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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), include contributions from both Baha'i and non-Baha'i academics, and be befittingly published rather than photostatically reproduced.

The success of this Bulletin, which has the blessing of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United Kingdom (though they are not responsible for any of the views expressed within it), 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 which would be welcomed:-

- a) Articles or short notes and studies whether historical, philological, sociological 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 or articles or reviews, etc. It would be particularly useful to receive notice of the now numerous publications in English, French, German, Persian and Arabic, etc., that are becoming available in many countries of the world.
- e) Previously unpublished notes or documents.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.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Each issue of this Bulletin may be purchased at the following rates (inc. postage)-: U.K. £2.00. Europe £2.50.p. Rest of world £3.00 (or equivalent). All subscriptions and communications should be addressed to -: Mr. Stephen Lambden, 77 Rothwell Road, Gosforth, Newcastle upon Tyne, England, U.K.

EDITORIAL

May I take this opportunity to thank all those who have responded to my request for contributions made in the last issue of this Bulletin. This is not to say however, that there is not still a great need for a steady flow of scholarly contributions. Many among us, to repeat myself, are in possession of a texts and documents which should be shared. There has always been a tendency among Baha'i intellectuals to covet unpublished-- and even published-- materials of importance for Baha'i studies. This form of taqiya is unfortunate inasmuch as Baha'i scholarship cannot flourish unless there is a sharing of sources. We may all be busy but it does not take much time to post off a few pages that might have been lying around and which could well be of interest at least to some readers of this Bulletin.

Stephen Lambden (Ed.).

A Note on Babi and Baha'i Numbers in Iran

Peter Smith

It is not yet possible to say with any certainty what the total number of Babis may have been. According to the Bab himself, in a work composed in the latter part of 1848, one hundred thousand adherents had been converted during the first four years of his career. (MacEoin, 1982: 117-18), a figure also referred to by the Russian Ambassador Dolgorukov in February 1849, on the authority of the Iranian chief minister, Amir Kabir (Dolgorukov, 1966: 19), and by the British minister Sheil in May 1850 (Momen, 1981: 7n). That in the case of the two diplomats at least, this was very much a guess as to the actual numbers of Babis is underlined by Sheil's reference to an alternative (but presumed to be less likely) figure of fifty thousand. Whatever the case, no detailed support for any figure can be supplied, indeed, with a semi-secret organization lacking detailed records (such as Babism), there seems to be no way in which a figure can be confirmed or denied. Anyway, given that at least some Babis resorted to taqiyya (dissimulation), and that a wider circle of secret Babis and close sympathizers existed in addition to those who were definitely identified as Babis, what figure is being estimated? Again, Sheil is clear that he is referring to the number of Babi men, and we have simply no idea to what extent women and children were involved in the movement. If significant numbers were involved (but I think not) then the figure could even have been higher.

As to the number of Baha'is, it is easiest to start with the most recent figures as they are likely to be the most reliable. Accordingly, the number of Baha'is in modern Iran has been variously estimated by Baha'i sources as about 400,000 (March 1979) or more commonly 300,000 (Dec. 1981)¹, whilst informed non-Baha'i sources put the number at about 350,000 (Sept. 1979)², or at 295,000 (mid 1975) to 340,000 (mid 1980) (Barrett, 1982:388). Whilst several thousand Baha'is have undoubtedly left Iran since the Islamic revolution of February 1979 and a small number have been forced to recant their faith, it seems highly unlikely that these together could account for the discrepancy of 100,000 between the March 1979 and December 1981 estimates. I therefore assume the March 1979 figure to be an overestimate and would assume that the number of registered Baha'is in modern Iran is in the region of 300 - 350,000, this

figure including men, women and children. These uncertainties doubtless stem from the difficulties encountered in enumerating an unrecognized/persecuted religious movement which even the movement's own leaders may experience. Prior to the present century these difficulties were compounded by the comparative lack of organization within the Baha'i community and the conditions of extreme secrecy under which most Baha'is lived, all sorts of speculations being rife. Thus, J.D. Rees (1896), who travelled through Iran in 1885, was variously told there were no "Babis" at all in Iran, and that one-third of the educated classes were "Babis". Baha'is for their part appear to have grossly overestimated their numbers (for whatever reason), and many European observers followed suit. Thus Baha'i sources informed the British Consul in Bushire (c.1888) that they had a total Middle Eastern and Indian membership of five million (Momen, 1981:247), whilst Curzon (1892, i:499) estimated that there were at least half a million Iranian Baha'is and probably more like a million, and in 1903, Baha'i and diplomatic circles in Cairo were speculating on the possibility that Baha'ism would soon become the predominant religion in Iran (Phelps, 1904:X). Some later observers were, by contrast, liable to make what were apparently gross underestimates. Thus, Rosita Forbes (1931:168) doubted if there were more than twenty thousand Iranian Baha'is, whilst J.R. Richards (1932:225) placed their upper limit at thirty thousand, and W.M. Miller (1974:215) thought that by the time of 'Abdu'l Baha's death (1921) there would have been at most fifty thousand Baha'is in the whole world. Similarly, Wilber (1967:165) has cited an (undated) official Iranian government estimate of fifty thousand Baha'is. I find none of these figures really credible, however, given the lack of any evidence for the violent fluctuations in the number of Baha'is which they presume. Compatible both with the assumption of relative stability in numbers and with the more definite 1979/81 figures are a series of estimates which placed the number of Baha'is in Iran at 100,000 in the 1880s (M.F. Wilson, 1885:829), and somewhere between 100,000 and 200,000 in both the 1910s (S.G. Wilson, 1915:26), and the 1950s (Berger, 1954:125). On this basis a coherent pattern may be suggested. Taking the estimated percentages for Babi/Baha'i numbers as a fraction of the Iranian population as a whole (Table 1), then at the peak of Babi activity they may be assumed to have won the allegiance of perhaps two per cent of the population.

TABLE 1: Babi and Baha'i Numbers in Iran

Date	Estimated Iranian Babi/Baha'i population.	Estimated total Iranian population (millions).	Babi/Baha'is as a percentage of total population.
late 1840s	100,000	4.5 - 6	1.7 - 2.2
1880s	100,000	5 - 8	1.25 - 2.0
1910s	100 - 200,000	8 - 10	1.0 - 2.5
1950s	100 - 200,000	18.9 (1956)	0.5 - 1.1
1979	300 - 350,000	33.6 (1976)	0.9 - 1.0

SOURCES: For Babi and Baha'i figures see text. For the total Iranian population estimates see Abrahamian, 1974:14; Behnam, 1968:471; Bharier 1972; Clark, 1972; Curzon, 1892, ii:471; Issawi, 1971:28. The figures for 1956 and 1976 are derived from the Iranian Census, all figures prior to 1956 are at best educated guesses.

From 1850, numbers may then be assumed to have declined dramatically, stabilizing as the community became more ordered and then increasing quite markedly towards the end of the century, the dynamic nature of the Baha'i community at that time, and perhaps the general sense of social change, encouraging the Baha'is and others to be unrealistically confident as to their rate of growth. Thus, the very high estimates for the 1880s - 1910s, whilst, at best, the Baha'is appear only to have equalled the Babi percentage of two percent of the population. This spurt of growth would then appear to have ceased in the 1920s or 1930s, outside observers referring to the lack of increase (Forbes, 1931), or even decline (Richards, 1932), in numbers. Whilst a decline in absolute numbers may not have occurred, the percentage of Baha'is in the general population seems thereafter to have declined, remaining at one percent or less through the 1950s to the present day. Whatever occasional success the Iranian Baha'is may have had in gaining new converts it does not appear to have made an appreciable difference to their overall strength. Necessarily, the Iranian Baha'i community has come to rely on natural increase and the successful socialization of its children in order to maintain its existence. If -- reflecting emerging middle class norms -- the Iranian Baha'is have a lower fertility rate than the Iranian average then this would contribute to their relative decline, but whether this is the case is unknown to me.³ Whilst thousands of Iranian Baha'is have emigrated this has never been a large scale movement until recently and may thus be disregarded as a major demographic factor. The number of Azalis has always remained far smaller,

Dr. Sa'eed Khan estimating their number to be 1500 in 1930 and Jalal Azal putting them at between four and five thousand in 1963 (Miller, 1974:114, n.54; cf. Barrett, 1982:388; Keddie, 1981:52).

NOTES

This paper represents an amended version of section 7.1 of my Ph.D. thesis, "A Sociological Study of the Babi and Baha'i Religions" (Lancaster, 1982).

1. Press releases issued by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United Kingdom: "Iran and the British Baha'i Community", issued 14 March 1979; and "Iran Secretly Executes Baha'i National Leaders", dated 28 December 1981. Press releases subsequent to December 1981 have all referred to a figure of 300,000.
2. A "Declaration on the State of Religious Minorities in Iran" by the Human Rights Commission of the Federation of Protestant Churches in Switzerland (Zurich), dated 12 September.
3. Barrett (1982:388) estimates the Baha'i growth rate as being 3.05% as compared with a national growth rate of 3.08%

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Introduction

The relationship between the Baha'i Faith and scholarship in the work of those involved in Baha'i or Baha'i oriented study is a problem area that has remained fairly unthematized. Though there were two attempts at Cambridge to explore this relationship, I feel that we have not really penetrated to the heart of some of the provisional suggestions expressed in the two ethics and methodology seminars. Speaking for myself, I certainly experience the tension between my area of 'scholarship' and the complex phenomenon known as the Baha'i Faith. Now notice the presupposition expressed in the last sentence - it is a crucial one, and one I will unpack later: is the problem a function of the objective interface between scholarship (in my case philosophy and theology) and the Baha'i Faith, or does the problem lie in my as yet untutored and undeveloped consciousness? This is one of the issues, and I am grateful to Dr. Momen for providing the opportunity to reaffirm and develop some themes proposed in the Second Cambridge Seminar on Ethics and Methodology in October 1979. Needless to say this paper will be brief and programmatic.

The Depth Grammar Of Scholarship

Our concern as Baha'is about the relationship between scholarship and the Baha'i Faith is paralleled by a similar concern in the non-Baha'i religious community, especially in the Christian tradition since the Enlightenment period. To some degree then, what can be said about the Baha'i Faith and scholarly analysis will be equally relevant to those engaged in a similar problematic outside the Baha'i Faith.

Placing the problem, as I have done, in this wider context implies that the issues are to do with the structure of reality as such and not simply with methodology. This high sounding phrase refers to the description of the very nature of our most basic activities and their extra-linguistic context in which the scholarship/Baha'i Faith dichotomy is one of the many expressions. I want to affirm that the problem of scholarship is a function not simply of scholars intention (with its subsequent consequences), which Momen has ably

listed under the heading of 'Dangers of Baha'i Scholarship', but of scholarship as such; and this firstly, insofar as scholarship involves an abstract, distanced, refined syntactic framework in which a sentential structure presents a series of concepts to be entertained both by the scholar and the prospective reader, where these concepts somehow mirror what they are about. Secondly, insofar as scholarship can, though need not, become a process of comprehensive criticality knowing no authority other than its own forward movement. When scholarship operates like this, nothing is, so to speak, sacred except the omniscience of criticism. It must be admitted, however, that this is an idealization of the scholarly process. What usually happens is that some sector of experience is comprehensively criticised by someone operating with values and beliefs, which themselves have or will become the object of comprehensive criticism by another person. However, idealisation certainly brings out the point that a method (in this case rationality) can think itself to have no bounds. Thus the problem for the prospective Baha'i scholar is not simply something that occurs in his own head, so to speak, such as pride, impatience, intolerance or resentment etc. (c.f. Momen p.2). In fact there is no logical contradiction between a Baha'i scholar having those qualities just listed and that same scholar producing a fine piece of work. The problem is, as I have said, a function of the objective interface between scholarship and the Baha'i Faith. Furthermore, there are, I suggest two features to this one objective interface which correspond to the above two aspects.

Feature 1 comprises a problem in fact, where in fact means the way things are done now, though their being done in this way is not the only way.

Feature 2 comprises a problem in principle in which the very fabric of a state of affairs constrains and maintains the problem.

Feature 1 refers to the problem of relating a comprehensive criticality to a field in which authority plays an important role. There is, however, nothing in the nature of comprehensive criticality as far as I can see, to stop this authority becoming one of its premises, providing that this obviously complex relationship be adequately mapped. Feature 2 refers to the problem of relating a conceptual framework to something which is fundamentally non-conceptual or experiential. Here I can see no way out. There is something about the non-conceptual that makes descriptive language redundant. Perhaps that is why some philosophers who wanted to maintain the objectivity of religious discourse developed an evocative theory of religious language.

What I have outlined above has been historically expressed as the Faith/Reason dichotomy, where faith, traditionally understood, involves an act of the intellect firmly assenting to a truth given on authority and assisted by an act of the will. Applying this model to the Baha'i Faith: I assent to a proposition or propositions (expressed in the Baha'i writings or from a certified Baha'i source) which I myself cannot "see" (in an intellectual sense) but which I accept because of God's veracious testimony (located in the Central figures). Now traditionally, the intellect can only assent to that whose nature is 'unconcealed', so to speak, and which is clearly expressed, inferred and grounded. In the case of religious propositions this is obviously not the case, hence the intellect is prompted by the will, since it is the will that apprehends the (in this case) existential value of accepting that which it does not "know". Ever since the Enlightenment period scholars have tended to wed the desire for clarity with the above mentioned omniscience of criticism. The rise of the natural sciences in the 19th century has certainly reinforced this quest for clarity (though interestingly enough quantum mechanics involves a critique of the neutral 'look' - a close relation of clarity - at the world which many feel science yields). Grounding these developments is the perceptual process as the paradigm of knowledge. The rise of the social sciences, specifically the Sociology of Knowledge prompted by Marxist (and Mannheim's) analysis, brings to the foreground the social and historical location of our thoughts. The concept of Ideology is introduced as a description of those beliefs which somehow justify class privilege or an elite. Problematic though this is, the important issue is that society or rather societal forces are the focus of analysis rather than participant accounts. The two prongs of Natural and Social Science attempts to reinterpret religion and religious experience in their own particular fashion - both leading to a critique of religious authority. Philosophical analysis prompted by the success and robust approach of the Natural sciences also aids in the denuding of religious authority by systematically analysing religious utterances as cognitively meaningless (though allowing them to be expressions of the utterers emotive engagement with experience). Even the Wittgensteinian rehabilitation via the Sprachspiel concept makes religion simply one form of life among others.

My very cursory account of the Faith/Reason dichotomy (I have for example, not touched on the role of psychoanalysis nor existential analysis) seeks to highlight the reductive thrust of the development of the concept of rationality. The issue is, as far as I can see, this: if faith (as understood above) is based

upon what one considers to be God's veracious testimony then it is fairly easy given the development of comprehensive criticality grounding the natural and social sciences to reduce this decision and the referent of the decision to something else.

Now the scholar embarking on an analysis of the various aspects of the Baha'i Faith will be an heir to the methods and content of this comprehensively critical rationality where often an a priori assumption operates in which participant and text-based accounts are reduced to another supposedly clearer, more descriptive conceptuality. What happens is that reasons proffered in the participant/text-based accounts are reduced to causes whose access is dependant upon piercing through to another more general (thus accurate) and lucid syntax. One way in which the non-Baha'i academic community have overcome reductionism is simply to refuse validity to the a priority of the move and to appeal to a cultural relativism (c.f. Wittgenstein again, and others), where each system of thought and practice carries along with it its own internal logic. I do not want to enter here into an attempted critique of reductionism or cultural relativism but rather to suggest that there is a problem in scholarship and that this problem is a function of its critical mode in relation to an authority structure. This latter structure resists penetration and requires a certain measure of obedience from the scholar. Under the aegis of the Natural and Social sciences rationality and obedience have never been comfortable bed-fellows, and this because, as we have seen, rationality traditionally involves the acquisition of clear and distinct ideas of unconcealed essences or natures, whereas faith involves a decision in an area in which clear, 'unconcealed' and distinct ideas are not fully operative. The aligning of faith with mere belief or belief-plus and rationality with a matrix for fully justified knowledge-claims is another example of the traditional view. Part of Baha'i scholarship will involve a critique of this dichotomy; a repudiation of a historically conditioned conceptuality. Nevertheless it is a contemporary problem for the prospective Baha'i scholar, and as I said above, it is a problem in fact for there is nothing in the internal structure of rationality as such which precludes the role of an authority (transcendent or otherwise); only a peculiarly conceived rationality finds it abhorrent. Much more needs to be said about this area. Hopefully it may be pursued elsewhere.

Concept And Experience

The second problem of scholarship in relation to the Baha'i Faith involves what I believe to be a problem in principle. That is, it is not merely a problem of a method requiring methodological revision, nor the fuller utilization of what we could call an *underachieving* operation (i.e. widening the horizon of a narrowly directed intellectual and rational activity). I want to break this second problem area into some components.

1) There is an (irreducible?) dislocation between language (as a supply of words, constructions, set expressions etc. which form the matrix out of which sentences may be formed according to particular grammatical rules. Sentences are used to perform speech acts of which scholarship is one particular type.) and experience (this is a difficult area to unpack; I would say simply that language and speech are embedded in^a logically prior relationship to the world in which the former do not exhaust the possibilities of the latter. The saying/doing or saying/showing polarities only hint at what I mean by the dislocation. I do not doubt that language interpenetrates our life to the point of making experience possible but the more reflexive we become about experience the more we may lose touch with the actual enactment of experience).

2) Language operates on the whole via the use of concepts, where a concept is considered either as a mental representation of the nature of a 'thing' or as the capacity or skill to have ideas of a certain sort which we usually exercise verbally. Concepts seen as mental representations of an essence constitutes the dominant view from Plato to the 20th century. Concepts seen as capacities or dispositions to have certain ideas which we then exercise in a behavioural-verbal manner as responses to experience is the generally accepted view of contemporary philosophers and psychologists. In the older view concepts reflect the structural divisions of reality and are expressed in the form of words which are considered the names of concepts. The contemporary view on the other hand sees reality as the 'factual' backcloth in which we exercise the responsive capacities and skills - the divisions of reality delineated by concepts in the older view are not in the contemporary understanding so clearly cut. I suggest scholarship needs to completely move away from the older view.

3) Scholarship attempts to deal with its subject matter (for us the Baha'i Faith) via the use of 'lucid' concepts, that is, concepts denuded of their symbolic or evocative (even analogical) nature. The important pre-

supposition is that these concepts allow access to the nature of its subject matter in a better way than any other type of discourse e.g. participant or textual accounts.

