

THE ETERNAL QUEST FOR GOD**Author:** Julio Savi**Published by:** George Ronald, Oxford, 1989, 260 pages

This is a densely and meticulously written book, laden with quotations from the sacred writings of the Bahá'í Faith. It is not easy to give a succinct statement of the overall theme, but basically the author undertakes to discuss, from the point of view of the Bahá'í writings, certain perennial and fundamental issues of classical (and to some degree contemporary) philosophy, e.g., the existence and nature of God; the extent and limitations of human knowledge; the relationship between observable and nonobservable reality; absoluteness and relativity; being and stasis on one hand, and change and progression on the other. This is a daunting task, and the author has been largely successful in avoiding certain pitfalls inherent in his project.

To begin with, it is always easy for anyone versed in the Bahá'í writings to lose sight of the historical contexts of some of the questions these Writings treat, thereby undervaluing the importance of the contributions of previous thinkers and philosophers. But the opposite is also a danger: one may try to impose a limited or inappropriate interpretive framework on the Writings, thereby losing the novelty of the insights they bring to important and controversial questions. The author's treatment avoids both extremes, making many knowledgeable and useful references to the contributions of the major philosophers of history but always bringing to bear on each issue discussed a number of highly pertinent quotations from Bahá'í sources.

Indeed, one of the major contributions this book makes to Bahá'í literature is the way it brings together, within the framework of each particular discussion, a number of appropriate Bahá'í references from widely scattered (and often inaccessible) sources. The appropriateness of the Bahá'í references to each context shows that the author has reflected deeply about the meaning of the Writings in relationship to a number of important issues of philosophy. Yet, more often than not, the author makes only minimal inferences from the quoted texts and leaves to the reader the task of deducing their deeper implications. So much is this the case, that certain portions of the work are barely more than a series of highly relevant quotations from Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í sources, surgically spliced to form a seamless whole.

In the reviewer's opinion, the author could have frequently gone further than he did in making explicit connections between the Writings quoted and the issues discussed, without engaging in undue interpretation of the sacred texts. However, the author's restraint in this regard serves to avoid a heavily didactic tone and frees the reader to roam at leisure through the text.

The development of the themes in this work is not linear but cyclical. Issues are raised, discussed briefly, and then taken up later for a more thorough

discussion. Thus, after an introductory chapter on philosophical method, the author addresses (Chapter 2) the basic questions concerning the existence and nature of God. But, after an intervening discussion regarding the material and human levels of existence (Chapters 3, 4, and 5), the theological themes appear again in the discussion of the Manifestation (Chapter 6) and in the final chapter (Chapter 11). Similarly, questions of methodology raised in Chapter 1 reappear in Chapter 8 on the soul and in Chapter 9 on human evolution.

There is also some redundancy of treatment within the discussion of each particular theme. However, the reviewer did not find this feature objectionable since it tends to reinforce certain important ideas that are difficult to assimilate fully from only one exposure.

In sum, the author has produced a book that can serve variously as a portable reference, a succinct and serious discussion of philosophical issues central to the Bahá'í teachings, and an inviting browse through a microcosm of Bahá'í thought. We should thank him for this multifaceted achievement.

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