concerned with describing the Bahá'í Faith from the perspectives of history and typology of religion and laid the foundations for studying its language from the literary point of view. He was inclined to appreciate the Bahá'í Faith as a revelation of laws rather than mystical verities. Thus, he dealt only briefly and lately with studying the theological and philosophical aspects of his Faith. His paper 'Bahā' Allāh', in the 1960 edition of the *Encyclopédie de l'Islam*, may be considered an exception, in as much as it describes the Bahá'í theological concept of the 'special form of the manifestation of God . . . which features in the prophets (The Bahā'ī technical term is *mazāhir-i ilāhiyya*, divine manifestations rather than *rasul* or *anbiyā*)' (911). He recognised this mental attitude when he wrote in 1985 ('Foreword' ix):

I remember writing . . . some time ago that I did not think that it was yet time to study the Bahá'í Faith historically and scientifically. It seemed inconceivable to me as suggesting that in the first century AD, Christians should have written about the

Christian religion scientifically. I felt that we, as Bahá'ís, were too close, too interested, too emphatically involved in Bahá'í history to write about it objectively. The books of Bahá'í scholarship that have been published since have convinced me of the contrary.

His intellectual honesty is such that when the publisher of the English translation of *The Persians* decides to omit the last chapter of the original version, Bausani writes in his Preface (10):

The most important difference is the omission of the last chapter which appeared in the Italian edition containing chiefly my personal (and perhaps slightly exaggerated) considerations on the present situation of Persian culture. This edition, without losing anything important, has become in this way more objectively historical.

May we deduce from these words that he ascribed an apologetic, not a historical and scientific, value to most of the essays later published in the volume *Saggi sulla Fede bahá'í*? Only three of these papers are listed in the 'Bibliografia degli scritti di Alessandro Bausani [Bibliography of the Writings of Alessandro Bausani]' published posthumously in Scarcia and Rostagno, *Yādnāma* XIII-XXVII (1-15). These articles are: 'La lotta di Giacobbe con l'Angelo [Jacob Wrestling with the Angel]' (ibid. XXII [10], no.216), 'Some Aspects of the Bahá'í Expressive Style' (ibid. XXII [10], no.236) and 'La Fede Bahá'í e la Pace (The Bahá'í Faith and Peace)' (ibid. XXVI [14], no.318).

Perhaps it is too early to draw definitive conclusions on the results of Bausani's scholarly studies of the Bahá'í Faith. However, since practically all his writings on the Bahá'í Faith are in Italian, it seems appropriate to begin to present some aspects of his studies to the English-speaking world: a few methodological suggestions for Bahá'í scholars, some definitions of religion, ideas

on the oneness of religions, a typological analysis of the Bahá'í Faith, remarks on the Bahá'í Faith and syncretism, presentations of the Bahá'í Faith to scholarly audiences, reflections on the oneness of religions and a preliminary study of specific subjects as the Bahá'í world order, Bahá'í mysticism and the literary language of the Bahá'í Writings.

Methodological suggestions for Bahá'í scholars

The text of one of his talks published in *Saggi sulla Fede Bahá'í*, entitled 'Alcuni aspetti della religione bahá'í [Aspects of the Bahá'í religion]' (98-104) seems particularly relevant. He began his talk by saying: 'My first idea was to entitle this conference "What Orientalists do not know about the Bahá'í Faith"' (ibid. 98). Then he went on explaining that in his opinion, Orientalists 'with very few exceptions' do not understand the Bahá'í Faith, because they study it as a 'corpse to be anatomised according to certain scientific and methodological rules, typical of "orientalism" (a quite unclear methodology, among other things)' (ibid.). The Bahá'í Faith as an object of study, he said, is not a 'body of books, but a living organism' and how this living organism leads its own life (ibid. 100). He quoted as two examples of good studies on the Bahá'í Faith, Peter L. Berger, 'Motif messianique et processus social dans le Bahaisme [Messianic motifs and social process in the Bahaism]', published in *Archive the Sociologie des religions* (Paris, 1957) and William Garlington, *The Bahá'í Faith in Malwa, a Study of a Contemporary Religious Movement*, Australian National University, Canberra, 1975. He then corrected some misunderstandings about the Bahá'í Faith by famous orientalists, an issue that will be examined in the following pages. He concluded his talk by saying that 'orientalists should abandon their *philology* if they want to understand such a

steadily living and expanding historical and social movement as the Bahá'í faith' (ibid. 104).

Another paper by Bausani seems particularly relevant in this regard, his presentation (1979) of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's *The Secret of Divine Civilisation* (*Risáliy-i-Madaniyyat*), penned in 1875 and first published in Bombay in 1882 (see Bausani, *Saggi* 182-91). He observes that 'the kernel of the book (about 50 pages of 116) is devoted to a commentary of an Islamic tradition regarding the *'ulamá* (lit. "the learned", "doctors of the law" . . .)' (ibid. 186). The Tradition says: 'As for him who is one of the learned: he must guard himself, defend his faith, oppose his passions and obey the commandments of his Lord. It is then the duty of the people to pattern themselves after him' (ibid., see 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Secret* 34). 'Abdu'l-Bahá' also applies this Tradition to 'the ideal elected representative of the people' (ibid.). Therefore, Bausani's words are intended for politicians and scholars. Then, he summarises 'Abdu'l-Bahá's explanations of this tradition (ibid. 186-9, numbers added):

[1] to acquire the attributes of spiritual and material perfection . . . [that is] *culture . . . justice and impartiality: . . . a sincere wish to educate the masses* . . . [2] to protect and defend the body of the believers and to make it, as a social body, better, in all respects, than the other religious communities . . . to oppose one's passions, to subject oneself to moral authority . . . [3] to be obedient to the commandments of one's Lord . . . [forgetting] the ethical autonomy of one's conscience.

Bausani was faithful in his behaviour as a Bahá'í scholar to this critical instruction given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

Last but not least, an above-quoted statement by Bausani, 'Human beings all together are many zeros. They acquire a value only if we put them after number one, i.e., God' (quoted in Grieco 55) also seems relevant. It seemingly implies that Bausani would

have never tried to do anything, much less ‘to study the Bahá’í Faith historically and scientifically’ (‘Foreword’ ix), as though he did not believe in God and His latest Manifestation. This attitude in a good number of his writings on the Bahá’í Faith, which is not approved by certain modern academic circles, might justify the following already quoted words, written by Di Nola, a scholar and his friend and admirer: ‘This explains his often misunderstood pragmatic missionary commitment, which brought him to work in the Bahá’í Italian community actively and to write on *Opinioni Bahá’í*, the missionary periodical of the movement and in terms quite different from the rigour with which he had often spoken about that movement . . .’ (‘Testimonianze’ XX). Scarcia himself, while commenting upon *I Persiani* 264-5 (that will be quoted below), a page referring to the Bábís and Bahá’ís in Iran, writes that this page is millenarist rather than historical (‘Recensione di A. Bausani, *I Persiani*’ 215).

Definitions of religion

Bausani suggests various definitions of religion from different points of view, including practical, theological, and philosophical religious points of view.

From a practical point of view

He says that ‘religion . . . does not deal with complicated cognitive, Gnostic elucubrations, about how God or the world beyond are’ (*Saggi* 471, see 85, 210, 216) in which one ought to believe ‘si quis vult salvus esse’ (ibid. 27), that is, if one wants to attain salvation as ‘personal . . . sanctification’ (ibid. 26). Bausani repeatedly stresses this concept. Nay, this is the fundamental blame he puts on historical Christianity: that it became theologised, ‘Aristotelised’ and re-paganised (see ibid. 27); in other words, from a religion capable of opening the hearts to God, it turned into a body of rites and dogmas which whosoever wished to attain personal salvation was required to accept. He studies the negative results

of this awkward situation at length, particularly the contrast between the official religion and science, which lasted until the twentieth century (see *ibid.* 27-8). In his opinion, religion suggests a ‘direction of *moral sanctity*’ (*ibid.* 53); it is an ‘energetic impulse provided to realise a sanctity that today cannot be restricted into individual lives, but must be a social sanctity’ (*ibid.* 346). More specifically, he upholds that ‘the essential purpose of religion is the realisation of the oneness of humankind’ (*ibid.* 471), i.e., bringing ‘absolute unity in diversity’ (‘Reflections’ 3). Therefore, ‘the pivot of the concept of religion . . . is the *oneness of humankind* and the instruments to *realise it visibly*’ (*Saggi* 211). He says moreover that ‘religion [also] is “obeying to the teachings of the Lord”’ (*ibid.* 189, see Abdu’l-Bahá’, *Secret* 34) so that the purpose wherefore it is given to human beings may be fulfilled. Therefore, he wishes that religion may become, in its purest and most genuine form, ‘a supreme art of total life, a centre from which the decisions of each life may branch off and all other levels of oneness may stem’ (*ibid.* 270). In summary, he writes:

Religion is re-defined by the Bahá’ís as a transcendent, directional energy; it is not a ‘body of rites and dogmas’. Therefore, religion has no sacraments, priests, or ‘dogmas’ in the strict sense of the word. Priests are today ‘assemblies’; rites are today elections performed in a spirit of prayer and a sacred ‘consultation’; dogmas are today dynamic teachings on the abolition of racial, economic, etc. prejudices and equality of rights between the two sexes. Furthermore, the central concept is that . . . human nature can change only in one’s obedience to the vivifying impulse of the ‘Holy Spirit’. (‘I Bahá’í nell’attualità del dialogo’ 1)

From a theological point of view

Bausani writes that ‘the essence of divine religion is . . . faith in a God, an Unknowable Essence, who manifests himself in personalities that must not be followed as philosophers or scientists, but

as givers of laws of ethics and holiness' (ibid. 408). In the same vein, he also writes that religion is a 'devotional reverence to the Divine, as it becomes manifest (since it is unknowable in its sovereign essence) through the figures of the Prophets, the 'Manifestations of God,' the mirrors of God' (ibid. 252).

From a religious point of view

Bausani defines religion as "a human attitude whereby even that which is nothing for an irreligious person becomes integrated into a whole universal system and therefore takes on a value, nay a supreme value" (*Saggi* 18-9, see ibid. 380, and also in Grieco 52). He says that he drew this definition from a passage of a letter by St Paul (1 Corinthians 1: 26-9), which says:

For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence.

In order to clarify this definition, he brings an example: 'for an irreligious person "the dead" have no value, but a religious person prays for the dead and sometimes (as it is the case with the Bahá'ís) considers them as cooperators in a cosmic enterprise together with the living people' (*Saggi* 19).

Finally, he also mentions a definition of religion 'in the wider sense of the word of "several people grouped on the ground of their faith"' (*Saggi* 237-8).

The oneness of religions or spiritual oneness

One of the most cherished ideas of Bausani was that the most important task of modern religiosity is bringing to an end 'that which

is usually defined as “*the grievous scandal of Religions*”, whose responsibility all of us share, in one way or the other’ (*Saggi* 239). He writes in this regard: ‘When you have read some pages of the history of the last three of four millennia, you instinctively wonder whether you should also take the same drastic position’ of Bruno Bauer (1809-1882), the German philosopher, historian, and biblical critic. Bauer said: “‘How is religious opposition made impossible? By *abolishing religion!*’” (ibid.).¹² On the contrary, in the opinion of Bausani, ‘an incurably religious spirit’ (‘Tagore’ 9), the scandal will stop only through the oneness of religions, one of the highest goals humans may pursue.

Bausani distinguishes two kinds of the oneness of religions. One is the oneness ‘of natural, archaic religions’, which is a natural oneness, in as much as ‘*religio naturalis* [natural religion],¹³ in its fundamental tendencies, is *actually* the same everywhere . . . and *oneness along this way can be easily achieved*. It is a syncretistic, metaphysical oneness’ (*Saggi* 202-3). The other is a ‘*monotheist* oneness . . . whose realisation is much more difficult’ because it is a ‘*histori-cistic* oneness and it implies more significant sacrifices from the various religionists who will adopt it’ (ibid. 203).¹⁴ He also calls this oneness ‘spiritual oneness’. He defines it as ‘the recognition of the One Source where all known – or unknown – Religions found and find their inspiration, that is, religions in the broader sense of the word of “several people grouped on the ground of their faith”’ (ibid. 237-

¹² See Bauer *The Jewish Question*, at <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/jewish-question/>.

¹³ As ‘*religio naturalis*’, he intends ‘such naturalistic and pagan concepts as the idea of a dying and resurrecting God, of the Mother-goddess, and many others’ (*Saggi* 199).

¹⁴ As ‘monotheist oneness’, he means the concept whereby there is one God, all the Prophets/Manifestations come from him, and all the religions founded by the Prophets are of divine origin and thus are equally valid.

8). He maintains that this oneness will only be realised if ‘stubborn religious formalism’ (ibid. 243-4), a formalism which survives in all religions, is abandoned.

The oneness of religion is vital for both theoretical and practical reasons. From a theoretical perspective, up to now, religions have preached peace and sown war, so much so that several people, such as Bruno Bauer, were drawn to wish for all religions to disappear. The time has come for religions to regain their intrinsic truth, that is, peace, to overcome the formal conflicts which divide them and return to the ‘awareness of the oneness of the “People of God”’, that is, of all human beings (ibid. 240). From a practical perspective, Bausani remarks that ‘each religious phenomenon – as a mass-phenomenon – is necessarily also a political phenomenon’ (ibid. 243). Therefore, religious oneness is very useful because it can ‘create a wide opinion trend favourable. . . to the elimination . . . [of war] and to a constructive employment of human resources’ (ibid.). Since religions are divided today, ‘all their heartbroken calls to peace are useless’ (ibid. 245).

If religions must become united, it is necessary for ‘sectarianism, apartheid, and the “exclusivity of Truth” to be eliminated; everyone must admit honestly that . . . each religion . . . has its special intrinsic values, which are both an inalienable specific legacy and a *common Treasure* of all Humankind’ (ibid. 246). According to Bausani, for the oneness of religion to be achieved, ‘oneness must . . . begin from the Whole, from the afterwards, from a station which, seen at the human level, is the most difficult and the most universal: the oneness of humankind, as a living allegory of the oneness of God’ (ibid. 71).