Given this, if the Baha'i Faith is primarily a therapy, a means for the possibilities of moral and spiritual transformation (with significant social consequences), then a representation in language (and thought) does not capture the intentional significance of the Faith. Why? Because, I suggest religion (as the deepest example of the concept/experience dichotomy) is grounded in this experiential and non-conceptual dimension; religion requires enactment rather than varying degrees of analysis. Surely the Baha'i Faith is oriented towards the development of particular kinds of people rather than enunciators of principles. I am certainly ^{not} denying the need for conceptual analysis, but we must be aware of its irreducible limits with respect to a phenomenon that is primarily experiential. Thus, scholarship as conceptual analysis exemplifies the basic problem that all language shares concerning its relation to experience-as-enactment. Prospective scholars must be aware of this dislocation and also aware of the nature of the raw-material of its methodology i.e. concepts. I must emphasize that I am in no way disparaging the role of conceptual analysis - it is a necessary feature of our linguistic experience as communicators. If we lacked concepts we would be what some philosophers call 'abandoned' to sensory experience. Unable to adopt a stance with regard to the manifold of sensory data, particularity and singularity would 'exhaust' our consciousness. By forming concepts we split experience into subject and object. The question for scholars is this: is this subject-object model adequate to understanding religion?

My highlighting of the Faith/Reason and Concept/Experience polarities implies that the primary problem for the Baha'i scholar is cognitive and not simply affective or moral, though we must not underestimate the danger of the latter. Thus one way of combatting the danger of scholarship is to be aware of a) its traditional scope and method and b) its raw-materials. This goes some way to grounding what I consider the essential question for every prospective Baha'i scholar, namely: what kind of truth-claim does the Baha'i Faith make? If we keep this question as a heuristic structure conditioning our scholarship, whatever its subject matter, then I believe we will be doing justice not only to the impact the Baha'i Faith makes upon our lives but also to the non-Baha'i academic community. This latter community like the curate's egg is good in parts (and unlike the curate's egg in that it is getting better).

Moreover, one does not have to be a reductionist subscribing to a positivist philosophy to be an accredited member of this academic community.

I have only cursorily treated a number of ideas. Much needs to be said, for example, about the conceptual/experience polarity. Is there a language which cuts through or transcends this schema, or must language (specifically religious) continuously dramatize the limits of our understanding beyond which there is no progress except via a total life reorientation? We may also question the traditional view of faith presented above which tends to see the act of faith as an extrinsic relationship between a person and a proposition or set of propositions, hanging somewhere between tentative opinion or mere belief and knowledge. The whole structure needs re-working and a more experientially oriented understanding of faith developed. Many philosophers and theologians working outside of Baha'i parameters have done just this - we should certainly work with them. Another question which requires expansion - what is the Baha'i understanding of the scope and role of rationality? Abdu'l Baha presupposing the difference between the essence and existence of a 'thing' is optimistic that we can 'reach' to the existence of a Transcendent cause via a series of processes in thought. Whether this 'reach' is real or representational, that is, purely conceptual, is an interesting point for discussion concerning not only the scope of rationality but the mediating nature of concepts.

In sum: Scholarship or rather the method and raw-material of scholarship holds certain problems for those engaged in academic work on the Baha'i Faith. The problems are objectively grounded in the method and its raw-materials and are not a function of the scholar's intentions. The traditional quest for clear, distinct ideas related by equally clear and distinct inferences gave rise to a hierarchical conception of epistemological claims which grounded the rational method. In a sense, traditional accounts of faith capitulated to this, making faith a close relative of belief, and this because of the strong volitional element in the act of faith. However, there is more to life and hence rationality than logical entailment. The latter does not exhaust the content of human experience, thus prospective Baha'i scholars should disinherit these traditional coordinates in a rational fashion.

Scholarship involves the relating of sentences to a particular subject matter. Such sentences are further related to various states of affairs, which generally includes empirical and non-empirical states of affairs, meanings, events, etc. Now scholarship is not just speaking about and retrieving

these states of affairs, meanings, events, etc. It is a peculiar refined form of speaking which attempts to overcome problems inherent, not only in the states of affairs etc. themselves but also in other ways of speaking e.g. common-sense discourse and participant/textual accounts. The concept as representation supposedly improves upon the (for example) symbol, bringing about a better understanding of that which participant/textual discourse covers up. The presupposition, noted above, is that concepts allow better access to the subject matter. I am certainly not criticizing concepts per se. They are important for reasons stated earlier. However, concepts do not exhaust the experiential nature of enacting of which religion is the most important example. The map is not the territory. As I have said earlier, the Baha'i Faith is primarily a system that requires enacting, demands performance and as such contains a basic non-conceptual component. An interesting area of analysis which requires mapping is between language (concepts), that is, both scholars' and those presuppositions found in the Baha'i holy texts, and experience. Work also needs doing on exactly where in the Faith the non-conceptual element lies and how this borders on the conceptual.

We require a theoretical grounding of the nature of scholarship centering on the two structures presented above, namely rational method and the concept. The former may be revised and its limits noticed, whereas the latter is a problem in principle for the scholar.

Robert Parry.

Footnotes

1. By mere belief I refer to what some contemporary philosophers have called mere acceptance, whether of a proposition or of a person (belief in a person, however, is a special case which I will not comment further on). Here 'X believes that -p' involves 'X' being under the impression 'that -p' with the unreasoned absence of dissent. Mere belief also emphasises the psychological component involved in the concept, where the psychological state of a person is the focus of attention rather than the referent of the state.
 2. Belief-plus refers not just to the psychological state but to what is called the doxastic component. Here X believes that -p because there is adequate evidence for p. Traditionally understood belief is an assent to something where the evidence is not adequate enough for a knowledge claim concerning the same something. Neither mere belief nor belief-plus exhaust the meaning of religious faith.
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AN EPISODE IN THE CHILDHOOD OF SIYYID ALI MUHAMMAD THE BĀB

Stephen Lambden

Very little is known about the childhood of Siyyid ^cAlī Muhammad the Bāb (1819-1850) the founder of the Bābī movement and only son of the Shirāzī merchant Siyyid Muḥammad Ridā (c.1778?- c.1820/1826-7?) and Fātima Bagum (d.1882).¹ It is clear though that he commenced his elementary studies as a boy of about five under the tutelage of a certain Shaykhī teacher variously known as Shaykh Zayn al-^cAbidīn (^cAbīd), Shaykh-i Mu^callim, Shaykh-i Anām, Shaykh Muḥammad and Shaykhunā (d.c.1263.A.H./1846-7) in a school situated in the Bazar-i Murgh (Poultry Market) of Shirāz.² Various stories exist in Bābī-Bahā'ī literature about the school days of the Bāb which underline his alleged supernatural knowledge and extraordinary piety. They are reminiscent of countless legendary anecdotes which came to be related of the childhood of Jesus in the apocryphal infancy Gospels and of hagiographic expressions of the miraculous youth of the Prophet Muhammad and the Imāms in Shī^cī Muslim literature.³ Pious devotees of those who came to be seen as saints, prophets or messengers of God have pictured the childhood and youth of the object of their adoration as being attended by extraordinary phenomena and miraculous deeds often utilising time-honoured hagiographic motifs or legends. To some extent this kind of piety found oral and literary expression in 19th century Bābī-Bahā'ī circles. It is particularly noteworthy in connection with the story of the Bāb's being taught the alphabet or asked to recite Bismi'llāh al-Rahman al-Rahim on his first day at the school of Shaykh ^cAbīd.⁴

The accounts of the Bāb's first day at school:

1) In the Tārīkh-i Jadīd⁵.

The Tārīkh-i Jadīd (New History) of Mīrzā Husayn Hamadānī (d.c.1299.A.H./c.1881-2) exists in various recensions written in the early 1880's or roughly between 1296.A.H. and 1300.A.H. Apart from Mīrzā Husayn Hamadānī whose original draft appears to have made considerable use of the Kitāb-i Nuqtat al-Kāf (c.1852?) a number of writers including Mīrzā Abū al-Fadl Gulpaygānī (d.1914) Manakjī Līmji Hātayārī (the Zoroastrian agent in Iran, d.c.188) and Fadīl-i Qā'inī (= Nabīl-i Akbar, d.c.1309.A.H./1892) had a hand in the emergence of this variously entitled work.⁶ At least one recension of it, transcribed in June 1881/Rajab 1298.A.H. and referred to by E.G. Browne as the 'London Codex' (= British Museum [Library] Or.2942), contains the following version of the story of the Bāb's first day at school attributed to Shaykh ^cAbīd himself:⁷

"The first day that they brought him [the Bāb] to me at the school, I wrote down the alphabet for him to learn, as is customary with children. After a while I went out on business. On my return I heard, as I approached the room, someone reading the Qur'ān in a sweet and plaintive voice. Filled with astonishment, I entered the room and enquired who had been reading the Qur'ān. The other children answered < pointing to His Holiness [the Bāb] > 'He was.' 'Have you read the Qur'ān?' I asked. He was silent. 'It is best for you to read Persian books,' said I, putting the Hāqq al-Yaqīn [of Muhammad Bāqir Majlisī] before him, 'read from this.' At whatever page I opened it I saw that he could read it easily. 'You have read Persian,' said I; 'Come, read some Arabic; that will be better.' So saying, I placed before him the Sharh-i Amthila. When I began to explain the meaning of the Bismi'llāh to the pupils in the customary manner, he asked, 'Why does the word Rahman include both believers and infidels, while the word Rahīm applies only to believers?' I replied, 'Wise men have a rule to the effect that < extension of form implies > extension of meaning, and Rahmān contains one letter more than Rahīm.' He answered, 'Either this rule is a mistake or else the tradition which you refer to 'Alī is a lie.' 'What tradition?' I asked. 'The tradition' replied he, 'which declares that King of Holiness to have said; - 'The meanings of all the Sacred Books are in the Qur'ān, and the meanings of the whole Qur'ān are in the Sūrat al-Fātiha, and the meanings of the whole Sūrat al-Fātiha are in the Bismi'llāh, and the whole meaning of the Bismillah is in the < initial letter > B, and the meaning of the B is in the point < under the B > , and the point is inexplicable.'" On hearing him reason thus subtilely I was speechless with amazement and led him back to his home. His venerable grandmother came to the door. I said to her, 'I cannot undertake the instruction of this young gentleman,' and told her in full all that had passed. Addressing him, she said, 'Will you not cease to speak after this fashion? What business have you with such matters? Go and learn your lessons.' 'Very well,' he answered, and came and began to learn his lessons like the other boys. He began with the alphabet though I urged him not to do so." 8.

2) In Tārīkh-i Nabīl Zarandī

Mullā Muhammad, a Bābī (from 1265.A.H./1848-9) who became one of the leading disciples of Mīrzā Husayn 'Alī Bahā'u'llāh and who was known as Nabīl-i Zarandī and Nabīl-i A'zam (1247.A.H./1831-1310.A.H./1892-3), completed his lengthy history of the Bābī-Bahā'ī movements in about 1308.A.H./1890-91.⁹ The first part of this history was translated into English by the late Guardian of the Bahā'ī Cause Shoghi Effendi (1897-1957) under the title, The Dawn-Breakers. Nabil's Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahā'ī Revelation (1932).¹⁰ The following episode, which obviously differs from the loosely parallel account in the 'London Codex' of the Tārīkh-i Jadīd (see further below), is again narrated on the authority of Shaykh 'Abīd:

"One day", he [Shaykh 'Abīd] related, "I asked the Bāb to recite the opening words of the Qur'ān : 'Bismi'llāh al-Rahmān al-Rahīm'. He hesitated, pleading that unless He were told what these words signified He would in no wise attempt to pronounce them. I pretended not to know their meaning. 'I know what these words signify,' observed my pupil; 'by your leave I will explain them.' He spoke with such knowledge and fluency

that I was struck with amazement. He expounded the meaning of 'Allāh', of 'Rahmān', and 'Rahīm', in terms such as I had neither read nor heard. The sweetness of His utterance still lingers in my memory. I felt impelled to take him back to his uncle and to deliver into his hands the Trust he had committed to my care. I determined to tell him how unworthy I felt to teach so remarkable a child. I found his uncle alone in his office. 'I have brought Him back to you,' I said, 'and commit Him to your vigilant protection. He is not to be treated as a mere child, for in Him I can already discern evidences of that mysterious power which the Revelation of the Sāhib al-Zamān [= 'The Lord of the Age', one of the titles of the promised Qa'im] alone can reveal. It is incumbent on you to surround Him with your most loving care. Keep him in your house, for He, verily, stands in no need of teachers such as I.' Hājī Mīrzā Siyyid ^CAlī [ll.] sternly rebuked the Bāb. 'Have you forgottōn my instructions?' he said, 'Have I not already admonished You to follow the example of Your fellow-pupils, to observe silence, and to listen attentively to every word spoken by Your teacher?' Having obtained his promise to abide faithfully by his instructions, he bade the Bāb return to His school. The soul of that child could not, however, be restrained by the stern admonitions of His uncle. No discipline could repress the flow of His intuitive knowledge. Day after day he continued to manifest such remarkable evidences of superhuman wisdom as I am powerless to recount." 12.

3) In the Tārīkh-i Amrī-yi Shirāz. 13.

The abovementioned narrative of the history of the Bābī-Bahā'ī movements in Shirāz composed by Hājī Mīrzā Habīballāh Afnān (c.1875-1951) the son of Āqā Mīrzā-Āqā (a nephew of the Bab's wife) and grandson of Āqā Mīrzā Zayn al-^CAbidīn (a paternal cousin of the father of the Bāb) remains in manuscript. 14. It apparently contains valuable information on the childhood of the Bāb including a version of the story of his first day at school related by Āqā Muhammad Ibrāhīm-i Ismā^Cīl Bag an older fellow-pupil of Shaykh ^CAbīd. Hasan Balyuzi in his book The Bab summarizes this account as follows:

"The Bāb had taken a seat with great courtesy, in between this boy and another pupil who was also much older than Himself. His head was bowed over the primer put in front of him, the first lines. But he would not utter a word. When asked why he did not read aloud as other boys were doing He made no reply. Just then two boys sitting near them, were heard to recite a couplet from Hāfīz, which runs thus:

From the pinnacles of Heaven they call out unto thee;
I know not what hath thee here entrapped.

'That is your answer,' said the Bāb, turning to Āqā Muhammad Ibrāhīm." 15.

While this account of the Bāb's first day at school is independent of the the two versions purportedly related on the authority of Shaykh ^CAbīd quoted above, its essential point is the same; namely, that the youthful Bāb stood in no need of human instruction initially holding a noble silence.

[* insert: of which he had been taught to repeat.]

It will be obvious to the reader of the three accounts of the Bāb's first day at school that they cannot all be eye-witness or strictly accurate historical narratives. Accounts 1 & 2 cannot both, in all their details, be exact records of the words or observations and actions of Shaykh ^cAbīd. While the Bāb does appear to have been a remarkable pupil in the days of his youth the basically legendary nature of the accounts of his first day at school contained in the Tārīkh-i Jadīd and the Tārīkh-i Nabīl is strongly suggested by the fact that the gist of these accounts told in connection with the youth of Jesus is contained in loosely parallel versions in Christian and Islāmic literatures. It thus seems highly likely that accounts 1 & 2 of the Bab's first day at school originated in Bābī-Bahā'ī circles sometime before the early 1880's drawing upon and embellishing much older legends about Jesus' first day at school.

The apocryphal accounts of Jesus' first day at school.

The canonical Gospels, as is well known, record little of nothing (in the case of Mark and John) of the childhood of Jesus. It is only in Luke 2:41ff that we are told something of the precocious learning of the young Jesus.^{16.} By the time of the rise of Islām however, a very large number of apocryphal stories about Jesus' childhood and youth were circulating in written form—some of which are mentioned in the Qur'ān. One such apocryphal story which is widely attested is that of Jesus at school in Nazareth which affords some remarkable parallels to the accounts of the Bāb's first day at school in the Tārīkh-i Jadīd and the Tārīkh-i Nabīl. There are a very large number of versions of this story (which cannot possibly all be set down here). It must suffice to refer to one of the versions of the Infancy Gospel of Thomas the many recensions of which (6th cent. A.D.? > including Arabic versions) attempt to portray Jesus as an infant prodigy:^{17.}

"Now a certain teacher, Zacchaeus by name, who was standing there, heard in part Jesus saying these things to his father, and marvelled greatly that, being a child he said such things. And after a few days he came near to Joseph and said to him: "You have a clever child, and he has understanding. Come, hand him over to me that he may learn letters, and I will teach him with the letters all knowledge, and to salute all the older people and honour them as grandfathers and fathers, and to love those of his own age. And he told him all the letters from Alpha and Omega clearly, with much questioning. But he looked at Zacchaeus the teacher and said to him: "How do you, who do not know the Alpha according to its nature, teach others the Beta." Then he began to question the teacher about the first letter, and he was unable to answer him. And in the hearing of many the child said to Zacchaeus: "Hear, teacher, the arrangement of the first letter, and pay heed

to this, how it has lines and a middle mark which goes through the pair of lines which you see, (how these lines) converge, rise, turn in the dance, three signs of the same kind, subject to and supporting one another, of equal proportions; here you have the lines of the Alpha." [The text here appears to be corrupt].

Now when Zacchaeus the teacher heard so many such allegorical descriptions of the first letter being expounded, he was perplexed at such a reply and such great teaching and said to those who were present: "Woe is me I am forced into a quandary, wretch that I am; I have brought shame to myself in drawing to myself this child. Take him away, therefore, I beseech you, brother Joseph. I cannot endure the severity of his look, I cannot make out his speech at all. This child is not earth-born; he came tame even fire. Perhaps he was begotten before the creation of the world. I strove to get a disciple, and have found myself with a teacher. Therefore I ask you, brother Joseph, take him away to your house. He is something great, a god or an angel or what I should say I do not know."

"And when Joseph saw the understanding of the child and his age, that he was growing to maturity, he resolved again that he should not remain ignorant of letters; and he took him and handed him over to another teacher. And the teacher said to Joseph: "First I will teach him Greek, and then Hebrew". For the teacher knew the child's knowledge and was afraid of him. Nevertheless he wrote the alphabet and practised it with him for a long time; but he gave no answer. And Jesus said to him: "If you are indeed a teacher, and if you know the letters well, tell me the meaning of the Alpha, and I will tell you that of the Beta". And the teacher was annoyed and struck him on the head. And the child was hurt and cursed him, and he immediately fainted and fell to the ground on his face. And the child returned to Joseph's house. But Joseph was grieved and commanded his mother: "Do not let him go outside the door, for all those who provoke him die."

