



BAHA'I STUDIES BULLETIN

This Bulletin is primarily designed to facilitate communication between those among us engaged in Baha'i Studies. It is hoped that it may evolve into the Bulletin of an Association for the Study of the Babi and Baha'i Religions (or the like) and be befittingly published rather than photostatically reproduced.

The success of this Bulletin obviously depends on your support and willingness to contribute. A steady and sustained flow of scholarly contributions is vital especially since there are so few of us. The following list is intended only to serve as an indication of the nature and scope of contributions that would be welcomed:-

- a) Articles or short notes whether historical, methodological, sociological, doctrinal or theological, etc.,
- b) Bibliographical essays or notes;
- c) Copies of generally unavailable letters or tablets of the Bab, Baha'u'llah, 'Abdu'l-Baha or Shoghi Effendi whether in the original language(s) or in translation;
- d) Notices of recently published books, articles and reviews, etc.;
- e) Previously unpublished notes or documents;
- f) Reports of work in progress or of seminars and conferences relating directly or indirectly to Babi-Baha'i studies.

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SUBSCRIPTIONS

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Editorial Note

Once again I must apologise for the delay in producing this issue of the Bulletin. Please note that certain contributions contained within it were written some months ago and that it is dated Sept. 1985-- following Vol. 3.No.2. dated Sept. 1984 . Vol.3. No.4. (Dec. 1985 ) is just about ready for distribution. It is hoped that future issues will come out quarterly as planned. Distribution delays may however, be experienced.

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SOME THOUGHTS ON THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A PERMANENT BAHÁ'Í STUDIES CENTRE AND RESEARCH INSTITUTE.

It is the purpose of these notes to initiate discussion on the question of the present state and future possibilities of Bahá'í Studies; in particular the urgent need to set up one or more permanent Bahá'í Studies Centre and Research Institutes offering a full or part time 2 or 3 year scholarly course on western academic lines.

Since the late 1960's a new generation of academically oriented Bahá'í scholars has emerged in various parts of the world, most notably Europe and the United States and Canada. As certain of these scholars are well qualified graduates of departments of Oriental/Religious/Theological Studies in Western Universities and have acquired an expert knowledge in Bábí-Bahá'í Studies it would seem to be a good time to initiate discussion. It is also the case that a not inconsiderable number of Bahá'ís ardently desire to be trained in the scholarly approach to the study of their Faith and that the emergence of the Bahá'í Faith from obscurity necessitates the training of Bahá'í scholars capable of dialogue with the academic and intellectual world.

It seems to me that the setting up of a Bahá'í Studies Centre and Research Institute (= BSCRI) could quite easily be accomplished in the West. It might have a small ( 2-4 ) full-time teaching and research staff dedicated to furthering an academic Bahá'í scholarship. Ideally a BSCRI should have its own library and premises and be funded by the Bahá'í International Community; but might initially be linked with an accredited Western University. Apart from conducting scholarly researches a full or part time 2-3 year scholarly course could be offered to suitable students.

should be given  
Serious attention to the question of scholarly Bahá'í Studies by the Bahá'í International Community for a multitude of reasons— that will not all be fully discussed or mentioned here.

Firstly, it should be borne in mind that at present no full-time funding or research facilities exist for individuals who wish to serve their Faith in a scholarly capacity and that no institutions exist that adequately consolidate and coordinate the emergent academic Bahá'í Scholarship.

The now internationally organised Association For Bahá'í Studies (centered in Canada since 1981 and originally the Canadian Association For Studies on the Bahá'í Faith [established in 1974 ] ) undoubtedly serves a useful and important function. It achieves important objectives ( see Appendix below ) but differs in its orientation and terms of reference from the kind of BSCRI that would suitably consolidate and further an academically informed Bahá'í scholarship. An academic Bahá'í scholarship would be best furthered by academics trained in scholarly disciplines fundamental to the field of Bábí-Bahá'í Studies: i.e. Oriental Studies or Religious Studies. There is often a great difference in scholarly terms between an academically informed Bahá'í scholarship and the scholarly writings of Bahá'ís trained in (for example) the sciences. This is to some extent illustrated by the interesting though academically inadequate response of two Bahá'ís to Denis MacEoin's The Babi Concept of Holy War ( see Religion [1982] 12 pp.93-129 and [1985] 15, pp.29-51 ).<sup>1</sup> If Bahá'ís wish to dialogue with academics who challenge apparently "orthodox" Bahá'í perspectives it will be necessary for them to foster an academic Bahá'í scholarship. The field of Bábí-Bahá'í studies on an academic level is a specialist and self-contained discipline. Oriental Bahá'ís learned in the "traditional sense" generally operate intellectually within a different 'universe of discourse' from western trained academics learned in Oriental/Islamic/Religious Studies. Occidental Bahá'ís who have 'read books' sometimes imagine themselves experts in matters religious despite their ignorance of modern academic researches and methodologies and of the Persian and Arabic languages. My intention here is not to criticize "traditional" Bahá'í learning, picture Bahá'ís ( God forbid ) as being uninformed or unduly exalt a western type academicism but to highlight the difference between a professional academic Bahá'í scholarship and general Bahá'í intellectual standards. As time goes on the Bahá'í world will be increasingly in need of academically trained experts in Bábí-Bahá'í studies. This for both internal and external reasons. The setting up of a BSCRI would go some way towards initiating and perpetuating a tradition of academic Bahá'í scholarship.

1. A response by Denis MacEoin to Muhammad Afnan and William Hatcher's article is forthcoming in Religion. Though I by no means agree with all the points made by MacEoin his forthcoming article does highlight the need for a much more adequate Bahá'í scholarship.

In the field of religious scholarship Bahá'í intellectuals generally have much to learn and important tasks to undertake. Though, for example, a learned Bahá'í "theology" of the problem of the plurality of religions has yet to be adequately articulated, Christian scholars such as Wilfred Cantwell Smith have made important contributions (see Cantwell Smith's Towards a World Theology [Philadelphia 1981]). Internally speaking, Bahá'í Studies is in its infancy and is likely to remain so unless steps now be taken to support and consolidate the emergent academically informed Bahá'í scholarship. Many aspects of Bahá'í doctrine and history have not been studied. Many important writings of Bahá'u'lláh remain unpublished, unstudied, undated and untranslated. Is it not a sad fact that Azalis have published critical editions and facsimiles of Bahá'í texts while Bahá'í scholars generally remain unaware of even the existence of these writings? Is it not the case that Denis MacEoin is widely regarded as the leading expert in Shaykhí and Bahá'í Studies and is raising issues that Bahá'ís have yet to consider? Much work remains to be done if the Bahá'í community is to aspire to that intellectual integrity so beloved of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

A learned and academically informed Bahá'í scholarship cannot befittingly evolve outside of the establishment of permanent institutions that will provide full-time teaching and research facilities. The field of Bahá'í Studies needs to be organized and funded in a new, permanent and concrete manner. If steps are taken in this direction —:

- [1] Informed Bahá'í dialogue with the modern intellectual and academic world would be possible.
- [2] The present generally low standard of Bahá'í Studies would be improved.
- [3] An intellectually mature Bahá'í "theology" based on the findings of academic scholarship would begin to emerge.
- [4] The international recognition of the field of "Bahá'í Studies" and of the status of the Bahá'í International Community by the academic and thinking world—now more or less non-existent—would be initiated.
- [5] Real and concrete links could be forged between "Bahá'í scholars" and external University and other institutions of learning.
- [6] Tensions between academically trained Bahá'í scholars and certain segments of the Bahá'í International Community could be lessened.
- [7] Bahá'í intellectuals could be made to feel less alienated in that they would feel that they have a role to play within the Bahá'í community.

It will, I think, prove very difficult for these objectives to be achieved outside of the setting up of the kind of BSCRI envisaged—run on academic as opposed to "deepening" and quasi-propagandist lines. Relatively few Bahá'ís seek to be deeply informed about their Faith. The number who are conscious of academic Bahá'í studies is pitifully small. It is not seen to be fashionable today for individuals to indulge in the academic study of religion at the expense of a more 'pragmatic' and lucrative career. Influenced by modern secular attitudes many Bahá'ís tend to think similarly. Some have been seduced by a misplaced anti-intellectualism. Outside of very considerable Bahá'í community support it is likely to remain the case that few Bahá'ís will be ready to devote themselves to full-time Bahá'í studies and that Shoghi Effendi's long-cherished hope that a profound and coordinated Bahá'í scholarship emerge will remain unrealised. The emergence of an academic Bahá'í scholarship is not peripheral to Bahá'í concerns but absolutely essential. Unless something is done there will be a proportion of "deepened" Bahá'ís but almost none capable of Bahá'í dialogue with academically trained intellectuals.

Currently existing "deepening", "summer school" and other provisions for Bahá'í study have generally failed to produce experts in matters religious or persons aware of modern intellectual perspectives. Bahá'ís who (in Western Universities) trained in oriental studies in the previous generation (largely Iranians) and went on to specialise in this area—few though they were/are—have generally avoided the challenge of academic Bahá'í studies. Within the Bahá'í world today however, a new generation of Bahá'í scholars have taken up this challenge and are grappling with important issues. They need encouragement and support. How sad it would be if such individuals were moved to complain—in the words of a 16th century Muslim poet:

"I said to poverty: "Where dost thou hide?"  
In a scholar's inkwell, "Poverty replied."

The established world religions, many "secular" governments and no few numerically insignificant new religious movements provide facilities for scholarly and academic researches. Religions old and new encourage, fund, support and give great importance to internal scholarship. It is surprising in view of the numerical strength (3-4 millions), international diffusion (about 112,000 localities) and rich legacy of Bahá'í scripture and tradition that steps have not yet been taken by the Bahá'í International Community to support internal academic scholarship and research.

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In order to give some substance to these notes I have drafted some concrete proposals for an academically informed course in Bahá'í Studies from the "Religious Studies" perspective (see below). There exists sufficient literature to make such a course a definite possibility— though "gaps" do exist. Largely for want of time I have chosen not to include detailed course and seminar reading lists. The proposed possible seminar, essay and/or examination questions will give some idea of the level of academic orientation envisaged.

Appendix I gives some idea of the orientation of the Association for Bahá'í Studies (cf. above).

Appendix II is a select compilation of Bahá'í materials on the importance of Bahá'í Studies.

Appendix III is my somewhat 'theological' response to possible objections to the evolution of an academic Bahá'í scholarship.

Stephen Lambden

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BABÍ-BAHÁ'Í STUDIES:  
A PROVISIONAL COURSE  
OUTLINE.

Proposals for an academically informed 2-3 year full time course in Bahá'í Studies from the "Religious Studies" perspective.



YEAR I. COURSE UNIT IINTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF RELIGIONS

10+10 one hour lectures and 5+5 supporting seminars.

Term I

1. Approaching Religious Studies.
2. The Modern History of Religious Studies and the search for a scientific methodology.
3. Empathy, Objectivity and the Phenomenological Method.
4. Methodology and the Study of the History of Religions.
5. The Philosophy of Religion and Philosophical Hermeneutics.
6. Approaching Religious Texts: The History of Methods of Scriptural Interpretation and modern methods applied to the study of religious writings.
7. Sociological Approaches to Religious Studies and the academic study of new religious movements.
8. Fundamentalism and the academic orientation.
9. Science, Religion and Secular Ideologies.
10. Religious Studies Today: Attitudes and Perspectives.

