



Julio Savi

Perspactive: Mithaq Kazimi

- Written by MK
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It is hard to define a man whose life is sewed by many unique threads. But nevertheless, here is **Julio Savi**, an Eritrean by birth, a gynecologist by profession, an author by choice, a grandfather by destiny and a member of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Italy by majority vote.

While each of the above distinctions deserve an in-depth interview of its own, here we will begin to discuss a book he wrote some 25 years ago that has stood the test of time. His book, *The Eternal Quest for God*, is perhaps one of the most comprehensive study of Baha'i philosophy that covers any plausible question about the physical and meta-physical realities imaginable by the human mind. Questions about evolution and the big bang theory to human soul and the existence of extraterrestrial beings in the multiverses . It explores it all.

Mithaq Kazimi: What can you tell us about your background?

Julio Savi: I have studied at the Italian “Liceo Classico” in Asmara (Eritrea), a senior high school specializing in classical studies. I was graduated as a medical doctor at the University of Bologna and I specialized in gynecology at the University of Florence. I have worked for more than 30 years in the Italian hospitals and for more than 10 years as a professional gynecologist in the province of Bologna. I live a happy family life with my wife Paola, whom I knew in 1957 and married in 1964. We have two sons and three grand-daughters.

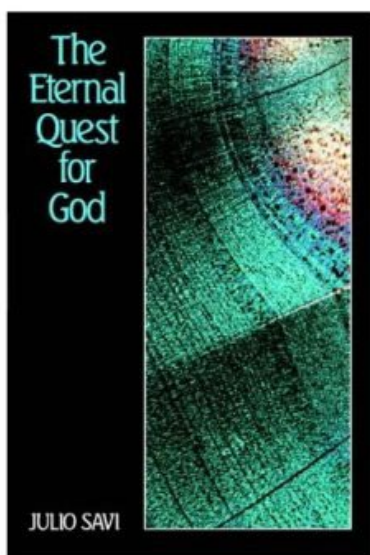
What has influenced your life and interests?

Two early influences had a great impact on my life: my father's encouragement to see life as an enthralling mystical adventure and the unspoiled beauty of Eritrea where I was born and grew up, that appeared to me as a translucent mirror of God's Beauty. My classical education taught me to appreciate the inner and outer beauty of words, especially the words of Scripture and of the great poets of the world.

Therefore I began very early in my life to write poetry, and, when I entered in the Baha'i community, I immediately seized the opportunity of complying with my passion and began to translate into Italian the English versions of Baha'i Scripture. I have thus participated in the translation of most of the major Baha'i Texts into Italian. Recently, with the assistance of a knowledgeable Persian friend, I have also begun to translate Baha'i Writings from Arabic and Persian.

What are your main areas of interest?

My areas of interest are Scriptures, spirituality, spiritual development of both individuals and society, inter-religious dialogue, human rights, translation, poetry and music. On these subjects I have given lectures in Europe, Asia, Africa, North and South America. I am the author of several books and papers on the subjects as well.



What would you say your book is about?

The Eternal Quest for God collects, in a systematic way, a number of Baha'i teachings on very important subjects, about which every human being should get her own idea so that she may conceive an overall vision of life on whose ground she will take her practical decisions while trying to effectively accomplish her twofold purpose on earth, within the limits of her opportunities and capacities: on the one hand, developing her spiritual potentialities, on the other using

those developing capacities to serve the progress of human civilization.

Where do these teachings spring from?

These teachings fall within Baha'i theology, whose central issues are, as described in the website of the Wilmette Institute, "many of the most basic and central teachings of the Baha'i Faith: its concept of the nature of God; how that God guides humanity through revelation vouchsafed unto Manifestations; the nature and purpose of the Manifestations and their successive teachings (progressive revelation and the Covenant); the nature and purpose of human beings and their physical existence; the

nature of physical creation; and the nature of the next world. In short, Baha'i Theology answers the basic questions human beings have always asked about the nature and purpose of life".

How would you define its purpose and goals?

The Eternal Quest for God is a call to search after God, after His knowledge, after His love, because without these blessings, human beings remain even smaller than what they are even when their gazes are turned towards the Infinite. The pursuance of this knowledge and this love seems to be a part of the essence of all the Faiths of the world. It also is an element that brings together all those who are attracted towards the Transcendent, even if they do not fully or partially identify themselves with an institutional religion. In this respect, this book would like to offset the materialistic conception of the nature of reality, which is so diffused in the Western world, that it seems a new dogmatic religion.

What inspired you to write the book and explore such topics?

This book is first of all the fruit of a prolonged and impassioned personal study, pursued because of a personal need of clarity of ideas on the issues explored in the book. Having collected a good number of quotations from Baha'i and other books on those issues, I thought that my collected material could be offered to the others as a study text, opened to revision, a text to which other quotations could be added, or perhaps from which a number of quotations could be detracted, because they are considered off the subject or inappropriate. Therefore, *The Eternal Quest for God* is intended first of all as an encouragement to deepen a number of theological subjects explained in the Baha'i Writings. This deepening is, in my opinion, indispensable not only for the personal spiritual growth of the individual, but also for the collective growth of human civilization.

Who is your audience?

It is addressed to all Westerners, with the ambition of reminding them of the noblest spiritual matrixes of their noble civilization, whose foundation are, in my opinion, of a spiritual character.