"And after some time yet another teacher, a good friend of Joseph, said to him: "Bring the child to me to the school. Perhaps I by persuasion can teach him the letters." And Joseph said to him: "If you have the courage brother, take him with you". And he took him with fear and anxiety, but the child went gladly. And he went boldly into the school and found a book lying on the reading-desk [Cf. Lk. 4:16f.] and took it, but did not read the letters in it, but opened his mouth and spoke by the Holy Spirit and taught the law to those that stood by. And a large crowd assembled and stood there listening to him, wondering at the grace of his teaching and the readiness of his words [Cf. Lk. 4:22], that although an infant he made such utterances. But when Joseph heard it, he was afraid and ran to the school, wondering whether this teacher also was without skill (maimed). But the teacher said to Joseph: "Know, brother, that I took the child as a disciple; but he is full of great grace and wisdom; and now, I beg you brother, take him to your house."

And when the child heard this, he at once smiled on him and said: "Since you have spoken well and have testified rightly, for your sake shall he also that was smitten be healed". And immediately the other teacher was healed. And Joseph took the child and went away to his house." 18.

Central to the many versions of the story of Jesus and the alphabet or of his first day at school is the so-called Alpha-Beta logion which is found in the Epistula Apostolorum (4) and attributed to the Marcosians by Ireneus (Adv. Haer. I. xx. 1) as well as in the Infancy Gospel of Thomas (Greek A+B+Syriac+Latin+Arabic, etc) and the related Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew (Latin+Slavonic+Arabic+Ethiopic, etc). Perhaps having originated among 2nd century Christian

Gnostics the following are a few versions of it: ^{19.}

Epist. Apost

"[Before I say Alpha] First tell me what Beta is" (Gk. text corrupt?).

Greek A [Infancy Gosp. Thom.]

"How do you, who do not know the Alpha according to its nature, teach others the Beta" (also quoted above, p.).

Greek B [Infancy Gosp. Thom.]

"Thou that knowest not the Alpha, how canst thou teach another the Beta?"

Arabic

"Explain to me Alaph, and then I shall say Beth." ^{20.}

While Brian McNeil has argued that the source of the legend of Jesus and the alphabet is to be found in a proverb contained in the Story of Ahikar (Syriac viii.36/ Arabic viii.33/ Armenian viii.23) Stephen Gero has speculated as to its Christian developmental sequence: ^{21.}

"A rather interesting, though admittedly very hypothetical, developmental sequence of the story of Jesus and the teacher emerges from this discussion. The original logion [the 'Alpha-Beta logion], in the first stage of oral transmission (1st-2nd century) developed into a concise controversy apophthegm. The apophthegm was written down in the second century (Epistula Apostolorum, Marcians, Irenaeus), but not thereby removed from oral circulation. In the next "tunnel period" of oral transmission, from the second to the sixth century, the narrative material was considerably expanded, but the saying itself was preserved unchanged. The narrative was then fixed in writing in the sixth century, and did not thereafter undergo much further development. However, in this third stage of mainly written transmission, between the sixth and tenth centuries, the saying itself began to be expanded, and brought into conformity, by two successive additions, with a synoptic model. This final stage is represented by the Greek Vorlage of the Slavonic and Greek versions and by the Syrian prototype of the late Syriac versions." ^{22.}

There are then, as noted, many versions of the story of Jesus and the alphabet in Christian apocryphal and other literatures. As Mc Neil notes however, they all agree in telling a story with the following features: " the master attempts to teach Jesus the alphabet, but cannot get beyond the first two letters, for Jesus demands that he explain the meaning of the letter Alpha; in most versions he himself then expounds the mystic meaning of the alphabet." ^{23.}

Not only is the **story** of Jesus and the alphabet found in the abovementioned (and other) Christian sources but exists in many different forms in both Sunnī and Shī'ī Islāmīc literatures. It is doubtless these Muslim transformations of the Christian story that have contributed to both the form and the content of the story of the Bāb's first day at school as reported in the Tārīkh-i Jadīd and the Tārīkh-i Nabīl. Only a few examples of the Islāmīc versions can be mentioned here.

Some Examples of the 'Story of Jesus and the Alphabet'
in Islamic literatures.

- 1) "The son of ^cAdī related on the authority of Abū Sa^cīd al-Khadri a tradition that when his mother handed over Jesus, son of Mary, to the school that one should teach him, the teacher said to him, "Write Bismillāhi (In the name of God)." Jesus said to him [the teacher], "What is Bismi (In the name)?" The teacher replied, "I do not know." Then Jesus said,
" [The letter] bā' is Bahā Allāh [the Glory of God], and
[The letter] sīn is Sanahu [His Granduer], and
[The letter] mīm is Mulkuhu [His Kingdom], and
Allāh is the God of gods. And al-Rahman [the Merciful]
means merciful in this world and the next; and al-Rahīm 24.
means Compassionate in the next world, ...etc.."

Here Jesus is represented as giving a profound explanation of Bismillāh al-Rahman al-Rahim on his first day at school like the Bāb in the Tārīkh-Jadīd and the Tārīkh-i Nabīl. The teacher does not know its deep meaning so the child enlightens him.

- 2) " Mary took Jesus to a teacher. The teacher asked, "What is your name?"
"Jesus" he said.
"Say the alphabet," said the teacher.
"What is the alphabet?" asked Jesus.
"I do not know," he replied.
Then said Jesus, "Get up from your place so I may sit there, and I shall teach you the explanation of the alphabet." The teacher got up, and Jesus sat down and said, "The alphabet begins with four letters, alif, be, jim and dal:
Alif: Allāh, "God";
Be : Bahā' Allāh, "God's splendour";
Jim : Jalāl Allāh, "God's awesomeness";
Dal : Dīn Allāh, "God's religion";
He : Huwa Allāh, "He is God";
Waw : Waylat Allāh, "God's woe";
Zayn: Zabaniyat al-kāfirin, "the myrmidons of infidels";
Ha : Hitta li'l-Khati'in , "forgiveness for those in error";
Ta : Shā'arat Tuba li'l-mu'minin, "the Tuba tree for believers";
Ya : Yad Allāh 'ala khalqihī ajma'in, "God's hand over all of His creation";
Kaf : Kalam Allāh, "God's Word";
Lam : Liqā' Allāh, "meeting God";
Mim : Malik yawm al-dīn, "the king of the Day of Resurrection";
Nun : Nūr Allāh, "God's light";
Sin : Sunnat Allāh, "God's path";
cAyn : ʿIlm Allāh , "God's knowledge";
Fa : Fiʿl Allāh , "God's action";
Sad : Sidq Allāh fī waʿdih, "God's sincerity in His promise";
Qaf : Qudrat Allāh , "God's might";
Ra : Rabūbiyyat Allāh, "God's divinity";
Shin: Mashi'at Allāh, "God's will";
Te : Taʿallā Allāh camma yashkurun, "God is more exalted than that for which he is thanked."

Then the teacher said to him, "You have done very well Jesus." He took him to his mother and said, "Your child did not need a teacher." 25.

This version of the story of Jesus' first day at school translated from an Arabic recension of Muhammad b. ^cAbd Allāh al-Kisā'i's Qisas al-Anbiyā' ('Tales of the Prophets', 13th century.A.D. and early translated into Persian) has Jesus assume the position of teacher and explain the significance of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Jesus' bewildered tutor takes the learned child back to his mother telling her that he is in no need of instruction just as, it may be noted here, Shaykh ^cAbīd takes the Bāb back home to his grandmother (Tārīkh-i Jadīd) or uncle (Tārīkh-i Nabīl) — his father being regarded as having passed away by this time in these two Bābī-Bahā'ī versions.

3) " Jesus was so intelligent that, when nine months old, his mother sent him to school. The master said the Bismillah— "In the name of God the Merciful, the Compassionate"— which the child at once repeated after him. The Master then gave a number of words to be read, of which the first was abjad. Jesus wished to know why he should do this, upon which the master became angry and struck him. The child said: "If you know, explain; if you do not listen. In abjad, a stands for Allah la ilah ('there is no God but God'), b for Bahjat Ullah ('grace of God'), j for Jalal Ullah ('the glory of God'), d for Din Ullah ('religion of God')," ". 26.

Here again, in this highly fanciful version of Jesus' first day at school as a 9 month old baby attributed to the 5th Shī'ite Imām Muhammad ibn ^cAlī Bāqir (c.57.A.H./675.A.D.— c.114.A.H./732.A.D.), there are obvious parallels to the accounts of the Bāb's first day at school in the Tārīkh-i Jadīd and the Tārīkh-i Nabīl.

Conclusion

In the light of the above it seems likely that the accounts of the Bāb's first day in the school of Shaykh ^cAbīd (quoted above) are highly hagiographic reworkings of elements contained in the Islāmic versions of Jesus' first day at school. It may be the case that the Bāb was an intelligent and unusual youth and that his teacher felt compelled to take him home in the light of this. Yet, the elaborate accounts in the Tārīkh-i Jadīd and the Tārīkh-i Nabīl doubtless owe not a little to the speculative piety of Bābī-Bahā'ī historians who were active before the 1880's. 27.

NOTES

1. Cf. Abbas Amanat, The Early Years of the Babi Movement, Background and Development (Ph.D. Thesis, Oxford University), 1981, p.100f.
2. Refer, Hasan Balyuzi, The Báb (Oxford 1973), p.32ff+ p.230. fn.4.
3. Refer for example, on legends surrounding the birth and childhood of Imām Husayn, Mahmoud Ayoub, Redemptive Suffering in Islam.. (Mouton Publishers, The Hague, 1978), p.69ff.
4. Other stories of the Báb's childhood also clearly utilize traditional motifs and legends. i.e. the notion that he exclaimed "The Kingdom is God's" (الملك لله) at the moment of his birth, refer, Kitāb-i Nuqtat al-Qāf (Ed. E.G. Browne, Leiden, Brill, 1910), p.110f, Tārīkh-i Jadīd (Ed. E.G. Browne, Cambridge University Press, 1893), p.262.
5. On the Tārīkh-i Jadīd (see fn.4. above) refer, Denis MacEoin, A Revised Survey of the Sources for Early Babi Doctrine and History (November, 1977. Unpublished dissertation), (Pt. II), p.195ff.
6. Refer, MacEoin, Revised Survey.., pp.205-6. cf. Amanat, op cit. p.427f.
7. Refer, E.G. Browne, The Tārīkh-i-Jadīd.. (see fn.4. above), introduction, p.xlix.
8. Ed. E.G. Browne, The Tārīkh-i-Jadīd, pp.262-264.
9. Refer, Shoghi Effendi, The Dawn-Breakers.. (London 1953), Preface, p.xxxv. cf. MacEoin, Revised Survey.. p.214ff, Amanat, op. cit. p.429f.
10. Shoghi Effendi's translation, The Dawn-Breakers, is only an English translation of the first part of Zarandī's history (up till 1852-3). The original text has not been published.
11. Hājī Mīrzā Siyyid ^cAlī was one of the maternal uncles of the Báb who looked after him after the death of his father. Refer, Balyuzi, op. cit. p.33f, 85ff.
12. Ed. Shoghi Effendi, The Dawn-Breakers.. pp.51-2.
13. I assume that this is the work of Hājī Mīrzā Habīballāh which is quoted and referred to by Balyuzi in his The Báb (pp.34-35, see below). cf. Amanat, op cit. p.444. A manuscript of Tārīkh-i Amrī-yi Shiraz exists in the Iran National Bahā'ī Archives (Lib. MS. No. 1027 D).
14. Hājī Mīrzā Habīballāh Afnān, like his father, was a Bahā'ī. He was originally named Muhammad ^cAlī. For some details on his life refer, Muhammad ^cAlī Faydī, Kitāb-i Khāridān-i Afnān (Tehran, 132. BE/ 1975-6. A.D.), p.230ff; Balyuzi, op. cit., p.32. fn.; H. Balyuzi, Bahā'u'llāh, The King of Glory (Oxford 1980), p.403ff, p.472. cf. also Hussām Nuqabā'ī, Manābi^c -i Tārīkh-i Amr-i Bahā'ī (Tehran, 133. B.E./1966-7. A.D.), p.64.
15. Hājī Mīrzā Habīballāh, Tārīkh-i Amrī-yi Shirāz [?] paraphrased and quoted in Ed. in Balyuzi, The Báb, pp.34-5.
16. On the canonical Gospel accounts of Jesus' infancy reference may be made to Raymond E. Brown, The Birth of the Messiah.. (London 1977).

17. On the Infancy Gospel of Thomas and related Infancy Gospels refer, Stephen Gero, The Infancy Gospel of Thomas in Novum Testamentum 13 (1971), pp.46ff (+ Bib.); E.Hennecke, New Testament Apocrypha (Ed. W.Schneemelcher/ ET.Ed.R.McL.Wilson), Vol.I. (SCM.Press,1973), p.388ff. (+ Bib.).
18. The Infancy Gospel [Story] of Thomas, Ch.6:1ff+7:1ff+14:1ff+15:1ff, ET. New Testament Apocrypha, Vol.I. (see fn.17), p.394ff.cf.also, M.R.James, The Apocryphal New Testament (Oxford 1926), p.49ff (= ET. of Greek Text A).
19. Refer S.Gero, art.cit.p.71f, for a more detailed list of versions of the 'Alpha-Beta logion'.
20. ET's from: Gk.A. New Testament Apocrypha, Vol.1.p.394; Gk.B. M.R.James, The Apocryphal New Testament, p.56; Epist.Apost+ Arabic, S.Gero, art.cit. p.71.
21. Refer, Brian McNeil, Jesus and the Alphabet, in Journal of Theological Studies (NS), Vol.21 (1971), pp.126-8. McNeil writes (p.127):

"I suggest that the source of this legend is to be found in the Story of Ahikar, in one of the proverbs which Ahikar imparts to his nephew. This is now extant in three versions:

(a) Syriac viii.36.

'My son, they say to the wolf, "Why dost thou follow after the sheep?" He said to them, "The dust is exceedingly good for my eyes." And they brought him into the schoolhouse [lit. 'the house of the scribe']: the master said to him, "Aleph, Beth"; the wolf said, "Kid, Lamb."'

(b) Arabic viii.33.

'O my boy! They made the wolf go to school that he might learn to read, and they said to him, "Say A, B." He said, "Lamb and goat in my belly."'

(c) Armenian viii.23.

'Son, they gave teaching to the wolf's cub, and said: "Say thou ayb, ben, gim [i.e. the first three letters of the Armenian alphabet]"; and he said, "ayts, bouts, garhn [i.e. goat, kid, lamb]." .." (citing texts and translations from F.C.Conybeare, J.Rendel Harris, and Agnes Smith Lewis, The Story of Ahikar [Cambridge, 1913]).

22. S.Gero, art.cit., pp.72-3.

23. McNeil, art.cit. pp.126-7.

24. Cited in J.Robson, Christ in Islam (John Murray, London, 1929), p.92 (= saying A.206 in Michael Asin y Palacios, Logia et Agrapha Domini Jesu apud Moslemicos Scriptorum. in Patrologia Orientalis Vols.XIII/XLX).

25. ET. W.M.Thackston, Jr., The Tales of the Prophets of al-Kisa'i (Boston 1978), pp.332-3.

It may be noted here that Jesus is represented as explaining the letter B (ب) as signifying Bahā'u'llāh which is the title assumed by Mirzā Husayn 'Alī Nūrī (1817-1892) the founder of the Bahā'ī movement. I wonder if this fact had anything to do with the Bahā'ī adoption of this story and its being linked with the Bāb's childhood? This might be unlikely but it may also be noted that the sixth Shī'ī Imām is reported as having stated that the letter B (ب) of Bismillāh.. signifies Bahā'u'llāh—a tradition apparently quoted by Siyyid Kazim Rashti in his Sharh-i Qasida and by 'Abdu'l-Bahā in his commentary on Bismillāh.. cf. Dhikrū'llāh.

Khadem, Bahá'u'lláh and His Most Holy Shrine in Bahá'í News No. 540
March 1976, p. 1ff; A.Q. Faizi, Explanation of the Symbol of the Greatest
Name (Bahá'í Publishing Trust, New Delhi, India, nd), p. 16. fn. 14.

26. Tradition attributed to Imām Muhammad ibn [°]Alī Bāqir cited
 in art, Christ in Mohammedan Literature in A Dictionary of Christ and
the Gospels (Edinburgh 1909), Vol. II. p. 882.
27. It should be noted that Shaykh [°]Abīd is said to have written a
 monograph or tract on the childhood of the Bāb: presumably shortly
 before his death in 1263.A.H./1846-7. (refer, Balyuzi, The Bāb, p. 231.
 fn. 4., Amanat, op.cit. p. 104. fn. 4.). This tract is apparently in the hands
 of those "not well-disposed to the Faith of the Bab and Bahá'u'llah"
 who have refused to divulge its contents or part with it. If this document
 really does exist it may be that it is the source of the story of
 the Bāb and the alphabet or his first day at school some of the contents
 of which may have been orally circulated— though this possibility seems
 to me to be unlikely. A perhaps less speculative suggestion would be that
 the circulation of the story in Bābī-Bahá'í circles owes something to
 Siyyid Javād Karbalā'ī (d. Kirmān, c. 1300.A.H./1882-3.A.D.) who had close
 links with the Bāb's family, apparently induced Shaykh [°]Abīd to view the
 Bāb and Bābism with favour, and confided in Mīrzā Abū al-Fadl Gulpaygānī
 who had a hand in the writing of the Tārīkh-i Jādīd. (cf. Amanat, op.cit. p.
 104. fn. 4. referring to Gulpaygānī's Kashf al-Ghitā' can Hiyāl al-A'cā'
 (Published, Ishqabad, nd.).
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SEVEN MANUSCRIPTS ATTRIBUTED TO BAHÁ'U'LLÁH

In two letters to Anton Graf Prokesch von Osten,¹ Artur Comte de Gobineau mentions corresponding with Bahá'u'lláh during His sojourn in Adrianople and 'Akká. The Gobineau collection in the Bibliothèque Nationale et Universitaire de Strasbourg (BNUS) contains six Persian manuscripts which are held to have been authored by Bahá'u'lláh: e.g. "Lettre de mirza Housayn Ali dit Baha'ullah: elle a été dictée à un secrétaire et ne porte pas de signature." Furthermore, there exists in the Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Paris a Turkish manuscript which is also said to be from Bahá'u'lláh.