The goal of the oneness of humankind is, therefore, indissolubly connected with the goal of the oneness of religions. If this important goal must be attained, Bausani says, it is necessary in the first place for ‘*the human heart to be changed . . . for the noble passions of the heart to be given a universal power and*

radius of action' (*Saggi* 254). He remarks that 'quite many people, even the mystics themselves, have misunderstood . . . [the heart] – in its natural condition – as the noblest part in human beings, as the one which is closer to God'. On the contrary, the heart 'is, substantially, their more typically animal part' (*ibid.*). The heart becomes important only 'when it is enlightened by a transcendent light', which 'cannot come from any other source besides the Manifestation of God in the world, the Prophet' (*ibid.* 255). Bausani explains that the Manifestation of God 'emanates a power that can transform the human heart' (*ibid.*). This transformation enables the heart to understand oneness and live in such a way as to realise it. 'Oneness', Bausani explains, 'is neither the sum of, more or less equally mingled together, parts, nor a common substratum of different parts; nay, it is, more dynamically, a supreme final goal towards which all parts are teleologically ordained' (*ibid.* 256). The Manifestation of God unifies all human beings because He shows them the direction towards which they are expected to bend their efforts.

The realisation of this oneness cannot be painless. According to Bausani, all human beings must willingly make certain sacrifices. The sacrifices which he points out are different for religionists and atheists. He includes atheists in achieving religious or spiritual oneness because, in his judgment, 'belief in a personal God is not an indispensable prerequisite of Religions' (*Saggi* 238). Thus, he presents two examples to confirm his statement: Hīnayāna Buddhism and Marxism. As to Marxism, he discovers certain aspects 'of a typically fideistic character' and 'a certain form of spirituality, bent to the achievement of highly humanitarian goals' (*ibid.*).

As for religionists, Bausani writes that three sacrifices are expected from them. The first is that they 'seriously and . . . scientifically study their religion' (*Saggi* 203). Whosoever embarks upon this study will discover 'that what he believed to be a

revelation of mystery' (ibid. 204) is, in reality, a debatable human idea, accepted as an irrefutable dogma. This discovery may lead many believers to 'discard such ideas as irreligious' and to realise that several followers of other religions have 'done the same thing regarding similar ideas, which they may have been taught . . . in . . . [their] traditional religion' (ibid.). This is what happened to many people in the West as well as to some 'Westernized' individuals in other climates. However, unfortunately, most of those people have turned to atheism. Bausani says a '*second sacrifice*' (ibid.) becomes necessary. One must recognise that science cannot solve the moral issue. If this were the case, writes Bausani, 'why . . . such an atheistic scientist as Bertrand Russell' (1872-1970) was commendably engaged during his life against war, Nazism and other horrors of his times, 'whereas his morality seems to be summarised in quite a poor sentence: "be happy and you will be good"?' (ibid., see 340). Therefore, the second required sacrifice is to recognise 'that we need a revelation of moral and social laws, that humankind by itself . . . cannot discover a valuable law (the number of people who were killed by human beings who chose an "autonomous morality" is far greater than the number of all the possible victims of all possible inquisitions and Holy Offices all together . . .)' (ibid. 204). The third sacrifice – perhaps the most difficult – is to understand that the oneness of religions 'cannot be a federation of a mixture of superstitions and cults, but should be a real practical union in a single Faith' (*Saggi* 36). This awareness implies that 'the old name' should be abandoned and 'the new one should be accepted . . . In fact, if religion is *law*, if the new revelation is the revelation of a valuable *law* for *all humankind*, the approach of this new kind of ecumenism should be accepting a new practical

universal law so that everyone may contribute *in the same degree* to build the new world, the new Jerusalem' (ibid. 205).¹⁵

As to the 'people of the highly refined Europe, or better of Western culture', who boldly state that they 'do not need whatever may resemble "religion"' (*Saggi* 78), Bausani indicates certain 'great sacrifices' (ibid. 79) to them as well. In his opinion, the world crisis of the twentieth century depends on three 'paradoxes of the modern rapid technological progress' (ibid. 78). The first paradox is the 'extreme *rapidity* of technological progress, both in the succeeding new inventions and improvements . . . and . . . in the increasing speed of the means of transportation' (ibid., see 341-2). The second paradox is the 'increasing *democratisation of the possession* of those means of transportation or information' (*Saggi* 78). The third paradox is '*the steady increase of population*' (ibid. 79). These three factors make the world situation increasingly critical. Bausani envisions only two solutions to this crisis. The first one cannot be proposed since it is 'violence'. The second one is 'easy to say, but more difficult to apply and laborious'. It consists of 'giving to the word "we" a wider meaning, a global meaning' (ibid.). If this goal – which could be called globalisation, obviously in a different sense from what the word is given nowadays – must be achieved, Bausani maintains that three 'great sacrifices' (ibid.) are required. The first sacrifice is to stop 'considering our religions, with their dogmas and rites conditioned upon the times and places where they grew and developed, as *the Religion, the Universal Religion*' (ibid.). He writes in this regard: 'It is today historically and actually demonstrated that *none* of the three most famous world

¹⁵ See 'Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name' (Revelation 3: 12).

“religions”, like Christianity, Islam and Buddhism, is *a real and effective* “universal” or “world religion” if we do not want to fool ourselves and if we want to give to the word “world” a planetary meaning’ (ibid. 79-80).

The second sacrifice, and before describing it, Bausani warns that he ‘will adduce only some examples, the most shocking ones’ (ibid. 80), is ‘giving up many historical phenomena of Western culture, which we consider as absolute values’, for example ‘the Roman law and its fundamental concepts, formal democracy, bureaucratic socialism, certain aesthetic values’ (ibid.). Finally, the third sacrifice, which is practically imposed by technological progress, is renouncing to ‘preserve *national frontiers* or Customs’ (ibid.). Then he remarks: ‘But which power could oblige us to make such sacrifices, which appear so dangerous for our same lives and civilisation?’ (ibid. 80-1). Then, he answers that, in his opinion, this power is religion, which has already proved capable of bringing such revolutions in the past, when, for example, it laid the foundations of Christian civilisation, leading the ‘refined intellectuals of the bright Hellenistic-Roman age to accept the “barbarian” Christian religion’ (ibid. 81).

He thinks that whoever suggests, like Italian historian of religion and educator Raffaele Pettazzoni (1883-1859), the essayist Roberto Vacca¹⁶ and the economist Aurelio Peccei (1900-1984),¹⁷ cultural solutions to the crisis of the twentieth century are utopians.

Pettazzoni, who was one of his teachers, writes that when religion has declined ‘into the dead waters of a stagnant conformism . . . [it] is up to culture to react and to reinvigorate an impoverished

¹⁶ Bausani alludes specifically to his *Medioevo prossimo venturo* [A close incoming Middle Age] and *Manuale per un'improbabile salvezza* [A handbook for an improbable salvation] in *Saggi* 29-30, 224, 339, 343-4.

¹⁷ Bausani refers specifically to His *Cento pagine per l'avvenire* [A hundred pages for the future] in *Saggi* 224, 422-30.

religion, delivering it from its dross and bringing it back to the living fountain of inner experience' (*Religione e Società* 171). Bausani objects: 'Culture? The same culture which has blindly refused any idea of religion and God only because a certain caste of priests has condemned Galilei? I would not agree' (*Saggi* 29).

Vacca, to whom he was bound by a great friendship since their early infancy (Vacca's mother, a professor of Arabic at the University of Rome, taught Bausani Arabic when he was about ten years old), suggests establishing a 'religion (as hateful as this word may sound) of the standard of a high and inflexible judgment, to be used in the schools, in the universities, in the choice of the managers', to be 'adopted for . . . [itself] and not for . . . [its] good social results' and to be taught to human beings 'in their early infancy, that is, in the primary and secondary schools' (*Medioevo* 128). Bausani objects to his friend that 'believing that this conditioning may be achieved in other ways than those which . . . [he calls] religious' is 'more utopian than wishing for a new religion' (*Saggi* 30). He is convinced that 'ethics cannot have a materialistic or utilitarian foundation'. He believes 'that the essential task of religion is not to formulate dogmas and to suggest rites, but to offer a moral code' (*ibid.* 344).

Peccei suggests 'a great cultural renaissance' (*Cento pagine* 29) and a set of innovations, which Bausani synthesizes in three points: 'To realise global policies and strategies; to put the world in a position to be governed; to learn how to govern the world – that which implies for us to learn how to govern ourselves [see Peccei 128-9]' (*Saggi* 429). Bausani objects: 'in our opinion, this is the task of any decent religion, and this was also the task, in the beginning, of those religions that have now turned into heaps of rites and ceremonies' (*ibid.*). Then he adds: 'If the Club of Rome also intends . . . to bring about a renewal of the present essential thought [see Peccei 140], it cannot do other than becoming a religion and noting, more than it has been doing, that

the Bahá'í Faith meets all these prerequisites' (ibid. 430). In conclusion, he writes:

The world is now in labour. A new culture, a new history, is seemingly taking shape and is consciously or unconsciously envisioned (wished or feared) by almost everyone. I firmly believe that, as has happened in the past, this new culture . . . will be established only through substantially religious energy, provided this word is given the meaning we mentioned at the beginning.¹⁸ (ibid. 29, see 224)

In short, Bausani maintains that the present crisis may be solved through 'two difficult actions': the first one is to recognise in humbleness 'that the end, the passing . . . [of the ancient] traditions has come' and the second one is ignoring 'smiles and . . . blames or . . . persecutions of both the followers of the "powerful traditions", and them who, distressed by the inefficacy of religions, became atheist' and 'building together the *new tradition of the future*' (ibid. 348).

In his opinion, only the Bahá'í Faith can build 'the new tradition of the future' (Saggi 348) because it meets two fundamental prerequisites, ideally suited to this purpose. In the first place, as it has been seen, 'it is *neither* a revelation *of dogmas* nor of more or less absurd information on the inaccessible essence of God; it rather brings an energetic impulse provided to realise a sanctity that today cannot be restricted into individual lives, but must be a social sanctity' (ibid. 346). In the second place, the Bahá'í Faith conveys 'guidance for action, a *plan*, supported by a divine energy, about how the new society should be' (ibid. 348). The Bahá'í plan is '*directional* rather than *static*' (ibid. 350) and provides the

¹⁸ In support of his thesis, Bausani quotes the English historian Arnold Toynbee (1889-1975) and his theories on the origins of civilisations, see *Saggi* 30, 485-6. The definition of religion Bausani refers to is mentioned above 62-4.

means for its implementation in the form of a ‘spirit, which we call “religious”, the same which drew the Prophets to say that it is better to be killed than to kill’ (ibid. 351).

Typological studies of the Bahá’í Faith

In his typological studies of the Bahá’í Faith, Bausani discovers that the Bahá’í Faith is a novelty in this respect as well because certain of its features cannot be easily classified through the usual typological criteria.

Traditional and founded religions

In Bausani’s historical and political classifications, the position of the Bahá’í Faith appears quite clear. For example, in the classification of religions in traditional religions, which have no historical founder ‘or, if they have one, he is enwrapped in legend or myth’ (*Saggi* 381), like Shintoism, Graeco-Roman and Hinduist religions – about which he writes that it ‘may be presently considered as the clearest reproduction of what, *mutatis mutandis*, the ancient Greek religion must have been at its times’ (*Saggi* 198-9) – and *founded* religions, which ‘have a historical founder, venerated in different degrees by their followers’ (ibid. 381), like Buddhism, Christianity and Islam, the Bahá’í Faith may be easily classified among the latter ones.

National and universalist religions

The position of the Bahá’í Faith is also evident in the classification of religions in ‘national religions, wherein one is born and whereto it is virtually impossible to convert oneself, like the Japanese Shintoism, the Graeco-Roman religion, Hinduism, Judaism, the present Zoroastrian Mazdeism’ and world, or ‘universalist religions, forming opened communities whereto whoever wants may belong, like for example Buddhism, Christianity and Islam’ (*Saggi* 20, see 381). The Bahá’í Faith is a world or universalist religion.

Ambiguities arise in other classifications, founded on, more specifically, religious criteria.

Religions of law and religions of salvation

Religions can be classified into religions of law, whose pivot is the sanctification of society, like Judaism and Islam, and religions leading to salvation, whose pivot is the attainment of ultramundane, personal salvation, like Christianity, or the attainment of personal liberation, like Buddhism (see Bausani, *Saggi* 26, 33). From this perspective, the Bahá'í Faith is, according to Bausani, 'a harmonious fusion' (ibid. 33) of the two types:

Although [the Bahá'í Faith] fully accepts personal salvation taught by Christianity, it teaches that this salvation should be integrated by an institution, which should lead to salvation not only individuals but the whole of humankind since humankind cannot be saved through the sum of many saints, but only through sacred institutions. The salvation of humankind is the 'motive' of God's revelation. (ibid. 33-4)

Religions mainly founded on the law, and religions mainly focussed on mysticism

In another classification, which divides religions into 'religions mainly focused on the law', like Judaism and Islam, and 'religions mainly founded on mysticism', like Buddhism and Christianity, Bausani maintains that the Bahá'í Faith occupies 'a balanced and "middle" position' (*Saggi* 433) between the two types. He draws this conclusion from a verse of Bahá'u'lláh's *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (3, para.5, see Bausani, *Saggi* 433-8): 'Think not that We have revealed unto you a mere code of laws. Nay, rather, We have unsealed the choice Wine with the fingers of might and power' and a passage in Bahá'u'lláh's *Seven Valleys* (39-40, see Bausani, *Saggi* 436-8):

In all these journeys the traveller must stray not the breadth of a hair from the ‘Law’, for this is indeed the secret of the ‘Path’ and the fruit of the Tree of ‘Truth’; and in all these stages he must cling to the robe of obedience to the commandments, and hold fast to the cord of shunning all forbidden things, that he may be nourished from the cup of the Law and informed of the mysteries of Truth.