Term II

1. The Origins and Definition of "Religion".
2. Concordant Discord: Modern Perspectives on the Plurality of Religions.
3. Biblical Studies and Modern Theology.
4. The Hindu, Buddhist and Zoroastrian Traditions.
5. Islamic Studies Today.
6. Orthodoxy, Heterodoxy and Mysticism.
7. Approaching Bábí-Bahá'í History.
8. Approaching Bábí-Bahá'í Doctrine.
9. Bábí-Bahá'í Studies, the Bahá'í Institutions and the Bahá'í Community.
10. The challenge of Bábí-Bahá'í Studies: "faith", "reason", and the academic orientation.

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF RELIGIONS (I.I.)

Possible Seminar,  
Essay and/or Exam-  
-ination Questions.

- Of what importance is the academic study of religion ?
- Are religions meant to be studied?
- Is a scientific methodology of Religious Studies possible?
- Is presuppositionless objectivity possible?
- What is the Philosophy of Religion? To what extent is it a "constructive" discipline?
- Examine the various methods of scriptural exegesis?
- What are phenomenological methodologies?
- Discuss the various definitions of the term "hermeneutics".
- What factors are involved in the scholarly understanding of a religious text?
- Compare and contrast the "fundamentalist" and academic orientations.
- Outline the methods and concerns of the sociologist of religion.
- What sociological insights have been gained by the study of "new religious movements"?
- What are the central issues in the modern debate about "Science and Religion" ?
- How would you define the terms "sect" and "religion" ?
- What problems surround modern scholarly attempts to speak about a "unity of religions" ?
- How successful have modern Christian thinkers been in attempting to come to terms with religious pluralism?
- Discuss the various definitions of Christian "theology".
- Attempt to give brief answers to the following questions: "Does Hinduism have a Founder?", "Is Buddhism theistic?" "What are the main sources for the study of Zoroastrianism?"
- Are the "Semitic" and "Aryan" world views compatible?
- Why do many contemporary Muslims feel threatened by western scholars of Islam? Has western "orientalism" failed to appreciate the phenomenon of Islam ?
- Does "mysticism" 'begin in 'mists' and end in schism'?
- What are the key issues in the modern study of religious mysticism?
- What methods do you think most appropriate to the study of Bahá'í history?
- Has Bahá'í doctrine evolved?
- Can "revelation" and source-critical theories be reconciled?
- Compare and contrast "Bahá'í deepening" and academic Bahá'í scholarship.
- Is there a relationship between Bahá'í scholarship and the Bahá'í community life?

YEAR I. COURSE UNIT II.AN INTRODUCTION TO THE ISLAMIC AND MIDDLE EASTERN BACKGROUND.

10+10 one hour lectures and 5+5 supporting seminars.

TERM I.

1. Islamic Origins: Muhammad and the Qur'an.
2. The Rise and Development of Islam.
3. The Origins and Growth of Shi'ci Islam.
4. The Transformation of Shi'ci Islam: Safavid Iran.
5. Qajar Iran and the wider Middle Eastern milieu.
6. Shi'ci Islam & Qajar Iran I.
7. Shi'ci Islam & Qajar Iran II.
8. The Impact of the West in 19th century Iran.
9. Islamic Messianism: Origins and Political Manifestations in 19th century Iran and the Middle East.
10. Reform Movements in Iran and the Middle East.

TERM II.

11. Islamic Doctrine and Practise: An Historical Survey.
12. Shi'ci Doctrine and Practise: Its Historical Evolution.
13. An Introduction to Shi'ci Tafsir and Shi'ci Fiqh.
14. An Introduction to Shi'ci Prophetology and Imamology.
15. An Introduction to Shi'ci Eschatology and Messianism.
16. Sufi Mysticism and Shi'ci Theosophy.
17. Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy in 19th century Shi'ci Islam.
18. The Shaykhi Movement: Origins and Sources.
19. Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i and Siyyid Kazim Rashti.
20. Shaykhism and the Babi-Bahai Movements.

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE ISLAMIC AND MIDDLE EASTERN BACKGROUND (I. II)Possible Seminar, Essay and/or examination questions:-

- What were the main features of the prophetic Mission of Muhammad?  
Compare and contrast the traditional Muslim and modern scholarly views of the Qur'an.
- Why did Islam become a major world religion?  
What are the main features of Islamic orthodoxy?  
Compare and contrast the traditional Shi'ci and modern scholarly views on the origins of Shi'ci Islam.
- What are the principal differences between Sunni and Shi'ci Islam?  
Why and how did Shi'ism become the state religion of Safavid Iran?  
Suggest ways in which Shi'ci Islam expressed and consolidated itself in Safavid Iran.
- Outline developments in Shi'ci Islam during the Qajar period.  
What was the relationship between religious and temporal authorities in Qajar Iran?  
What was the role of the ulama and tujjar (merchants) in Qajar Iran?  
What impact did the West have on Iran during Qajar times?  
What factors precipitated the emergence of messianic movements in the middle east in the 19th century?  
Survey and account for the existence of the chief reform movements in 19th century Iran and the wider Middle East.
- Write brief definitions of the terms "Khariji", "Mu'tazili", "Sunni", "Shi'ci", "Ismaili", "Ishraqi", "Sufi", "Akbari" and "Uguli".  
To what extent and why do the beliefs of Sunni and Shi'ci Muslims differ.  
What are the distinctive features of Shi'ci tafsir?  
What were the qualifications and function of the mujtahid in Qajar Iran?  
Outline the distinctive features of Shi'ci fiqh.  
What are the characteristically Shi'ci views of history and prophetology?  
What are the principal features of Shi'ci Imamology?  
Outline the key eschatological expectations of Shi'ci Muslims?  
Write brief notes on the terms:- qaim, dajjal, raja and mahdi.  
Outline the Shi'ci doctrines surrounding the occultation and return of the 12th Imam.  
Are Sufism and Shi'ism compatible?  
Who were the principal members of the so-called "School of Isfahan" and what were their main intellectual concerns?  
Who were the most influential Shi'ci theosophical writers?  
How might "orthodoxy", "heterodoxy" and "heresy" have been defined by a 19th century Shi'ci mujtahid?  
Compare and contrast "orthodox" and "popular" Shi'ism as it existed in Qajar Iran.

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Why did the Shaykhī movement gain the respect and admiration of a not inconsiderable number of Shi'ī Muslims?

What are the principal features of the lives of Shaykh Ahmad and Siyyid Kāsim?

What are the chief sources for the study of the Shaykhī Movement?

To what extent was eschatology and messianic expectation a central concern of pre-Kirmani Shaykhis?

Outline the Bábí-Bahá'í view of Shaykhism.

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YEAR I, COURSE UNIT III.

AN INTRODUCTION TO BABI-BAHA'I STUDIES

10+ 10 one hour lectures and 5+5 supporting seminars.

TERM I.

1. An Outline of the History of Bahá'í scholarship in the East.
2. An Outline of the History of Bahá'í scholarship in the West.
3. The Field and Present State of Bábí-Bahá'í Studies.
4. An Introduction to the Writings of the Báb
5. Sources for the study of Bábí History and Doctrine.
6. An Introduction to the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh.
7. Sources for the study of Bahá'í History and Doctrine.
8. The Ministry and Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá: An Introduction.
9. Bahá'í History, 1892-1963: An Introductory Review.
10. Attitudes Towards the Bábí-Bahá'í Movements.

TERM II.

11. The Bábí-Bahá'í World View: God, the Universe and Man.
12. The Bábí-Bahá'í Doctrine of the Manifestation of God.
13. Bábí-Bahá'í Historical Perspectives: The succession of Religions.
14. One Religion—Many Religions: The Bahá'í Theology of Unity.
15. An Introduction to Bábí-Bahá'í Law, Ethics and Spirituality.
16. Bahá'í Perspectives on Science & Religion and the Search for Truth.
17. The Origins and Growth of the Bahá'í Administrative Order.
18. The Growth of the Bahá'í Community in the East.
19. The Growth of the Bahá'í Community in the West.
20. The Bahá'í Faith Today and the Bahá'í Vision of the Future.

AN INTRODUCTION TO BABI-BAHA'I STUDIES (I.III).

Possible Seminar, Essay and/or examination questions:-

- Who were the most important oriental Bahá'í scholars?  
 Why has Mírsá Abu'l-Faql Gulpaygání come to be seen as the leading Baha'i Apologist?  
 Who were the most important occidental Bahá'í scholars?  
 What importance do the researches of E.G.Browne have today?  
 Indicate areas in which further research needs to be done in the field of Bábí-Bahá'í studies.  
 How would you define the field of Babi-Baha'i studies?  
 Why was Babi-Bahá'í studies neglected after the passing of E.G.Browne?  
 Are the writings of the Bab meaningful today?  
 Which writings of the Báb do you consider most central to the understanding of his teachings?  
 What are the principal sources for the study of-: a) Bábí history and b) Bábí doctrines?  
 How might the writings of Bahá'u'lláh be classified?  
 Which writings of Bahá'u'lláh do you consider most central to the understanding of his teachings?  
 What are the principal sources for the study of --: a) Bahá'í history and b) Bahá'í doctrine?  
 To what extent have non-Bahá'í scholars contributed to the Bahá'í self-understanding?  
 What are the principal features of the ministry of 'Abdu'l-Bahá?  
 What is the Bahá'í understanding of the person of 'Abdu'l-Bahá?  
 What do you consider to be the most important writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá?  
 Outline the growth and spread of the Bahá'í Faith between 1892 and 1963.  
 How do Iranians view the Bábí-Bahá'í movement?  
 Why have certain Christian missionaries written anti-Bahá'í tracts?  
 How have modern western intellectuals viewed the Bábí-Bahá'í movement?  
 What is the Bábí-Bahá'í view of God?  
 How do Bahá'ís view the origins and nature of man?  
 What is the Bahá'í view of the purpose of life?  
 What, for Bahá'ís, is a "Manifestation of God"?  
 How do Bahá'ís view history? What do they mean by "progressive revelation"?  
 What is the Bahá'í view of the purpose and function of religion.  
 What do Bahá'ís mean when they speak about the "oneness of religion"?

How do Bahá'ís conceive the relationship between their own Faith and the major world religions?

What is the Bahá'í view of past sacred writings?

To what extent are the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths legalistic?

What does a Bahá'í mean when he or she speaks about "spirituality"?

What are characteristic Bahá'í expressions of religiosity?

What is the Bahá'í view of modern science?

How might a Bahá'í define "Truth" and how appropriate it?

What is the Bahá'í administrative order?

When is a Bahá'í 'not a Bahá'í'? Why and for what reasons might a Bahá'í loose his or her 'voting rights' or be declared a "covenant breaker"?

How and why did the Bahá'í community grow in the East?

Why have westerners become Bahá'ís?

How does the Bahá'í Faith today differ from the Bahá'í Faith at the time of 'Abdu'l-Bahá?

What is the Bahá'í view of the future of mankind?

YEAR II, COURSE UNIT ITHE BAB & THE BABI MOVEMENT.