Although various scholars and students of the Bahá'í Faith have previously dealt with individual manuscripts, all seven are reproduced here--together with a brief English description--to provide the reader with the opportunity to compare the manuscripts as to content, style and handwriting.

Ⓐ The earliest letter seems to be that preserved in the BNUS, Ms 3534, No. 6, which Schemann states Gobineau received in the early summer of 1868.² In this letter, the author states that he does not know Gobineau personally, but that he has heard much of the qualities and the goodwill which Gobineau exhibited in Persia. The letter then goes on to describe Bahá'u'lláh's exile to Baghdád, Constantinople and finally to Adrianople, "where I have resided for the past five years," and the intrigues of the Persian government against the Bahá'ís, carried out with the collusion of the Ottoman authorities. As an example thereof, the author refers to the arrest of four Bahá'ís--citizens of the Ottoman Empire--by the Persian consul in Manşuriyyh (Egypt) and the refusal of the Ottoman authorities there to intervene. The author then requests that Cobineau forward the enclosed petition to the "Throne of the Monarch of the Century" in order that a number of people be able to live quietly in the shadow of his protection.

Gobineau's translation of the manuscript, contained in Ms 3534, No. 7, was published by Schemann.³ The seal was translated as reading: "He who is well known (among the Faithful)."

Ⓑ The second manuscript, a petition in Turkish dated 9 August 1868, is contained in the Archives of the French Foreign Ministry, Dossier d'Adrinople. The French Vice-Consul in Adrianople, Ronzevalle, sent this petition, along with a translation and a report explaining the situation, to Nicolas Bourée, the French ambassador to the Sublime Porte, who in turn forwarded it to the Foreign Ministry in Paris.⁴ It has not been possible to ascertain if this petition is identical with the petition mentioned in the previous letter.

- Ⓒ The third, undated letter acknowledges a letter from Gobineau, thanks him for forwarding the petition, and states that the writer has contacted no other government in this matter.
- Ⓓ The fourth manuscript, also undated, acknowledges a further letter from Gobineau and states that nothing new has happened.
- Ⓔ This letter was, according to the Research Department at the Bahá'í World Centre, "written from 'Akká, fifty days after the arrival of Bahá'u'lláh, presumably around 20 October."⁵ It describes the tribulations of the Bahá'u'lláh and His companions during the exile from Adrianople to 'Akká and their condition in 'Akká, states that they have committed no offense other than being Bábís, and mentions the arrest of thirty other believers in Baghdád. Gobineau refers to this letter in his letter dated 18 November 1868 to Prokesch-Osten, mentioning that the author of the letter thanked Prokesch-Osten for his efforts on behalf of the Bahá'ís.
- Ⓕ This manuscript--contained, in the BNUS, MS 3516, "Pieces relative to Gobineau's work on Oriental languages"--is addressed to Gobineau as the French plenipotentiary minister in Brazil. It refers to the earlier letter from 'Akká, states that the prisoners' conditions are worsening, and thanks Gobineau for his and his government's efforts on their behalf. Schemann published Gobineau's translation of a letter very similar, but not identical to this one and stated that it was received on 4 January 1869.⁶
- Ⓖ The final manuscript is undated and does not mention the place from which it was written, although internal evidence points to the fact that it was written in Adrianople: "it is now sixteen years since we arrived in Baghdád." It points out that although the group was not at fault--"Earlier the disciples resisted every attack. We have forbidden this."--seventy are held prisoner without any provisions, and asks the matter be brought to the attention of the "Kings of the World".

Unfortunately, Gobineau's responses to these manuscripts are not available, with the exception of one included in a letter to Prokesch-Osten.⁷ This letter, written at the end of August 1868, describes Prokesch-Osten's intervention on behalf of Bahá'u'lláh with the Sublime Porte, which is referred to in manuscript E.

As is evident from this and other correspondence, Gobineau believed that the above letters and petitions were from Bahá'u'lláh and intervened with both the French and the Ottoman authorities on the basis of this assumption. However, the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice has stated that "the handwriting is not that of Bahá'u'lláh or of any of His known amanuenses; and the seal does not correspond with impressions of any of His authentic seals available at the World Centre."⁸

Furthermore, as Moojan Momen has also noted,⁹ these letters do not compare in style or content with other known writings from the pen of Bahá'u'lláh.

These seven manuscripts--which would seem to contradict the eyewitness accounts of both Áqá Muhammad-Riḍá-y-i-Qannád-i-Shírází and Áqá Husayn-i-Áshchí¹⁰ which state categorically that Bahá'u'lláh did not turn to any person or government regarding His banishment--raise two basic questions:

- just who did author these letters--Bahá'u'lláh Himself, one or more of His followers, one of the Covenant breakers, a Muslim enemy of the Faith or even a member of the Christian community of Adrianople, which had originally called the attention of the European consuls to the impending exile--and
- what were the motives for these letters?

The reasons which speak against Bahá'u'lláh's authorship have been previously noted; furthermore, it is extremely unlikely that one of the followers of Bahá'u'lláh would have dared forge a document in His name, even in an attempt to attain foreign assistance. On the other hand, internal evidence leads to the assumption that the author--or authors--were members of the party which accompanied Bahá'u'lláh to 'Akká, which would exclude both the Muslim enemies and the Christian supporters of Bahá'u'lláh.

Therefore at the present time, it would seem most likely that the author or authors of the manuscripts are to be found among the followers of Mírzá Yahyá, Subḥ-i-Azal, who attempted to gain assistance for Bahá'u'lláh and His companions, and thus for themselves, in this manner. This, however, is merely a hypothesis which must be confirmed or revised through further research by qualified scholars.

I wish to thank the Research Department at the Bahá'í World Centre, Peter T. Terry Jr., and Dr. Moojan Momen for providing photocopies of the manuscripts; Mag. Elisabeth Gamlich, Dr. Darius Ma'aní, and Dr. Baghá'u'lláh Wossough for assisting in their translation; and Mme. Lucrèce Reynaud for providing invaluable material on Gobineau.

Kent D. Beveridge

NOTES

- ¹ 31 August and 18 November 1868. The exchange of letters between Gobineau and Prokesch-Osten was published as Correspondence entre le Comte de Gobineau et le Comte de Prokesch-Osten (1854-1876), ed. Clément Serpeille de Gobineau, (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1933); see also K.D. Beveridge, "Anton Graf Prokesch von Osten and the Bahá'í-Faith: the Adrianople Episode," Bahá'í Studies, forthcoming.
- ² Ludwig Schemann, Quellen und Untersuchungen zum Leben Gobineaus, (Strasbourg: Verlag Trübner, 1914), p. 433.
- ³ Quellen, pp. 430-433.
- ⁴ Cf Moojan Momen, The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions, 1844-1944: Some Contemporary Western Accounts, (Oxford: George Ronald, Publishers, 1981), p. 190.
- ⁵ Letter to the author dated 31 January 1982.
- ⁶ Quellen, pp. 434-435.
- ⁷ Correspondence, pp. 334-335.
- ⁸ The Research Department to Mme Lucrèce Reynaud, 23 March 1976:
 "Mme Reynaud has asked about the authenticity of the Tablet which Count Gobineau is said to have received from Bahá'u'lláh (ms A above, K.D.B.). This Tablet came to the notice of Shoghi Effendi shortly before his passing, and he received a copy of it in October 1957 from Strasbourg, through a personal representative whom he sent to investigate it.
 He never authenticated it, and since only Tablets bearing the seal or signature of Bahá'u'lláh can be considered authentic, we cannot state that it is in this category."
 and 14 June 1976:
 "Since the Guardian did not authenticate the document received by Count Gobineau as a Tablet of Bahá'u'lláh, the Research Department is not prepared to pass such a judgement, unless in the future additional evidence is found to substantiate this view.
 There are certain indications which cast doubt on its authenticity. For example the style does not resemble Bahá'u'lláh's normal style in His Tablets; the handwriting is not that of Bahá'u'lláh nor of any of His known amanuenses; and the seal does not correspond with impressions of any of His authentic seals available at the World Centre."
- ⁹ Bábí and Bahá'í Religion, p. 191
- ¹⁰ H.M. Balyuzi, Bahá'u'lláh: The King of Glory, (Oxford: George Ronald, 1980), pp. 255-257.

فوائده دولت فخریه سند تو سولوس بکینه

رتبه بی

الله ایچون دانسا پنجه دولت علیه قبا حشر اولد بغیر حاله بن اندا کی شیری سزه پونستو ایدر
 التی سنه اول بزی تبعیته دعوت ایندیلر بقول ایتدک صکر بلا تصویر ایران استدما سبله
 بغداد دن استبوله سرکون ایتدیلر واستنبیل دن دروای سکره ادر نه به منفی ایتدیلر
 و شمعی کینه ادر نه دن سرکون اولدک لکن نریه کد جکیز بلی دکل در و حال بو که هیچ بر
 بقدر و جمیع مال مزبور باد اولدی شمعی اگر دولت علیه بزی استقر سه چونکه اصله ملک
 عثمانیه دن دکلن بنه اجازت و رسونلر که باشقه بر پادشاهت مملکت کدلم و اوربا
 پادشاهلرک که از اولقه سور لوانلرک بر حیت لر نندن بوفی رجا ایدر ز که
 بوفقر الری قور قار سونلر ایشدم

حسینعلی



۱۸۶۸
۹

Sir

in the name of God & humanity we protest to you against the plight which we have been subjected to from the Turkish government.

Six years ago we were invited at the Ottoman suggestion & we have accepted. Later, without having committed any fault & at the request of Persia we were sent from Baghdad to ~~Adrianople~~ ^{Cons^{ple}} Adrianople. After a stay of 4 months, we were exiled to Adrianople.

Now, once again, we are being exiled from Adrianople without the knowledge of where we are destined & without any reason, all our possessions were disposed of. If the Turkish government does not welcome us anymore, & as we are not of this country let us be free to go into a country of another power. It is to the sovereigns of Europe who like to help the oppressed that we plead, supplicating them to release us from this bondage.

Aug 9th 1868

signed: ~~Muz~~
Hussein-Ali

Traduction: Au J. Vassulat de France à Constantinople.

M^r. de Vassulat,

Au nom de Dieu et de l'humanité,
nous protestons auprès de vous contre
toutes les misères dont nous sommes
l'objet de la part du gouvernement
turc. Il y a six ans, on nous a
invités à la suggestion Ottomane, nous
l'avons acceptée, ensuite, dans un
communisme saint et sur la
demande de la Perse, on nous a
envoyés de Bagdad à Constantinople,
et après un séjour de quatre mois,
on nous a exilés à Andrinople.

Maintenant, le nouveau on nous
exile à Andrinople sans savoir
si nous allons, et on a, sans raison,
gaspillé tout notre bien. Le
gouvernement turc ne veut plus
de nous, et presque nous ne sommes
pas originaires d'ici, qu'on nous laisse
libres d'aller dans le pays d'une
autre puissance. C'est aux
Souverains de l'Europe, qui
aiment à sauver les malheureux,

que nous avons recours, les suppliant
de nous en libérer.

Le 9 Août 1858.

M. de Vassulat.

عزم میبود خدمت سفیر اعظم اکرم و در بر نفیام و ام آباء العالی که گنوب حضرت عالی رسیده و سپه های دربار و شاهان و پادشاهان

در باره از همه اصحاب از آنحضرت منسوب دست داد خدای واحد شاه پدرا که دعای عمر درود و قابل کرامت

درب در روز و زبان این اسیران و مجوسان گشته و در کل آن از جن مسکن است که عمر درود

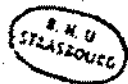
و عزت آنحضرت بجز این و عادت تازه واقع شده اسیر همان حال سابق باقیست

و بی آنحضرت هر وقت که دست آنحضرت عالی میرسد سدر و فرج بی اندازه دست میدهد

لیکن حال خجالت از این حاصل است که آنحضرت عالی را بزرگت اندازیم تا این

امید داریم که این زحمت و مشقت سبب نیک آیی و اجای و کفر آنحضرت کرده

ذرا آن جسی بدل و جان بر عا کونی سزاوار شوند باقی اسیران اعلی مطاع در اسلام



عرض این بنده در خدمت حضرت وزیر اعظم و سبزه انجم اکرم دام آبرو انکه امور این بنده نسبی واقع شده که علم و بیان آن
 نامر است محل آنکه مدت شش سال در اردن حسب الامر دولت علیه عثمانیه سابق بودیم و ابد از این عبد و سلطان خلاف اصول ظاهر شد
 چنانچه جمیع اهل اردن شاهد و گواهند مع ذلک سماء قبل بغتة نامورین دولت عثمانیه در خانه را گرفتند و آنچه از سلطان این عهد
 که در بازار دکان داشتند جمیع را گرفتند بدو خانه حکومت بردند و بعد آدمی از حکومت آمد اخبار کرد که حسب الامر پادشاهی ابدی است
 و اطفال بکلیسولی برودید و دیگر هیچ چه فرصت ندادند جمیع اسباب مستغنیان تحت حکم ضابطان لشکر تقویت بسیار کم فرود
 و اندر فرصت ندادند که بول آن گرفته شود بعد این بنده را با اجناس و نفر از زن و مرد و اطفال کوچک بکلیسولی آوردند بعد از ورود
 ناموری مخصوص عمراندی بن باشی با پنج چاقوش از اسنانبول وارد شد نه مکی بیرون آوردند که حسب الامر شش نفر بنگار
 بودند پنج نفر قبرس و من بانی رجوع ندرام خود مختارند و بعد معلوم شد که تدریک کرده بود زیرا پول و اچور را از همه گرفت و کل را بنگار
 که بد آب و هوای ترین روی زمین است آورد و آنجا فرزند که بطنه خرابه در جزیره قبرس بردند بجز در و در عکاسی را در سر بازنه خانه
 حسن کردند حتی زنهارا و اطفال شش ماهه را و ابواب دخول و خروج را با لکه بستند و حال بنامه نوزاد است که در عکاسی در سر بازنه خانه
 خرابه مجوسیم و جمیع از بدی آب و هوای خوش شده بدینا خوشبهای صعب نسیمیک در دور و زسه نفر نژاد بی طیب و غذا و در و اطفال
 این عباد نمانند ایم که تقصیر چه بوده و چیست ابدی سوال و جوابی شده و ابد از این عباد تقصیر و خوف اصول ظاهر شده اگر تصور کنه
 این عباد است این از اول معلوم بود و اولیای دولت علیه عثمانیه مطلع بودند که این عباد با بیستنه این امری ستور بود مع ذلک این بنده
 دولت خواسته با جمعی از مستغنیان از بغداد با کمال خلوص بدو حضرت پادشاهی آیدیم مع ذلک بر روز بلای وارد شد آنکه متنی شد
 بین بزرگان اگر تقصیر و کیر این عباد نسبت میدهند مجلس کنند و استفسار شود بعد از تخمین واضح و مبرهن خواستند که آیا این عباد خارج
 از اصول حرکتی کرده و جمیع توکلها که در اردن از جانب دولت فخر است کنند مطلقند جمیع شهادت دادند که این عباد منفر نیستند
 و آنچه فرستیم بنده که تقصیر این عباد چه چیز است ابدی ذکر نمودند که اخراج حاصل شود استبدای این عباد از آنحضرت عالی آنست که توبی
 فرزند که نام عنایت و الطاف اعلی حضرت شاهنشاهی بر این عباد سرور نماید مقصود اصلی این عباد اینست که شاه ابدی ای متواتر در
 حمایت ابدی طور اعظم انجم اکرم دام ظلها آسوده شوند و بدعای دولت ابدی مشغول شوند و از جود اخبار که بنظر آن خبر رسیده آنکه
 در بنده استی نفر از مزار و در سلطان این عهد را بدو در جرم تقصیر بجز بر سر که گن کردند و الا که این عهد را جمیع ضبط کردند استبدعا
 آنست از مشور بنده او استفسار فرمائید معلوم کرد که جمیع این امور بدو نوزاد تقصیر دارد شد جمیع این عباد منظرند که از افاق عنایت
 و عدالت شاهنشاهی زمان و امیر اعظم دوران توجیه کار عالی آفتاب عنایتی پسران نماید ابدی امر اشرف عالی مطاع

have letter
 received Oct. 20
 1868



Ms 3516

Handwritten scribbles or initials in the top right corner.

