

NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE BAHÁ'Í STUDIES SEMINAR: DECEMBER 6-7 1986.

A group of Bahá'ís from the U.K. and elsewhere met over the weekend December 6-7th 1986 to present papers and to discuss various aspects of the academic approach to Bahá'í Studies. In the opening session the present state of Bahá'í scholarship was analysed and discussed. It was felt by participants that the Bahá'í International Community has yet to become adequately aware of and supportive towards academically oriented Bahá'í scholarship; especially important in view of the emergence of a more informed Bahá'í dialogue with academically trained intellectuals and religionists. An unbecoming anti-intellectualism (wholly incompatible with Bahá'í scriptural guidance) has, in some quarters, had adverse effects upon Bahá'í intellectuals. Greater and continued support needs to be given to those aspects of Bahá'í intellectualism capable of nurturing and perpetuating a truly scholarly and academic tradition. On an internal level many important tasks remain unfulfilled; including the interviewing of experienced living Bahá'ís with memories of persons and events which should be recorded for posterity.

The following papers were presented over the weekend:

Moojan Momen, Religions East and West and the Bahá'í teaching of the 'Oneness of Religion.'

The Bábí Upheavals of 1848-1852: An Analysis of Paradigms
[reproduced in this Bulletin pp.4-21].

Philip Smith, Bahá'í Organization and the Early Years of the British Bahá'í Community.

Stephen Lambden, The Sinaitic Mysteries: Some notes on Moses-Sinai Motifs in Bábí and Bahá'í Scripture. (cf. SBBH. Vol. 5.).

As a result of this seminar a letter expressing the views of the participants about the importance of academic Bahá'í scholarship was addressed to the Universal House of Justice. Regretably it could not be forwarded until 22 October 1988 and a reply was received dated 19th December 1988:

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

BAHÁ'Í WORLD CENTRE

Department of the Secretariat

19 December 1988

Mr. Stephen Lambden
30 Victoria Square
Jesmond
Newcastle upon Tyne NE2 4DE
United Kingdom

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

The Universal House of Justice referred to the Research Department your letter of 22 October 1988 in which you submitted a list of questions in connection with your studies for your doctorate as well as Bahá'í activities. We are now directed to send you the enclosed copy of the memorandum prepared in response. The attachments to this memorandum are being carried by hand of a returning pilgrim who will no doubt contact you for instructions as to their delivery.

With reference to the letter which you had prepared on 22 December 1986 and been unable to forward, the House of Justice appointed an Ad Hoc Committee to study your submission on the Development of Bahá'í Studies at the Academic Level and a copy of its findings submitted to the House of Justice is also enclosed.

The House of Justice is delighted to have this evidence of your return to health and wishes you well in your scholastic endeavours. We are to assure you of its prayers on your behalf in the Holy Shrines that divine confirmations may descend upon all your efforts in the path of service to His Cause.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,



For Department of the Secretariat

Enclosures (2)

M E M O R A N D U M

To: The Universal House of Justice

Date: 19 November 1988

From: Ad Hoc Committee

Re: Submission on the Development of Bahá'í Studies at the Academic Level

As requested by the Universal House of Justice, we provide the following comments on the recommendations for the development of Bahá'í studies contained in the letter prepared at the time of the Bahá'í Studies Conference in Newcastle upon Tyne in December 1986 and submitted by Mr. Stephen Lambden in October 1988.

The letter draws attention to the need to encourage Bahá'í studies at the academic level, to create a group of Bahá'ís who are professionally trained in their own and other religions and who are therefore able to communicate effectively with academics and experts in other religions. It further explains that this need is currently unmet due, in part, to the fact that individuals are discouraged from entering the field of religious studies because of the lack of adequate funds to support them during their training period and the scarcity of later employment opportunities, and to the fact that Bahá'í studies is not, as yet, a recognized field of academic study.