10+10 one hour lectures and 5+5 supporting seminars.

Term 1

1. The Present state of Babi Studies.
2. Siyyid 'Alī Muḥammad the Báb I : The Early Years.
3. Siyyid 'Alī Muḥammad the Báb II (1844-50).
4. Islām and the emergence of the Babi movement.
5. Shaykhism and the emergence of the Babi movement.
6. The Babi hierarchy and its Social basis.
7. Qajar Politics and the Babi Upheavals.
8. Islāmic eschatology and Babi Messianism.
9. Mīrzā Yahyā and Azālī Babism.
10. The Babi phenomenon: Modern appraisals.

Term 2

1. The Early Writings of the Báb.
2. The Later Writings of the Báb.
3. The Writings of Leading Babís.
4. The theology, cosmology and prophetology of the Báb.
5. The Claims of the Báb and leading Babís.
6. Islām, Shaykhism and Babi Doctrine.
7. Babi tafsīr: the qabbalistic and spiritual hermeneutics of the Báb.
8. Babi law and ritual.
9. From the Babi movement to the Bahá'í Faith.
10. The Bahá'í view of the Báb and the Babi movement.

THE BAB & THE BABI MOVEMENT (II.I)

Possible seminar, essay and or examination questions:-

What major areas within the field of Babi studies remain unresearched? In what kind of religious and social environment did the Báb spend his early years?

Summarise what is currently known about the early years of the Báb and suggest new avenues of investigation.

What prompted the Báb to intimate his claims in May 1844?

Outline the six year ministry of the Báb (1844-1850) and attempt to account for the rapid spread of the Babi movement.

Write brief answers to the following questions:- Why did the Báb go on pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina? What was the purpose and outcome of the conference of Badaght? Why was the Báb executed in July 1850?

Why did the Qajar rulers and Shi'í 'ulamā attempt to suppress the Babi movement?

What was the Babi attitude towards the Qajar state and the Shi'í 'ulamā?

Why did the Babi movement attract a fairly large number of Shi'í Muslims?

Why did the Shi'í 'ulamā charge the Báb with apostasy?

To what extent could the Babi movement be said to be neo-Shaykhi?

Why did Karīm Khān Kirmanī attack the Báb?

What were the main characteristics of the Babi hierarchy?

Examine the role of Tahira within early Babism.

Did those Babís who took part in the major upheavals believe that they were waging holy war (jihād)?

In what ways did the Báb claim to have fulfilled Shi'í eschatological expectations?

Examine and account for the Báb's teachings about man yuzhiruhu'llāh.

To what extent was the Babi community a "unity in diversity"?

How did the Babi community react to the martyrdom of the Báb?

Outline the career and claims of Mīrzā Yahyā Nūrī?

In what sense is it true to say that Mīrzā Yahyā was the Báb's successor?

What are the chief characteristics of Azālī Babism?

Why is Azālī Babism virtually extinct while the Bahá'í Faith is establishing itself as a new religion?

What can be learned from the study of Babism about the genesis of new religions?

Assess the major modern western theories about the rise of the Babi movement.

What can be learned about the early teachings of the Báb from the Qayyum al-Asma'?

What are the key features of the Báb's earliest teachings?

"Judging from the Bayan.. Mirza Ali Muhammad [the Báb] was primarily interested in the triumph of his faith, and not so much in any project of social and political reform." [ Mangol Bayat ] Do you agree ?

Explain and comment on the five categories into which the Báb divided his writings.

What proofs are presented in the Báb's [Persian] Dalá'il-i Saba' ?

Of what nature are the extant writings of leading Bábís?

What are the problems surrounding the authorship and dating of the Kitáb-i Nuqtat al-Káfi? Is this work an Azalí forgery?

Outline the key teachings of the Báb about God and the Prophets.

What were the main claims of the Báb? Did they evolve?

Why did a number of leading Bábís make theophanic claims?

What are the chief characteristics of the Báb's interpretation of Islámic sources?

Why did the Báb utilise a qabbalistic and allegorical hermeneutic?

What is the relationship between Shaykhí and Bábí doctrine?

What are the main features of Bábí law and ritual?

To what extent were the Bábís able to practise their faith?

Did the Báb provide a workable socio-economic system?

How did the Bábís react to the leadership role of Mirzá Yahyá and the claims of Bahá'u'lláh?

How do Bahá'ís view Mirzá Yahyá ?

Compare and contrast Azalí Babism and the Bahá'í Faith.

What were the main arguments used by Bahá'ís to convert Bábís?

Why did Mirza Yahyá reject the claims of Bahá'u'lláh?

What is the Bahá'í view of the Bábí movement?

YEAR II, COURSE UNIT II.

10+10 one hour lectures and 5+5 supporting seminars.

BAHA'U'LLAH AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE BAHAI FAITH

Term 1

1. Bahá'u'lláh :The Early Years. (1817—1852).
2. Bahá'u'lláh at Baghdad. (1853—1863).
3. The writings of the Baghdad Period.
4. From Constantinople to Adrianople ( 1863—1868).
5. The writings of the Constantinople—Adrianople Period.
6. The 'Akka' Period (1868—1892).
7. The Writings of the 'Akka' period I.
8. The Writings of the 'Akka' period II.
9. The Claims of Bahá'u'lláh. and the Bahá'í view of his station.
10. The passing of Bahá'u'lláh and the Covenant crisis.

Term 2

1. The Theology and Prophetology of Bahá'u'lláh.
2. The Ethical and Mystical Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh.
3. The Kitáb-i Aqdas and the Laws of Bahá'u'lláh.
4. The Kitáb-i Iqán and Bahá'u'lláh's interpretation of past scriptures.
5. The Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh to the kings and rulers and his social teachings.
6. Leading disciples of Bahá'u'lláh and the emergence and social basis of the oriental Bahá'í community.
7. Early oriental Bahá'í Apologetics: the debate with Muslims, Shaykhis and Azalis.
8. The early oriental Bahá'í mission to Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians & other religious minorities.
9. Early oriental Bahá'í historiography.
10. Bahá'í and other estimates of the mission and writings of Bahá'u'lláh.

BAHA'U'LLAH AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE BAHAI FAITH (II, II)Possible seminar, essay and/or examination questions:-

In what kind of social and religious milieu did Bahá'u'lláh spend his early years?

What happened to Bahá'u'lláh during the period 1844--1852?

What precipitated Bahá'u'lláh's "exile" to Iraq?

What were the key features of the Baghdad period of Bahá'u'lláh's life?

Why did Bahá'u'lláh withdraw to Kurdistan and why did he return from that region to Baghdad?

What was the nature of the relationship between Bahá'u'lláh and Mirzá Yahya during the Baghdad period (1853-1863)?

What led Bahá'u'lláh to "declare his mission" in May 1863 and what was the nature of that "declaration"?

When did the Bahá'í Faith originate?

What are the chief subjects mentioned in Bahá'u'lláh's writings of the Baghdad period?

Explain Bahá'u'lláh's transition from Baghdad to Constantinople to Adrianople.

Outline the key events of the Adrianople period.

How did the Adrianople and Baghdad settings of Bahá'u'lláh's ministry differ?

What precipitated the "Most-Great separation"?

What are the chief subjects mentioned in Bahá'u'lláh's writings of the Adrianople period?

What was the nature of the Bábí-Bahá'í community during the Adrianople period (1863-1868)?

Why was Bahá'u'lláh exiled to Akká and Yahya to Famagusta?

What were the chief events of the Akká period (1868-1892) of Bahá'u'lláh's ministry?

What was the nature of the West Galilean social and religious milieu into which Bahá'u'lláh was exiled?

What are the chief subjects mentioned in Bahá'u'lláh's writings of the Akká period?

Comment on the major claims of Bahá'u'lláh? Did they evolve?

How do Bahá'ís view and relate to the person of Bahá'u'lláh?

What happened when Bahá'u'lláh passed away in 1892?

Outline Bahá'u'lláh's teachings about God and his Messengers.

Comment on the key ethical directives of Bahá'u'lláh? Is there a Bahá'í doctrine of salvation?

What is the significance of Bahá'u'lláh's Seven Valleys?

To what extent does the Bahá'í revelation incorporate mystical elements?

Why does the Kitáb-i Aqdas contain what it does?

What kind of society would the implementation of the laws of the Kitáb-i Aqdas lead to?

What are the key features of Bahá'u'lláh's "tablets to the Kings and Rulers"?

What was Bahá'u'lláh's attitude towards the West?

Suggest why those 19 counted "Apostles of Bahá'u'lláh" were accorded this status.

How and why did the oriental Bahá'í communities grow during the period 1863-1892?

Make suggestions as to the social basis of the early oriental Bahá'í communities.

Comment on the nature and content of the early oriental Bahá'í dialogue with either a) Muslims, b) Shaykhis or c) Azalis.

What led Bahá'í teachers to attempt to convert oriental religious minorities?

Why was the Bahá'í mission to oriental Jewry successful and that to oriental Christendom unsuccessful?

What attracted Zoroastrians to the Bahá'í community?

What are the chief tendencies of early oriental Bahá'í historiography?

Why has the Tarikh-i Nabil ("The Dawnbreakers") come to be regarded as the most important work of Bahá'í history writing?

How have modern western scholars viewed the mission and writings of Bahá'u'lláh?

Comment on current Bahá'í views of the person and writings of Bahá'u'lláh.

## YEAR II. COURSE UNIT III.

## THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH (1892-1921).

1. The Life of 'Abdu'l-Bahá: 1844—1910
2. The Life of 'Abdu'l-Bahá: 1910—1921
3. The Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.
4. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's exposition of the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh.
5. 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Oriental Bahá'í communities.
6. Oriental Bahá'í Literature and attitudes towards the Bahá'ís in the East. (1892—1921).
7. The Spread of the Bahá'í Faith to the West I : > 1910.
8. The Spread of the Bahá'í Faith to the West II: 1910—1921.
9. Western Bahá'í Literature and attitudes towards the Bahá'ís in the West (> 1921 ).
10. Emergent Bahá'í "orthodoxy", the Covenant and the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

## Term 2.

1. The Life and Ministry of Shoghi Effendi : 1897—1944.
2. The Life and Ministry of Shoghi Effendi : 1944—1957.
3. The Writings of Shoghi Effendi.
4. Aspects of the Growth and Spread of the Bahá'í Community: 1921—1944.
5. Aspects of the Growth and Spread of the Bahá'í Community: 1944—1963.
6. The Emergence of the Bahá'í Administrative Order.
7. The Universal House of Justice and the Bahá'í Administrative Institutions.
8. Oriental Bahá'í Literature (1921→ ) and oriental perceptions of the Bahá'í Faith.
9. Western Bahá'í Literature and occidental perceptions of the Bahá'í Faith (1921 → ).
10. Recent Developments with the Bahá'í Community and External Perceptions of it.

## THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH (1892-1963) ( II.III )

## Possible seminar, essay and/or examination questions

- Why did Bahá'u'lláh choose 'Abdu'l-Bahá to succeed him ?
- What were 'Abdu'l-Bahá's key objectives as head of the Bahá'í community?
- How do Bahá'ís view the person of 'Abdu'l-Bahá ?
- Why did 'Abdu'l-Bahá visit the West?
- How might the writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá be classified?
- What was 'Abdu'l-Bahá's attitude towards the West?
- Did 'Abdu'l-Bahá develop the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh?
- What do you consider to be the most important contributions of 'Abdu'l-Bahá to the evolution of the Bahá'í Community?
- What was the significance of the "Tablets of the Divine Plan"?
- What developments took place among the oriental Bahá'í communities during the ministry of 'Abdu'l-Bahá?
- What was 'Abdu'l-Bahá's attitude towards politics?
- What contribution did 'Abdu'l-Bahá make towards the evolution of the Bahá'í administrative order?
- Did oriental attitudes towards the Bahá'í community change during the ministry of 'Abdu'l-Bahá?
- Who were the major oriental Bahá'í apologists and historians during the period 1892—1963? What were their chief concerns?
- How did the Bahá'í Faith spread to the western world?
- Who was Ibrahim George Kheiralla?
- How did early Western Bahá'ís manifest their devotion to 'Abdu'l-Bahá?
- How did early Western Bahá'ís present their faith to prospective converts?
- What did early Western Bahá'ís understand by the "Covenant"?
- How was the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá received by the Bahá'ís of the West?
- Why did 'Abdu'l-Bahá appoint Shoghi Effendi the Guardian of the Bahá'í Community?
- How do Bahá'ís view the person of Shoghi Effendi?
- What were Shoghi Effendi's chief objectives?
- What was Shoghi Effendi's attitude towards Western civilization?
- Outline and account for opposition to Shoghi Effendi within the Bahá'í community.
- How did the Bahá'í community react to the passing of Shoghi Effendi? What were the chief developments within the Bahá'í world between 1957 and 1963?

Outline and account for the growth and spread of the Western Bahá'í communities during either 1921-1944 or 1944-1963.

What developments took place within the Iranian Bahá'í community during the ministry of Shoghi Effendi?

What are the chief institutions of the Bahá'í administrative order?

What are the functions and purposes of Local Bahá'í Assemblies?

What are the chief features of the Bahá'í theory of the Guardianship?

Why was the Universal House of Justice first elected in 1963?

Outline and comment on the functions of the Universal House of Justice?

Outline what you consider to be the key steps in the evolution of the Bahá'í administrative order.

How do Bahá'ís envisage the "Bahá'í Commonwealth" of the future?

"This new-born Administrative Order incorporates within its structure certain elements which are to be found in each of the three recognised forms of secular government, without being in any sense a mere replica of any of them.." (Shoghi Effendi). Discuss.

What are the chief categories and contents of oriental Bahá'í literature written during the ministry of Shoghi Effendi?

Why have Bahá'ís in the orient suffered martyrdom?

What western Bahá'í literatures composed during Shoghi Effendi's ministry do you consider to be most important?

How, if at all, have Western perceptions of the Bahá'í community changed among western observers?

What recent developments have taken place with the Bahá'í community?

How do contemporary Bahá'ís express their religiosity?

## APPENDICIES

# ASSOCIATION FOR BAHÁ'Í STUDIES

The Association exists to cultivate opportunities for formal presentations of the Bahá'í Faith at universities and colleges. It has the related role of contributing to Bahá'í scholarship.

The Association was originally established as the Canadian Association for Studies on the Bahá'í Faith by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada in B.E. 132 (1974) in response to a goal of the Five Year Plan given to the Bahá'í Community by the Universal House of Justice:

*To cultivate opportunities for formal presentations, courses and lectureships on the Bahá'í Faith in Canadian universities and other institutions of higher learning.*

This goal was reemphasized in the 1979 message of the Universal House of Justice inaugurating the Seven Year Plan:

*Expand the opportunities for teaching in Canadian institutions of higher learning and further develop the Canadian Association for Studies on the Bahá'í Faith.*

In 1981, the Association decided, because of worldwide expansion, to change its name to Association for Bahá'í Studies and has secured the approval of the Universal House of Justice.

## ACTIVITIES OF THE ASSOCIATION

The Centre for Bahá'í Studies, adjacent to the campus of the University of Ottawa, coordinates the activities of the Association and serves as a centre for research, instruction and information on Bahá'í studies.

The Association maintains a library within the Centre for Bahá'í Studies, collecting Bahá'í literature and studies on the Bahá'í Faith (e.g. books, articles, theses and dissertations).

The Association is engaged in developing curricula suitable for the presentation of the Faith at universities, and the cultivation of relationships with those responsible for accrediting such courses at universities.

The Association organizes presentations of the Faith through invited lectures at university departments and to scholarly groups.

The Association holds annual meetings, frequent international conferences, and a number of regional conferences which provide opportunities for Bahá'ís and others interested in Bahá'í studies to make formal presentations and exchange ideas. These conferences are held wherever sufficient membership and interest permit.

## APPENDIX I

The Association's publications include a series of scholarly monographs, *Bahá'í Studies*, and a general journal and newsletter, *Bahá'í Studies Notebook*.

## \*MEMBERSHIP

Membership is open to any registered Bahá'í in any country. Members receive new issues of *Bahá'í Studies* and *Bahá'í Studies Notebook* and have the opportunity to consult with the Executive Committee at the Annual Meeting. The Executive Committee, appointed annually by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada, is responsible for the direction of the affairs of the Association.

## LIFE MEMBERSHIP

Any Bahá'í may become a life member of the Association for a fee of \$500. This one-time payment secures all the privileges of regular membership without the need to renew membership annually. As well, it enables the Association to acquire funds to support the cost of a number of its activities in universities and other institutions of higher learning, and to extend its field of service in the Bahá'í community.

ASSOCIATION FOR BAHÁ'Í STUDIES  
ASSOCIATION D'ÉTUDES BAHÁ'ÍES

34 Copernicus Street, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K1N 7K4 (613) 233-1903

April 22, 1983

Robert Stauffer  
818 N. 30th  
Renton, WA  
USA 98055

Dear Mr. Stauffer:

Thank you for your letter of 2 April 1983. To answer your questions systematically, I refer to the numbering used in your letter of 11 January 1983.

1. Membership in the Association is open to Bahá'ís in good standing. Therefore Bahá'ís without administrative rights may be subscribers to Association publications, but may not be members.

2. Anyone may submit papers to the Association. All manuscripts received are given out for blind review, that is, the author's name is obliterated from the manuscript before it is circulated for review. We feel this process ensures an impartial review procedure as possible.

3. In the case of lifetime membership, if the member becomes ineligible for membership, the fee becomes a lifetime subscription. It would defeat the principle behind "endowment funds" if these fees were refundable.

4. As an Association based in Canada promoting Bahá'í studies, we are under the auspices of the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada. It has only been through their generous subsidies that such an Association ever got established.

The National Spiritual Assembly formally appoints the members of the Executive Committee after receiving recommendations from the Association. The National Spiritual Assembly defers all reviewing and publication decisions to the Executive Committee. Matters of great import (for example, expansion of Association activities in the United States) are decided in consultation with the institutions of the Faith that are directly concerned whether on a local, national, or international level.

5. The correspondence from the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada and the Universal House of Justice is couched in very general terms. It was left to the Executive Committee to propose specific objectives within the broad mandate of promoting Bahá'í scholarship and awareness of the principles at universities and other institutions of higher learning. We enclose a brochure listing these objectives.

6. Enclosed please find a diagram of the administrative structure of the Association. The members of the Executive Committee are selected from the general membership. Generally, potential members come to our attention through outstanding contributions at the regional level of Association activities - or through recommendations from other Bahá'ís who feel the candidate has outstanding qualities to offer the Association through service on the Executive Committee. Members receive Bahá'í Studies, Bahá'í Studies Notebook and the Association Bulletin and may serve on regional conference committees or special committees such as the Persian publication and conference committee based in Vancouver.

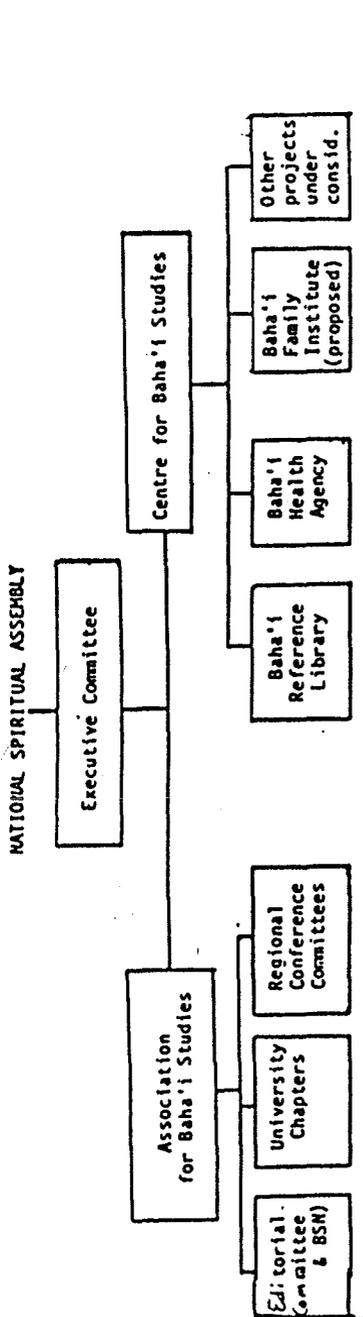
7. Manuscripts are sent blind to three independent reviewers. We have used both Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í reviewers who have expertise on the topic of the manuscript. The final decision to print or not to print rests with the Executive Committee a subset of which serves as the Editorial Board. Any manuscripts which generate opposing reviews are sent out to further review to assist the Editorial Board in their decisions. We ask the usual three copies, typed, double spaced, well referenced, using the Chicago Manual of Style format if possible. (We realize some universities insist on a house style). Manuscripts must be thoroughly referenced. I had not thought any studies of areas of Bahá'í scholarship were proscribed until you suggested Covenant-Breaking materials. As Bahá'í authors are cautioned by Bahá'u'lláh to avoid such writings as a poison, it would seem unadvisable for Bahá'ís to produce such studies and the Association has never received any submissions of the sort.

8. We welcome your suggestions as to the organizations of small libraries. We have consulted with the librarians at the World Centre Library and a Bahá'í librarian who heads the Oriental Section of the New York Library for suggestions, but no final decisions have been made. We have merely inscribed acquisition numbers and are inputting particulars on our CBM-8032 computer. We are attempting to compile a bibliography of theses and dissertations on Bahá'í topics, and a former Executive Committee member has worked years on a bibliography project which the Association hopes to publish.