میرزا

خدمت حضرت وزیر اعظم بنویر القوم اکرم دام ابداً العالی علی سید که عوذیه مسرور شد و باد میں ارسال

نالی دستخط عالی آنحضرت بجهت بخش خاطر وزیر در کان شد و ذکر کباب میرزا انجمن استغاثی و در کباب

عالی بنقد احوال این مجربان مسرور فرمودند بسیار بسیار این عید در آنحضرت عالی اکرم

زیاده از حد ذکر و بیان حاصل شد و امر این مظلومان در بر اویم که باشند و است و فصل

شد از خدا آئیم که در کنان و ایمان بر گردودت و عزت آنحضرت میرزا

از انجمن آنحضرت عالی را بر جهت از اخم و کس این امر امیدوارم که این روز است

و کثیر آنحضرت شود و در دیبا و آخرت استمالا مال برسد با آنکه امر است



MS 3516

عوضہ تفسیر و قایح مجتہد اشرف اوز حضرت قزاق قومیہ وزیر مختار دولت ہند
فرانسہ برازیل

اولیای دولت علی

عرض این بنده خدمت سیر عظیم و وزیر اکرم اگر بجای این عباد بقای رسیده که ظلم و براد از تحریر آن عاجز و عاجز درین حدیث
 و آنچه وارد شد سوگند علی امده صابر بگر راضی دست گردوم خدای واحد شاه است که همیشه تنظر شهادت بوده ام و لکن چون پیش از این
 شغولند و از اسواه متقطع در هر دیار انانما و ذکر اصغیر و کبیر استلا و مظلومند مع اگر شاه نرود سینه شود از نرد این عبید
 تقصیری سسر زده و آنحضرت البته شنیده اند که قبل از شاه نرود سینه این طایفه محل ظلم نمینمودند و کفایت نمینمودند و این عبید
 بقسمیک در هر لیکه شده و مع ذلک متعرض نفسی نشند و حال شاه نرود سینه شود که آنچه از این طایفه کشته اند از نرد
 و حال آنکه حال توی ترند از قبل و در هر لیکه از بلاد ایران بیشتر از پیشترند مع ذلک آنچه از ظلم بر ایشان وارد شده ساکت و صابر
 بوده و هستند و حال مظلوم ترین اهل ارشد بر این عبد لازم شد که عرض این مظلومان را پیشگاه حضور شاهنشاه جهان معروض ام
 و همین قدر استدعا مینمایم که غایبی شود که این مظلومان مثل سایر باس رفتار کنند و از قواعد اصول دولتیه تجاوز نمایند
 شان خورشید اشراق و اعطای انوار است و لایق محاب امطار در ایتمک بر حضرت شاهنشاه رعایت جمعی مظلوم لازم است
 و در این روزها امر این جوان بسیار شدید شده و ساعت بساعت در شدت است قریب بمقادیر نفس
 جمیع ناخوش و ریش و میگذاردند که بجهت دوا و غذا کسی بیرون برود و دیاری مصارف تا حال ندادند چیزی روز
 قبل پاشا آمده نزد بنده زاده و ذکر نمود که لغراف زده اند که بعضی را روزی یک فرنگ و بعضی را نیم فرنگ بدیم
 فقره هم که یا مقصود اقتضای این بنده بوده چندی قبل تفصیل امور را خدمت سفیر کبیر دولت فخریه امده معروض ام
 و ایشان هم اگر فی الجمله توجیه فرمایند امور اصلاح بسیار بد چکه قصوری از این عباد ظاهر نشده و ابد بقاعده اصول بر این طایفه
 خطائی ثابت نگشته و هنوز گفته اند که سبب این بلا چه بوده و علت چه شده البته آنحضرت بقدر وسع در امور
 این عباد توجیه خواهند فرمود خدای واحد شاه است که از آنحضرت کمال امتنان حاصلست همین قدر که چنین
 وقتی این عبید را یاد فرمودند فی الحقیقه کافیت و هرگز از نظر خود نخواهد شد و از حق جل جلاله استدعا مینمایم که بر این جوان

عمر و قوت و دولت آنحضرت بیفزاید انبی اکرم العالی مطاع

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Letter A

He is God, the Exalted

I wish to say that, although we have never met, I have heard much of your excellency's praiseworthy qualities, that you behaved with kindness towards all the people, especially my followers, when you were in Tehran. They were and are most grateful for your excellency's kindness and beneficence, and have mentioned to me the details of your grace and bounty. I, therefore, considered it necessary to give you a short account of what has taken place, the perhaps through your excellency's attentions some may find peace and dwell in the shade of the protection of the Prince of the Age, the Monarch of the Era, the King of the World, the Most Mighty, Most Noble, and Most Great Emperor.

What I have to relate is as follows: I went from the capital of the kingdom of Iran to Iraq, with the permission and approval of the King and the awareness of the foreign ambassadors, and for twelve whole years I resided in Iraq. Even now I have in my possession the document (issued by) the government of Iran, (stating that) we left with (their) permission and approval. During the period of my residence in Iraq, not one unworthy or untoward action was manifested by me; all the foreign consuls who were then in Iraq will bear witness and attest to (the truth of) what I say. The government of Iran, seeing that some Iranian citizens showed and still show affection towards me, determined to act against me. Every day, the Iranian consul (? kārpardāz-i Īrān -- Mirza Buzurg Khan?) would write a complaint to the (Ottoman) government officials. Since I observed that such developments would lead to mischief, I explained things to the Governor of Iraq, Namiq Pasha. He felt that it would be wise to adopt Ottoman citizenship, and so some of my friends chose to become Turkish citizens. This, however, was contrary to the wishes of the government of Iran, and it was for this reason that they started in earnest to take action against me. They made a request of the Ottoman government, and the latter summoned me to Istanbul. The Governor of Iraq showed great affection and gave me a full account (of the affair). I for my part obeyed the decree of the government and went to Istanbul, together with some of my family, children, and servants.

After arriving in Istanbul, however, it became apparent that they were doing whatever the Iranian ambassador wished. We stayed four months in Istanbul and (during that time) I never went anywhere or associated with anyone. After four months, a decree was issued to the effect that we must go to Edirne. We sought to know the reason for this, and various pretexts were advanced, but it became known to us that the real purpose was to carry out the wishes of the Iranian ambassador. I complied (with the decree) and we arrived in Edirne.

We have been living in Edirne for five years now, and nobody has anything to complain of from me or my relatives. Let enquiries be made of the consuls resident here, that the truth of what I say may be made known. In spite of this, the Iranian ambassador has not rested content with what has been done, nor has he been satisfied. Every day, he has involved himself in some affair and lodged a complaint with the Ottoman state officials. They have accepted and continue to accept whatever he says or wishes.

Things reached such a pitch that, in Mansuriyya in Egypt, the Iranian consul arrested four Ottoman citizens who had committed no offence. However much they protested they were Ottoman citizens, no heed was paid to them. They even took their passports and tore them up, after which they assembled them and banished them in chains and fetters. A certain Hajji Abu 'l-Qasim, who was a well-known merchant there, simply on account of the fact that he had gone to Edirne to see me, was, on his return to Mansuriyya, made the object of the hostility of the Iranian consul and, although he had committed no crime or offence, he was arrested. They impounded all he possessed then entered his house, dragged forth his daughter, and carried her to the street and the market-place. But the Ottoman government paid no heed. It is obvious that, whether out of friendship or for other reasons, the Ottoman government undoubtedly carries out and implements whatever the Iranian ambassador says, nor do

they neglect his wishes or his good-pleasure. But it is far from clear what the reason for this may be.

Since your excellency is informed as to how things are in Iran, I beg of you to present my petition before the throne of the King of the Age, that perchance he may perform an act of grace whereby the hearts of some people may be put at rest, that all may find ease in the cradle of the protection and security of the Monarch of the World and in the shadow of his bounty. The one God is witness that I have not entertained and do not entertain any thought of myself. I am content with whatever has been written down by the supreme Pen on the Tablet of Fate. From the first day that I recognized the Truth, I have set aside both life and property. Nay, at every moment I hope and pray that I may offer up my soul as a sacrifice in the path of the Beloved of the Worlds. But since a large number of individuals have been oppressed, I have felt it necessary to explain how matters stand. I beg you to let no-one know of this until the purpose of this petition has been achieved.

(I remain) obedient to your command.

Letter C

He is God, the Exalted

Your excellency's letter has been received. It showed great kindness and was productive of the utmost joy and happiness, gladness and delight. It is obvious that, whatever is done by your excellency, it will not be deficient. In reality, what you are doing involves good-will towards the King of the Age (and something? -- word unclear), for a large number (of people) will arise to pray for the continuation of his rule; in all the provinces of Iran, there shall endure until the resurrection continual well-wishing for the King of the Age and for yourself. I have not until now referred to any matter before any government. We hope, therefore, that, through your excellency's attention, this matter may come to a conclusion, that all may, in the utmost ease, devote themselves to speaking of the continuation of (the king's) rule.

(I remain) obedient to your command.

The purpose of this letter is to show gratitude to your excellency for having shown the greatest kindness and having delivered the petition.

Letter D

He is God

Most mighty and noble ambassador, most great minister, may your prosperity continue, I wish to say that your letter has arrived and that it was productive of the greatest joy and happiness. We are more grateful to you than can be estimated. The one God is witness that the tongues of these prisoners and confined ones are occupied night and day in praying for your excellency's life, felicity, and prosperity. At every moment, we beseech the True One to increase your life, your felicity, and your glory.

Nothing fresh has occurred; things are just as they were before. But, in truth, whenever the letters of your excellency are received, we experience unlimited exaltation and happiness. Yet we are, at the same time, extremely embarrassed to be the cause of inconvenience to your excellency. We hope that, God willing, this trouble and inconvenience may result in a good reputation and a perpetuation of goodly remembrance for your excellency, for at this moment a great many are busied with heart and soul in praying for you.

I remain obedient to your command. Salutations.

Letter E

Heading (not copied fully)

Most mighty minister, most great and noble ambassador, may your prosperity continue, I wish to say that my affairs have so fallen out that pen and tongue, writing and utterance are alike powerless to (describe them? -- not copied).

To give a brief account, we resided for six years (sic) in Edirne on the orders of the Ottoman government; nothing contrary to the laws (of the state) was ever manifested by me or my followers, as all the people of Edirne bear witness and confess. Nevertheless, three months ago, officials of the Ottoman state suddenly surrounded our house, seized all the belongings of my followers in the bazaar, and took them to the government building. After this, a man came from the governor and informed us that, on the orders of the Sultan, I had to go with (my wives? -- not copied) and children to Gallipoli. They gave us no further notice than that. All the belongings of my followers were sold for a paltry price at the decree of the military commanders, but they did not even give us an opportunity to collect the money. After this, they brought me to Gallipoli, along with seventy men, women, and small children. Following our arrival, a special official, ^cUmar Effendi Rīnbāshī (= bigbāshī; major), arrived from Istanbul with five sergeants. They issued a decree to the effect that **orders had been given for six individuals to go to Acre (with us? -- not copied), and for five to go to Cyprus; I had no claim on the rest -- they were to be free to choose for themselves.** It afterwards became apparent that he had arranged things, for he took the money for the steamer from everyone and brought all of us to Acre, which has the worst water and the worst air in the world -- except for four individuals, who were taken to a ruined fortress in Cyprus.

No sooner had we arrived in Acre than they imprisoned us in a ruined barracks, even the women and six-month old children, and they forthwith shut the doors of entry and exit. We have now been imprisoned in the ruined barracks for fifty days, and, on account of the badness of the water and air, we have all been stricken by serious illnesses, such that, after two days, three people died without a physician or food or medicine. Up until now, we have not learnt the nature of our crime. There has been no enquiry. But neither wrongdoing nor acts contrary to the laws have ever been witnessed from us.

If it be supposed that our crime is that of being Babis, this was known from the start, and the Ottoman government officials were aware that we were Babis. It was not something that was kept concealed. Nevertheless, I was summoned by the government (reading īn ^cabd-rā: rā not copied), and I came with a number of my followers from Baghdad to the court of his highness the Sultan, in the utmost sincerity. In spite of this, a new tribulation befell us every day, until things culminated in this mighty ordeal.

If they accuse us of some other crime, let them hold a tribunal and question us. When investigations have been held, it will be clear and apparent that we have not transgressed the laws. All the consuls resident in Edirne on behalf of the great powers are aware (of this) and all have borne witness that we have not committed any wrong. What we want is to know just what our crime has been, but they have not once mentioned it so that we might be informed. We beseech your excellency to turn your attention towards us, so that the breezes of the grace and bounty of his imperial highness the Sultan may blow upon us. Our fundamental aim is perchance to find shelter from these widespread tribulations in the shade of the protection of the most mighty, great, and noble Emperor, may his exalted shadow endure, and that we may occupy ourselves in prayer for his eternal rule.

Among the news which has reached us by way of the telegraph is that in Baghdad thirty of my well-known adherents have been sent to Jazira without (having committed) any crime or offence, and my property has all been impounded. I ask you to make enquiries of (your) consul in Baghdad, that it may be made known that all these things have happened without the slightest explanation. We all wait expectantly for the sun of bounty to rise up from the horizon of the grace and justice of the Monarch of the Age, the most great Emperor of the Era, through the attention of your excellency.

I remain obedient to your command.

Letter F

He is God

Most great minister, most mighty and noble ambassador, may your prosperity endure, I wish to mention that a petition was written and that, at the time it was sent, your excellency's second letter brought joy to the hearts of these withered souls. God be praised that the (something unclear) news of your blessed and exalted existence and your investigation of the circumstances of these prisoners, rendered joyful these sad ones. I am very, very grateful to your excellency; our gratitude is more than can be rendered by either speech or utterance.

The affairs of these oppressed ones have worsened every day -- I have already given you the details. We hope that God may increase your excellency's life, prosperity, and glory at all times. I am most ashamed to have put your excellency to such trouble. But we hope that, God willing, this trouble may prove the cause of the goodly mention of your excellency, and that you may attain to all your hopes in both this world and the next.

I remain obedient to your command.

(Address)

Petition detailing events, addressed to his noble and illuminaed excellency Count Gobineau, Minister Plenipotentiary of the French Government in Brazil.

Letter G

He is God, the Exalted (? -- partly copied)

Most mighty ambassador, most noble minister, allow me to say that the tribulations of these servants have reached such a point that pen and ink are powerless to record them. During these (last) few years, I have (several words illegible) to the officials of the Ottoman government. Whatever has befallen me, I have endured it patiently, relying on God, nay I have been contented and grateful. The one God is witness that I have at all times expected martyrdom, but since I observed that a number of poor ones occupied with the mention of God and detached from all save Him were oppressed and downtrodden in every land, both men and women, young and old... (sic -- the sentence does not have a complement for chūn, 'since'). And this despite the fact that, in the sixteen years from my arrival in Baghdad until now, no offense has been committed by anyone. Your excellency will have heard that, before those sixteen years, this sect did not endure oppression, but took revenge. I forbade all (to do so), so that they were put to death in every land, yet opposed none. It is now sixteen years that, although members of this sect have been killed, they have not shown opposition, despite the fact that they are stronger than before and are greater in numbers in every part of Iran. Nevertheless, whatever oppression has befallen them, they have remained and remain silent and patient, and are the most oppressed of the people of the earth.

It is, therefore, incumbent on me to present the plea of these oppressed ones before the King of the World. I pray he may show such grace that men will behave towards these downtrodden ones as they do towards others and may not transgress the basic laws of the nations. It befits the sun to rise up and shed its light, and it behoves the cloud to pour down rain. It is, therefore, necessary for his highness the King to look after the interests of an oppressed people.

In these days, the case of these prisoners has become extremely serious. Hour by hour, the severity of our condition increases. They have imprisoned nearly seventy individuals, all of whom are in discomfort and ill, yet they will not allow anyone to go out to obtain medicine or food, nor have they yet given us even a dinar for our expenses. A few days ago, a pasha came to my son and said they had telegraphed to say that some (of us) would be given one

franc per day, others half a franc. It seems that the purpose of this was to bring dishonour on me.

Some time ago, I sent a report of what had happened to the Austrian ambassador. If he should pay heed, things will improve, for there has been no fault on our part. They have never proved legally that this sect has committed wrong, nor have they explained the reason for this affliction. Undoubtedly, your excellency will pay attention to our affairs as far as lies within your capacity. The one God is witness that your excellency has shown the greatest favour, to such a degree that you remembered me at such a time. That, in truth, is in itself sufficient, and it shall never be erased from my memory. I pray that God may increase your life and glory and prosperity every day.

I remain obedient to your command.

SEVEN MANUSCRIPTS ATTRIBUTED TO BAHÁ' ALLAH

Some further comments -- Denis MacEoin

We must be grateful to Kent Beveridge for having taken the trouble to make available at last the original texts of the letters supposed to have been written by Mirza Husayn ^CAli Baha' Allah to the Comte de Gobineau. Although the publication of these texts will not, of itself, solve the problem of their provenance, it will, at least, enable discussion on this and other issues to proceed on a more informed and constructive level. In order to render their publication more widely useful, I have provided English translations of the Persian letters, which are here appended to the originals.

In the absence of the extensive materials available to the Baha'i research department at Haifa, I am not in a position to enter usefully into any very serious discussion concerning the handwriting or seals used in these letters. Nevertheless, it seems worth making a few comments at this point. The statement of the Haifa department to the effect that 'the handwriting is not that of Baha'u'llah or any of His known amanuenses' is slightly misleading in one respect: it fails to distinguish between the different hands that can be discerned in these documents. As far as I can tell, three different individuals were responsible for the letters: one Turkish (B) and two Persian (A; C, D, E, F, G), but without the originals, I would hesitate to say much more than this. Baha' Allah certainly employed numerous secretaries at different times, and we have no reason to suppose that he might not have used some individuals for only a few items, leaving no general record of their hands. To compare these letters only with documents written by Baha' Allah or his 'official' amanuenses is hardly sufficient, and I would recommend a wider scrutiny of manuscript materials in the hands of other members of the Babi exile community. Letter A certainly seems to be the work of a professional scribe (which would be appropriate to the circumstances), while B appears to be in a Turkish hand (which suggests that it was penned by a translator/composer).

The question of the seals is a little difficult. Haifa records that 'the seal does not correspond with impressions of any of His authentic seals available at the World Centre', but it is not made clear how many of these latter they have. Adib Taherzadeh notes that 'apart from one seal which bore His name, Husayn-^CAli, Baha'u'llah had altogether ten seals which were made at different times during His ministry' (Revelation of Baha'u'llah vol.1 p.25) and reproduces ten seals originally reproduced in The Baha'i World vol.V, p.94. None of these latter seals is that of 'Husayn ^CAli', but that on these letters is (as far as I can see on the best reproduction, that of letter B) precisely that. Is it possible that the Haifa research department is basing its statement on the ten known seals, that it has no copy of the 'Husayn ^CAli' seal, and that the seal on these letters is that seal? An exact reply on this point would be informative.

I am rather less happy about Moojan Momen's argument that 'the style and content of the letters are not compatible with the alleged authorship' (i.e. Baha' Allah), to which Dr. Beveridge refers. To begin with, content seems scarcely relevant, since these are very specific documents which, by their very nature, are bound to differ in content from other writings of Baha' Allah (which, of course, themselves differ in terms of subject matter); should the present letters be proved on other grounds to be authentic, then we will simply have to add their contents to the already wide range of matters touched on by Baha' Allah. Nevertheless, I think Moojan is being somewhat disingenuous in this respect, since, as I shall demonstrate, these letters do, in fact, contain quite a few passages dealing with topics discussed in a number of letters known to be by Baha' Allah.

As regards style, this is also a little disingenuous. First of all, Baha' Allah did not have a single literary style on the basis of which a simple comparison can be made; his style varies according to date, subject matter, recipient, and, as I shall note, manner of composition (i.e. whether direct or in another persona). Again the point has to be made that the present letters are unlike other extant writings of Baha' Allah, in that they are specifically intended as petitions (and so adopt many of the features of standard Persian epistolary style designed for this purpose); should they be proved authentic, we will have another style to add to those already familiar from other works. It is also

worth noting that any attempt to talk about Baha' Allah's style on the basis of the English translation of his writings by Shoghi Effendi would be seriously misleading, and I would caution readers not to attempt to make a stylistic comparison between my renderings here and those to be found elsewhere. Shoghi Effendi uses a uniform style for all his renderings of Baha' Allah's works, regardless of whether the original be in Arabic or Persian, simple or complex, and normally elaborates greatly on their language and even content. An example of how risky it can be to use translations as the basis for such a discussion is to be found in the case of the translations of the Bab's works made by Habib Taherzadeh according to Shoghi Effendi's style: it would appear from these that the Bab's style and that of Baha' Allah were remarkably similar, whereas they differ tremendously.