From these words, Bausani writes, we understand that Bahá’u’lláh revealed neither ‘a mere code of laws’ (*Saggi* 436), that is, a ‘body of outward precepts that human beings should follow’, nor ‘a mere mystic Wine . . . which will set human beings free, as Paul assumed, from any law’ (*ibid.*). The Bahá’í Faith, Bausani maintains, is a mystic way, with its Law and ultimate Truth. However, the Bahá’í Faith is neither esoteric nor ascetical because its Law is a social law whose implementation will sanctify individuals and society. Its Truth is not a body of metaphysical and abstract verities but that same sanctification of individuals and society, which will be attained only through the implementation of the Law. Thus, the Law comes to be considered as ‘the secret of the “Path” and the fruit of the Tree of “Truth”’ (Bahá’u’lláh, *Seven Valleys* 40).

Monotheistic and pantheistic religions

Another classification in which the Bahá’í Faith occupies, according to Bausani, a peculiar position is that which classifies religions on the grounds of their description of God. In this respect, religions may be monotheistic and pantheistic – or monistic. The former religions, like Judaism and Sunni Islam, teach that there is, on the one hand, ‘a Personal Transcendent God wherein all Sacredness is concentrated, beyond the world, and, on the other, the world created by him and subjected to him; man is God’s “viceroys” [see Koran 11: 30], but even the Prophets themselves are not distinguished from other men’ (*Saggi* 168). The latter ones, like Hinduism, teach that ‘God is not a person, but something divine spread throughout the

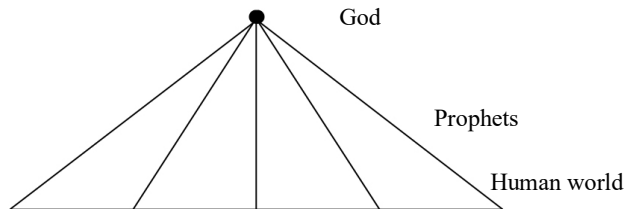
world' (ibid.). As to the Bahá'í Faith, in 1955, Bausani described the Bahá'í Faith as 'the youngest – but well-differentiated – religion of that group of monotheistic-prophetic, supra-national religions (Judaism, Islam, Christianity and perhaps Zoroastrianism) which offer . . . such a typical contrast with *natural* national religions' (ibid. 462-3). Later on (1985 circa), however, he wrote that the Bahá'í Faith is 'advantageously different' for the progress of society 'from the archaic tendentially pantheistic religions, from monotheist religions like Judaism and Islam, and Christian theology' (*Saggi* 387). Therefore, according to Bausani, the Bahá'í Faith also occupies a peculiar position in this perspective. He quotes in this regard the following passage from a Tablet by 'Abdu'l-Bahá (*Tablets* 1:204-5):

Thou hast written concerning the Impersonality of the Divinity. Personality is in the Manifestation of the Divinity, not in the Essence of the Divinity. The reality of the divine world is purified and sanctified from limits and restriction. But the pure Mirror, which is the Manifestor of the Sun of Truth and in which the Sun of Truth is manifest in full appearance – that mirror is restricted, not the lights . . . By seeing God is meant beholding the Manifestation of Himself; for witnessing the sun in its entire splendour, in a clear glassy surface, is identical with witnessing the essence of the sun itself.

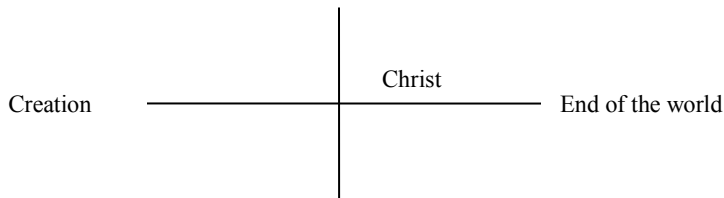
Bausani says these words are like 'an embryo of "Bahá'í theology"' (*Saggi* 170). In his opinion, they describe a 'concept [of God] which includes both the two fundamental religious ideas . . . In other words, God is unknowable but manifest in degrees, that is, in His attributes, which are mirrored forth in all things and certain human beings' (ibid.). His already quoted words come to mind: 'religious truth, which claims to be transcendent, is inaccessible to human beings so that human verities, and religious verities themselves, can only have a directional value; they cannot have an idolatrous value of sanctity' ('Breve storia' 40).

Three types of monotheism

As to monotheist religions, Bausani describes three fundamental types of monotheism, which he expounds through some graphic representations. The first type of monotheism is Judaism. In this case, he draws the divine and the human levels as a point and a line, respectively, then he draws several 'rays connecting the Personal Divine point with the line of the earth' which, he says, 'correspond to the voices of the prophets' (*Saggi* 382).



The second type of monotheism is Christianity. Bausani draws it as a cross:

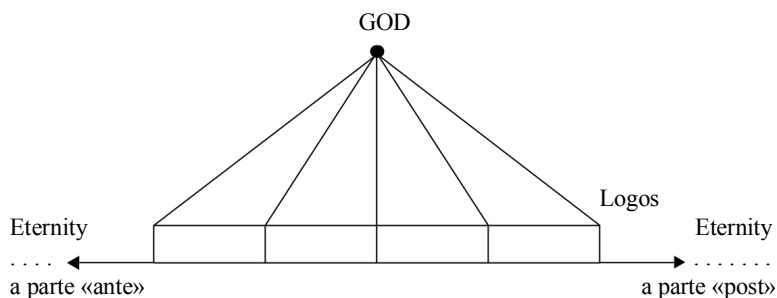


There is a personal divine point stretching as far as intersecting, in a single point, the line of human history: the point-Christ, which can be assigned a precise position in time and place (Palestine, the years 0-33). If we want this religious structure to be symmetrical, we could also imagine the inferior line as having a beginning and an end in history (creation and the end of the world, respectively).

The third type of monotheism is the Bahá'í Faith. Bausani explains that its position

is different from the Christian orthodox position. Like Christianity, the Bahá'í Faith admits that the Divine line is inserted into the human, and thus, it recognizes a unique and not a mere human station of the Prophet. However, it does not restrict this possibility to a single point in history and time, nor does it dissolve the Divine into history. (*Saggi* 383)

Thus, he suggests the following scheme:



Bausani explains (*Saggi* 383-4):

The various intersections symbolise the Manifestations of God, who will continue to educate and 'deify' humankind in higher and higher forms, from an eternity with no beginning to an eternity with no end. God is not directly knowable; He is transcendent (and in this regard, the Bahá'ís are strictly monotheist). However, God expresses his will through an eternal *Logos* . . . which becomes manifest in an indefinite number of sacred persons that occupy a different station than normal human beings (and in this regard, the Bahá'í Faith is different from the conceptions of radical monotheism like Islam and Judaism and more similar to Christianity). The successive descents of these sacred persons on earth had no beginning and will have no end (the Bahá'í Faith does not agree with the orthodox concept of the singleness of the historical Christ, whereas Bahá'ís may agree with Christians as to the singleness of the *eternal Christ*). Many, nay infinite, points and not only one point, of the line that symbolizes the human level are *also* divine

(and in this regard, the Bahá'í Faith resembles archaic religiosity). However, all those points are *neither indiscriminately* nor potentially divine (and in this regard, the Bahá'í Faith is different from philosophical and mystical pantheism and certain forms of archaic religiosity).

Evolution of monotheism

Bausani also describes 'an evolution of monotheism' (*Saggi* 26). From its initial 'national and racial forms' of Judaism, monotheism 'is universalised by Christ', then Islam 'lays the foundations . . . for the sanctification of the community' (*ibid.*). He studies the evolution of monotheism from the point of view of its laws. He maintains that in the Bible, we find a first type of 'ancient local laws promulgated by early prophets, about whom tradition records a little more than their names' (*ibid.* 200). They are the laws of the person, given by Adam, those of the tribe, given by Noah, and those of a group of tribes, given by Abraham. The laws of the second type are those given by Moses to a people as a whole. According to Bausani, Christianity 'could accept the Pauline dogma of the refusal of the law' (*ibid.* 201) for three fundamental reasons. The first reason is that 'its primary goal . . . was to create the *greatest individual power and sanctification* for a new practical organisation of humankind under God's orders' (*ibid.*). The second reason is that the Christian Dispensation was destined to have a relatively short duration. According to Bausani, it ended in 622 AD with the beginning of the Muslim Dispensation. Bausani explains that the Bahá'í concept of progressive revelation implies that 'the Muslim revelation is part of the same cultural cycle as the Mosaic and Christian revelations because it is but the ancient monotheism of Abraham. Therefore – since Muslim revelation comes after Christian revelation – it substitutes it, in the same way as Christian revelation substitutes and abrogates the Mosaic one' (*ibid.* 291, see 291-3, 297-8). The third reason whereby religious law could

be given lesser importance in the Christian dispensation is the existence of the ‘legal framework of the Roman Empire’ (ibid. 298). After Jesus, Muḥammad created a ‘common supra-racial nation, the *ummah* or community of brothers’ (ibid. 200). The Bahá’í Faith is the latest stage in this evolution and implies ‘the revelation of a new law that unites not only parts of humanity but all human-kind in a single great nation’ (ibid. 201).

Religions and creation

Bausani studies religions from a typological perspective based on their attitude towards creation and divides them into three types. The first type comprises archaic religions and philosophical pantheism. These religions ‘either approach the issue [of creation] in a purely mythical form, and presume the existence of a primal sacred matter, or they do not care about it’ (*Saggi* 385). The second type comprises monotheist religions, like Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. These religions maintain that in the beginning, ‘nothing was, and then God created the world’ (ibid. 386). The third type comprises the Bahá’í Faith, which maintains that the divine attribute ‘creator’ is coeternal with God and requires the existence of a created object. Therefore, the world of creation is coeternal with God, but its eternity ‘is of a lower degree (that is, it is purely temporal) than that of the Creator, who is the *uncreated creator*’ (ibid.).

Religions and Sacred Words

Bausani also suggests a classification of religions based on their attitude towards the “‘Sacred Word”” (*Saggi* 147). In this perspective, he distinguishes three types of religions. The first type comprises the religions which teach that ‘God becomes manifest once for all in a “*Sacred Scripture*”’ (ibid.). This Scripture is ‘unique in its authority and sometimes its authors are not historically clearly known’ (ibid.). Among those religions, Bausani lists, ‘despite other typological differences among them . . .

Judaism with its *Torah*, Islam with the *Koran*, Hinduism with its *Vedas*, Buddhism with the various *Sutras* of its Canon . . . [and] Sikhism which deify its sacred book, the *Grant*' (ibid.). The second type, represented by Christianity, 'perceives the Word of God as *incarnated in a person*, rather than expressed in a *Book*' (ibid.). Bausani explains that, in this respect, the Christ of Christianity is equivalent to the Koran of Islam since both are coeternal with God according to their respective Faiths. The third type, represented by the Bahá'í Faith, is characterised by two fundamental features. In the first place, 'it rejects the concept of *incarnation* of the divine Word as a whole in a man' (ibid. 148). In this respect, it differs from Christianity. In the second place, the Bahá'í Faith has not 'a single "Sacred Book" abstractly perceived as the only source of authority throughout the centuries, thus subject to a sort of free examination' (ibid.). In this respect, it differs from the religions of the first group.

According to Bausani, the Bahá'í Faith differs from all the other religions because it has 'a, so to say, *living body* of Scriptures, although it does not admit a scripture-person' (ibid. 149). The Bahá'í sacred Books are a body of Scriptures revealed between 1844 and 1892. The authoritative interpretations given from 1892 to 1921 by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Centre of the Bahá'í Covenant, and by Shoghi Effendi, who was the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith from 1921 to 1957, should be added to them. The authority of these interpretations is granted in Bahá'u'lláh's Testament as to 'Abdu'l-Bahá and in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and Testament as to Shoghi Effendi. After the passing of Shoghi Effendi, no one was invested with the authority to interpret the Bahá'í Scripture. Therefore, 'as long as the Bahá'í religion will be valid, the *Word* will not be left at the mercy of ambitious human free interpretations, but it will be established according to precise instruction by the founders themselves' (ibid. 150). The guidance of Scripture is, however, integrated and prolonged over time by

the institution of the Universal House of Justice. Since the fundamental function of Scripture is not the revelation of metaphysical verities but the bestowal of directives for action for the realisation of the oneness of humankind in the world, divine guidance remains on earth in the form of the central body of the community to which the legislative infallibility is conferred and which is thus capable of infallibly guiding the community to the fulfilment of its goals. This typological aspect, which Bausani calls “‘infallibility in evolution’, *living* infallibility’ (ibid. 439), makes the Bahá’í Faith alive, vital, flexible through the years, and effective at achieving its high goals.

Relations between humankind and God

Another typological study concerns the relations between humankind and God. In this respect, Bausani describes four types of religions. Some of them, like archaic, pre-monotheistic and mystic religions, teach that God is accessible to all human beings. Others, like Christianity, teach that God is accessible to a single man, Christ, Who incarnates Him in His essence. Others, like Judaism and Islam, teach that God is unattainable by any creature, even the Prophets. The position of the Bahá’í Faith reconciles all the others. To the mystics, it replies that the station of God in His Essence is precluded for all creatures. To the Christians, it replies that incarnation is impossible, and the Prophet is but the perfect mirror that manifests all the qualities of God. To the Jews and the Muslims, it replies that the Manifestation of God is the Perfect Man and thus his nearness to God is the supreme possible nearness for a creature, a nearness which is also qualitatively different from that which is accessible to human beings (see *Saggi* 386-7).