The letter submits, for the consideration of the Universal House of Justice, two suggestions for action that could be taken to alleviate the situation, namely:

1. the creation of a small number of post-graduate and post-doctoral fellowships in Bahá'í studies which could be tenable at a university anywhere in the world
2. the establishment of an international centre for Bahá'í studies to act as a focal point for the development of Bahá'í studies.

Before addressing the specific recommendations we feel it is useful to make some preliminary comments about the nature, scope and purpose of Bahá'í scholarship.

The development of Bahá'í scholarship is a matter of continuing interest to the Institutions of the Faith. One of the objectives of the Six Year Plan is to foster appreciation of the Faith "in scholarly and academic circles by developing Bahá'í scholarship". Bahá'í scholarship clearly has a vital role to play in the consolidation of the Bahá'í community and in enhancing its ability to respond to opportunities that arise from the emergence of the Faith into the arena of public attention.

In the Bahá'í context, scholarship is linked to the promotion and protection of the Faith, and with service to humanity, a service that is expressed directly through the extension of knowledge and the study of subjects that conduce to human well-being, and indirectly, through the gradual transformation of scholarly disciplines by their increasing contact with the light of the Divine teachings.

Bahá'í scholars are called upon not only to develop a high level of competence in their own chosen fields, but also to become scholars of the Faith and its teachings. Writing on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, his secretary stated:

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....

This concept of scholarship, which allies spiritual knowledge and qualities with secular knowledge, and the desire and ability of the believer to relate the teachings to current thought, is reiterated in the following extract from a letter dated 21 October 1943 to an individual. It states:

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.

The potential scope of Bahá'í scholarship is exceedingly broad. The Universal House of Justice in a letter dated 8 May 1985 addressed to the Bahá'í Youth of the World, for example, challenged "today's youth" to aspire toward excellence. It called upon them to:

...move towards the front ranks of the professions, trades, arts, and crafts which are necessary to the further progress of humankind...

While the definition of Bahá'í scholarship implicit in the extracts cited above in no way devalues academic learning, it is evident that an academic education constitutes but one important avenue toward the acquisition of scholarly knowledge and expertise. It is obviously not the only means of achieving this end. Further, though the pursuit of religious studies at the academic level is a useful and praiseworthy endeavour, which will doubtless contribute significantly to the advancement of one field of Bahá'í studies, the Universal House of Justice envisages that the development of the Faith will require believers with expertise in a broad range of specialities. For example, in addressing the Bahá'í youth in June 1966, the House of Justice wrote:

The Bahá'í community will need men and women of many skills and qualifications; for, as it grows in size the sphere of its activities in the life of society will increase and diversify. Let Bahá'í youth, therefore, consider the best ways in which they can use and develop their native abilities for the service of mankind and the Cause of God, whether this be as farmers, teachers, doctors, artisans, musicians, or any one of the multitude of livelihoods that are open to them.

The need articulated above by the Universal House of Justice inevitably has implications for the development of Bahá'í studies and underlines the importance of fostering scholarly activity in many different subject areas.

With regard to the suggestion about the creation of a small number of fellowships to enable individuals to pursue advanced academic degrees in Bahá'í studies (with an emphasis on religious studies), there are undoubtedly difficulties to be encountered by Bahá'ís entering this field and sacrifices to be made in this worthy form of Bahá'í service. At the same time, it is the view of the Committee that, at this particular stage in its unfoldment, the Bahá'í community stands in need of so many different kinds of expertise that it would be premature for the Institutions to single out this one area of Bahá'í studies for special funding. On the other hand, it would be appropriate for the individual believers in need to approach their National or Local Spiritual Assembly for assistance in locating funds to finance their studies.

As to the recommendation about the establishment of an international centre for Bahá'í studies to serve as a focal point for the development of Bahá'í studies: in the past, when such proposals have been made, the Universal House of Justice has expressed the preference for a more decentralized approach. The House of Justice has favoured the establishment of a number of separate organizing bodies, e.g., Associations for Bahá'í Studies, in different parts of the world, rather than having one world-wide Association. It does, however, acknowledge the desirability of there being "one international coordinating centre" with which the separate Associations could affiliate, and in a letter dated 1 January 1984 written on its behalf to the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada, it is stated that the House of Justice feels that this centre "should certainly be in Canada".