Here again, however, the matter is not quite as simple as it appears. The present letters do, in fact, bear a close stylistic resemblance to those of Baha' Allah's 'tablets' written in the persona of Mirza Aqa Jan, his principal amanuensis (for examples, see Ma'ida-yi asmani vol.4 pp.121-22, 220-60; *ibid* vol.7 pp.126, 175 ff.; see also Taherzadeh Revelation vol.1 pp.40-42). This may not be insignificant in the present context. The device of speaking through Aqa Jan (if it really is that, as Taherzadeh and others maintain, and not genuinely Aqa Jan writing independently) seems to be used most in letters which give an account of historical events, perhaps as a means of avoiding the embarrassment of having the 'supreme manifestation' referring directly to mundane matters. Insofar as the present letters refer, often in detail, to events in the life of Baha' Allah or to developments affecting his followers in Egypt or elsewhere, it is arguable that a similar device is employed, namely the use (as in the Aqa Jan letters) of the phrases In 'abd or In bande ('this servant') for 'I' etc., and the adoption of a petitionary manner.

The following parallelisms between passages in these letters and in writings of Baha' Allah may help to make some of the foregoing clearer:

- 1) 'Tablet' in Ishraqat p.45: بعد از توجیه این مظلوم حب اجازه حضرت سلطان عراق عرب
'After this oppressed one went to Arab Iraq by the permission of his highness the Shah.'

Epistle to the Son of the Wolf p.123 (translation p.166): بعد از ورود در عراق
بامر پادشاه ایران

'after our arrival in ^cIraq, following the command of His Majesty the Shah of Persia....'

Ibid:

ما را حسب الامر باینجا فرستاده اند
'In accordance with the Royal command We have been sent unto this place.'

- 'Tablet' to Nabil in Ishraqat pp.103-4: این مظلوم از ارض طا بامر حضرت سلطان
عراق عرب توجیه نمود

'At the command of the King, this oppressed one turned from the land of ^{Ta} to Arab Iraq.'

Letter A: این عبد از مقر سلطنت ایران باذن و اجازه سلطان ... بعراق عرب رفته
'I went from the capital of the kingdom of Iran to Iraq, with the permission and approval of the King....'

- 2) 'Tablet' to Nabil in Ishraqat p.105:
'Seventy individuals were with me.'

هفتاد نفر در حضور بودند

Letter E:

'with seventy individuals.'

با هفتاد نفر

- 3) 'Tablet' in Ma'ida-yi asmani vol.7 p.193:
'they suddenly surrounded the house'

بعثة بیت را احاطه نمودند

Letter E:

'the officials... suddenly surrounded the house.'

بعثة مأمورین ... دور خانه را گرفتند

- 4) Surat al-haykal p.97 (referring to Baghdad): *ابداً خلاف دولت و ملت و مغایر اصول و آداب اهل مملکت از این عباد ظاهر نشد*
 'There has never been manifested by these servants (anything) contrary to the state or the nation, or opposed to the laws and principles of the people of (this) country.'

Letter E: *ابداً از این عباد و متعلقان خلاف اصول ظاهر نشد*
 '... nothing contrary to the laws (of the state) was ever manifested by me or my followers.'

Ibid: *ابداً از این عباد تقصیر و خلاف اصول ظاهر نشد*
 'Neither wrongdoing nor acts contrary to the laws have ever been manifested by us.'

- 5) Surat al-haykal p.102: *این عباد را باستانبول احضار نمودند*
 'They summoned me to Istanbul.'

Letter A: *این عباد را باستانبول فراستند*
 'They called me to Istanbul.'

- 6) Surat al-haykal p.124: (on Acre, in Arabic): *انها اخبث مدن الدنيا واقبحها صورة واردها هواً وانتهاماء*
 'It is the most desolate of the cities of the world, the ugliest in appearance, the worst with respect to its air, and the most stinking with respect to its water.'

Letter E: *علاکه بد آب و هوا ترین روسی زمین است*
 'Acre, which has the worst water and air in the world.'

- 7) 'Tablet' in Ma'ida-yi Asmani vol.8 p.5: *وبعد وارد گلی بولی قدیم عمر افندی باشی (یعنی) مخصوص با پنج نفر ادرن باشی وارد شدند*
 'We then arrived in Gallipoli; ^cUmar Effendi, a specially-(-appointed) major, arrived with five corporals.'

Letter E: *بعد از ورود (بگلیبولی) مأمور مخصوص عمر افندی باشی با پنج چاروش از استانبول وارد شدند*
 'After our arrival (in Gallipoli), a special officer, ^cUmar Effendi Binbashi (major), arrived from Istanbul with five sergeants.'

- 8) 'Tablet' in Ma'ida-yi asmani vol.8 p.5: Use of *له* for *له* (Austria).

Letter G: Same.

- 9) 'Tablet' in Ma'ida-yi asmani vol.8 p.27: *چهار ماه در آن مدینه (استانبول) ماندیم*
 'We stayed four months in that city (i.e. Istanbul).'

Letter A: *چهار ماه در استانبول توقف شد*
 'We remained four months in Istanbul.'

- 10) ESW p.78 (trans. p.106): *مقصود از این حرکت ذلت این مظلوم بوده*
 'Their design in this matter to dishonour this Wronged One.'

Letter G: *و از این فقره هم گویا مقصود افتضاح این بنده بوده*
 'It seems that the purpose of this was to bring dishonour on me.'

- 11) ESW p.79 (trans. p.108): از قنصل دولت علیه ایران که در اینجهاست بده اند استفسار فرمائید
'... inquire from the Consuls of the honoured Persian Government who have been in this country.'

Letter A:

'Let enquiries be made of the consuls resident here.'

از قنصلها که در این ارض ساکنه استفسار شود

- 12) ESW pp.90-92 (trans. pp.123-5): Various accusations against the Iranian Embassy in Istanbul.

Letter A: Similar accusations.

- 13) Sūrat al-mulūk (in Alwāh-i nāzila khitāb bi-mulūk p.41; Gleanings pp.235-6):
یعنی سلطان بان یکن فیضه کاشمش یربی کلشی ... و یکن رحمة کالسحاب
ینفق علی الجباد کما ینفق السحاب امطار الرحمة علی کل ارض

'It behoveth every king to be as bountiful as the sun, which fostereth the growth of all beings.... The King should be as generous, as liberal in his mercy as the clouds, the outpourings of whose bounty are showered upon every land....'

Letter G:

شأن فوری اشراق و اعطای انوار است و لایق سحاب امطار
در اینمقام بر حضرت شاهنشاه رعایت جمعی مظلوم لازمست

'It befits the sun to rise up and shed its light, and it behoves the cloud to pour down rain. It is, therefore, necessary for his highness the King to look after the interests of an oppressed people.'

It may also be noted that the statements in letter A that 'I went from the capital of the kingdom of Iran to Iraq, with the permission and approval of the King and the awareness of the foreign ambassadors....' and 'even now I have in my possession the document (issued by) the government of Iran, (stating that) we left with (their) permission and approval' are borne out by a passage in a letter from 'Abd al-Baha' to Jibran Effendi Sahibi (in Ma'ida-yi asmani vol.9 pp.81-82). According to this letter, the idea that Baha' Allah was forced to leave Iran is a falsehood; in reality, he himself asked the Iranian government for permission to depart on his hijra to Iraq. 'Until now,' 'Abd al-Baha' continues, 'the official papers from the Iranian Prime Minister's office and the (Ottoman) embassy in Tehran are in our possession!'. This letter also refers to the concern of the foreign ambassadors in Tehran.

The foregoing represents only a preliminary and partial attempt to demonstrate verbal and contextual parallelisms between some of the present letters and certain authenticated works of Baha' Allah. On the basis of these and other considerations, I think that a reasonable case can be made for ascribing their authorship to Baha' Allah himself, rather than to any of the other groups or individuals suggested by Dr. Beveridge. I cannot, in fact, see any a priori reason for supposing that Baha' could not have been their author, other than the hagiographical assumption that he never sought assistance from foreign powers. The standard image of Baha' Allah as a long-suffering exile and prisoner is, I think, one that needs considerable revision. Even so, I cannot see that a refusal to accept external assistance or even to appeal for it is demanded by the popular version of Baha' Allah's life.

Baha' Allah showed gratitude for the intervention of the Russian minister in Tehran in effecting his release from prison there in 1853; in his Surat al-muluk, he calls on the rulers of the world to 'examine Our Cause, enquire into the things that have befallen Us, and decide justly between Us and Our enemies' and condemns them because, 'though aware of most of Our afflictions, ye, nevertheless, have failed to stay the hand of the aggressor'; he reproached the Emperor Franz Joseph

(somewhat unreasonably, I would have thought) for having failed to enquire about him when visiting Jerusalem; in his letter to Nasir al-Din Shah, he expresses the hope 'that His Majesty the Shah will himself examine these matters, and bring hope to the hearts'; while in Edirne, he contacted Rev. L. Rosenberg, whom he asked to appeal to the British Vice Consul for the exercise of influence on his behalf, in order to prevent a further exile (see Women Babi and Baha'i Religions pp.187-90).

I am something of a loss as to why Balyuzi, Momen, and now Beveridge have all obviously felt uneasy about the possibility that Baha' Allah might obviously have written these letters. Not only is his authorship of them consistent with his behaviour noted in the last paragraph, but it has plenty of other perfectly respectable parallels. The prophet Muhammad sought help from the bedouin at the annual fairs in Mecca, may have looked for assistance to the Negus of Abyssinia, tried to find a protector in al-Ta'if following the death of his uncle Abu Talib, was compelled to plead for formal protection (jiwar) in order to return to Mecca, and finally accepted the military help of the Medinans offered him in the Treaty of War. None of this is thought to be inconsistent with his role as prophet. Again, the strategy of making contact with influential persons, particularly governors and rulers, and from time to time seeking their immediate protection in cases of persecution, was much used by 'Abd al-Baha' and Shoghi Effendi and remains a normal procedure in contemporary Baha'i activity. Once this point has been grasped, I cannot see what serious objection there can be to the possibility of Baha' Allah's having written letters such as these printed here.

There certainly appear to be no grounds whatever for Dr. Beveridge's quite cavalier suggestion that the letters may have been the work of some of the adherents of Mirza Yahya Subh-i Azal. This sort of gratuitous attribution of perfidious schemes to 'covenant-breakers' and 'enemies of the faith' and all the other components of the Baha'i demonology has a long and rather shabby history. The most notable example is the extraordinary attempt by Mirza Abu 'l-Fadl Gulpaygani and 'Abd al-Baha' to attribute the Nuqtat al-Kaf to Azali authorship and to allege that E.G. Browne had colluded with Azalis in the production and publication of the work -- claims that are wholly untenable for several reasons that have been discussed by me elsewhere (see my Revised Survey of the Sources for Early Babi History and Doctrine). This ploy of falling back on the Azalis as sources for materials found embarrassing for one reason or another is really most disturbing. In the present instance, it seems a very wild suggestion indeed. Why should Azalis not go directly to foreign consuls, without any need to seek assistance for the Baha'i faction, to whom they were opposed and from whom they sought to be separated? Why should they write specifically about Baha' Allah and his followers, thereby running the risk that only they would be offered help? Why should they not at least mention themselves, even if only in passing? Is it not something of a coincidence that, although only four Azalis were sent to Acre, the very individual or individuals responsible for writing these letters should have been among them? The whole hypothesis is so implausible that I am surprised anyone even seriously entertained it at all.

It is, therefore, my conclusion that we may accept provisionally the original attribution of authorship to Baha' Allah as valid, unless and until fresh evidence to the contrary is discovered. It may be impossible to confirm this attribution absolutely, but it is even more difficult to establish a plausible alternative authorship. In any case, the onus of proof rests with those who wish to prove that Baha' Allah did not write the letters, rather than with those who are happy to accept that he did. I see no reason, therefore, why we may not now make use of these documents as reasonably reliable sources for future historical research.

NOTE

The quality of the copies sent by Dr. Beveridge was not first-rate, and this has meant that a number of words and phrases remain illegible: I have noted all such instances in my translations. In order to make further reproduction from these copies worthwhile, I have undertaken to touch up the texts, except where blurring or lacunae were too great. It is to be hoped that sharper copies will eventually be made available; in the meantime, the present copies provide us with good working texts.

A Response to MacEoin's 'Problems of Scholarship...'

Dr. Moojan Momen

I read with interest Denis MacEoin's contribution: 'Problems of scholarship in a Baha'i Context' in the last issue of this Bulletin (Vol.1.No.3, December 1982, pp.44-68). Lambden's response (ibid, pp.69-80) covered much of the ground where Baha'is can, to some extent, agree with MacEoin but I would like to point out a number of issues over which, I feel, a Baha'i would disagree. MacEoin's paper, despite his asserione to the contrary, appeared to be much more an emotional vindication of his decision to leave the Baha'i community than a useful contribution to the discussion of scholarship in a Baha'i context. In MacEoin's paper can be seen two elements that are to be found in much of his writings on this subject: the first being a curious attachment to a rather outdated idea of objectivity in scholarship which underlies the second element: a veneer of more modern sociological theory which he is determined to impose upon the Baha'i Faith whether the facts fit or not.

To deal with the second of these elements first as it is the simpler, MacEoin appears to be unaware that in his description of the attitudes of the Baha'i administrative system, there is a contradiction that spans almost the entire length of his paper. At the beginning of the paper (p.45), he attributes the anti-intellectualism and dogmatism that he sees in the Baha'i community to the fact that the Baha'i Faith is sociologically still a sect-type movement. Throughout much of the rest of the paper and in some of his other writings, he expresses the utmost pessimism with respect to the dogmatism and authoritarianism of the Baha'i administration and considers this aspect of the Baha'i Faith likely to become worse rather than better (pp.57-59, 66-69, etc.).

As a footnote I would disagree with MacEoin's classification of the Baha'i community as, sociologically, a sect. This relates to MacEoin's own very limited experience of the world Baha'i community. There are several parts of the world where there are large Baha'i communities and wholly-Baha'i villages and, in these regions, the efforts of the Baha'is towards community development, the finding of uniquely-Baha'i solutions to social problems, the emergence of Baha'i educational and health projects, etc., all demonstrate a move by the community away from a sect-like attitude and towards exhibiting the attitudes of a church. Even some of the recent decisions of the British National Spiritual Assembly have some elements of this move in them.

To return to the main line of argument, however, even if we allow MacEoin's assertion that the Baha'i community, at present, exhibits many of the attributes of a sect, it is very clearly in the process of evolving towards being a church even in areas where there are not many Baha'is. It has already shed (or never had) many sect-like features: it sets no geographical or ethnic boundaries to its membership, it is oriented towards conversion of all, it rejects asceticism or any form of separation from the world. This would therefore contradict MacEoin's pessimism regarding the future direction of Baha'i administrative authoritarianism, since in moving from sect to church, there is a corresponding liberalisation of many aspects of authoritative control and a decrease in anti-intellectualism. The very fact that a paper such as MacEoin's with its harsh criticisms should be published in a Bulletin that is subject to the Baha'i review procedure speaks a great deal for the movement that has been made in recent years towards liberalisation and more effectively negates MacEoin's criticism of the Baha'i reviewing process (pp. 61-62) than any words of mine could. Nor was the Baha'i Faith ever so rigidly authoritarian as MacEoin seems to think it was. Avarih's book was not "dropped like a hot brick" (p. 60). It continued to be sold even after his apostasy and is mentioned in my book as well as appearing in its bibliography. Strangely enough, the last issue of the Bulletin which contained MacEoin's paper also carried evidence refuting MacEoin's assertions. I refer to the letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi in 1934 allowing Ahmad Sohrab's book to be advertised and distributed by the Baha'i administration after he himself had been declared a Covenant-Breaker (p. 83). Shoghi Effendi also clearly describes this evolution of the Baha'i community in a more liberal direction (not that I would expect MacEoin to put any faith in that alone).

It is difficult to know where to start in criticising MacEoin's naive faith in an outdated idea that scientific objectivity is attainable in a field such as the study of religion. In brief, although in the nineteenth century, scholars used to consider that it was possible to observe and analyse all phenomena in a detached and impartial manner, this is now recognised to be illusory. As one moves from the "hard" sciences to the "soft" sciences, the inter-relationship of the observer and the observed have an increasingly large effect upon the observations made. Not only is the observer capable of inducing changes in the observed but the individual and cultural biases of the observer will distort the observations made and may even influence the choice of what observations are to be made. In studying religion which must be considered to be at the extreme "soft" end of the range of "hard" and "soft" sciences in that it is an area of human activity guided by emotion and intuition rather than rational and verifiable processes, any claim to impartial observation is untenable. The claims made by a religion, and particularly the Baha'i Faith, are so far-reaching and all-encompassing that one is forced in one's mind to adopt an

attitude of either rejection or acceptance of those aspects of these claims that impinge upon the individual's personal life. Having once reacted in this way, one cannot then be said to be an impartial or unbiased observer. And the more one researches and delves into the subject, the less detached and impartial one becomes. Impartiality is illusory in such a field of study, and the more any scholar protests that he is impartial, the more likely it is that he is either deliberately concealing a bias or deluding himself. In criticising Mirza Abu'l-Fadl Gulpaygani's work for not having "that pretence of rigour..and lack of obvious bias that is so essential in [modern Western] scholarship" (p.58), MacEoin does not seem to be aware that he is admitting that many modern Western scholars put a great deal of effort into creating an appearance of impartiality and scholarship which is in fact a veneer for deep biases within their work.