Religions and science

Finally, Bausani studies the typology of religions from their relation with science and classifies them into archaic pre-monotheist religions, monotheist religions, and the Bahá’í Faith. He explains

that since in the archaic religions, all is divine, nothing can be subjected to a scientific analysis, which is perceived as desecration. Monotheism delivers the world from this obstacle since it concentrates all the sacred in a single point outside the word, i.e., God or the Man-God. In this respect, monotheism opens the world of creation to a free search by human curiosity. We may wonder why Christianity prevented the development of science. Bausani explains quoting his teacher Pettazzoni (*Religione e Società* 171), who said: ‘There is in religion (history demonstrates it) a tendency to stick to dogmatism and exterior formalism, to quench the flame of faith in the dead waters of a stagnant conformity’, a concept which is somewhat confirmed in the Bahá’í Writings. Bausani maintains that Christianity was born as a religion of both ethical and spiritual laws, but later it turned into a religion of dogmas, when ‘paganism, ever-resurging without a radical and assiduous surveillance’, was inserted into its ‘strong revealed monotheist stock’ in the form of ‘such naturalistic and pagan concepts as the idea of a dying and resurrecting God, of the Mother-goddess, and many others’ (*Saggi* 199). Thus, science was not prevented by the primitive Christian monotheism but by the paganism, philosophy, and Aristotelism of Christian monotheistic theology. Thus, he writes (*ibid.* 207), ‘the *theo* of this atheism’, at whose sign modern science developed,

*is neither the God of the Bible and the Koran, nor the ethical and redeemer God of Christ; He is the God of Aristotle, the God of an albeit refined *pagana naturalis religio*, misunderstood throughout the centuries by Christians as the lawgiver non-mysteriosophic God of the authentic holy writings of monotheism. The true God is the God in which Newton . . .*

and Einstein believed . . . the God in which al-Bírúní, Galileo, and al-Báqillání believed.¹⁹

‘In the ancient words of Mawlaná Jalálu’d-Dín Rúmí’,²⁰ Bausani writes (*Saggi* 208), “God lives in nothingness, he has his workshop in Nothingness”, that is, in plain words, in *transcendence* (ibid.). Another self-imposed limit by Christian and Muslim monotheisms, when they considered their respective revelations as definitive, is that they deprived themselves of the possibility of accepting the ideas of evolutionism, which, for this reason, took on atheistic and anti-religious characters.

The Bahá’í Faith has a liberal attitude. It dissociates the functions of religion and science. The former shows the directions leading to personal and collective salvation and the required energies for achieving that goal. The latter discovers the mysteries of the world of creation within the limits of the protective law prescribed by religion so that human beings may be empowered to achieve the goals set by religion. Since the Bahá’í Faith teaches the doctrine of progressive revelation, that is, the concept that divine guidance is given neither once for all nor through a single historical personage but is conferred according to an eternal progression from pre-eternity to post-eternity, it opens the doors to an evolutionistic concept of reality. The Bahá’í Scriptures expound this concept in clear terms.

¹⁹ Abu’l-Rayhán Muḥammad al-Bírúní (973-1050) is a well known Persian scientist (see Bausani, *Saggi* 27, 206); Galileo Galilei (1564-1642), the renowned Italian scientist (see Bausani, *Saggi* 28, 207); Abú Bakr al-Báqillání (d. 1013) is a famous atomist philosopher and Ash‘arite theologian (see Bausani, *Saggi* 206).

²⁰ Mawlaná Jalálu’d-Dín Rúmí (1207-1273), one of the most celebrated poet of Persian language. See *Mathnaví* 2:690 and 5:1960.

The Bahá'í Faith and syncretism

Bausani remarks how several eminent scholars, for example, the Italian Islamists Carlo Alfonso Nallino (1872 1938, see 'Bahā'ī, Bahā'ismo' 870) and Michelangelo Guidi (1886 1946, see 'La religione Bābī-Bahā'ī' 2:336-8), misinterpret the Bahá'í Faith as 'a *syncretism* and a cocktail of Western and Eastern ideas, a mixture of American theosophy and fanaticism of Eastern plebs' (*Saggi* 102). He explains that 'the Bahá'í Faith is a Religion, and not a confused *syncretism* or a vague *synthesis* of religions . . . [as] modern theosophy . . . Neither is it a synthesis, a concentration of different elements to form an autonomous superior entity as if it was a *religious philosophy of history*, or something similar' (ibid. 275-6). Bausani ascribes the misinterpretations of the Islamists to their 'philological book-learned methodology' (ibid. 102), which led them 'to consider the object of . . . [their] study as a corpse to be anatomised according to certain scientific and methodological rules typical of "Orientalism"', which he defines as 'quite vague' (ibid. 98). Bausani maintains that if one adopts the same method while studying Christianity, Christianity will also be considered as a syncretism. In Christianity,

there is the Jewish idea of a monotheist God who creates from nothingness, there is also the idea of a divine personage who incarnates himself, and the feminine element of the divinity etc. . . . and yet very few persons . . . will be willing to define for this reason Christianity as a religious syncretism. Syncretism is something created theoretically, a doctrine that is diffused as a doctrine among intellectuals. (ibid. 102, see 202-3)

He points out that if the people of His generation must understand the Manifestation of God, He can only avail Himself of '*languages and ideas popular in His times*' (ibid. 102). Whatever the ideas and the languages used by the Manifestation of God, His

teachings are expounded as ‘*an integrated plan*’ (ibid. 103) which comes from God.

At this point, we should explain what Bausani meant by the word ‘revelation’. Bausani maintains that according to ‘classical Christian theology, Christ is distinguished from other founders of religion who, as precious as they may have been, have but spoken of a *religio naturalis*, because Christ has revealed *that which human reason could have never known*, that is, the mystery of the essence of God, the Trinity, original sin, incarnation, *supra-national* cognitive (and yet salvific) verities’ (*Saggi* 103). On the contrary, according to the Bahá’ís, as well as the Muslims, the Manifestations of God do not reveal dogmatic salvific verities but ‘an *ethical and religious energy* in order to realise the divine plan in their *respective stages of human evolution*’ (ibid.). Therefore, the Bahá’í Faith is the revelation of what God wants human beings to do now to realise humankind’s oneness on earth. These teachings are revealed as a clear, harmonious, unitary, and finalised body of teachings; therefore, the Bahá’í Faith is not a syncretistic philosophy but a new religion.

Presenting the Bahá’í Faith to scholarly audiences

Bausani did not spare his efforts to help present the Bahá’í Faith to scholarly audiences. Five papers seem particularly meaningful in this regard. The first is entitled ‘Un “Ġazal” di Qurratu’l-‘Ain [A *Ghazal* by Qurratu’l-‘Ayn]’, and it was published in 1949 (*Oriente Moderno* 29.10-12 (1949):190-2). Although the paper only intends to offer the Persian text and the Italian translation of a poem by Táhirih (*Gar bi-tu uftad-am* [Should I ever see Thee]), it mentions the Báb and the scanty bibliography on his Faith available in those years. The second is entitled ‘La Fede Bahá’í [The Bahá’í Faith]’, and it was published in 1950 (*Scienza e Umanità* [Science and Humanities] 3.4 (1950): 1-16. See Bausani, *Saggi* 59-74). It is an early

scientific presentation of the history and the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith. The third paper is entitled “Il martirio del ‘Báb’ secondo la narrazione di Nabíl Zarandí [The martyrdom of the Báb in Nabíl Zarandí’s narrative],” and it was published in 1950 (*Oriente Moderno* 30.10-12 (1950): 199-207). It is a scientific account of the well-known episode of the execution of the Báb, enriched by many learned notes. The fourth paper is entitled ‘Sviluppi istituzionali della religione Bahá'í [Institutional developments of the Bahá'í religion]’, and it was published in 1955 (*Atti* 447-50) and later, in an enlarged form based on his own typed text, in *Saggi* 444-64. It is a scientific description of the Bahá'í Administrative Order. The fifth paper is entitled ‘Modernismo e “eresie” nell’Islam contemporaneo [Modernism and ‘heresies’ in contemporary Islam]’, and it was published in 1975 (*Sviluppi recenti* 43-62). Although this paper mentions the Bahá'í Faith only in a sentence of six lines and two lines of a note, it seems important to understand Bausani’s opinion on modern Islam.

Bausani discusses the meaning of ‘modernism’ in a Muslim context. He suggests four possible modern developments in Islam, intended as four degrees of refusal of the *taqlid* (lit. imitation, i.e., following a teacher or the official tradition). The first one is ‘clearing the ancient and genuine traditions and the *consensus* of the earliest generations from all the additions of the successive codifiers and working personally, that is, enforcing the *ijtihad* [lit. Effort], based on the Koran, of the authentic traditions and of the early consensus’ (Bausani, ‘Modernismo’ 54). The second possibility is ‘looking for a reformation of Islam, only in the Koran, while abandoning the tradition’ (ibid. 55). The third possibility is ‘distinguishing, in the Koran itself, what God revealed in order to guide a primitive people, as pre-Islamic Arabs, from what is intended as an eternal and universal law, the “essential spirit” of the Koran’ (ibid. 56). The fourth possibility is that ‘God alone can distinguish what is

alive and what is dead in the Sacred Book, sending another law-giver-prophet' (ibid. 57). Bausani comments:

Obviously, adopting this attitude means coming out of Islam, and this is not a mere theoretical possibility since it happened with the new Bahā'ī religion. This religion was born within Islam, as Christianity was born within Judaism; however, it is radically distinguished from Islam because it has a new Muḥammad (Bahā'u'llāh d. 1892), new books (his writings), and a new sacred law. (ibid.)

The chapter entitled 'The New Babi-Bahai Religion' in his *Religion in Iran* (379-412) and appendix 1, entitled 'La religione Bābī-Bāhā'ī' of *L'Islam* (211-9), occupy a special place among Bausani's writings on the Bahá'í Faith for at least two reasons. Both of them are complete and scholarly presentations of the twin Faiths. Both are part of well-known books, which were successful when they were published and are successful even today. A paragraph of *The Persians* (166-7) should be added to these works. Unfortunately, the English translation does not carry what Bausani wrote in *I Persiani* 264-5, pages that are of special interest to understand what Bausani thought about modern Iranian religious thought:

In the present situation of the Persian people, still strongly imbued with religion . . . Iran can be saved from colonialist nationalism . . . only through a religious reformation that may influence practical aspects, that is, values perceived as alive, discussed, rejected or cherished, and not the pseudo-archaism of the official patriotism. Such a religious reformation has indeed emerged in Iran with the Bābī and Bahā'ī movements, born in the last century . . . In this reformation, the Iranian genius has surpassed Islam – as some aspects of the Iranian elite are trying to do, in much less valid forms, leaving the people, who almost do not understand the ancient Iranian religiosity, with nothing else than untouched folkloric superstitions of the

worst Islam. This reformation has surpassed Islam in a historically more valid way, i.e., presenting the vibrant personality of a new prophet that develops Islamic concepts, purifying them and carrying them farther, as Christianity modified and carried farther Jewish concepts.

Bausani openly stated that if the Bábí movement, a precursor of the Bahá'í movement, 'had taken hold, it would have . . . had a definitely beneficial [moralizing, this word has not been translated from the Italian] influence on the life of the country, but it was bitterly opposed by both the religious and political authorities' (*The Persians* 166). He also wrote that 'the political failure of the Bábism in Iran in the nineteenth century was a considerable disaster for Iran' and, quoting such 'personages as Lord Curzon and Browne' concluded (*I Persiani* 265) that 'the success of such a religious reformation would have been . . . a decisively positive fact for the culture of modern Iran and a solution of the crisis which presently afflicts it'.

Bausani also wrote short articles for several Encyclopaedias, for example, the entry words 'Babismo' and 'Bahā'ismo' of the *Enciclopedia Cattolica* [Catholic Encyclopaedia] 2:640-1, 692-3 in 1952 and 'Bāb', 'Bābīs', 'Bahā'Allāh' and 'Bahā'is' of the *Encyclopédie de l'Islam* 1:856-8, 870, 938-9, 943-6 in 1958 and the short essay 'La fede baha'í' in *Le grandi religioni* [The great religions] 5:279-88, an encyclopedia published in the 1960s by Rizzoli in weekly instalments sold in news-stands. Sometimes, his works substitute earlier imprecise entry words. A few examples are the inaccurate article "Bahā'ī, Bahā'ismo" by Nallino in the *Enciclopedia Italiana* 5: 870 substituted by his 'Bahā'ī, Bahā'ismo', in *Enciclopedia Italiana. Quarta appendice 1961-1978* [fourth appendix] 1:220-1 and the incorrect article 'La religione Bābī-Bāha'ī [The Bābī-Bāha'ī religion]' by Guidi in Pietro Tacchi Venturi, *Storia delle religioni* [History of Religion] 2:336-8, substituted by his 'La religione Bābī-Bāha'ī', in the 1971

completely revised edition of the same *Storia delle religioni* (2:260-74).

We may wonder what results came from his efforts. As early as 1970, Di Nola writes that Bausani wrote the best explanations on the Bahá'í Faith with the primary intention of 'setting it free from the faulty judgments which have been formulated in the past, through superficial information gained from Bahaist-American propaganda pamphlets' ('Bahaismo' 900). Di Nola praises Bausani's efforts because they are the result of a direct and deep study of the Bahá'í texts and of an intimate frequenting of Bahá'í circles.

The Bahá'í world order

The most original ideas of Bausani about the Bahá'í world order are three. First, he conceived the Bahá'í world order as a theodemocracy. This concept has been explained above. Another passage of one of his essays will clarify his position:

... the Bahá'í Faith *is not a church*, but a new and enlarged form of *people of God*, as Israel was in a limited ethnic sense, and also the earlier Islamic community was, in a broader but still elementary form. Therefore, the Bahá'í Faith, in a sense, should be considered a new wide kind of 'political party' whose members cannot obviously belong to *another* party. This is the reason why – a strange thing for a contemporary democratic person – the individual elected to the Bahá'í institutions, albeit elected from the bottom, are not responsible *towards their electors* in the 'divinely' pre-established time of their office, but only towards God, because they have been elected by God, through their electors. Someone will fatally say: 'Then they are priests . . .'. No, they are not *because they do not administer any sacrament*, and, as individuals, they have no sacral function. Only the body, the *Assembly*, is important. Moreover, this Assembly is not concerned with metaphysics and sacraments but with the

organisation of the community and its *administration* in the word's broader meaning. (*Saggi* 221-2)

Bausani seemingly considered the earliest Muslim *ummah* as a kind of precursor of the Bahá'í world order: 'in the earliest Islam there were neither priesthood nor sacraments . . . therefore "theocracy" was a kind of power of the 'people of God'. Such a golden age was for the Muslims the age of the first four Caliphs, a kind of proto-democracy governed by God . . .' (*Saggi* 296).