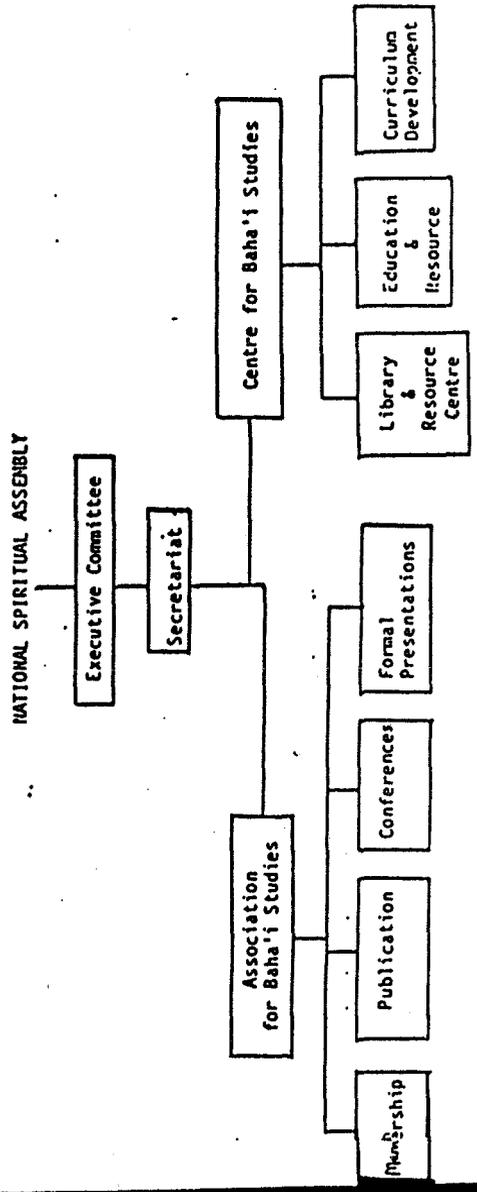
9. The Association mandate is received from the Universal House of Justice in every Seven Year Plan. It appears logical to place all Bahá'í university and college organizations under the Association's mantle. In Canada, we have Universal House of Justice permission to begin Association for Bahá'í Studies chapters at Canadian universities working with Local Spiritual Assemblies and existing Bahá'í Clubs on campus. We hope eventually to have the budget to hire a resource person who would act as research and education (curriculum) coordinator. It is premature to estimate a target date.

10. The Association has a file of Lancaster papers. Some are missing.

11. The Association is supported by membership fees, literature and tape sales, and by National Spiritual Assembly subsidy. Non-members pay for



FUNCTIONS



services rendered (e.g., conference fees, subscription fees, copying fees and postage). As the Association is not identical to the Bahā'ī Faith there is not the restriction against receiving funds from non-Bahā'īs. We expect to investigate the terms of various non-Bahā'ī granting agencies in Canada to see how the Association might use such funds to sponsor research on Bahā'ī studies. Our balance sheets are prepared semi-annually and are not restricted information.

12. The Association is not incorporated but has the status of non-profit religious organization. The Association enjoys federal and provincial tax exemptions for all goods used "solely for the promotion of religion." We use the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada's incorporation, as parent organization.

13. At this time there are plans for expansion of Association sponsored activities outside Canada and at present there are three United States Regional Conference Committees functioning. However, there are no plans to open any offices and the library holdings will be consolidated in Ottawa.

14. The University of Toronto has a course, Religion 1119T on the computer for the next three years. They require a minimum registration of five graduate students to hold the course. The courses on the Bahā'ī Faith that have been taught in Canada have all been non-credit and taught by Bahā'ī graduate students.

15. The Association's focus is on college and university courses, and these are our first priority.

I trust this letter answers your questions. If not, please do not hesitate to write again.

Sincerely,

*Christine Zerbinis*  
 Christine Zerbinis  
 Executive Secretary \*

Encl: Brochure diagram

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\* Reproduced with the permission of Robert Stauffer (Ed.).

Appendix II

Some select quotations on the importance of Bahá'í Scholarship

"There are certain pillars which have been established as the unshakable supports of the Faith of God. The mightiest of these is learning and the use of the mind, the expansion of consciousness, and insight into the realities of the universe and the hidden mysteries of Almighty God.

To promote knowledge is thus an inescapable duty imposed on every one of the friends of God..."

( Abdu'l-Baha passage cited Selections From the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha [Haifa 1978], p.126 [No. 97] ).

" It seems that what we need now [ 1949 ! ] is a more profound and coordinated Bahá'í scholarship in order to attract such men as you are contacting. The world has—at least the thinking world—caught up by now with all the great and universal principles enunciated by Baha'u'llah over 70 years ago, and so of course it does not sound 'new' to them. But we know that the deeper teachings, the capacity of his projected World Order to re-create society, are new and dynamic. It is these we must learn to present intelligently and enticingly to such men! "

(From a letter dated July 3, 1949, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer ).

"The Cause needs more Bahá'í scholars—people who not only are devoted to it and believe in it and are anxious to tell others about it, but also who have a deep grasp of the Teachings and their significance, and who can correlate its beliefs with the current thoughts and problems of the people of the world." ( From a

letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi 21 October 1943

"What he [Shoghi Effendi] wants the Bahá'ís to do is study more, not to study less. The more general knowledge, scientific or otherwise, they possess, the better. Likewise he is constantly urging them to really study the Bahá'í teachings more deeply."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi dated 5th July 1947 ).

"Bahá'í scholars and writers will, no doubt, gradually appear, and will, as promised by Baha'u'llah, lend a unique support to their Faith."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi cited in U.S. Bahá'í News No. 102 [August 1936], p.2. )

" As the [Bahá'í] Cause develops it will need more and more people who are really versed in their branch of learning and who can interpret the [Bahá'í] teachings to suit the facts."

( From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi in Bahá'í Youth : A Compilation, p. 14 ).

" What the Faith needs, even more than teachers, is books that expound the true significance of its principles in the light of modern thought and social problems."

(From a letter of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer dated 6 May 1933 cited Unfolding Destiny..[London 1981], p.431 ).

".. the majority of Bahá'ís, however, intensely devoted and sincere they may be, lack for the most part the necessary scholarship and wisdom to reply to and refute the claims and attacks of people with some education and standing."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi dated 25th September 1942 cited in ibid., p.439 ).

"Scholarship has a high station in the Bahá'í teachings and Bahá'í scholars have a great responsibility to a growing, divinely-guided world society.."

"Bahá'í scholarship is of great importance in the development and consolidation of the Bahá'í community."

(From a Statement of the Research Dept. of the Universal House of Justice on Bahá'í Scholarship [1979] ).

"The Supreme Body [= The Universal House of Justice] has informed us [= the International Teaching Centre] that it believes that both the International Teaching Centre and the Boards of Counsellors can render valuable services in the field of Bahá'í scholarship by encouraging budding scholars, and also by promoting within the Bahá'í community an atmosphere of tolerance for the views of others."

( From a letter of the International Teaching Centre dated 22 March 1981 ).

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*"In the message of Naw-Ruz 1979 addressed to the Bahá'í world, the Universal House of Justice stated that 'at the heart of all activities, the spiritual, intellectual and community life of the believers must be developed and fostered'. In pursuance of this objective, the International Teaching Centre sent a letter to all Continental Boards of Counsellors on 9 August 1984, providing further information on this important subject in the hope that it would assist them to devise ways to foster the development of Bahá'í scholarship along lines that are in accordance with Bahá'í standards and values.*

*"The Universal House of Justice feels that this information would also be of particular assistance to your National Spiritual Assemblies, and has therefore instructed us to send you the enclosed excerpt from the International Teaching Centre's letter."*

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated 25 October 1984, to selected National Spiritual Assemblies.)

## A STATEMENT ON THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF BAHÁ'Í SCHOLARSHIP

Issued by the International Teaching Centre on 9 August 1984

### The Importance of Baha'i Scholarship:

Over 50 years ago, the Guardian emphasised the need for development of the intellectual life of the Bahá'í community, in the statement:

"In these days when people are so skeptical about religion and look with so much contempt towards religious organizations and movements, there seems to be more need than ever for our young Baha'is to be well-equipped intellectually, so that they may be in a position to present the Message in a befitting way, and in a manner that would convince every unbiased observer of the effectiveness and power of the Teachings."

(From a letter dated 5 May 1934 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer.)

Some years later, he described Bahá'í scholarship as being an important aid to teaching the Faith to those who do not find the Bahá'í principles novel in the light of modern thought:

"It seems what we need now is a more profound and co-ordinated Bahá'í scholarship in order to attract such men as you are contacting. The world has — at least the thinking world — caught up by now with all the great and universal principles enunciated by Bahá'u'lláh over 70 years ago, and so of course it does not sound 'new' to them. But we know that the deeper teachings, the capacity of His projected World Order to re-create society, are new and dynamic. It is these we must learn to present intelligently and enticingly to such men."

(From a letter dated 3 July 1949 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer.)

More recently, attention has been directed to the role to be played by Bahá'í scholarship, in the statement:

"The Universal House of Justice regards Bahá'í scholarship as of great potential importance for the development and consolidation of the Bahá'í community as it emerges from obscurity."

(From a letter dated 3 January 1979 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer.)

As the Supreme Body pointed out in the opening sentence of the Ridván 1984 message to the Bahá'ís of the world, the emergence from obscurity of the Faith has been a marked feature of the past five years. This directs unprecedented public attention to the Cause of God, and also necessitates increased emphasis on the development of Bahá'í scholarship, since in the same message, the House of Justice says:

"Persistently greater and greater efforts must be made to acquaint the leaders of the world, in all departments of life, with the true nature of Bahá'u'lláh's revelation as the sole hope for the pacification and unification of the world."

### The Nature of Bahá'í Scholarship:

A vital prerequisite to the fostering of Bahá'í scholarship is the acquisition of a clearer understanding of the meaning of this term. We can do no better than to offer an illuminating passage from the writings of the Guardian, which might well be taken as a definition of the attributes toward which a Bahá'í scholar should aspire:

"... The Cause needs more Bahá'í scholars, people who not only are devoted to it and believe in it and are anxious to tell others about it, but also who have a deep grasp of the Teachings and their significance, and who can correlate its beliefs with the current thoughts and problems of the people of the world."

(From a letter dated 21 October 1943 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer.)

This passage calls for distinctive qualities. The description of the kind of Bahá'í scholar of which the Faith stands in such need at this time places emphasis upon belief, devotion to the Faith, a profound understanding of the Teachings and a strong desire to share them with others. A distinctive feature of such Bahá'í scholarship, which is also reiterated in other passages of the writings of the Guardian, is that of relating the Bahá'í teachings to the present-day concerns and thought of the people around us.

### Fostering Bahá'í Scholarship:

The Universal House of Justice specified how the Counsellors can foster Bahá'í scholarship:

"In the field of Bahá'í scholarship . . . the Boards of Counsellors can render valuable services in this area by encouraging budding scholars and by promoting within the Bahá'í community an atmosphere of tolerance for the views of others. At the same time the fundamental core of the believers' faith should be strengthened by an increasing awareness of the cardinal truth and vital importance of the Covenant, and an ever-growing love for Bahá'u'lláh."

(From a communication dated 10 February 1981 written by the Universal House of Justice to the International Teaching Centre.)

We consider first the matter of "encouraging budding scholars".

From the passage of the Guardian's writings dealing with the attributes to which a Bahá'í scholar should aspire, it is evident that Bahá'í scholarship is an endeavour accessible to all members of the Bahá'í community, without exception. All believers can aspire to the attributes described by the Guardian, and can strive to relate the Bahá'í teachings to the thinking and concerns of the non-Bahá'í population around them. You can perform a valuable service in bringing this potential role to the attention of all the believers — including those who may lack formal education, and those who dwell in remote areas, villages and islands — and to discourage any thought that Bahá'í scholarship is an activity open only to those who are highly educated or who are pursuing an academic career.