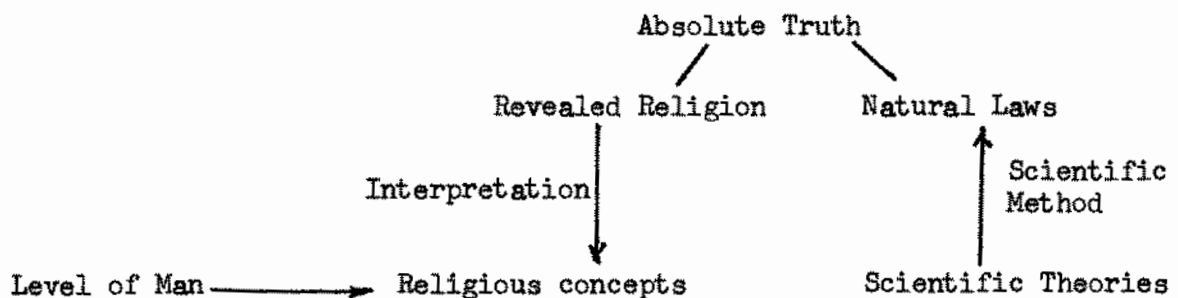
MacEoin accuses Baha'i scholars of bias although he is happy to make such sweeping assertions as: "I do not believe that a single work of scholarship of any merit whatsoever has ever been published within the confines of the Baha'i system, nor do I think any are likely to be" (p.58). I would reverse the statement and ask whether anyone who is as hostile and unsympathetic to the Baha'i Faith as MacEoin evidently now is should continue in this field of study or whether he should divert his very considerable intellectual talents into another field where his efforts are likely to be of more lasting value (it is worth noting that historically apostates have not been noted for making good scholars of the religion from which they apostasised). MacEoin's cynical attitude towards the Baha'i Faith is reminiscent of the attitude of many 19th Century orientalist towards Islam. While the work of these scholars on such peripheral matters as an analysis of the foreign words in the Qur'an may be of some lasting value, their attempts to describe the "internal" aspects of Islam or its history are not considered to have been of any permanent value because of their basic hostility to Islam and Muhammad which affected and distorted their writings. Scholarship in the twentieth century has come to realise that such an approach is not useful in analysing the reality of a religion. The reality of a religion consists not in the observable manifestations of the religion (its institutions, doctrines and practises) but in the area of what these externals mean to those who practise the religion. And anyone who takes a cynical, unsympathetic or hostile attitude to a religion will never penetrate this area at all. Similarly, in the field of history, that part of 19th-century orientalist scholarship which was directed towards demonstrating that Muhammad was a liar and an imposter or that his teachings were unoriginal is now played down and even considered something of an embarrassment to Western scholarship. Western scholars still attempt to analyse in detail the social and economic factors in Muhammad's environment and try to discern the effects these may have had on him, but the tone of their work is much removed from the superior, cynical attitude of many 19th-century scholars. Their references to Muhammad are courteous and respectful and it is clear that their object is not to cast doubt on Muhammad's integrity or indeed upon his claims.

Thus in his approach to the study of the Baha'i Faith, I feel MacEoin is out of touch with much of modern scholarship. In my opinion Wilfred Cantwell Smith (see Comparative Religion: wither and why, in The History of Religions: Essays in Methodology, Ed. M. Eliade and J. Kitagawa, University of Chicago, 1959) has produced the most thoughtful and penetrating account of this modern approach. Perhaps the key sentence in his essay is the following that he makes regarding Islam but which is applicable to the study of any religion: "Anything that I say about Islam as a living faith is valid only in so far as Muslims can say "Amen" to it." (He qualifies this statement by adding that the reverse is not necessarily true: that every statement about Islam that is acceptable to Muslims is not ipso facto true, p.43, and this is of course important otherwise we would be straying outside of the field of academic scholarship). I do not have the space to quote large sections of this work but I think one more quotation will give the reader an idea of Cantwell Smith's approach as well as being relevant to a topic that I intend to discuss shortly (I recommend anyone interested in this subject to study the whole essay most carefully): " Since the scholar presumably works from a university, that is, within the academic tradition, the statement he produces must first of all be meaningful and cogent within that tradition. That is it must satisfy all the most rigorous standards of scholarship. In the particular case where the encounter is between the academic tradition of the West and a particular religion, the statement that is evolved must satisfy each of the two traditions independently and transcend them both by satisfying them both simultaneously. This is not easy but I am persuaded that both in principle and practise it can be done" (p.53).

MacEoin is very wide of the mark when he makes such assertions as: " Hence the publication of the Kitab al-Aqdas or the writings of the Bab that are certain not to cause distress to the Baha'i masses, who would probably abandon the movement in large numbers if they knew what those writings really contained" (pp.61-2). Parallel to this is his statement: " there are also important- and more problematic- conceptual gulfs between what the majority of Baha'is (particularly in the West) believe and what the Baha'i Scriptures (much expurgated and bowdlerised in translation) teach. In this sense, I feel that large numbers of sincere people are, unknown to themselves, working and sacrificing for aims sometimes the diametrical opposite of those that they themselves cherish" (p.66). Such assertions, which as far as I can see have little substance to them, are easy to make and difficult, especially when no concrete examples are given, to refute without going into great length. But I would like to indicate the main lines along which I would dismiss this assertion. Anyone may take Baha'u'llah's writings, interpret them in all sorts of ways and then say to Baha'is: "Look! Baha'u'llah's writings are different to what you are being taught is the Baha'i Faith. But the concept of the Covenant requires that what Baha'is believe and act upon are

Shoghi Effendi's interpretation of Baha'u'llah's Revelation. In other words, it matters not a whit for Baha'is in what way MacEoin or anyone else thinks. Baha'u'llah's writings are different from what Western Baha'is believe as long as these Baha'is are satisfied that what is taught in the West accords with Shoghi Effendi's interpretations. Shoghi Effendi wrote much of his most important work in English and therefore most Western Baha'is have direct access to this material (without any need for translation and hence any supposed bowdlerisation and expurgation). Thus they are quite able to judge for themselves, with no fear of any major hidden surprises, whether the teachings of the Baha'i Faith are something that they wish to work and sacrifice for or not. One further point that MacEoin has failed to take into account is the fact that most people become Baha'is and remain Baha'is not because of any intellectual analysis of the Baha'i teachings but because of what they experience as the reality of the religion.

Much of the discussion in MacEoin's paper revolves loosely around the much-discussed Faith/Reason dichotomy. Here again I feel that MacEoin has misunderstood the principles involved, MacEoin states that although the Baha'i teachings play lip service to the essential harmony between science and religion, in reality, if there is a disagreement between the two, the rational argument is forced to bend in favour of the revealed word: "the Baha'i version of revelation invariably reserves for revelation the final say" (p.57). But this is not at all the Baha'i viewpoint. If I may put what could be a very lengthy discussion briefly, simplistically and diagrammatically:



The Baha'i Faith believes that there is an Absolute Truth which is beyond the powers of finite man ever to attain. But in our efforts to get closer to it, we have two main paths of approach, the rational faculty associated with the scientific method and the intuitive faculty assisted by the revealed word of God. Although in their absolute form both of these approaches are "true" (i.e. the revealed word of God is the "Truth" and the Universal Laws of nature are the "Truth"), in practice, man has no access to these absolute values: for in respect to the word of God, man, in applying this to any given situation, is introducing the element of interpretation which means that there is no longer any certainty of being "true"; and in respect to natural laws, man can only, through the scientific method, produce theories which appear to him at the time to explain most closely natural phenomena, fully realising that the

passage of time will certainly lead to the discarding of present theories in favour of other formulations that more closely match the pattern of observable phenomena. Thus at the level of man there can be no certainty and no infallibility in either the scientific or the religious approach. The Baha'i view then is that we must, in building our conceptual frameworks, seek for solutions that satisfy both our understanding of the revealed word and our current scientific theories (thus we end up in a position not very far from that described by Cantwell Smith—see above). In the event of a clash between the two, we must attempt to transcend the apparent contradiction by either reviewing our interpretation of the revealed word or re-examining our scientific theories in the hope of breaking through the impasse. Should that be achieved, then we have brought ourselves a small step closer to the "Absolute Truth" and if we fail then we must suspend judgement and wait for the evolution of religious thought and scientific theory to resolve the problem at a future date. This is obviously a very large subject but I think the above is sufficient to show how the Baha'i idea of the essential harmony between science and religion in no way leads to an automatic rejection of all science that does not agree with religion. MacEoin may well rejoin that, in his experience, the practise does not conform to the theory as outlined above but I would maintain that that may well have been due more to the tone and manner in which he made his views known— a subject to which I will return shortly.

I would maintain moreover that the Baha'i approach outlined above is more in keeping with the spirit and trend of much modern scholarship. The sort of secular rationalism (or perhaps it should be labelled rationalist positivism) obviously favoured by MacEoin (and demonstrated in his frequent quotations of Popper) is being increasingly rejected by the intellectual world (or at least large sections of it). Having experimented with such secular philosophies and pseudo-scientific rationalism for several generations, the resulting tendency to a sterile reductionism has left many scholars and intellectuals looking for more satisfying solutions. The last decade has seen an intensification of this trend (together with a parallel movement in the world at large towards a "return towards religion" and a revival of existential philosophies). This tendency is not a "flight from reason toward irrationalism" as MacEoin has stated (p.58) but rather a recognition that there is a limit to how far such methods as reductionism and conceptual analysis can take the scholar particularly in a field of study such as religion. While these methods may have some success in analysing the minutiae of the externals of the religion, they have very limited application when it comes to assessing deeper and more fundamental questions.

By all this I do not intend to dismiss MacEoin's secular rationalist approach (in the same way he dismisses the Baha'i one) as being devoid of any possibility of producing useful results. All I say is that it must take its place alongside

other methods and approaches(such as a Christian,Buddhist or Baha'i approach) and has no a priori claim to superiority as an approach.It may have advantages in some areas but its approach imposes its own limits in other areas (as is true with every other approach) and I have indicated what some of these are.It is up to every scholar to decide which approach is most likely to yield useful result in the work he is doing.

Underlying much of MacEoin's criticism is his antagonistic attitude towards the Baha'i administration which is no doubt a direct result of his clash with the Baha'i institutions while he was a Baha'i.Again there is some confusion in MacEoin's thinking on this matter.While it may be true that the Baha'i Faith is, to a large extent, epistemologically authoritarian,it is only to a small degree totalitarian (i.e. politically authoritarian) in its administration.MacEoin has made a large and illogical jump from the one to the other.Having demonstrated epistemological authoritarianism in the Baha'i Faith,he goes on to make assertions and draw conclusions particularly about the future direction of the Baha'i Faith as though he had established its totalitarian nature.In fact in the whole of the 23 pages of the paper there is no evidence whatsoever produced to support his assertion that the Baha'i Faith is certain to slide into ever greater degrees of totalitarianism beyond the rather vacuous assertion that: "mankind cannot rely on the professed ideals of groups as a guide to how they will behave" (p.58).It is possible to postulate that any political or administrative structure could be undermined by individuals and end up in a distorted form(even Western democracy has witnessed this with Hitler) but it is hardly a useful basis for discussion if there is no other evidence to present.Again MacEoin's assertion that "critical examination,based on sociological,philosophical or other criteria,of textual or empirical data that may lead to conclusions about Baha'ism[sic] radically different to those of official propaganda" (p.66) sounds very impressive but one searches in vain for any evidence for this assertion in the paper.

One is left wondering,after reading MacEoin's paper, what sort of political system he is advocating.From his statement that he would like to live in a system where he is free to abandon any rules with which he does not agree (p.65) ,one wonders whether he is advocating anarchy.But if we assume,for the moment that he accepts the need for order in society and therefore for limitation on personal freedom,then I would maintain that the system envisaged in the Baha'i Faith fulfills all the requirements that he sets out while at the same time guarding against some of the less desirable aspects of Western democracy.

As Shoghi Effendi has pointed out,the Baha'i administrative system is not a democracy,not is it totalitarian,not theocracy nor a large range of other systems that mankind has tried before.Therefore the balance between the various systems of authority that the Baha'i Faith possesses will be uncomfortable to all who enter it (just as much for someone like MacEoin from a democratic Western background as for

someone from a tribal or other non-Western culture who may find the democratic aspects of the Baha'i system alien and disconcerting) but that is part of the challenge of being a Baha'i.

It is worth pointing out that the Counsellors who are portrayed in MacEoin's account as authoritarian demagogues in fact possess no executive powers at all. Their role is solely advisory and exhortatory. All executive decisions are in the hands of the democratically-elected institutions. I do not deny that there may be authoritarian individuals among Baha'is as among any other group of human beings but the structure of the Baha'i community is more effective than most in minimizing the cult of personality and the impact that one authoritarian individual can have. As Stephen Lambden has pointed out in his response to MacEoin's paper, the response that one elicits from such individuals as Counsellors depends a great deal on the occasion and manner in which controversial points are put to them rather than the points themselves. Their principal responsibilities are not for maintaining the academic purity of Baha'i thought but of nurturing and developing the Baha'i community and therefore if the unwise actions of the scholar threaten to disrupt the community and cause dismay, the Counsellors may well act in a manner that will seem to the scholar to represent a cutting off of a free exchange of thoughts and ideas. But the same thoughts put forward by the same scholar on a more suitable occasion would be accepted and discussed.

MacEoin sees a certain amount of authoritarianism in the Baha'i system and predicts from this that the Baha'i Faith will grow more and more authoritarian despite what he admits are many passages in the Baha'i Holy Writings that enjoin against such a trend. I would postulate, on the contrary, that the Baha'i community has, in its Scripture, a permanent self-correcting mechanism. For each generation of Baha'is will be concerned not so much with what the previous generation of Baha'is thought and did but rather will look to this Scripture and aim to bring the reality of their community more closely into line with the ideals set out therein. Thus whatever distortions and deviations from Baha'i teachings may be present in the present generation will not be the basis for even greater deviations in the next generation.

A great deal of the area in which Baha'is would disagree with MacEoin revolves around his underlying, unspoken assumption that the Baha'i community should, in its teachings, its literature, its organisation and its activities, comply with academic standards. Thus, for example, he states concerning Baha'i literature: "large numbers of ideologically unexceptionable materials are churned out, none of which have any scholarly value" (p. 61). I fail to see any reason why Baha'i literature, very little of which has ever been written by academics or for academics, should have any scholarly value. The primary purpose of these publications is to be spiritually edifying, to present the Baha'i Faith to the non-Baha'i

world*, or to clarify some aspect of its internal workings. If they happen to be of scholarly value, all well and good, but that is hardly a criterion for publication. Similarly, MacEoin's complaint that the books published tell us "nothing about the most crucial issues," presupposes that the Baha'i world agrees with MacEoin as to what are the "crucial issues". In fact those aspects of the Baha'i Faith that MacEoin appears to consider crucial are of no more than passing interest to the majority of Baha'is. This brings us back to the point that the Baha'i Faith is a religious community not a club for scholars.

A similar narrowness of outlook surrounds MacEoin's discussion of the term Culama. Culama means those who possess Cilm and this word has connotations much wider than the narrow type of "book-learning" that MacEoin is implying. Cilm also implies perception and understanding as well as being used for the mystical and esoteric type of knowledge. It is quite clear from Baha'u'llah's praise of certain Culama whom he regards as being the true Culama and his condemnation of others with their narrow book-learning (see for example the passage regarding Muhammad Karim Khan Kirmānī in Kitāb-i-Īqān, London, 1961, pp. 118-119) that he looked to this much wider view. Shoghi Effendi's appointment, as Hand of the Cause, of Musa Banani, by his own admission barely literate, must also be taken into consideration. Thus it is clear to any Baha'i that, both in theory and practice, the Baha'i Faith has taken a much wider view of the term Culama than the one that MacEoin wishes to impose.

I wish to put on record that I have not the slightest doubt of Denis MacEoin's very considerable intellectual abilities nor is anything that I have written in this paper intended to cast doubts on his integrity (although I consider that his negative attitude towards the Baha'i Faith has had a deleterious effect upon his output on the subject in recent years). However, over the years, he has penned many similar papers and letters, harshly critical of the Baha'i administration in particular, and, although in the past I have not been sufficiently interested in the issues raised to reply, I felt that his latest outpouring may have caused a good deal of dismay and distress to some Baha'is who may have read it and therefore I felt that a firm rebuttal of many of the points in the article that were clearly distortions of the Baha'i Faith and its teachings was necessary. I must record my surprise moreover that such an emotional and subjective paper should have been published in a Bulletin that purports to maintain scholarly standards. Perhaps its publication may be linked to the editor's complaint on p. 2 of the same Bulletin that he has failed to receive sufficient material for publication and has been forced to fall back on "space-fillers" in which case I can only heartily re-inforce his plea for a greater influx of material.

* Despite MacEoin's stricture (p. 44), I see nothing wrong in the use of this term [non-Baha'i]. Even academics use the terms "Christian and non-Christian", "Muslim and non-Muslim", see, for example Joachim Wach's collection of essays, Types of Religious Experience: Christian and Non-Christian. I suspect that the basis of this and much else that MacEoin writes is an unwillingness to accord the Baha'i Faith recognition as being on an equal basis with the other world religions.

A Critique of Moojan Momen's Response to my 'Problems of Scholarship in a Baha'i Context

Denis MacEoin

On first being shown Moojan Momen's response to my article on Baha'i scholarship, I was delighted that he had taken the trouble to write it -- I had, after all, presented my original remarks solely with the object of initiating a wider discussion. Having already written at some length and, to some extent, had my say on several important issues, I was happy to let Moojan's rejoinder speak for itself and, perhaps, in due course, evoke further responses. But after finishing and reflecting on his comments, I found myself strangely disturbed, and in the time that has elapsed since then, I have not been able to shake off that initial sense of disturbance, until, in the end, I have felt compelled to put pen to paper again. It has saddened me very much that an old friend like Moojan has been so unfair in his evaluation and presentation of what I have written and that he has felt it necessary or desirable to use so many ad hominem arguments in the course of his response.

That, of course, is still pretty much on the personal level, and, had that been all, I think it would have been wisest to have let the matter rest there. After all, he does have the right to a few sharp words addressed in my direction after my fairly critical review of his recent book. But there is more to Moojan's response than personal attack on me and my motives. By re-arranging and reworking the arguments in the way he has, and by misquoting and misrepresenting me on occasion, he has succeeded in turning what was a basically **academic debate** (controversial in tone though it may have been) into a matter of apologetics, much as earlier Baha'i writers such as Gulpaygani (in the Kashf al-ghita') used all manner of tendentious ploys to repudiate Browne's views about the distortion of Babi history and doctrine by the Baha'is. Reading Moojan's response confirms a feeling I have had for some time, that he is not really concerned with academic scholarship, but with the promotion and defence of a fairly orthodox view of Baha'ism. Now, there is absolutely nothing wrong with that, so long as we are all aware that that is what is going on. There must be such writers in any religious tradition, and I have very high regard for Moojan's abilities as an orthodox scholar; he is, to my mind, a great deal more honest and accurate than many earlier writers in the same tradition, such as Ishraq Khavari, and is a very worthy successor in this country to Hasan Balyuzi, whom I also held in very high esteem.