In light of the foregoing guidance and recognizing the differing stages of development of Bahá'í studies in the world-wide Bahá'í community, it would seem wise to continue, for the present, with the more decentralized approach to the organization of Bahá'í scholarship (in the broadest application of this term), rather than to attempt to crystallize such activities. This would allow for the natural evolution of the national and regional Associations and would help to preserve a degree of diversity so necessary at this early stage in the development of Bahá'í studies.

It is suggested, therefore, that the British friends interested in Bahá'í studies (religious studies) endeavour to work with the Association for Bahá'í Studies in Canada, in its capacity as an "international coordinating centre", seeking consultation and assistance with some of the needs they identify. Such collaboration could well hasten the further development of this aspect of the Association's functioning. Another group to which the friends could turn for possible collaboration is the recently established Association for Bahá'í Studies in Ireland.

In the long term, it is possible that, following the establishment of the Centre for the Study of the Texts, the Universal House of Justice might consider assigning the functions of stimulating and coordinating Bahá'í scholarship to this Institution.

NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE BAHÁ'Í STUDIES SEMINAR . JUNE 23rd-25th 1989.

Over the weekend of June 23rd-25th, more than 30 friends met at the Bahá'í Centre in Newcastle-on-Tyne for a Bahá'í Studies Seminar. Six presentations were made on a variety of areas related to the scripture, administration, and history of the Faith, and the practices of the Bahá'í community:

'Some Facts and a Credibility Gap: a Cause Within a Cause' by Keith Mellard (on the involvement of women in the administration of the British Bahá'í community).

'Liberalism and Fundamentalism: Towards an Understanding of the Dichotomy' by Moojan Momen.

'The Concept of "Manifestation" in the Bahá'í Writings and in the Gospel' by Kházeh Fananapazir and Sína Fazel.

'Some Aspects of Resurrection and the Resurrection of Jesus' by Stephen Lambden.

'What Was a Bahá'í?: Concerns of British Bahá'ís 1920-57' by Philip Smith.

'A Law Student's Reflections on International Law and Human Rights' by Payam Akhavan.

A letter from the Universal House of Justice in response to proposals made at a previous Seminar was read, and all those attending joined in wide-ranging discussion on many aspects of Bahá'í scholarship.

On the Saturday evening of the seminar weekend a brief synopsis of the important contribution of E.G. Browne to Bábí-Bahá'í studies was presented by Moojan Momen. Among other things it was pointed out that early in 1889 EGB was involved in studying and translating parts of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas at his parent's residence in Newcastle upon Tyne. The north of England has had small numbers of Bahá'ís for at least 50 years. The British Bahá'í Journal of 1940, for example, reported "signs of great activity" in Newcastle, mentioned that the Theosophical Society had been twice addressed by a Miss D. Jacobs of 9 Alexandra Place (Newcastle), and that there were Bahá'í study classes going on at the time. A Local Spiritual Assembly has been in existence in Newcastle more or less continually since the early 1950's.

It was during this same Saturday evening, June 24th 1989, that Dr Moojan Momen reviewed the life of EGB at the Civic Centre of Newcastle upon Tyne (for a few details see the article reproduced on p. 34 of this Bulletin).

One Hundredth Anniversary of First Public Mention of the Faith in the West

[The following was written at the request of the National Assembly to remind us of this important anniversary in our, and the world's, Bahá'í History.]

by Dr M Momen

Shoghi Effendi, in *God Passes By* (p. 256), refers to the brief mention that was made of the Bahá'í Faith at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893. Many Bahá'ís have taken to calling this the first public mention of the Faith in the West. Although it may well have been the first public mention of the Faith in North America, the first public mention of the Faith in the West was in Britain in 1889.