Second, he considered the Universal House of Justice as the embodiment of a 'living infallibility. He observed that 'unlike purely "bookish" religions, the Bahá'í Faith has a, so to say, living body of scriptures, although it does not conceive a person-book (the incarnated Word as in Christianity)' (*Saggi* 149-50). He considered (*Saggi* 221, see also 438-9) the canonical Jewish and Islamic Laws as 'a paper pope', deprived of 'the vitality they could receive from a principle of living movement and development'. Thus, he greatly appreciated in the Bahá'í Faith the existence of both a code of law, the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, and an infallible guidance in the application of its laws to the needs of the various ages, first through 'Abdu'l-Bahá, as the Centre of the Covenant and authorised infallible interpreter of Bahá'í Scripture, then through Shoghi Effendi, also infallible interpreter of Bahá'í Scripture and finally through the Universal House of Justice. As Bausani explains, the Bahá'í institutions are divided into 'two pyramids, the one of a more specifically legislative and administrative character, elected by the grass-roots, the other one of a sacral-docent character, appointed from above' ('Bahā'ī, Bahā'ismo' 220 [1978]). The Universal House of Justice is the apex of the legislative and administrative pyramid. The Universal House of Justice has been conferred the authority 'to decide about issues not explicitly dealt with in the holy texts by Bahá'u'lláh. Its decisions are infallible as the provisions of the text itself, and

the House of Justice has the authority of abrogating its own decisions according to the needs of the times' (*Saggi* 455 [1955]). The Universal House of Justice is also invested with the duty

clearly expressed by Bahá'u'lláh to codify those *new* laws that may become necessary because of the changing needs of humankind and to abrogate the laws a previous House of Justice may have promulgated in previous times. Therefore, the Law has . . . on the one hand, a 'sacred', mystical character, and on the other, it is not something given once forever, but interestingly presents, so to say, an 'evolving infallibility', a living infallibility. One of the foremost original features of the Bahá'í Faith is that it preserves the concept of *infallibility*, that is, of the Absolute, but connects this concept to the evolution of the times, even in religious law. Moreover, this Law is identified as 'the mystic Wine unsealed by the hand of the divine power. (*Saggi* 221, see also 438-9)

Third, Bausani ascribed a sacred meaning to all the features of the Bahá'í Administration, the precursor of the Bahá'í world order, as the election of the Assemblies. He wrote in this regard (*Saggi* 466-7): 'Bahá'í elections, performed in a prayerful attitude, are for a believer the same thing as for other religions, like for example Catholicism, Sacraments are'. He explained that the election of the Universal House of Justice, done in a sacred time, the Ridván Festival, and in a sacred space, the Bahá'í World Centre, fills the electors with a unique inner charge; they 'are a new form of "Veni Creator Spiritus [Come, Creator Spirit]"'. In a Catholic milieu, as in Italy, he compares them to the election of the Pope by the Cardinals, who 'insist that it is the Holy Spirit that elects, and not human considerations'. He goes on to say

Those who are elected, say the Bahá'í Texts, *are not responsible towards their electors* while they are in office . . . This is obvious because it is not the electors who elect; they are mere instruments of the Divine spirit. It is God who, through

the electors, chooses the individuals who can better serve the Cause. This approach is quite different from that of the *political* elections.

Bahá'í mysticism

Bausani explains the differences between mysticism, as it is commonly intended, and Bahá'í mysticism. In the first place, he explains 'the rather negative Bahá'í attitude towards mysticism in its more strictly esoteric and personalist-individualist aspects' (*Saggi* 103). He writes ('Reflections' 5) that the Bahá'í teachings convey

a very subtle criticism of that system or those systems of religious mysticism (so frequent in oriental countries and often a cause of decay for those peoples), which assume that sinking into oneself, shutting one's eyes to every exterior reality, is the supreme goal of man. In the words of Bahá'u'lláh, we have a religious revindication of exotericism and activity against the exaggerated importance given by almost all religions to meditation and annihilation.

He quotes (ibid. 5) in this regard a passage by Bahá'u'lláh (see *Majmú'iy-i-Alváḥ-i-Mubárákih* 345) he translates into English:

Open thy spiritual wings and soar through all the spiritual kingdoms with the swiftness of a lightning. Fling wide open the vision of the eyes and regard the grace of the invisible world. If thou throwest mud into the water it sinks, but if thou depositest a rose into it, it remains like a crown floating upon it: i.e., *ẓáhir* and *baqá* (exteriority and permanence) are better than *báṭin* and *faná'* (interiority and annihilation). In other words weight is the cause of sinking, therefore thou must free thyself from the weight of possessions and, like a rose, in this very bodily frame float through eternity upon the surface of earthly dominions.

The Bahá'í Faith, Bausani writes, teaches that we 'must float upon earthly things through eternity, that is, dominating earthly things

and putting them into the great invisible frame of a divinely appointed Order. Doing something *with* them, not sinking *into* them' ('Reflections' 5). He remarks (*ibid.*), moreover, that

too often pseudo-religious persons, imagining they are deeply sinking into unheard of spiritual abysses, do nothing more than mix up their own subconscious and unconscious zones. Even great mystics, said Bahá'u'lláh . . . took their poetical imaginings about God for reality. Only God . . . speaking through his Manifestations can inspire humanity with creative thoughts, which result in creative action.

Bausani specifically lists some resemblances and differences between mysticism, as it is commonly understood, and Bahá'í mysticism. The Bahá'í Faith is essentially a mystic way, that is, a way with its laws, which, if you follow them, will make you attain truth or sanctification. The first difference is that the Bahá'í laws do not come from a human teacher but directly from the Manifestation of God, a personage whose 'station [is] qualitatively different from that of human beings' (Bausani, 'Bahā'ī, Bahā'īsmo' 220). The second difference is that those laws do not prescribe ascetical practices, but rather, such social actions as meetings for and consultations about, as well as actions on, practical issues regarding how the oneness of humankind may be realized. As has been seen, he writes in this regard (*Saggi* 466-7, see 442):

Bahá'í elections, performed as they are in a spirit of prayer, are the equivalent, for the believer, of what sacraments are in other religions, like Catholicism. They take place for all the assemblies in a sacred time, that is, in the period between 21 April and 1st May [*sic*], a period which is for the Bahá'ís the 'King of Festivals' . . . Moreover, in the case of the election of the House of Justice, the place itself is particularly sacred. They take place in the World Centre of the Faith . . . [This fact] fills the electors with an inner power, in a new form of 'Veni Creator Spiritus [Come, Holy Spirit, Creator blest]' . .

. the electors . . . are but instruments of the Divine spirit. God Himself chooses, through the electors, the persons that will best serve the Cause.

Scarcia comments ('Quattro incursioni' 488) on Bausani's ideas on mysticism as follows:

Since the idea of the absolute divine arbitrariness as to justice is nastier than the idea of wings created to fly and fins created to swim when it could easily be the opposite with no perturbation for any conscience, how can one know for sure which is the most *equitable* form of ethical, moral, and juridical behaviours? At this point, the mystic rebels and then submits to common sense and his sense of community only because he wants to be humble. Bausani compared this attitude to conscription, which he said I should go through – making me furious, but only in that case – because, he said: 'doing for a whole year absurd, meaningless, foolish things is anyhow a useful lesson'.

Another difference between mysticism, as it is commonly understood, and Bahá'í mysticism is that sanctification, bestowed by God out of His grace upon those who struggle in His prescribed way, does not consist in extraordinary Gnostic powers but in the acquisition of qualities which empower human beings to realise the goals of the sanctification of society. These goals are considered the supreme purpose of the divine revelation. Bausani maintains: 'The station of social progress is higher than the deepest individual *Gnosis*. This mysticism certainly implies detachment from the world and an absolute purification of each individual . . . *but then it reintroduces the sanctified individuals into the world of society*, so that they may rebuild the world and change it into a paradise (*Saggi* 154-5).

Bausani also explains his position as a Bahá'í concerned with mysticism in a paper entitled 'Cuore, cervello, mistica, religione. Opinioni di un Bahá'í [Heart, brain, mysticism, religion. Opinions

of a Bahá'í] published in 1978 (see *Saggi* 174-82). In this paper, he says that he is a 'mystic in his own way' (ibid. 178) and that he becomes suspicious or impatient whenever he hears people 'who fight against mysticism, without even knowing what it is . . . and people who believe themselves to be immersed in spiritual, mystical atmospheres' (ibid.). However, he agrees with the former whenever they fight against mysticism intended as spiritualism, as a superstitious knowledge of spiritual verities – 'spiritualistic pseudo-science' (ibid. 181) – which are out of the reach of any limited human mind. His mysticism searches for the 'vertical knowledge' humans cannot create. Only God himself can bestow it upon human hearts. He writes that if a man wants to acquire that kind of knowledge, he should not follow the path of asceticism or meditation, with its fixed man-made rules, but should 'take a step, which we could define as negative, that is, emptying and cleansing, as much as he can, his own heart' (ibid.). He explains that the Bahá'í Faith

does not recommend a sentimental and instinctual acceptance, but a well-pondered and conscious open-mindedness, on the one hand, towards the infinitely perfectible sciences elaborated by a man creator of his glorious future, on the other, towards the God-given vertical science of the heart whose result is not a discursive knowledge, but action, a divine renewing energy. (ibid. 182)

He relates to this perspective the following words by Bahá'u'lláh: 'O Son of Spirit! My first counsel is this: Possess a pure, kindly and radiant heart, that thine may be a sovereignty ancient, imperishable and everlasting' (Hidden Words, Arabic 1).

The literary language of the Bahá'í Writings

Bausani knew more than 30 languages, which he learnt with great ease. He even invented a new language called Markusko when he was an adolescent. Studying his writings on words and their

meaning is beyond the scope of this paper. However, we are only interested in those scripts that can help us better understand the Bahá'í Writings. These are his comments on the meaning of the mystical language of neo-Persian literature, which is used in the Bahá'í writings. The chapter entitled 'The Motifs of Lyric Religious Poetry' in *Religion in Iran* (260-89) and that entitled 'The Motifs and Forms of Persian Poetry' in his *Letteratura Persiana* [Persian Literature] (138-81), a chapter that is almost identical to 'The Motifs of Lyric Religious Poetry', in *Religion in Iran*, are precious in the study not only of Persian lyric poetry but also of the Bahá'í Persian and Arabic Scriptures. He more specifically deals with the sacred language of the Bahá'í Scripture in three Italian papers published in his posthumous book *Saggi sulla Fede Bahá'í* [Essays on the Bahá'í Faith]. The papers are as follows: 'I testi sacri della religione bahá'í [The sacred texts of the Bahá'í Religion]' (*Saggi* 147-62), 'Considerazioni su alcuni aspetti meno noti dello stile espressivo bahá'í [Considerations on Unusual Aspects of the Bahá'í Expressive Style]' (ibid. 162-73), Italian version of 'Some Aspects of the Bahá'í Expressive Style (*World Order* 13.2 [Winter 1978-79] 36-43) and 'Cuore, cervello, mistica, religione: Opinioni di un Bahá'í [Heart, brain, mysticism, religion: a Bahá'í opinion]' (ibid. 174-82). Only a few general remarks will be expressed.

Bausani mentions the Bahá'í Writings in his 'Letteratura neopersiana', where he says that they are written in 'a beautiful traditional style', and he praises them for their 'Sa'dí-like style, simple and elegant at the same time' (538). That language is quite unusual for Western readers. The best Western classical education does not prepare students to read them. Neither Greek, nor Latin, nor European poets, not even Dante and the Faithful of love [Fedeli d'amore], not even Petrarch help us to savour Rúmi, 'Aṭṭár, Sa'dí and Ḥáfiz fully. Encountering that seemingly flowery language, rich in symbols and metaphors, a reader may feel attracted, but he

may also be disconcerted and sometimes misled. Bausani takes us by the hand and leads us through those Eastern regions. We meet their magic landscapes and those which Bausani calls the clichés of the Muslim mystic literature: the nightingale in love with the rose, the face of the beauteous one covered by her mysterious black curls, the tavern where the traveller drinks a strong wine and forgets everything in his inebriation, the handsome Cup-Bearer who pours his precious wine into the cups of the table-companions, while the minstrel of love draws sweet sounds from his flute. Among those clichés, we also find personages of religious history: Abraham, untouched by the fire of Nimrod, who kills ‘four birds of prey’ which God raises again as birds of goodness, Jacob blind because he wept for such a long time over his beloved and lost Joseph; Moses, in a swoon on Mount Sinai at the vision of His Lord, or drawing forth His white hand from His bosom. We also find mythical personages, such as Khiḍr, the lovers Laylī and Majnūn, as well as fairy-tale animals, such as the Símurgh and the Leviathan. Bausani helps us unravel the symbolic meanings of all these poetical images so we may appreciate their subtle beauty. He writes (*Saggi* 151):

Classical and, even more so, the mystical literary Persian tradition is *definitely anti-realistic symbolic*. A famous Persian verse recites . . . ‘Let us write, some other way, Love’s secrets-better so’ [See Rūmī, *Mathnavī* 1 (Nicholson): 136], i.e. love’s secrets should not be told directly, but veiled in metaphorical forms. However, the symbolic images which veil those secrets do not come from this world, as in modern realism, but from other worlds. A verse by Mawlana Jalálu-d’Dīn Rūmī . . . says: ‘Those images that fascinate the mind are a reflection of the beautiful moon-faced maids from the gardens of God’ [See Rūmī, *Mathnavī* 1 (Nicholson): 72].

Literary figures are used in Islamic mystic poetry only because they symbolise a spiritual reality, which is assumed to be ‘reality’, whereas the reality described by literary figures is seen

as a symbol. The former is the archetype; the latter is its earthly expression. The former is Reality; the latter is its shadow thrown upon the material plane of existence. Bausani writes in the 1967 edition of the Italian translation of *The Seven Valleys*, whose editor he was, that some poets go so far as to apply ‘the adjectives “apparent” and “allegoric” to things which – according to the general opinion – are on the contrary material and concrete. Thus, “apparent or allegoric love” is the love between a man and a woman, whereas “true love” is the love of God: “apparent homeland” is the earth and physical life, whereas “true homeland” is the heaven, etc.’ (‘Note’ 49, n.52).