As the followers of the Blessed Beauty make efforts to correlate the Bahá'í teachings, which impinge upon every aspect of human life, with the thoughts and problems of the people around them, they will inevitably discover new ways of presenting the teachings convincingly and will also acquire an ever-increasing understanding of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh.

At the same time special encouragement should also be given to believers of unusual capacity, training or accomplishment to consecrate their abilities to the service of the Cause through the unique and distinctive contribution they can make to Bahá'í scholarship. The Guardian repeatedly linked the work of Bahá'í scholars to the expansion and consolidation of the Faith, as stated in the following:

"If the Bahá'ís want to be really effective in teaching the Cause they need to be much better informed and able to discuss intelligently, intellectually, the present condition of the world and its problems. We need Bahá'í scholars, not only people far, far more deeply aware of what our teachings really are, but also well read and well educated people, capable of correlating our teachings to the current thoughts of the leaders of society.

"We Bahá'ís should, in other words, arm our minds with knowledge in order to better demonstrate to, especially, the educated classes, the truths enshrined in our Faith."

(From a letter dated 5 July 1949 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer.)

The Universal House of Justice, in responding to a Bahá'í who wanted to use logical means to convey and prove spiritual principles, wrote that:

"... the House of Justice understands that you desire to find ways of conveying spiritual truths in logical ways and demonstrating their validity through scientific proofs. There can be no objection to such an attitude. 'Abdu'l-Bahá Himself used such a method. The danger Bahá'í scholars must avoid is the distortion of religious truth, almost forcibly at times, to make it conform to understandings and perceptions current in the scientific world. True Bahá'í scholars should guard against this."

(From a letter dated 7 June 1983 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer.)

The Supreme Body has also referred to the distinctive role to be played by Bahá'ís who acquire expertise in various fields of endeavour, in affirming that:

"As the Bahá'í community grows it will acquire experts in numerous fields — both by Bahá'ís becoming experts and by experts becoming Bahá'ís. As these experts bring their knowledge and skill to the service of the community and, even more, as they transform their various disciplines by bringing to bear upon them the light of the Divine Teachings, problem after problem now disrupting society will be answered."

(From a letter dated 21 August 1977 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer.)

Closely allied to this role is the call of the House of Justice for:

"... the promotion of Bahá'í scholarship, so that an increasing number of believers will be able to analyse the problems of mankind in every field and to show how the Teachings solve them."

(From a letter dated 19 January 1983 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer.)

The Counsellors and Auxiliary Board members can do much to assist in the response to this call by their stimulation and encouragement of Bahá'ís of distinctive capacity and promise, especially young Bahá'ís who are choosing their life work. Since the Bahá'í Teachings relate to every dimension of human thought and activity, believers who become eminent in any legitimate field of knowledge are in an enviable position to make a significant and far-reaching contribution by presenting the Teachings in a way that demonstrates the profundity and efficacy of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh.

The Bahá'í community can already point to the example of several believers who have become recognised widely for their scholarship, and whose intellectual pursuits were enriched by their abiding devotion to the Faith, and their compelling desire to teach the Cause. Within this company is to be found Mírzá Abu'l Fadl, who was described by the Guardian as "very excellent and erudite", as well as the Hands of the Cause of God George Townshend, whose scholarship was praised by the Guardian, and Hasan Balyúzi, who was eulogised by the Universal House of Justice for "his outstanding scholarly pursuits", as well as others who are presently engaged in like service.

#### Promoting an Atmosphere of Tolerance:

We now consider "promoting within the Bahá'í community an atmosphere of tolerance for others" and strengthening "the fundamental core of the believers' faith". The Universal House of Justice has stated that:

"The combination of absolute loyalty to the Manifestation of God and His Teachings, with the searching and intelligent study of the Teachings and history of the Faith which those Teachings themselves enjoin, is a particular strength of this Dispensation. In past Dispensations the believers have tended to divide into two mutually antagonistic groups: those who held blindly to the letter of the Revelation, and those who questioned and doubted everything. Like all extremes, both these can lead into error. The beloved Guardian has written that 'The Bahá'í Faith . . . enjoins upon its followers the primary duty of an unfettered search after truth . . .'. Bahá'ís are called upon to follow the Faith with intelligence and understanding. Inevitably believers will commit errors as they strive to rise to this degree of maturity, and this calls for forbearance and humility on the part of all concerned, so that such matters do not cause disunity or discord among the friends."

(From a letter dated 7 October 1980 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer.)

The challenge to all believers is to develop the balanced combination prescribed by the House of Justice to such an extent that they do not fall into one of the mutually antagonistic groups of which the Supreme Body warns.

On the need for tolerance the Universal House of Justice wrote:

"The House of Justice agrees that it is most important for the believers, and especially those who hold positions of responsibility in the Administrative Order, to react calmly and with tolerant and enquiring minds to views which differ from their own, remembering that all Bahá'ís are but students of the Faith, ever striving to understand the Teachings more clearly and to apply them more faithfully, and none can claim to have a perfect understanding of this Revelation. At the same time all believers, and scholars in particular, should remember the many warnings in the Writings against the fomenting of discord among the friends. It is the duty of the institutions of the Faith to guard the community against such dangers."

(From a letter dated 18 July 1979 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer.)

Promotion of an atmosphere of tolerance thus requires that those holding positions of administrative authority not over-react, and that those setting forth their understanding of the Teachings not foster discord and dissension, deliberately or unwittingly. The warning against the fomenting of discord highlights one of the hazards facing believers who embark upon the practice of Bahá'í scholarship. On one occasion the Universal House of Justice felt moved to comment that:

"There have, however, been cases of believers who look upon themselves as scholars, and may even be such in an academic sense, who have considerable expertise in certain aspects of the Faith but are lamentably ignorant or misinformed about other aspects of the Cause and the Teachings. Others have expressed bitingly critical views with a quite unscholarly intemperance."

(From a letter dated 8 October 1980 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer.)

By striving to express themselves with courtesy, moderation, tact and wisdom, Bahá'í scholars will contribute to the maintenance within the Bahá'í community of an atmosphere of tolerance which facilitates their limitless exploration of the meaning and implications of the Bahá'í Revelation.

#### Strengthening the Core of the Believers' Faith:

This need for Bahá'í scholars to become thoroughly deepened in the spirit of the Cause, and well versed in its Teachings is emphasised in the following passage:

"In the application of the social laws of the Faith, most of the difficulties can be seen to arise not only from outright disobedience, but also from the actions of those who, while careful to observe the letter of the law, try to go as far as it will permit them away from the spirit which lies at its heart. A similar tendency can be noted among some Bahá'í scholars. The great advances in knowledge and

understanding in the vital field of Bahá'í scholarship will be made by those who, while well versed in their subjects and adhering to the principles of research, are also thoroughly imbued with love for the Faith and the determination to grow in the comprehension of its teachings."

(From a letter dated 27 March 1983 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer.)

In the same letter the Supreme Body calls attention to the danger of intellectual pride, which a Bahá'í scholar must combat within himself, in these words:

"The House of Justice feels that Bahá'í scholars must beware of the temptations of intellectual pride. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has warned the friends in the West that they would be subjected to intellectual tests, and the Guardian reminded them of this warning. There are many aspects of western thinking which have been exalted to a status of unassailable principle in the general mind, that time may well show to have been erroneous or, at least, only partially true. Any Bahá'í who rises to eminence in academic circles will be exposed to the powerful influence of such thinking."

(From a letter dated 27 March 1983 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer.)

The provisions of the Covenant stand as our inviolable protection against distortion of the Teachings and against the subtle temptations of intellectual pride. Central to the Covenant is the authority of the Manifestation of God and of the infallible institutions that the Holy Writings ordained. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has specified that:

"Unto the Most Holy Book everyone must turn and all that is not expressly recorded therein must be referred to the Universal House of Justice. That which this body, whether unanimously or by a majority doth carry, that is verily the Truth and Purpose of God Himself."

(From "Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá", Part Two.)

The Universal House of Justice has clarified that:

"In the Bahá'í Faith there are two authoritative centres appointed to which the believers must turn, for in reality the Interpreter of the Word is an extension of that centre which is the Word itself. The Book is the record of the utterance of Bahá'u'lláh, while the divinely inspired Interpreter is the living Mouth of that Book — it is he and he alone who can authoritatively state what the Book means. Thus one centre is the Book with its Interpreter, and the other is the Universal House of Justice guided by God to decide on whatever is not explicitly revealed in the Book."

(From a letter dated 7 December 1967 written by the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer.)

and it has pointed out that:

"While it may often be the part of wisdom to approach individuals or an audience from a standpoint of current knowledge, it should never be overlooked that the Revelation of the Manifestation of God is the standard for all knowledge, and scientific statements and

theories, no matter how close they may come to the eternal principles proclaimed by God's Messenger, are in their very nature ephemeral and limited. Likewise, attempting to make the Bahá'í Faith relevant to modern society is to incur the grave risk of compromising the fundamental verities of our Faith in an effort to make it conform to current theories and practices."

(From a letter dated 21 July 1968 written by the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly.)

A vital element of Bahá'í scholarship is humility in recognising the limitations of the human mind in its attempts to encompass the Divine Message. Bahá'u'lláh addresses the Creator in a prayer, using these terms:

"Exalted, immeasurably exalted art Thou, O my Beloved, above the strivings of any of Thy creatures, however learned, to know Thee; exalted, immensely exalted art Thou above every human attempt, no matter how searching, to describe Thee! For the highest thought of men, however deep their contemplation, can never hope to outsoar the limitations imposed upon Thy creation, nor ascend beyond the state of the contingent world, nor break the bounds irrevocably set for it by Thee."

(From "Prayers and Meditations by Bahá'u'lláh, No. CLXXXIV.)

Another vital provision of the Covenant is that concerning interpretation. The Universal House of Justice states:

"... individual interpretation is considered the fruit of man's rational power and conducive to a better understanding of the teachings, provided that no disputes or arguments arise among the friends and the individual himself understands and makes it clear that his views are merely his own. Individual interpretations continually change as one grows in comprehension of the teachings.

"... although individual insights can be enlightening and helpful, they can also be misleading. The friends must therefore learn to listen to the views of others without being overawed or allowing their faith to be shaken, and to express their own views without pressing them on their fellow Bahá'ís."

(From a letter dated 27 May 1966 written by the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer.)

The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh gives rise to a Bahá'í community which will increasingly become known for its fostering of creative development and for its encouragement of individual expression. The Covenant also provides guiding principles by which a Bahá'í scholar can exemplify that harmony of faith and reason which is a hallmark of the Bahá'í Dispensation.

With the Seven Year Plan calling for the fostering of the intellectual life of the Bahá'í community, and with the closely-associated development of Bahá'í scholarship, the world-wide community of the followers of the Greatest Name embarks upon an exciting phase in its development, which will widen the range of people attracted to its truths, greatly enhance its prestige and influence, and broaden the foundation of the world civilization to which the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh will ultimately give rise.

The Letter reproduced on pp. 75-81 (cf. p. 74) is taken from, Bahá'í Scholarship, An excerpt from a letter to the Continental Board of Counsellors from the International Teaching Centre. National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of New Zealand Inc. New Zealand., 1985. [pp. 1-8].