This book was not written only for the Baha'is. Rather it was meant for all people who are interested in the issues of spirituality. It offers a preliminary discussion of

themes that are very important for all people of faith, themes that reflect not much the “temporal” aspects of religion, as its “perennial” aspect, with the intention – perhaps too ambitious – to point out through the words of the Baha’i Writings the fundamental elements of a spiritual conception of the nature of reality that may bring together the followers of all faiths, beyond their specific visions, which have been up to now viewed as conflicting with, contradicting and denying one another.

Will the book appeal to the non-Western audience as well? if so, who?

The Eternal Quest for God addresses also those many people who, from outside the West, believe “not only that human nature is deeply influenced by spiritual forces, but that its very identity is spiritual,” but were once more marginalized by the West, whose “dogmatic materialism . . . ensured that no competing voices would retain the ability to challenge projects of world wide economic exploitation” (Commissioned by the Universal House of Justice, *One Common Faith*, para.4). It proves that also in the West there are voices, albeit they are a minority, that do not dissent from theirs, and encourage them to persist in their attachment to the Transcendent, inviting them to try to discover “the unity of purpose and principle running throughout” the Scriptures of all the world’s religions” (Commissioned by the Universal House of Justice, *One Common Faith*, para.39).

This book is thus an encouragement to build in this direction bridges that may lead all human beings to a road through which they may arrive to the point of building all together a new world of justice and peace, blessed by the wealth of unity in diversity: “unity in the political realm . . . unity of thought in world undertakings . . . unity in freedom . . . unity in religion . . . unity of nations . . . unity of races . . . unity of language” (‘Abdu’l-Baha, *Selections*, p.32, sec.15), in the inspiring diversity of the diverse “ethnic geniuses” of our varied world.

What specific quote or principal of the faith set you on the path to writing this book?

My book is my personal response to the following call by ‘Abdu’l-Baha: “We must also render service to the world of intellectuality in order that the minds of men may increase in power and become keener in perception, assisting the intellect of man to attain its supremacy so that the ideal virtues may appear. Before a step is taken in this direction [1] we must be able to prove Divinity from the standpoint of reason so that no doubt or objection may remain for the rationalist. Afterward, [2] we must be

able to prove the existence of the bounty of God – that the divine bounty encompasses humanity and that it is transcendental. Furthermore, [3] we must demonstrate that the spirit of man is immortal, that it is not subject to disintegration and that it comprises the virtues of humanity” (‘Abdu’l-Baha, *Promulgation*, pp.325-6).

What were you challenged by during the writing process and how did you overcome them?

I remember the days when I wrote my book, while simultaneously pursuing my demanding profession, as very happy and galvanizing days. A daily reading of ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s prayer “O Lord, I have turned my face unto thy Kingdom of Oneness” (*Tablets* 3:676) gave me great spiritual sustenance. I chose that prayer because of the words ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote as an introduction to it: ‘If thou desirest that God may open thy (spiritual) eye, thou must supplicate unto God, pray to and commune with Him at midnight, saying. . .” (*Tablets* 3:676).

How long did the process take, from the first words to publication?

It is difficult to say. I began my personal collection of quotations in the mid of the Seventies. The idea of writing a book loomed in my mind in the beginning of the Eighties. The book was first published in Italian in 1988.

How was it received after its publication?

The Baha’i English-speaking world has received it with a certain interest, which did not diminish in the course of time. People from all the parts of the world tell me or write to me how useful my book has been for them, in their daily efforts to live up to the high standards of the Baha’i teachings. Perhaps this interest is one of the reasons why the book has been translated and published in Spanish and Portuguese.

What do others have to say about this book?

Professor William Hatcher wrote about this book, it “can serve variously as a portable reference, a succinct and serious discussion of philosophical issues central to the Baha’i teachings, and an inviting browse through a microcosm of Baha’i thought” (*The Journal of Baha’i Studies*, vol. 5, no.2 (1992), pp.87-8).

Given its rising and constant popularity, what's next? a sequel or another edition?

After 1989, I did not stop studying the subjects of my interest, both in the Baha'i Writings and in other books. I have continued to collect quotations on the subjects dealt with in my book and other closely related with them. Thus I have published a number of papers on Baha'i theology, mysticism, destiny and freedom, inter-religious dialogue. Moreover in my book *A Nest on the Highest Branch* published in India I have expressed a number of ideas on history in the light of the Baha'i teachings. Many of these ideas could become part of a second revised and enlarged edition of *The Eternal Quest for God*. God willing, I will be able to realize this project.

What else have you been writing since?

In the meantime I also have published other books: *Remoteness. Selected Poems* (Rome 2002), *A Nest on the Higher Branch. Reflections on Human Success, Prosperity and Happiness* (New Delhi 2003), *For the Sake of One God. Notes on Philosophy of Religion* (New Delhi 2005), *Towards the Summit of Reality. An Introduction to Baha'u'llah's Seven Valleys and Four Valleys* (Oxford 2008), a work that took about twenty years of research.

And finally, what should we look forward to?

In the last years I have tried to translate from Persian into English a number of Poems composed by Baha'u'llah in the Iraqi period, and I have written a long introduction and a commentary on each poem. God willing, I will publish a book on this subject.