Bausani suggests that this interpretation should be modified and refined in the case of Bahá’í Texts. He says that the sacred language used in the Bahá’í Writings is, as any other “sacred” language . . . a special, *numinous* language’ (*Saggi* 150). It is the result, on the one hand, of a former literary tradition, that is, a ‘specific form of Arabic and Persian, used in Persia during the Qájár epoch (nineteenth century)’ and, on the other, of a particular ‘conception of the Sacred’ (ibid.). Moreover, he observes that Muslim and Bahá’í mysticisms differ, and their fundamental differences are reflected in their languages. Bahá’í mysticism, he explains, ‘is a preparation to a renewed active life on the earth’ (ibid. 155). According to Bausani, the fundamental character of Bahá’í mysticism is that those spiritual energies which are created in the hearts by the mystic relation with the Absolute are used so that this earthly world may be transformed and reflect the qualities of the celestial world, that is, so that the unity of humankind may be established in our earthly society. Therefore, whereas terrestrial realities are valuable for the Muslim mystics only because they are symbols of transcendent realities, for the Bahá’í mystic ‘earthly realities . . . acquire a new *value*, as if they were translucent with the absolute’ (ibid.) in themselves. ‘A new kind of realism results’, he says, ‘which differs from modern realism and its

typical denial of traditional symbolism. This novelty is also reflected in the *stylistic forms* of the Bahá'í writings' (ibid.).

On the ground of these considerations, Bausani suggests that any allegory used in the Bahá'í Writings 'is susceptible to three levels of interpretation: . . . a realistic level, . . . a mystic-symbolic level, . . . and a Bahá'í or realistic-symbolic level . . . a level wherefore allegory *once again also means* earthly things' (*Saggi* 155). He clarifies (ibid. 155-6) this concept through some examples:

For a Bahá'í, a sentence like 'the angels circumambulate the throne of God' *also means* earthly things, that is, Bahá'ís go on pilgrimage to the holy places in Haifa and 'Akká . . . Another example: 'the dove of eternity sings on the Ṭúbá tree' . . . is susceptible to three levels of interpretation: a) realistic level: in a pretty garden on a luscious and verdant tree which resembles the tree of Ṭúbá a dove sings fascinating melodies; b) mystic-symbolic level: in the Gardens of Paradise, outside of this lowly world, saints and blessed ones sing praises of God; c) Bahá'í or realistic-symbolic level: in April 1863 Bahá'u'lláh proclaims His new message and sends forth a renewing spirit into the world . . . Therefore, the spatial and temporal concreteness remains but becomes translucent with eternity. And this 'becoming translucent with eternity' means endowing real things with a sacred, renewing, irresistible power.

Bausani also began to explain the meanings of some Arabic and Persian words used in the Bahá'í Writings, like *nafs*, usually translated as 'soul', *rúh*, usually translated as 'spirit', the Arabic word *qalb*, and its Persian equivalent, *dil*, usually translated as 'heart'.

As to *nafs* and *rúh*, he explains that we should forget the usual meanings ascribed to these words in our Western languages. He says that the two words may be better understood if one instead refers to the ancient Greek words $\psi\upsilon\chi\acute{\eta}$, *psuchē*, 'the animal sentient principle only; thus distinguished on the one hand from . . . [*pnēuma*], which is the rational and immortal soul; and on the

other from . . . [zōē], which is mere vitality, even of plants’ (Strong, ‘A Concise Dictionary’ 79, no.5590) and πνεῦμα, *pněuma*, ‘the rational soul’ (ibid. 58, no.4151), as they were used and explained by St Paul and St Peter. These two terms are in the following verse by St Paul: ‘It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul (*psuchē*); the last Adam was made a quickening spirit (*pněuma*)’ (I Corinthians 15:44-5).

As to the word ‘heart’ (*qalb* and *dil*), he writes that in the Bahá’í Writings, the ‘heart . . . is the instrument of a higher wisdom (and *not* of sentiments)’ (*Saggi* 180), and the seat of ‘a gnosis, an intuitive knowledge from on high’ (ibid. 178). This knowledge is a ‘non-scientific knowledge . . . [it] is not created by human beings and it is a gift of the “spirit of faith” or “holy spirit”’ (ibid. 179). He explains that this knowledge cannot be attained ‘without the divine revelation . . . and for an unaided human initiative’ (ibid. 178) and describes it through the Arabic and Persian word *ma ‘rifat*, which he suggests to translate ‘mystical knowledge . . . gnosis’ (ibid. 176). Bausani defines this knowledge as ‘vertical’ (ibid. 178) knowledge, whereas he defines scientific knowledge as ‘horizontal’ knowledge (ibid. 179) and writes that its seat is the ‘brain’. He also explains in this context that the Bahá’í teaching of the harmony between science and religion does not correspond to the ‘harmony between “brain” and “heart” in a *traditional* sense’ (ibid.). He sees this harmony as the oneness between ‘*Mens* [minds] and *Pectus* [breasts]’, as described in a famous Ambrosian hymn ascribed to Rabanus Maurus (776-856), Abbot of Fulda and Archbishop of Mainz: ‘Veni Creator Spiritus, / *mentes* tuorum visita, / imple superna gratia / quae tu creasti *pectora* [Come, Holy Spirit, Creator blest, / and in our souls [literally, minds] take up Thy rest; / come with Thy grace and heavenly aid / to fill the hearts [literally, breasts] which Thou hast made]’ (ibid.). Then he adds (ibid.):

The knowledge of the heart (gnosis or *ma'rifat*) does not interfere with the knowledge of the brain. If the brain claims Gnostic knowledge, it moves towards absurd superstitions. If the heart becomes degraded and interferes with the knowledge of the brain, it engenders ideological fanaticism and becomes an obstacle to actual science.

A deeper discussion of this subject goes beyond the scope of this paper. A direct study of Bausani's texts, some of which are available in English, will enable interested readers to understand his ideas more deeply.

An exceptional personality

His international renown as a scholar is undisputed. However, his friends, colleagues and admirers were also unanimous in bearing witness to his 'doctrine and goodness' (Gabrieli, 'Profilo' IX). Those who appreciate him mainly as a scholar and exalt him as an encyclopaedic and versatile man whose encyclopedism was so 'upsetting as to bring to despair any systematic encyclopaedist, prudently clinging to a healthy order of knowledge' (Minissi, in 'Testimonianze' XXXII), 'a "sacred monster" of Orientalism . . . a gifted and well-known scholar . . . a linguist . . . a polymorphous and well-known exegete . . . [whose] scientific interests . . . ranged in wide fields of the Near-East, Koranic, Arabic, Turkish, Persian, Zoroastrian Urdu, etc., knowledge' (Cagni, 'Ricordo' XV), 'the last giant of Italian Orientalism' (Garbini, in 'Testimonianze' XXVII), a 'character by Borges, treacherously withdrawn into Babel's library' ('A. Bausani' 2), etc. We who have just followed the ways of his religious experience will rather seek for the signs of his 'great inner wealth' (Di Nola, in 'Testimonianze' XX), of 'his existentially right choice, never buried in the empty aridity of a mere erudition' (Di Nola, in 'Testimonianze' XXI), of the 'goodness' through which, besides his 'doctrine', he 'won over' friends and disciples (Gabrieli, 'Indagine' 3), of his humanity, of his gifts which drew the Orientalist Pio Filippini-Ronconi, who translated the whole Buddhist Canon into Italian and also was his friend in the years of the University studies, to write that Bausani has 'spoken, written and thought for a whole life' about Light and that 'he was a Gnostic that tended towards order and clarity, of which his mathematical and abstract thought was deeply imbued' and that 'he held the key of Gnosis, at least in the Iranic and Islamic fields' ('Identità' 175). We will try to discover the signs of these gifts by reading once more the words uttered and written by his many friends and admirers, especially after his death. We will also

consider the subchapter entitled 'La personalità [His personality]', of the already mentioned thesis in history by Laura Marcheschi (29-36), which is precious because it was written with the assistance of Mrs Bausani, who 'has narrated the most important and curious episodes of her husband . . . and, together with Marisa, Bausani's sister, has read the three chapters and verified all the information' (ibid. 8). We will also do it, trying to recollect those nine years of work, from 1975 to 1984, in the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'is of Italy that the present writer has shared with him, also enjoying the privilege of the hospitality of his home on Saturday evenings in the course of each meeting.

The main features of Bausani's personality that emerge from these sources are his curiosity and love of the quest for knowledge, his humanity and kindness, his humour, his joy and his sensitivity to beauty.

His curiosity and his love of the quest for knowledge

His curiosity, which has been already mentioned, seems to be one of the most defining traits of his personality since many of those who wrote about him have mentioned it. Di Nola defines it as 'Leonardian'. He writes that this 'unsatisfied thirst for knowledge with his existentially right choice, never buried in the empty aridity of mere erudition' (in 'Testimonianze' XXI) drew him 'to know, to understand, to penetrate the innumerable horizons of cultures, even the more distant, hidden in the geography of the unknown, and not in the perspective of a mere, wholly intellectual, curiosity, of an empty, scientifically mental analysis, deprived of any vitality and participation' (ibid. XIX). Scarcia ('Quattro incursioni' 492) deepens the human and joyous aspects of this curiosity:

His curiosity [was] wholly intellectual, and yet free from such coldness as usually goes with this quality; a wholly humanistic, sometimes happy, almost Rabelaisian, but less coarse, curiosity;

a curiosity that perhaps belonged to former centuries; a cognitive curiosity that was not anxiety, but eagerness and *pleasure* – his pleasure and the pleasure of all those who found refuge (and delight) in the shadow of his cypress; . . . a curiosity, intended as a human adventure, that becomes stateless, rather than cosmopolite when it happily meets with another significant component: the denial of boundaries; the genuine curiosity of a child that solely moved him whence it moved.

In the short biography published in his *Saggi*, inspired by the talk given at his funeral by Giovanni Pappalettera, for long years, his colleague on the editorial board of the Bahá'í quarterly review *Opinioni Bahá'í*, we read: 'his genuine curiosity combined with his innate talents enabled him to deepen all the branches of knowledge to which he devoted his attention. He was endowed with that reasoned insight commonly defined as genius' ('Alessandro Bausani: una breve biografia', in Bausani, *Saggi* 11). Laura Marcheschi writes (30-1) that according to Mrs Bausani,

his inexhaustible passion as a researcher was founded upon a secret: his love for God, nourished through prayer and meditation . . . for Bausani, studying all the aspects of reality, which he considered a divine gift, was a way to love God and thank him for what one has received. Therefore, scientific and religious search has always been two connected and complementary elements of his life, to which he devoted himself with a joyous attitude that did not diminish over the years.

His extraordinary curiosity drew him to study many subjects until he became the encyclopaedic scholar he was at the end of his human adventure. He wrote: 'In my opinion knowing things, the amount of one's information, in a word, what today is contemptuously called "merely factual knowledge" is dangerous for the stupid, but is an essential element of culture' (*Lingue inventate* 8).

Besides knowing Persian, Arabic, and Urdu so profoundly, he spoke over thirty languages. However, he did not know them as philologists. He was also familiar with the cultures of the people who spoke them, particularly their religion. According to Di Nola, his unpublished dictionary of Fijian does not convey only linguistic information. It also explains ‘the human condition behind the phonemes . . . the condition of the Fijian man, who appears in his cultural iredies, in his smile, as opposed to the silent sadness of the city where he lives, to the existential melancholy that accompanies us’ (in ‘Testimonianze’ XIX). He was interested in geography, astronomy, ancient Arabic astrology, and higher mathematics. Moreover, he encouraged anyone interested in something worthy of study.

Adriano Valerio Rossi, a scholar in Biblical and Assyriologic studies, remembers in this connection ‘how joyously and almost playfully he put himself at the disposal of youth, active in the most various areas’ (‘Su Alessandro Bausani’ XIII). Moscati remembers that he ‘fascinated his pupils, who gathered around him as in a literary clique, so that he was more similar to a master of ancient Greece, or better yet a master of that peripheral Islam that was so dear to him, than to a teacher of our times’ (‘In memoria’ 199). Thus, he had many pupils who became famous in their areas of interest. ‘His closest disciples’, writes Filippini-Ronconi, lovingly called him the ‘Bau’ (in ‘Testimonianze’ XXIII). Among all of them, he considered one of them, Gianroberto Scarcia, as ‘the most original and challenging of his pupils’ (Rossi, ‘Su Alessandro Bausani’ XI), ‘as his only true disciple’ and used to say that ‘smilingly, amused of the fact that he would have raised storms of implacable jealousies in the burning bush of his pupils’ (Scerrato, in ‘Testimonianze’ XXXVI). He must have also encouraged his colleagues in their research if such a well-known Italian Indologist as Raniero Gnoli writes: ‘For selfish reasons (but not only for those) Alessandro Bausani is one of the friends

whose death I mourn more deeply. Whenever I find myself before a difficult problem, I think: if only Bausani were still here!’ (*La scuola orientale*). Another great Italian scholar, Filippini-Ronconi, writes in the same vein at the beginning of an essay he dedicated to him in the decennial of his passing: ‘To remain somehow one of his “pupils”, I do not dedicate to him an essay in the discipline that I teach, but this article on the Islamic discipline that he taught, regretting that he is not here to inspire me according to the Just and True, that he has now attained’ (*Identità* 176). Also, Rossi ascribes to him this important role when he states that many scholars ‘are indebted in various forms to him for being their genial precursor as well as a promoter of the organisation of Eastern Studies’ (*Su Alessandro Bausani* V).

His curiosity drew him to take advantage of his profession to travel. He travelled worldwide so that he appeared to the eyes of his colleagues as a ‘modern descendant of Ulysses’ (Gabrieli, *Profilo* XI). Wherever he went, ‘he soon came in touch with the language, became familiar with costumes, politics, folklore’ (*ibid.*). He was curious even of the food, and he did not understand those who, before a ‘strange food, different from the usual spaghettis or roast’, refuse ‘to taste it because “it is not for us”’ (*Saggi* 105). He enjoyed upsetting his fussy friends by telling amusing anecdotes about the strange foods he had tasted in various parts of the world.