APPENDIX III

A Brief Response to possible Bahá'í objections to the support of Academic Bahá'í Scholarship and the Establishment of a Permanent Bahá'í Studies Centre and Research Institute.

Objection : The time now is for the Bahá'í World to concern itself with teaching; to proffer its 'good news' to mankind and develop its administrative institutions. Academic scholarship is something for the future.

Reply : This kind of Bahá'í voiced sentiment is both understandable and widespread. It is not a false perspective though it is often voiced by Bahá'ís who have little or no knowledge of what the aims, intentions and purposes of academic scholarship are; by individuals who have a limited perception of what Bahá'í scholarship might contribute to the Bahá'í world. To say that Bahá'í scholarship is 'for the future' is to say that detailed research into Bahá'í scripture, history and doctrine, etc.. is currently irrelevant. It is to say that Bahá'ís who wish to study their Faith in detail are wasting their time—they should be 'out teaching'.

In the light of the plethora of Bahá'í texts that underline the importance of the intellect and Bahá'í intellectual life it can hardly be said that Bahá'í scholarship is a waste of time. A variety of authoritative Bahá'í texts explicitly state that Bahá'í administrative institutions should strive to promote and enrich the intellectual life of the Bahá'í community. The Bahá'í philosophy of 'teaching' obviously includes the intellectual articulation of Bahá'í perspectives. Academics and intellectuals also need to be 'taught' or informed about Bahá'í teaching. The concrete support of Bahá'í scholarship would have important consequences for internal Bahá'í 'deepening' and external Bahá'í 'teaching'. It would serve to enable certain individuals to be more adequately informed about their own Faith and enable them to befittingly communicate it to others. It would also equip individuals to 'defend their Faith' against distorted and hostile misrepresentations — which are increasingly of a detailed nature or such that the 'non-expert' in Bahá'í history and doctrine cannot hope to discuss or 'refute'. Experts and academically trained Bahá'í scholars are needed to discuss and communicate research findings that clarify 'obscure questions' and to throw light on doctrinal and other issues that 'trouble individuals or Bahá'í communities'.

Quite apart from the concrete benefits that the support of academic Bahá'í scholarship can now offer there is also the point that studying religion is ontologically valuable and important—it is important, in other words, in its own right and for its own sake as an expression of the creative human spirit. It should not be necessary to justify the academic study of the Bahá'í Faith.

Bahá'í scholarship should be viewed as an integral part of Bahá'í community life. As human beings Bahá'ís have intellects and should use and develop them to the full. It is obvious that the scholarly study of religion is important inasmuch as the lives of countless individuals are determined by their religious beliefs and practices. It can be extremely intellectually, emotionally and spiritually stimulating and demands a high level of empathy, insight, imagination, detachment and honesty. The contemporary decline of interest in religion has perhaps influenced Bahá'ís more than many would care to admit in terms of obscuring the importance of religious studies in general and Bahá'í studies in particular. So-called 'concrete careers' or 'business success' become all important to the detriment of the alleged 'ephemerality' of the study of religion—even the Bahá'í Faith itself!

Another reason why it is imperative that Bahá'í institutions begin to support Bahá'í Studies in a concrete manner—the sooner the better in this connection—is that it is becoming increasingly important that Bahá'ís understand the history, nature and teachings of the great world religions. As time passes the Bahá'í dialogue with, for example, Hindus, Buddhists, Jews, Christians and Muslims will take on new dimensions and become more and more informed. Academically trained experts on the history and teachings of these religious traditions will be needed; Bahá'ís who are capable of informed dialogue with leading intellectuals. The standard of the Bahá'í approach to the 'great world religions' is, at present, intellectually very poor. Secondary Bahá'í literature designed to 'convert' Hindus, Buddhists, Jews and Christians, etc., has much to be desired; the errors of 'fact' are many and the apologetic stance dated. Intellectuals who read this literature are frequently horrified by the low standard of Bahá'í scholarship. The writers of such tracts are often devoted and well-meaning Bahá'ís who have not had the benefit of informed tuition. In no oriental or occidental language does there exist an informed Bahá'í approach to contemporary Jews, Muslims or Christians. The Bahá'í literature is, for the most part, dated and inadequate. Outside of the promotion of Bahá'í scholarship this situation is unlikely to improve. The establishment of Bahá'í Studies institutions would go some way towards educating Bahá'ís such that informed dialogue with other religionists becomes possible.

The support of Bahá'í Studies cannot be left for the 'future' as if the internal and external articulation of Bahá'í perspectives is divorced from scholarly research.

Objection: The establishment of an 'Institute for Bahá'í Studies' would lead to a Bahá'í intellectual elite.

This, I think, and I have heard it voiced on several occasions, is a quite absurd objection. No scholarly or academic institution for 'higher study' can exist without applying the principle of selectivity. Some individuals are better suited to specific academic pursuits than others. Everyone cannot be a 'nuclear physicist' or a philosopher. Not all Bahá'ís desire or would be particularly good at religious studies—even those who take religious studies degrees can differ markedly in ability; otherwise they would all get 'first class degrees'. Not all Bahá'ís

desire to be 'Bahá'í scholars' or engage in the disciplined approach to Bahá'í Studies. Not all Bahá'ís would be willing or able to face the challenge of studying their own Faith; to achieve the necessary balance of empathy and objectivity.

Though then, selectivity is inevitable this has nothing to do with elitism. Bahá'í scholars are simply Bahá'ís—no better and no worse—who study their faith in a systematic and disciplined manner. Those who might graduate from a course in Bahá'í Studies do not become anything; they are not then entitled to say 'I am a Bahá'í scholar', 'I am special' (God forbid) or anything else. They are nothing other than Bahá'ís who have attempted to study and understand their Faith in a disciplined manner. On a spiritual level they may emerge 'no better than anybody else' since the scholarly study of the Bahá'í Faith is not necessarily the same as 'deepening'. In actual fact the scholarly study of one's own Faith can be an extremely humbling experience. One has to admit—often frequently—that one did not know about or understand Bahá'í teaching or history as well as one might have imagined. One makes mistakes and has them exposed. Far from giving the student any sense of belonging to an elite it should be that he or she becomes more aware and tolerant of other religionists and of human limitations.

Bahá'í scholars are not 'priests' or anything comparable. They have no authority as individuals at all. Their detailed studies do not qualify them to guide others spiritually. They are simply fallible members of the Bahá'í community who, for one reason or another, have decided to study their Faith in detail. They do not constitute an elite.

Objection: The Academic approach to Bahá'í Studies is an inappropriate one.

This possible objection is based on a misunderstanding of the 'academic approach'. The academic approach is neither directly designed to promote nor destroy faith. There may be academics—both Bahá'í and not—who seem to challenge faith positions but it is often the case that what are challenged are uninformed and premature crystallisations of a supposed "Bahá'í orthodoxy". Scholars sometimes, by virtue of their detailed researches, come up with Bahá'í perspectives that are new and it is not infrequently that case that textual support for their theories is discovered—scriptural texts are found, not generally known or published, that confirm their detailed researches.

Conscious of the fact that the academic approach is not incompatible with apologetics and theology (= "faith articulating itself") each of the great world religions sponsor institutions that take an internally academic approach. Bahá'ís have nothing to fear about taking an internally academic approach. If Bahá'ís wish to establish institutions of higher learning that are respected for their academic integrity it is imperative that they understand and adopt an academic stance. It remains for the future for Bahá'í scholars and theologians to work out the kind of academic approach that is best suited to Bahá'í Studies. It seems to me to be certain however, that an inhibiting 'fundamentalist' position will not equip Bahá'í scholars to enter into adequate dialogue with the thinking world or befittingly articulate their Faith.

Objection: Are there not already learned Bahá'ís and Bahá'í scholars who are capable of fulfilling Bahá'í intellectual needs? Why bother with an Institute?

While there are learned Bahá'ís and Bahá'í scholars there is no institution designed to promote and coordinate academically informed Bahá'í scholarship and no full-time course which caters for the needs of younger Bahá'ís who desire to undertake detailed study. A definite gap exists. Furthermore, many of the learned Bahá'ís and Bahá'í scholars have no real training—if any at all—in the academic study of religion. The academic study of religion is a specialised discipline. Knowing a lot about the Bahá'í Faith seldom equips a given individual to enter into academically informed religious debate. The proposed Centre or Institute would promote this kind of scholarship; students would be trained in Bahá'í studies according to the best contemporary methodologies surrounding the study of religion. This would lead to new intellectual developments within the field of Bahá'í Studies. If Bahá'ís are to keep up with modern developments in the study of religion it is not enough to fall back on the generality of 'learned Bahá'ís'. If Bahá'ís are to enter into dialogue with modern intellectuals they must be academically informed.

A learned Bahá'í may know a great deal, for example, about the Bahá'í notion of 'progressive revelation' but this does not mean that he or she could contribute in an academic manner to the contemporary debate about the possibility of an emergent 'world theology'. A Bahá'í scholar may be learned in the Bahá'í interpretation of the Bible but may be completely unable to understand or evaluate the methods and findings of modern Biblical scholarship. Such examples could be multiplied. The setting up of a Centre or Institute on academic lines would produce scholars who might make important contributions to key contemporary concerns.

The number of learned Bahá'ís who have been trained in the study of religion remains very few. The proposed Institute would go some way to increasing their number and raising Bahá'í intellectual standards. No matter how well-qualified a Bahá'í might be in such fields as medicine, chemistry, physics, engineering, psychology or economics this does not mean that his studies make him or her a good student of religious subjects. Many Bahá'ís regarded as learned are learned in areas other than Bahá'í studies. Bahá'í studies is a self-contained and specialist field. As such it needs to be fostered and developed. Learning in an area peripheral to Bahá'í studies does not mean that academic integrity in Bahá'í studies is automatic. In brief, because contemporary Bahá'í deepening and study does not lead to

academically informed and expert knowledge in Bahá'í studies there is a need to establish academically oriented research and teaching Institutes. Oriental Bahá'í scholarship tends to polymathism rather than systematic analysis and is generally uninformed by modern scholarly methodologies. Occidental Bahá'í "deepening" is usually 'teaching-oriented' and unaware of a plethora of texts and MSS in Arabic, Persian and other languages central to the more scholarly approach. I am not suggesting that "deepening" should be scholarly research but trying to highlight the differences between them. Though there is some contact, Bahá'í "deepening" is generally as different from academic research as the Christian "Bible study group" is from a University Biblical Studies course. Many questions seldom if ever raised in Bahá'í "deepening" are fundamental to scholarly research. Texts and documents, Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í, crucial for academic research are relatively unimportant in the "deepening" context.

A PERMANENT BAHAI'I STUDIES CENTRE AND RESEARCH INSTITUTE -- FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Denis MacEoin

I have read with considerable interest Steve Lambden's 'Thoughts on the Establishment of a Permanent Baha'i Studies Centre and Research Institute' and wish to congratulate him for having set out so lucidly a proposal which appears to merit serious attention in the Baha'i community. I wish him luck in his efforts to generate sympathy for his scheme and hope sympathy may in the end lead to concrete support in the form of adequate funding for the enterprise. In general, I find myself in agreement with most of his observations, although I have reservations about what seems to me to be an overly elaborate and unduly directed syllabus proposed for a three-year course in Baha'i studies. I have no doubt that, were such an institute to be set up, it could serve a valuable function and contribute a great deal to the development of this field as well as to the enrichment of the intellectual life of Baha'is as a whole.