The religion of the Báb was brought to prominence by the Comte de Gobineau in his book *Religions et Philosophies dans l'Asie centrale*, which was published in 1865. At least one public reference to the religion of the Báb was made as a consequence of this book. The famous writer and critic, Matthew Arnold, made a brief reference to the Faith in an address that he gave to the Birmingham and Midland Institute on 16 October 1871 (See M. Momen, *Bábí and Bahá'í Religions*, p. 25). However, the great interest caused by Gobineau's book makes it certain that if we were to search hard, other more extensive references based on Gobineau could be found. This however, only relates to the religion of the Báb.

The fact that the religion of the Báb had transformed itself into the Bahá'í Faith was somewhat slow in reaching the West. The person to bring this to the attention of the people of the West was Professor Edward Granville Browne of Cambridge University. Browne spent almost a year in Iran in 1887-8. On his return to England in September 1888, he began to organize the information that he had collected about the Faith. Then in early 1889, he began to write up his findings regarding the Bahá'í Faith for an academic paper.

During the Easter vacation that year, he returned to his family home in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. There on 29 March 1889, he gave a presentation on the Faith before the Essay Society. Later the same year, he presented two papers to consecutive meetings of the Royal Asiatic Society in London on 15 April and 17 June, 1889. The two papers were entitled "The Bábís of Persia. I. Sketch of their History, and Personal Experience amongst them" and "The Bábís of Persia II. Their Literature and Doctrines." These two papers were published in the *Journal of the Society* in July and October of the same year. (See *Selections from the Writings of E.G. Browne on the Bábí and Bahá'í Religions* {ed. M. Momen} pp.144-315).

Therefore we are this year celebrating the one hundred anniversary of the first public references to the Faith in the West. These papers were also the first substantial translations of the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh into English. The second paper contains parts of the *Lawh-i-Nasir*, *Suratu'l-Haykal* (including extracts from the Tablets to the Shah, the Pope, Napoleon III, Queen Victoria, the Russian Emperor, and the *Suriy-i-Ra'is*), and the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. The very first translations that the present author is aware of are the few words of the Tablet to the Pope translated by Rev. Bruce Wilson in 1874 (see *Studies in Bábí and Bahá'í History* {ed. M. Momen}, vol. 1, p.63-4. The year given there is an error. Baron Victor Rosen had also published a translation of a few words of the *Suratu'l-Haykal* into French in 1877 without being aware of the identity of the Author (*Collection Scientifiques de L'Institut des Langues Orientales*; vol. 1; *Manuscrits Arabes*, pp 198, 199).

[The Bahá'ís of Newcastle celebrated this centenary by holding a meeting in Newcastle's Civic Centre on 24 June. In attendance were the Lord Mayor of Newcastle, Councillors Terence Coney and Lady Mayoress, Councillor Isobel Cooney who were presented with two Bahá'í books: "A Crown of Beauty" and "The Promise of World Peace".

Dr Momen, the speaker for the evening reviewed the life of Edward Granville Browne reminding the gathering that Browne's family lived in Newcastle and he, himself, is buried in Newcastle Elswick Cemetery. Dr Momen mentioned in particular the meeting Browne had with Bahá'u'lláh in 1890. Browne wrote movingly of this meeting and the words spoken by Bahá'u'lláh to him are often quoted:

"We desire but the good of the world and the happiness of all nations; Yet they deem Us a stirrer up of strife and seditious words worthy of bondage and banishment... That all nations should become one in faith and all men as brothers; that the bonds of affection and unity between the sons of men should be strengthened; that diversity of religions should cease, and differences of race be annulled - What harm is there in this? Yet so it shall be; these fruitless strifes, these ruinous wars shall pass away, and the 'Most Great Peace' shall come..."

The Newcastle Bahá'í community is also honoured by the fact that their city is twinned with the city of Haifa and some of the Lord Mayors of Newcastle have been to the Holy Land and visited the Shrines.]

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