Rome, EUR, Museum of Popular Arts and Traditions, 1963. With his Arunta friend, Fred Murray, his wife, Elsa, and another friend.

His humanity and kindness

The Continental Board of Counsellors in Europe described him as a ‘very loving, pure soul’ and praised him ‘not only for . . . his high standard of scholarship but also for his gentle manner’ (‘Letter’). Di Nola remembers his ‘deep humanity, his search for the real face of man and the dimension of the universal destinies in the paths tread down the centuries through the texts’ (in ‘Testimonianze’ XIX). Nullo Minissi, a scholar in Slavic philology, remarks that all his studies are ‘dimensional enquiries of modern man and may be summarised in his historical vision of religiosity, the apex of his research and the favoured object of his thought’ (in ‘Testimonianze’ XXXII). Father Poggi remembers him in 1992, writing that ‘in a peaceful corner of heaven if ever we will be willing to turn away from the vision of God, I wish I could continue talking with him, so that I too may thank him for his coherent religious testimony’ (Poggi, ‘Preti a colloquio’ 208). These remarks point out the true origin of Bausani’s humanity, his religiosity and his interest in religion as a supreme lesson of life, a thrust towards the oneness of humankind, a oneness in which we will be finally able to ‘give the world “we” an ampler, global, meaning’ (Bausani, *Saggi* 79).

Lionello Lanciotti, a scholar in Chinese philology, describes his capacity to act in such a way that ‘even when one does not agree with him, one cannot get angry’ because ‘his way of arguing was disarming for his interlocutors’ (in ‘Testimonianze’ XXX). Bausani used to quote (see *Saggi*, 262) the following words by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá: ‘dissension – even with the Devil – is the way to bitter loss . . . [and] conflicts and disputes are not allowable, not even with Satan himself’ (*Selections* 275). This pacifying attitude was a component of his vision of political behaviour, confirmed by his Faith. In a political discussion, Bausani writes, a Bahá’í

will never adopt . . . an antagonistic, protester, fighting (even verbally), or violent position . . . As difficult as it might be, although sometimes such an attitude is scarcely visible, it is much more effective than the behaviour of those who fight with hate against what they consider evil. While so doing, they make more significant and virulent mistakes they want to fight, strengthening violent reactions in a vicious circle without end. (*Saggi* 217-8)

Scarcia writes, on behalf of his pupils, that Bausani ‘was the Šayh, the Elder, the Master’, and mentions Bausani’s ‘serene diversity, and quite normal originality and highly social individuality’ (‘Quattro incursioni’ 486). He writes that ‘for Bausani living in the world was tantamount to sharing the plurality of the world, being perfectly at ease in the confusion of the world after the hubris of one’s bid for heaven’ (ibid. 493). His friend Roberto Vacca writes that he was ‘ready to absorb every wind of culture, professionally beyond reproach, academically perfect, but not a fossil, witty and bright in his expositions, sensitive to the expressions and the thoughts of simple and humble people’ (‘Letter’). Cagni remarks that he combined ‘in a masterly manner the cultivation of science and an assiduous quest for human values’ (‘Ricordo’ XVI).

Confirming his humanity and desire to be in peace with all, Moscati, his old friend and schoolmate, narrates that once he found himself, during a debate on organisational and managerial issues of the University, on the opposite side from Bausani. Moscati writes that on that occasion,

a fact happened that will never cease amazing me and that remains fixed in my memory. While the debate was ignited, Bausani gave me a handwritten letter in which he remembered our student years, especially when he was a guest in my modest house, and my widowed mother had offered him poor cakes of war with her wishes for a better future. That – he wrote to me – was important, not this debate. This lesson is still alive in my

heart, and I would like to transmit it to the generations coming after us. (*In memoria di Alessandro Bausani* 198)

His modesty

Gabrielli remarks ('Profilo' XI) that

his modesty and contentment with just a little sometimes were an antinomian attitude, almost of a Muslim dervish; sometimes, he jokingly defined himself as an adept of Malāmatīya, a Sufi confraternity that, in a way, is similar to the Greek Cynicism. In reality, he had chosen and possessed the best among life's good things.

The inner wealth he obtained from his deep love of God was undoubtedly manifest in his love for human beings and his affability. As to his secret instant with Him, he seemingly always hid them, like the Malāmatīs, behind his detached irony towards himself. We may only glimpse these wealthy inner landscapes from his poems, which he stopped writing as early as 1955 and which, unpublished as they are, are unknown to the public. We will offer just two examples, written on 11 May 1948 and 8 July 1948 respectively:

I can offer thee just a gilded
tray of slime guilts.
I anxiously run after thee on all roads
and always perceive, before my face,
the breath of thy windy vesture.
And thou goest farther and farther
Even though sometimes I feel
that thou hast come back and watch me
behind the corner of a road
when the night is falling.

Hymn of a nihilist

Bestow upon us, O Lord,
no more a soft weep
but glimmers of dew
upon our stem.

Grant, O Lord,
that our long cry
may become a soft breath
of a wind on high peaks.

Do not forbear to grant
that our sharp thoughts stop piercing us as needles
and may be as small faint lights
and grant them to vie to burn
them to come together
them to cling to
this burnt-out torch of the world.

Let it be revived, a fiery,
vivid blaze

And before it is wholly burnt out

May we behold thy face

O Lord

beyond the stirring folds of humid shade.

His modesty was evident in his speech, which was always inspired by everyday language, as rigorous as his argumentations may have been. He did not like to use the language of the learned. He preferred to bring the issues he loved within the reach of his interlocutors. For him, remarks Minissi, ‘writing is talking, conversing with a wide audience to present essential problems to anyone in such a form that anyone may understand them’ (in ‘Testimonianze’ XXXIII). Mrs. Bausani often related an episode whose witness she had been in Palermo in the 1970s. Bausani had to present a mystical poem of the Persian Bábí poetess Táhirih. That poem, *Gar bi-tu uftad-am* (Should I ever see Thee), already mentioned in this essay, is highly refined, almost esoteric in its Sufi

language. It is a love song in which the metaphor of earthly love hints at the love for God through realistic images. In those circumstances, Bausani

intended to give an easily understandable example of transposing an earthly love into a divine one. Therefore, he asked his listeners to give a mystical interpretation to a popular Neapolitan song and began to sing: ‘Chiù lontano me stai, chiù vicino te sento [The farther you are, the closer I feel you]’.²¹ Initially, the public responded with astonishment, but then it was enthusiastic. At the end of the lecture, when Bausani was seated beside his wife, a young lady offered him a rose with tearful eyes. (Marcheschi 35)

This perhaps is the reason why Ceronetti does not appreciate his celebrated translation of the Koran, which, on the contrary, the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei considers as ‘stylistically superior to any previous or later one’ (*Rendiconti*) and which, in Gabrieli’s eyes, ‘combines a philological exactness and a unique fluidity and elegance’ (‘Indagine’ 3), and says that Bausani ‘wrote quite badly, as all the great Italian scholars do, who write in a slovenly way and translate very badly from languages they know perfectly well’ (‘Il gatto di Mimy’ 3). Bausani himself, however, referred to ‘his usual rather wearying and involved style’ (*Le lingue inventate* 7). The present writer gratefully remembers that Bausani guided him, in his translations of the Bahá’í Writings from English into Italian, towards a sober and concise style, drawing him gradually away from the bombast, which sometimes inexperienced translators misunderstand as elegance.

²¹ The song is ‘Passione [Passion]’ (1935) by Libero Bovio (1883-1942) who also composed the famous ‘O paese d’o sole [The sunny contrry]’ (1925) and Bausani also used it to explain the power of Platonic love in Ḥāfīz’s poems during the Convegno internazionale sulla poesia di Ḥāfīz [Interantional conference on Ḥāfīz’s poetry], Rome, 30-31 march 1976 (see *Il ‘Pazzo sacro’ nell’Islam* 344-6).

Those who met him always considered him as an unassuming person. Heshmat Moayyad, professor of Near Eastern languages and civilisation at the University of Chicago, who enjoyed ‘many years of association and friendship with Bausani’ and who, at the end of the 1960s, was invited by him to teach Iranian Studies at the Oriental Institute in Naples, writes (‘Alessandro Bausani’ 169):

Despite this enormous scholarly productivity, Bausani was leisurely, easy-going, humble, and unassuming. No trace of haughtiness or pomposity could be found in his deportment. His sense of humour, openly and unabashedly displayed everywhere and with everyone, revealed much about his inner feelings and views . . . His nonchalant way with people of high and low rank alike was endearing . . . so many found him so warm and engaging.

Therefore, he had friends of all ranks. Besides having the amity and esteem of most distinguished colleagues, he enjoyed the sincere and disinterested friendship of other persons of high rank. Mohammad Zia-ul-Haq (1924-1988), the president of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan from 1977 to his death in an aeroplane crash in 1988, acknowledged him not only as a famous scholar but also as a ‘sincere friend of Pakistan’ (‘Letter’),²² and Muhammad Khan Junejo (1932-1993), the Prime Minister of the same nation from 1985 to 1988, remembered him as a renowned scholar, but also as ‘a good friend’ (‘Letter’). However, he was also a good friend of Fred Murray (1884-1963), an Australian Arunta Aborigine²³ who accepted the Bahá’í Faith in 1955. The Italian

²² Bausani is famous in Pakistan for his translations of the Pakistani national poet Muḥammad Iqbal (1877-1938). For this reason he was awarded the Hilal-i-Pakistan, a very important decoration, seldom awarded to foreigners.

²³ Arunta is a tribe of Australian Aborigenes who live in Central Australia around Alice Springs.

anthropologist Tullio Tentori (1920-2002) remembers this friendship thus:

One day, I saw him unexpectedly arriving . . . at the Museum of Popular Arts and Traditions, which I had recently organised at the EUR Roman quarter – together with Elsa and a strange bearded gentleman who spoke a language that I did not know. He was an Arunta who had just landed in Europe, or more precisely, catapulted into Italy directly from interior Australia, where in his tribe, he was a horse breeder. This experience was shocking for the good Arunta. He refused to sleep alone in a hotel room and was suspicious of everything, from sanitary facilities to food. As to food, I remember that he would not eat fish without asking how it had been killed. Therefore, Sandro considered bringing him to my Museum to see his reaction and promote an intercultural dialogue. Obviously, there were several difficulties. For example, how could we explain to the good Arunta what the banners of Siena's Palio were? Neither Sandro²⁴ nor Elsa lacked imagination. In their explanations, those banners became totemic symbols, and through this explanation, the Arunta established a connection between him and us and his and our culture.

The present writer remembers that Bausani's house had a photo portraying them smiling together, the 'sacred monster' of Italian Orientalism and the Arunta horse breeder. This friendship also was, for him, a way to demonstrate his faith in the oneness of humankind in his deeds.

His modesty and love for simple people and things became evident in his choice of a pet. He did not choose a lapdog but adopted a mongrel, Pupino, who had followed him and his wife one day while they were walking. That lost puppy, intrusive and

²⁴ 'Sandro' was Bausani's nickname.

unattractive, aroused his tenderness; he took it home, where he kept him for about eighteen years.

However, his modesty was not ‘false modesty’. Umberto Scerrato, a historian of art and his sincere friend, describes him as ‘peacefully serene for the fact that his God had providentially equipped him well: he did not certainly seek for recognitions, he simply expected them and accepted them with unembarrassed grace, while preferring in any case, with mannered coquetry, honours to onuses’ (in ‘Testimonianze’ XXXVI)

His humour

In the speech he delivered on Bausani’s 60th birthday, Scarcia said: ‘Bausani . . . dispels the possible condition of spiritual sadness of the person in front of him, and I was deeply moved when, a few days ago, I heard a student saying the same thing . . . he is an *a priori* synthesis between emotion and science, pleasure and scruple’ (‘Per Alessandro Bausani’ 396, 397). Scarcia, who was certainly very close to his teacher, did not define him only as *Shaykh* but also as a ‘child who wanders about temples and mosques, synagogues and *mašriq al-aḏkārs*,²⁵ with his magic smile, bewildering the scholars: a wise child, our extraordinary and unique *kūdak-i dānā* [wise child]’ (‘Quattro incursioni’ 492). This childish trait also impressed Di Nola, who described him as ‘a childish soul’ taking a delight ‘in an unexhausted remote childhood that passing years had not wiped out’ (in ‘Testimonianze’ XIX).

The Italian Assyriologist and Biblicist Father Luigi Cagni (1929-1998) defined him as a ‘lovable, witty and facetious person, a good-natured criticizer of the flaws of the others, a man as well as a scholar, open to any curiosity and all reasons of joy in life’

²⁵ *Mašriq al-aḏkārs* (Mashriqu’l-Adhkārs), in Arabic ‘dawning-places of the mention of God’, are the Bahá’í Houses of Worship or Temples.

and remembers him ‘with his falsetto-like and always witty voice . . . as if he were surrounded by a halo and out of time . . . Leaning on his famous stick smelling with sandal of which he was proud, he talked, great conversationalist that he was, of pleasant and humorous things, and did not disdain kindly gossips’ (‘Ricordo’ XV-VI). Filippani-Ronconi remembers him ‘cheerful and carefree, capable of looking at himself, from the high sphere of his superiority, and of laughing at himself’ (in ‘Testimonianze’ XXIV), recollects his ‘candid, as well as sly and teasing, character’ (ibid. XXIII) and recognizes him as ‘the only Master he has met who combined an ironic, sceptical mood and a golden thread of love and understanding, that enabled him *in spiritu* to redress the mistakes of the others’ (‘Identità’ 175-6). Giovanni Garbini, a scholar in comparative Hamitic and Semitic linguistics and Old Testament philology, recollects his salacious quips, his ‘lively and lovingly ironic look’ (in ‘Testimonianze’ XXV) and ‘his carefree tone, almost as if he wanted to hide the great seriousness and deep passion with which he was doing his work’ (ibid, XXVII). Lanciotti described him as ‘always willing to smile and ironise about facts and persons’ (in ‘Testimonianze’ XXX). Moscati mentions his ‘joking, original, sometimes paradoxical approach’ (‘In memoria’ 199). According to his wife, Bausani’s humour was born from his persuasion that everything is nothing and that only God has value and meaning. Better, then, to adopt an ironic but loving attitude of detachment from everybody, including oneself, in one’s awareness of sharing everybody’s nothingness. In this perspective, the short biography published in the section “In Memoriam” of the *Bahá’í World*, an international Bahá’í record, vol. 20, adapted from an article by Pappalettera, we read (896):

Alessandro was very cordial, taking immediate interest in others. He loved to repeat that everything required a deliberate effort. His endless quest for knowledge led him to believe that all men, including those who could be considered among the most

important, are as nothing when compared to the infinite. He affirmed that people's potentialities to acquire value is developed only to the extent that they follow the Manifestation of God.