I do, at the same time, have one or two more general reservations the expression of which may help to clarify some of the problems that may be engendered by the establishment of such an Institute and, perhaps, assist in the formulation of more precise plans for the development of academic work in this area. Perhaps my most general observation is that the growth of Babi and Baha'i studies has always suffered from something of a tension between Baha'i perceptions of the status of Baha'ism and the actual, mundane situation of that religion. It is, I think, important to bear in mind that the notion that Baha'ism is a 'world faith' is an ontological assumption for adherents rather than a statement of observable or meaningful fact. Even if we accept the highest current estimate of Baha'i world membership as standing at 3 to 4 million (a figure which, for various reasons, I believe to be exaggerated, perhaps as much as twice the true figure), we still do not have a religious group of any greater size or significance than the Mormons or Jehovah's Witnesses. In historical terms, Baha'ism is a very new and untried phenomenon, with no significant literary, artistic, architectural, political, social, philosophical, theological, or legal achievements to its credit; it has never been the religion of a state or region or the basis for a civilization; and its spread has been the result of conscious, somewhat forced planning (assisted by modern transport and communications) rather than natural or sustained growth. I do not say any of this to be disparaging. In its own terms or in comparison with other new religious movements, Baha'ism has been extremely successful, and I see no reason why it should not continue to be so for at least a little while to come.

But it is obvious that there are acceptable reasons for doubting whether it makes sense -- for the outsider at least -- to try to put Baha'i studies on a par with, say, Buddhist or Islamic studies, or to attempt to fit Baha'ism as a major component into general courses on world religions or as part of a contribution to the development of a 'world theology'. By that standard, general world religion courses would be bursting at the seams with an endless array of small religious traditions claiming parity with the major faiths. I have often in the past expressed my concern about the rather artificial (and, I think, misleading) efforts of Baha'i institutions to have their faith introduced into schools on a par with the established religions of major ethnic minorities. At my harshest, I would describe it as something of a con trick which seeks to take advantage of general public ignorance about the true status of Baha'ism in the world as a whole. Certainly, it is, I am sure, true to say that most scholars even now would approach the Baha'i faith (in its widest sense, as embracing Babism -- something I would on other grounds dispute) from two principal angles: 1) historically, dealing only with the Babi period (up to the 1870s, perhaps), within the context of modern Shi'ism, Islamic reform, or 19th-century Iranian or Middle East history; and 2) sociologically, as a new religious movement (with rather less attention to the question of origins). Those concerned with broader studies of world religions would still be perfectly justified in giving it only the most perfunctory attention, if any at all. All this may, of course, change quite a

lot in the next 50 years or so, but for the present I believe a down-to-earth appraisal of the situation is the one most likely to lead to useful results. Even I, who am very far from promoting Baha'ism as a major topic, find difficulty in convincing colleagues that it is a subject worth considering in any depth at all.

None of this need, of course, have very much impact on purely internal studies, but it does, I think, have to be taken seriously into account in any attempt to foster relations with the academic world outside the Baha'i community or to incorporate Baha'i studies into the framework of religious studies as a whole. A realistic view of how things stand will do more to encourage a positive attitude on the part of outsiders than any amount of what will be seen as pretension or self-delusion about status and comparability. In a situation where even well-established and important minor religious traditions such as Zoroastrianism, Sikhism, or Shintoism are not well provided for, one cannot expect to bring Baha'i studies deep inside the mainstream of religious studies.

This is, in itself, something of an argument in favour of the establishment of a wholly internal institution designed to train Baha'is in the academic study of their faith. There are, however, problems with such a proposal. At present, the structure of the Baha'i administrative system is such that there would seem to be virtually no room for direct vocational training leading to a career within the Baha'i organization itself. Even if those institutions of the Baha'i faith most in need of religious experts (as opposed to computer programmers, managers, or accountants), by which I mean the Auxiliary Boards and Counsellors (and perhaps some of the Haifa-based agencies, such as the Research Centre), in their capacity as Baha'i 'ulama', were to develop along more clearly professional lines in the near future, the ethos of appointment would seem to be such as to preclude structured training for the explicit purpose of recruitment into a specific branch of the leadership cadre. The implication that an Institute such as that proposed by Steve might lead to some sort of careerism within the Baha'i administration would, I think, provoke wide opposition in Baha'i circles. It is, of course, eminently arguable from an internal Baha'i perspective that professionalism is at least as desirable in the ranks of the 'religious' leadership (dare one say 'clergy'?) as in the more mundane areas of Baha'i administration, but I shall leave such a debate to those more intimately concerned with it. Another problem with a wholly internal Institute is that, for Baha'i youth to undertake a three-year course in what would effectively be a form of seminary training, would prove of little or no direct benefit to them in choosing and pursuing careers in the outside world -- not an irrelevant consideration in the current economic climate. Inevitably, such an Institute could prove to be a viable proposition only for those with the funds and alternative career options (or family backing) to make it workable.

From an academic viewpoint, the idea of a Baha'i-financed and Baha'i-directed Institution raises serious questions. My own experience in the Baha'i community and what I know of the current activities of bodies like the Canadian Association for Studies on the Baha'i Faith (who managed, for example, recently to hold a conference on 'The Baha'i Faith and Islam' without the participation of anyone who had actually carried out original research in that field) make me skeptical about the chances for such an Institution to be accorded genuine academic freedom consonant with the standards deemed necessary in any secular establishment of higher education. It would be only natural and understandable for Baha'i institutions, were they to finance an operation of this sort, to seek to control the content and direction of courses and research, much as they currently control publications on Baha'i subjects. They are, after all, in the business of converting the world to their faith, not encouraging the dissemination of contrary opinions or doubts. I do not see how such an objection can be realistically circumvented. The mere espousal of the principle of academic integrity would not, of itself, reassure outside academics that control of some sort would not be exercised (as evidenced by the highly tendentious career of CASBF). Even established universities face serious problems concerning academic freedom in the case of externally-funded appointments (my own lectureship at Newcastle, funded by Saudi Arabia being a case in point -- there are current fears that it

may be terminated on the grounds that I carry out and supervise research into 'non-Islamic' topics — i.e. Shi'ism, Shaykhism, Babism, and Baha'ism). Those who hold the purse-strings must, in the final analysis, influence (however unconsciously) the direction and tenor of research and teaching. One has to ask whether the funding bodies would view with equanimity such possibilities as courses taught by someone like myself or a percentage of Baha'i students withdrawing from the faith or the publication of a journal or books likely to contain material that would not be passed by a Baha'i reviewing panel. Only institutions with no direct stake in the subject taught can hope to remain unconcerned by potentially divisive or damaging developments like those I have mentioned.

It seems to me that a more realistic proposition at the present time would be the creation of a centre for Babi and Baha'i studies (thus differentiated) at a department of religious studies in a reputable western university. This could be done by the provision of funds for, let us say, one lecturer and one research fellow, as well as library facilities and funding for publications, including a journal. Such funding would have to be given absolutely and without strings of any description, ideally in the form of an outright endowment to the university in question, with no stipulations whatever concerning the appointment of incumbents, the content of the library, or the review of publications. It would take some courage on the part of whatever institution (or individual) provided the funds to set up such a centre, but their faith in such a venture would, I believe, be amply rewarded by a reciprocal faith in the teaching and research carried out there.

It seems to me that an essential prerequisite for discussions leading to the establishment of such a centre will be the recognition on the part of Baha'i officialdom of the difference between critical academic study of the Baha'i religion and unacademic hostile comment. If it can be accepted that academic work on religion must entail some degree of controversy and even at times lead to trenchant criticism of established positions and dogmatic assumptions, but that this is crucial to genuinely independent and intellectually valid research, then the possibility of a centre staffed at some stage only by non-Baha'is (just as a centre for Islamic studies might well have no Muslim staff on occasions) might appear less threatening (or less conspiratorial) than it possibly does at present. It is a two-sided affair. If the Baha'i leadership wishes Baha'ism to be taken seriously in academic circles and wants to introduce it into university curricula on some level, it must come to terms with the fact that this can only really be done by taking the academics themselves seriously and according them the respect they deserve as professionals doing their job as they best know how.

It really boils down in the end to a question of professionalism. Steve has already alluded to the fiasco of the Afnan/Hatcher critique of my article on Babi holy war. What was crucial to that whole situation was the fact that it involved two amateur scholars wading into a controversy they were unequipped to handle (but which they/they knew a lot about), using a thin veneer of scholarship as a mask for what were essentially fundamentalist motives, ending in the production of a naive attack on a professional study which, whatever its merits or demerits, accuracy or inaccuracy, was based on a thorough investigation of complex source materials. As I state in my response, the Afnan/Hatcher article performed a serious disservice to the cause of scholarship in the area, whether by Baha'is or others, to the extent that it would implicate the former in its polemical motivation and fundamentalist methodology, and discourage the latter from involvement in a field of research which could lead to unpleasant situations of that kind. Only a thorough-going professionalism can help allay the fears raised by ill-informed critiques such as this or the earlier Baha'i attacks on E.G. Browne.

I do not think my suggestion precludes Steve's idea for a Baha'i Institute in its own right. The two proposals would be parallel approaches to a complex problem. Steve proceeds from a position of optimism with regard to the growing status of Baha'ism as a faith and a community, I take a more cynical view of the importance and future prospects of the movement. To that extent, the purposes Steve has in mind might best be served by an internally-run seminary-style institution (similar to others established in recent years by adherents of other new religious movements, such as the Unification Theological Seminary, the Religious Science School of Ministry, and the Dharma Realm Buddhist University);

more secular academic ends would be met by the provision of some teaching and research in a single establishment under non-Baha'i control, attracting both Baha'i and non-Baha'i students. It is, of course, possible that one of the results of such a division would be that the Baha'i Institute would become more theologically-oriented and the outside Centre a more strictly religious studies operation, but I think such a demarcation is implicit in the situation. I know Steve wants to create a Baha'i Institution that would conform to the highest academic standards, but, as I have argued in two earlier articles in this Bulletin, there would be tensions between such an aim and the aims of Baha'i scholarship as seen, for example, by the Haifa Research Centre.

In closing, perhaps I can reverse Steve's basic concern about the lack of academically-trained Baha'i scholars (a concern which I nonetheless endorse) by drawing attention to the fact that, as things stand, I am still the only non-Baha'i scholar engaged in full-scale research and writing on Babi or Baha'i subjects. Until larger numbers of outsiders can be persuaded to enter the field in a serious way (even if only to the extent of two or three major publications), there must remain an imbalance the effects of which will continue to be deleterious to the proper development of the subject. I feel this particularly acutely because of the reception my work receives in certain Baha'i circles. Were there to be a wider non-Baha'i scholarship on the subject, it would be more difficult to dismiss some of my theories and approaches as my own personal eccentricities or the results of personal animus: there would be a wider context into which my work could be fitted, as in the case of any other academic subject. And that in itself would, I venture to say, prove a major step forward in the process of making Babi and Baha'i studies take their place, however minor, in the full spectrum of scholarship.