His irony was written on his face, especially on his smile. Nullo Minissi, an expert in Slavic philology, remembers that smile as 'serene, a little mischievous, gentle, framed by a restless beard, that year after year became threaded with white, and lighted by the brilliant eyes' (in 'Testimonianze' XXXI). The cover letter of *La bisaccia dello Sheikh* (quoted in 'Alessandro Bausani' 9) defines it as 'vaguely amused and mocking'. The present writer remembers that a friend he brought to one of his lectures in Bologna in the early 1960s defined that smile as enigmatic and serene, as the smile of the ancient Etruscan statues.

His joy

Mrs Bausani used to speak with her friends about the occasions she had seen her husband particularly happy. She said to Laura Marcheschi that she saw her husband very happy

when in the apartment of his paternal grandfather at Porto Santo Stefano all'Argentario,²⁶ an uncomfortable place without water and light, he translated the Koran using a typewriter placed on a commode and admired and praised the beauty and poetical quality of its language . . . when he translated *The Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys* by Bahá'u'lláh, or when he would read other Bahá'í writings and would involve Elsa in his understanding of the oneness of the Messengers of God and religious progressiveness. (31, 33)

²⁶ Mount Argentario is an ancient island joined today to the dry land by two offshore bars reveals his constant and sensitive observation of nature, known as tomboli, which enclose the Orbetello lagoon.

His sensitivity to beauty

This gift, often mentioned by Mrs Bausani, was evident in his tastes. He loved beauty in both nature and art. His love of natural beauty was translated into an interest in plants and flowers, which he did not simply admire but always tried to identify in scientific treatises. The same thing he did for sea organisms, which he loved to observe while snorkelling at the foot of what Scerrato remembers as ‘a “satanic” and lonely cliff of Santo Stefano dell’Argentario’ (in ‘Testimonianze’ XXV), upon which Bausani’s grandfather’s house stood, connected with his infancy and his later summer vacations. Scerrato narrates that one day in that house upon the Argentario,

a passing bird that seemed to us a flamingo reminded us of that passage of the Babur Name where the adventurous Turkish conqueror of the Indus’ and Ganges’ plains describes through lyrical eyes the unforgettable spectacle of the huge pink flamingo’s flocks flying above the motionless expanses of the blue waters of the Ab-i Istada in Afghanistan.²⁷ (ibid.)

A remembrance wherein their love of the beauty of nature and their admiration of art merge in a harmonious enjoyment. Moreover, that little but efficient telescope placed on the terrace of his apartment in Via Filippo De Grenet 91, in a peripheral residential quarter of Rome, which in the late 1970s and early 1980s was not yet surrounded by tall buildings as today, was used to observe, and show to others, the beauty of the star dotted sky, like Saturn’s rings, which the present writer, as many others, saw for the first time thanks to his loving care.

²⁷ The memoirs of Zāhiru’d-Dīn Muḥammad Bābur (1483-1530), the founder of the Mughal Empire and a great-great-great-grandson of Timur, written in the Chaghatai language.

As to art, his love was oriented towards literature, but he also loved architecture and music, especially the great Bach and his Passion, according to Matthew. Mrs Bausani would say that he loved Indian classical music concerts and ‘when mystical poems which he particularly loved were chanted, he would translate them for his wife with a great emotion’ (Marcheschi 33). However, although he was so sensitive to beauty and humanity, he ‘did not like easy enthusiasms, especially if they were collective, and he was suspicious of them’ (ibid. 33).

His sensitivity to beauty is manifested in his poems, which are mainly inspired by his love for God, the foundation of his sensitivity to beauty. On 15 May 1952, he wrote:

And objects faded away
all around.
And the river of time
stopped flowing in clear meanders
a sudden motionless presence
was reflected therein.
How much do I love thee, O lord, in the naked
silence of the world
in the voice smaller than a grape
of the Primal Darkness!

...

And thou smilest dawns and certitudes
unexpected and longed for
deaf to the watery prayers of the old saints
unaware of any bewailing cry.
And the hand I clasp has a taste of heart
of a high wing of pearls.

Any flaw?

At this point, after these few words have been written to describe the best aspects of Bausani’s religious path and personality, readers

may consider this essay a hagiography. How could anyone try to find the few flaws in a person who always tried to see the best of the personalities of others, or at least recognised that ‘everyone has the right to be what he wants’ (Marcheschi 35)? This excursus on his flaws is thus reluctantly addressed. Bausani also had his small distempers: he would not tolerate a lack of punctuality in persons, he did not like the hypocrisy of people showing an interest they did not have, the immodesty of people pretending to know what they did not know and kept aloof from collective emotions, even at the cost of seeming, only in those circumstances, cold. In such cases, he was candidly frank in expressing his disapproval. However, are these fundamental flaws?

This frankness in expressing his disapproval was perhaps the reason why the present writer never felt entirely at ease in his presence, as all the others said they did. I was, in fact, the object of one of these frank disapprovals. In 1975, just at the beginning of my frequenting of Bausani’s home, wholly unaware of his preference for the practical and organisational aspects of religions rather than those mystical and salvific, I happily asked Bausani to kindly help me to understand better the mystical language of the Bahá’í Writings, especially the Seven Valleys, a work that has always been in a primary place in my scriptural interests. He brusquely answered that whatever he knew was written in his *Religion in Iran* and his *History of Persian Literature*. He advised me to study those texts. I imprudently answered that I had read them, that I was not interested in the intellectual and cultural aspects he had explained in those books, and looked for the meaning of that language in the context of Bahá’í mysticism. He repeated that he had nothing else to say. However, he could have had something to tell me: we could have, for example, discussed the issues he later explained in his essays on the Bahá’í expressive style. He likely misunderstood my intentions and thought I was, in a certain sense at

least, like that half-crazy friend of his about whom he narrates the following anecdote (*Saggi* 368-9):

A pleasant madcap, a friend of mine, now passed away, who believed himself to be the reincarnation of a Pharaoh and was esoteric, made Dr Giachery, who in those days had his residence in Rome, to lose . . . a whole day, insisting that, *in camera charitatis* [confidentially] he would reveal to him, as an ‘initiate’, the initiatory secrets of the Bahá’í Faith, which, he insisted, ‘must exist’, since such a religion could not be only a ‘social’ religion. Dr Giachery did, in vain, his utmost to tell him that such secrets did not exist and that anyone could become a Bahá’í if he accepted Bahá’u’lláh and that there were no particular initiations or classes of believers. The guy went away convinced that those secrets were so . . . secret that Dr Giachery did not want to reveal them to him . . .

My shyness and embarrassment before a man everyone defined as a ‘sacred monster’ – and such he appeared to my eyes – forbade me to clarify this misunderstanding. Thus, I deprived myself of the possibility of covering more quickly, under his direct guidance, that very long and tiresome way I later on covered all by myself so that I might begin to understand the essence of the mystical language of Bahá’u’lláh’s Seven Valleys. However, in other respects, this episode was providential because, well aware of the great value of the person who had refused to help me, I learnt his lesson about the sacredness of the Bahá’í Administrative Order, which, in my eyes as a young Bahá’í had initially appeared as a secondary feature.

His marriage

The ‘charming and delicious Elsa’ (Scerrato, in ‘Testimonianze’ XXXV) was ‘his unique wife’ (Filippani-Ronconi, in ‘Testimonianze’ XXIV) for almost 38 years – they married in Rome on 27

October 1951 – and then ‘the faithful vestal of his memory’ (Garbini, in ‘testimonianze’ XXV). For their many friends, the remembrance of Bausani ‘cannot be dissociated from the smiling and equally loved image of Elsa’ (Garbini, in ‘Testimonianze’ XXV), his ‘sweetest and strong Elsa, whose unique assistance enabled him to express himself and to teach to the last moments of his life’ (Filippini-Ronconi, in ‘Identità’ 175). Alessandro Bausani was for her ‘a lovely and tender husband . . . a person with whom I have shared my life as a Bahá’í, a person that answered all my “whys” and with whom I walked following the footsteps and the example of the Master ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’ (Scola, ‘Discorso’). A reciprocal love and a shared love of God characterised their bond. Mrs Bausani remembers (ibid.) this double bond of theirs as follows:

When we got engaged, he told me with great tenderness that he loved me but loved God even more. He told me we would have spent our whole life together, but I should have left him alone each week for one morning: he had to go on the Palatine Hill to walk and ‘converse with the Eternal’.

The present writer remembers a Bahá’í meeting in Verona, in the home of mutual friends, during which our hosts improvised a celebration of their marriage’s 25th – I think – anniversary. On that occasion, Mrs Bausani related a significant event in her private life. A few minutes before the nuptial ceremony, said Mrs Bausani, my mother took me aside and told me: ‘My daughter, you are about to take a crucial step, and I want to give you some advice. Consider your marriage as a precious chalice of fine crystal. A slight blow can break it. Although you may repair it once it has broken, it will never be the same. Therefore, take the utmost care of your marriage and preserve it as beautifully as it promises today. Mrs Bausani said that she had never forgotten that lesson and that she had always done her utmost to protect the integrity of her

bond. Today, after so many years, she could say she had succeeded. In a strange coincidence, Mrs Bausani abandoned this world on 12 March 2003, exactly 15 years after her husband, who passed away on 12 March 1988.

His last months

‘A cruel and ironic disease struck him in his conversational nature, his most seductive virtue. The irresistible conversationalist remained immured, closed and mysterious, as an idol’, complains Minissi (in ‘Testimonianze’ XXXI). When he fell ill, his devoted pupils gathered close ‘around him, with sorrowful affection, and assisted him in that incurable disease that . . . affected him, gradually isolating him from his didactic and scientific activity that had been the best part of his life . . . that faithfulness of his disciples was enlightening as to the values he had lived and handed down to his pupils’ (Gabrieli, ‘Profilo’ XI-XII). ‘As his illness progressed’, writes Gabrieli, ‘the “Cynic” malāmatī proved to be a Stoic, in his silent, heroic endurance of the cruel ailment’ (Gabrieli, ‘Profilo’ XI). They who repeatedly saw him in those days, like Pappalettera whose funeral speech inspired the short biography published in *Opinioni bahá’í*, remind us that ‘his meekness, humbleness, attitude of continual openness to the others, the serenity of his soul and his inner peace, aspects that became fully evident in the terminal stage of his disease that did not allow him to move or to communicate, are expressions of those spiritual abiding features that have always accompanied his intellect’ (‘Alessandro Bausani’ 11). Scarcia writes that he thinks Bausani had a good death, i.e., he forsook ‘each dearly beloved thing without pain, and at the same time without having reached such a saturation point as may have made his departure easier’ (ibid. 511). This idea is confirmed by the testimony of Mrs Bausani, who wrote to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Italy immediately after his passing: ‘I wish . . . to remind

you what you already know: that Sandro has always been very serene because of that love of God with which he was nourished; that he left this life with a great serenity' ('Letter'). His serenity, writes Scarcia ('Per Alessandro Bausani' 395)

came towards us in the stirrings of his last, always horizontally eternal, breathe on March 12. Each painful rustle of those inspirations and expirations was a Sheykh Sa'di's twin praise of God, which, a poetical tale as it was, turned into certitude. To a God of the same age, a child, a companion in-jokes and games, or perhaps in pranks. To the one God Whom we can ourselves, as Alessandro Bausani wished, tenderly understand and forgive.

The last time the present writer saw him in this world, not long before his passing, together with the colleagues of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Italy, remembers that he wanted to let everyone know that no one should worry for him, because although his body was confined in a bed and unable to move any muscle, his spirit could still laugh.

Conclusion

Bausani rebelled against all irrational dogmas, against any absolute exclusivism. However, he did not arrive, as many other Western intellectuals did, at a subjective religion, in the illusion that religion may be founded upon an individual's judgment, who may freely accept the aspects of his religion which he likes and refuse those he dislikes. He did not arrive at the militant social engagement of those who consider a longed-for triumph of justice in human societies as their highest ideal, whereas they deny any divine intervention in human history and stand aloof from all upholders of this idea. Nor did he attempt, as other intellectuals did, to insert modern and practical ideologies into the old root of their tradition. In 1948, Bausani discovered a new religious form which – when he met it – was just 104 years old: it was the Bahá'í Faith, and he very soon embraced it as though he was waiting for it. There, he found all the answers to his inner queries and ample opportunities for practical engagement in establishing justice in this world, a goal for which he was particularly ardent.

Whenever the present writer remembers him, he thinks of the great wealth dispensed, through his deeds, words and writings, by a man who combined the merits of the best modern intellectuality and the gifts of an 'incurably religious spirit' cultivated day after day during an entire lifetime. The Koran (24:35) defines such a man as 'light upon light' and 'Abdu'l-Bahá writes about him (in 'A Compilation on Bahá'í Education' 1:282, no.627):

If, however, an individual hath spiritual characteristics and virtues that shine out, and his purpose in life be spiritual and his inclinations be directed towards God, and he also study other branches of knowledge – then we have light upon light: his outer being luminous, his private character radiant, his heart sound, his thought elevated, his understanding swift, his rank noble.

Blessed is he who attaineth this exalted station.

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