Problems arise, however, when basically pietist scholars like Moojan, or those associated with the Canadian Association for Studies on the Baha'i Faith or World Order magazine, insist that they are involved in the same sort of scholarly activity as researchers in the wider world. Sometimes, of course, that is true, but very often it is not, and the results can frequently be misleading. It is because of this and because of the risk that it may add further to the confusion that exists in this area, that I feel compelled to reply to Moojan's response, at the risk of turning a simple discussion into a protracted controversy. I will readily admit, however, that at least one other factor impelling me to reply in this way is my realization that Moojan himself would prefer the whole issue to be dropped in case it disturbs too many people, whom he appears to feel it is his duty to protect. I do not, on the whole, respond well to hints of that kind.

I suppose my strongest reaction to Moojan's response (apart from the inevitable sense of personal injury from several of his remarks) was a feeling that, in a way, the whole thing confirmed just about everything I had written about the difficulties of generating valid scholarship within a Baha'i context. A number of passages indicate the level on which Moojan carries on his argument:

'... it matters not a whit for Baha'is in what way MacEoin or anyone else thinks Baha'u'llah's writings are different from what Western Baha'is believe as long as these Baha'is are satisfied that what is taught in the West accords with Shoghi Effendi's interpretations' (p.61).

'I fail to see any reason why Baha'i literature... should have any scholarly

value. The primary purpose of these publications is to be spiritually edifying.... (p.64).

'... I felt that his (MacEoin's) latest outpouring may have caused a good deal of dismay and distress to some Baha'is who may have read it and therefore felt that a firm rebuttal of many of the points in the article that were clearly distortions of the Baha'i Faith and its teachings was necessary' (p.65).

Now, I fully appreciate Moojan's concern as expressed in these and other passages and I am happy to accept that, within its proper context, such concern is proper and unavoidable. All I would venture to suggest is that the context of these statements is that of faith, not scholarship, but that what I was seeking to discuss was scholarship, not faith. Of course my views matter not at all to anyone committed to blindly accepting Shoghi Effendi's interpretations; of course Baha'i literature ought not primarily to be scholarly, any more than, as Moojan says (p.65), the Baha'i faith should be a club for scholars; and of course some of my views may cause distress in certain quarters and necessitate Moojan's timely intervention to keep the faithful on the straight and narrow. But what has any of this to do with the question of how scholarship can be carried on about Baha'ism and related topics (a) by non-adherents, (b) by adherents, or (c) by both groups together?

It is axiomatic that most religious literature should be 'spiritually edifying' (though what is axiomatic does not necessarily follow naturally, as the Baha'i example shows); but it is also, I would have thought, axiomatic that scholarly writing on the same subject be academically sound, that historical writing be empirically accurate, that theological discussion be philologically, textually, hermeneutically, and methodologically rigorous. It is obvious that my views may be wholly irrelevant to the true believer, but that does not mean they are irrelevant absolutely. There is a bigger world out here, in which most people do not subscribe to Shoghi Effendi's interpretation of anything, and the inhabitants of that world have every right to suggest alternative views of Baha'i scripture, history, or doctrine. Moojan is perfectly correct from the point of view of undeviating faith and 'protection'; but the debate is about scholarship.

This problem is evident in the very first paragraph of Moojan's reply, where he maintains that Steve Lambden's response 'covered much of the ground where Baha'is can, to some extent, agree with MacEoin' and goes on to say that he will now point out some issues 'over which... a Baha'i would disagree' (p.57). I am disturbed here by the phrases 'Baha'is can... agree' and 'a Baha'i would disagree'. What does this amount to but an assertion that there is a sort of party line on agreement and disagreement, that individuals, once committed to the true faith, cease to exercise any kind of independent thinking, that they must instead subscribe wholly and unreservedly to certain propositions established by Moojan and others? There is, I fear, reflected in this much of the orthodox Baha'i view that there ought to be a high level of agreement between believers on all issues: disagreement implies disunity, and disunity is the greatest of all sins. That, again, is a perfectly fair attitude from the point of view of faith (although the idea of unity at any price is, perhaps, ethically questionable), but, for the purposes of scholarship and even of meaningful dialogue, it is deleterious in the extreme. Even on the level of faith, however, I doubt whether it is an altogether healthy attitude, and I would think there are many Baha'i readers who would take issue with Moojan on this point. I shall return to a different facet of this problem later, in discussing the question of 'authenticity'.

I am, in general, not a little disturbed by Moojan's ill-disguised contempt for contemporary western scholarship, despite his numerous attempts to pretend that he is concerned with academic values. This underlying hostility is inadvertently but, I think, sharply revealed in a passage on page 59 in which he quotes from my original article:

'In criticising Mirza Abu'l-Fadl Gulpaygani's work for not having "that pretence of rigour... and lack of obvious bias that is so essential in (modern Western) scholarship (p.58)", MacEoin does not seem to be aware that he is admitting that many modern Western scholars put a great deal of effort into creating an appearance of impartiality and scholarship which is in fact a veneer for deep biases within their work.'

It is instructive to refer back to my article to see what I actually wrote there: '... because they (the works of Baha'i scholars from Gulpaygani onwards)

lack even the pretence of rigour, of critical analysis, of open-mindedness, of balance and lack of obvious bias that is so essential in works of scholarship.' I do not wish to suggest that Moojan has deliberately misquoted me, but I do find it significant that he has done so in the way he has and that he has drawn from his misquotation the conclusions he presents. It is curious that he has not seen the significance of the word 'even', that he has left out those phrases ('critical analysis', 'open-mindedness', 'balance') that do not fit very well with the idea of 'pretence', and that he has sought to qualify 'scholarship' with 'modern Western', which I did not do. Moojan's own deep-seated fantasy that modern western scholars are all really engaged in maintaining a pretence of impartiality and open-mindedness has so taken hold of him that he does not even find it curious that I should 'admit' to such a thing.

In his first paragraph, Moojan also argues that, despite my assertions to the contrary, my paper 'appeared to be much more an emotional vindication of (my) decision to leave the Baha'i community than a useful contribution to the discussion of scholarship in a Baha'i context' (p.57). To be fair, I did not claim that my article was wholly free of any element of vindication, but expressed the belief that it did not represent 'in the main' an attempt to rationalize and justify my own loss of faith. I did, in fact, try to address this problem on page 65. I am willing to accept that there is more than an element of vindication in my article -- it would scarcely be human to expect otherwise. But I did attempt to avoid justificatory issues as far as possible, and I am disturbed that Moojan has failed to see that. My reasons for joining the Baha'i movement in the first place, for remaining in it for nearly fifteen years, and for leaving it in the end, are very complex and have much to do with my development on several levels as a person. Moojan himself argues, quite rightly, that 'most people become Baha'is and remain Baha'is not because of any intellectual analysis of the Baha'i teachings but because of what they experience as the reality of the religion' (p.61). In addition -- but this is bound to be more uncomfortable for Moojan to accept -- many people leave Baha'ism behind in the end also 'because of what they experience as the reality of the religion'. If joining and belonging can be justified in such terms, so, I fear, can leaving. I would even go so far as to say that, for some people, abandoning a religion such as Baha'ism can be an important and necessary step in their spiritual development.

Of course, I had intellectual problems as a Baha'i, but, as in the case of other ex-Baha'is of my acquaintance, these were not ultimately responsible for my decision to leave. When I wrote that I did not want to pen a vindication of that decision, I was being entirely honest, with my readers as much as with myself. To write such a vindication would require a wholly different approach and would involve much discussion of my own personal development from a teenager open to the appeal of Baha'i ideas and society through to an adult whose experience of life and of the Baha'i community compelled him in other directions. It seems significant to me that Moojan has failed to appreciate this very basic fact, particularly since he has known me personally for a very long time. It is possible -- and I stress this point -- to write objective explanations of Baha'ism which have nothing to do with purely personal responses to it as a religion. If such explanations should be critical, this may have nothing at all to do with personal feelings. In my article, I took great care to point out that the majority of my criticisms were ones I had already entertained as an active, believing Baha'i (albeit one with those doubts that are such an essential adjunct of faith). To seek to invalidate those same criticisms by asserting that they represent some sort of private vindication is somewhat shabby, and I hope no-one will be seriously misled by it.

It is certainly not helpful in a discussion of this sort to refer to me, even if only indirectly, as an 'apostate' (p.59). That Moojan thinks in such terms at all is somewhat disturbing and not a little revealing. The use of intemperate language of this kind is, of course, fairly common in Baha'i literature, particularly in the works of Shoghi Effendi, who hurls invective and abuse at all whom he regards as 'enemies of the cause', and Moojan is well within the conventions of this tradition when he employs such terms. Whatever else it may be, this is not the language of scholarship or informed debate.

I will admit that many of the points I make involve issues about which I feel strongly, and that they are often expressed in emotive language. Emotive, but not, I think, unconsidered. My adoption of a critical and forceful style is in part a natural and honest reflection of the strength of my feelings about certain issues, in part a deliberate attempt to stimulate controversy. Moojan, like the Haifa Research Department and so many other defenders of Baha'i orthodoxy, fights shy of anything that may 'cause alarm in the breasts of... believers'. He would rather I did not write on the subject at all; my ideas may cause distress in some quarters, which will necessitate a 'firm rebuttal' in order to calm those disquieted by unconventional views. God forbid that someone might be agitated enough to engage in some sort of independent search after truth. I can understand Moojan's concern and, to some extent, sympathize with it. But, to be frank, it worries me more than anything. None of us enjoys watching news reports about famine in Ethiopia or massacres in Assam, but it is extremely important that we do so. Some governments do not like public debate about sensitive issues, but politics would stagnate without it. And sometimes the issues are just too important to allow the sensitivities of a handful of civil servants or government ministers to prevent open and critical debate -- as is the case, for example, with the nuclear weapons and civil defence issues in this country. Moojan reminds me a little of Margaret Thatcher and Michael Heseltine, smoothly trying to reassure the public that they and their generals have everything under control and that, if war does break out, we should white-wash our windows and hide under the table. People need to be shaken, shocked out of complacency, disturbed by the realities of life. Can Moojan really deny that almost all Baha'i writing, speeches, and discussions are bland and uncontroversial to the point of sterility? Or has he lived so long in the cocoon of Baha'i values and standards that he has completely lost sight of what goes on outside. If a controversial style helps puncture complacency or disturb blandness, it can be no bad thing.

I cannot help feel that there is a large element of elitism in Moojan's attitude. He, of course, is privy to these difficult matters and can handle them. The mass of simple believers, on the other hand, must be protected from them, must be kept in blissful ignorance. Moojan does not, at the same time, seem to think it at all harmful for the same people to be exposed to the inanities, gross oversimplifications, and pious meanderings of any number of popular and influential Baha'i writers. These, no doubt, he sees as spiritually uplifting. But for whom? Not, surely, for himself -- I cannot imagine that he finds anything in them. For the simple masses, of course.

This underlying dread of controversy is clearly responsible for many of the attitudes expressed in Moojan's response and is, indeed, one of the most notable features of his literary work in general. It is particularly evident in his support of the view that 'the response that one elicits from such individuals as Counsellors depends a great deal on the occasion and manner in which controversial points are put to them rather than the points themselves' (p.64) and his insistence that 'if the unwise actions of the scholar threaten to disrupt the community and cause dismay, the Counsellors may well act in a manner that will seem to the scholar to represent a cutting off of a free exchange of thoughts and ideas' (ibid). It is interesting that these passages occur in the course of an attempt to defend Counsellors from the charge of authoritarianism, whereas the attitude of extreme deference expressed in them seems to me to provide a certain confirmation of that charge. It is significant that Moojan is ready to depict the words or actions of the scholar as potentially 'unwise', 'threatening', 'disrupting', and 'dismaying', whereas those of Counsellors are 'nurturing' or 'developing'. But what if -- as I have often known to be the case -- Counsellors or other members of the Baha'i hierarchy behave unwisely, what if they threaten deeper values, what if they dismay intelligent and sensitive individuals? It seems that, once the hierarchical perspective has been adopted, words and actions may be judged, not on their own merits, but in terms of the authority-source from which they originate. Scholars are, indeed, often unwise and do frequently cause dismay; but so, for that matter, do Hands, Counsellors, Board Members, NSA members, and so on. Merely to submit to the opinions or feelings of individuals because of the

formal positions they hold bolsters up precisely that kind of authoritarianism about which I have previously expressed misgivings.

Perhaps the matter would not be quite as serious if things were as black and white as Moojan suggests: hot-headed, inflammatory scholars (typified by apostates like myself) on the one hand, and wise, sensitive Hands or Counsellors or whatever on the other. But in my own experience and that of others with whom I have spoken over the years, the most worrying feature of such clashes as have occurred lies precisely in the fact that innocuous or even strictly orthodox remarks based on scripture can often evoke near-hysterical responses. I may have a personal penchant for controversy, but I am not so wholly lacking in tact or wisdom as Moojan appears to think (though I am lacking in subservience). In my later years as a Baha'i, I did, in fact, make genuine and considered efforts to tone down my writing and lecturing, and I know that a great many perfectly ordinary Baha'is responded positively to my views. It was all the more horrifying to me, then, that I was again and again attacked, not for having expressed obviously controversial or heretical views, but opinions backed up by scriptural authority or solid historical evidence which just happened to run counter to the views of certain privileged groups or individuals. I was never surprised when my consciously controversial opinions were refuted, but I was surprised and hurt when cautiously-expressed, thoughtful views were attacked with a breath-taking viciousness that left me stunned. Moojan sets much store by the fact that Counsellors 'possess no executive powers at all' (p. 64), stressing the fact that 'their role is solely to advisory and exhortatory' (ibid). Counsellors and all the rest do not need executive powers to exercise authority. Does Moojan honestly imagine that real power rests solely with executive bodies, that human society is that simple? The ulama' in Islam possess no executive powers, but I would not like to conclude from that that they possess no authority. Indeed, Islam, like Baha'ism, claims to be a religion without a priesthood; but it cannot be denied that it has a powerful spiritual hierarchy.

All of this is taking us a little away from the main topic, so let me return to Moojan's response. On page 57, Moojan first raises an argument which is to feature regularly in his discussion -- the view that I have 'a curious attachment to a rather outdated idea of objectivity in scholarship'. He considers this point in detail on pages 58-59 where he attempts to criticize my 'naive faith in an outdated idea that scientific objectivity is attainable in a field such as the study of religion' (p. 58). I fear that here, as elsewhere, Moojan's preferred technique is to set up Aunt Sallys, which he can then proceed to knock down; but I cannot let him get away with this. I do not wish to undertake a further, prolonged discussion of scientific method and so on -- it would be preferable if readers returned to my original article to find out what I actually did say, rather than relying on what Moojan thinks I said. But it is important to point out that I have nowhere expressed a belief in the attainment of total objectivity, and that I do not, in fact, hold to such a belief. Perhaps Moojan should read again my remarks on page 55 of my article. I state there that 'there is such a thing as objective or absolute truth' (which, I notice, Moojan also states on page 61), but I then go on to describe the positivist outlook (which holds that such truth can be attained by men) as 'meaningless'. Some sentences later, I describe how 'our advancing theories are steps on an unending path towards an ultimately unattainable goal, approximations rather than final statements about the truth' (p. 55). Following this, I quote Popper to the effect that 'science has nothing to do with the quest for certainty or probability or reliability. We are not interested in establishing scientific theories as secure, or certain, or probable' (ibid). I later quote him again as saying that objective truth is 'the standard which we may fall short of' (ibid). My own attitude is, I think, well summed up some pages earlier in the statement that 'the scientist (or sociologist or linguist or historian) must proceed by methods that are rational, critical, open to criticism, universal, and as free from subjective bias as it is possible to render them' (p. 53). It is perverse of Moojan to conclude from such a discussion that I cling to an 'outdated' belief that 'scientific objectivity is attainable', when I have just stated exactly the opposite. I have, indeed, to ask whether he has actually read or read carefully the relevant sections of my article. And I wonder if he has ever read any Popper.

I suspect, however, that it matters very little to Moojan what I really think and what I actually say. It is evident from several passages in the present

refutation that he is determined to demonstrate that I am somehow uninformed of modern developments, even in my own field: 'in his approach to the study of the Baha'i Faith, I feel MacEoin is out of touch with much of modern scholarship' (p.60). Apart from the rather insulting quality of such remarks directed by an amateur to someone working full-time in the area, I feel that they are very wide of the mark and, in fact, indicate further Moojan's own inability to grasp the nature of contemporary debate in this field.

The basic problem in Moojan's arguments on page 60f and his use of Cantwell Smith to bolster his position lies, I think, in a failure to distinguish between the areas of empirical investigation and the discussion of faith-related matters. Perhaps Moojan has not yet read Smith's classic study, The Meaning and End of Religion, a work which I would recommend to him most highly. There, Smith distinguishes what he calls the 'cumulative tradition' from 'faith' and argues as follows: 'Men may differ as to the content of faith or as to its validity, but there is in principle little room for differing as to its overt manifestations across the centuries in their resplendent or grotesque variety. The unobservable part of man's history, especially his religious history, may and indeed must be acknowledged an open question so far as scholarship is concerned. Meanwhile the observable part, including that of his religious history, is because of that very scholarship accessible to open scrutiny' (p.155).

No scholar, however eirenicly inclined, will ever condone lack of rigour, bias, or obfuscation in the investigation of empirical facts about religion: what really happened in history, what texts actually state, what social factors are at work. Disagreement there will be, of course, but there will be mutual respect between disputants so long as all are willing to abide by what one might describe as the 'rules' of academic research. And it is this that I was primarily concerned with in my article, in that I sought to identify what I consider to be obstacles in the way of such research within the Baha'i community. I do not suggest that there can ever be absolute agreement as to 'facts', and I certainly would not wish to imply that there could (or should) ever be agreement as to the interpretation even of mutually-agreed empirical data.

I am aware that one of Moojan's major concerns is to defend his faith from what he sees as 'hostile and unsympathetic' (p.59) analysis phrased in 'emotional and subjective' (p.65) language. Certainly, Baha'ism has in the past suffered greatly from largely unwarranted attacks from its Muslim and Christian opponents, and it is understandable that sensitivity has developed in this area. Moojan, I think, in common with quite a few other more orthodox Baha'is, sees my writing as falling within this category and seeks to erect defences against it, using methods similar to those employed in the refutation of polemical attacks. He is, of course, entitled to think and react in that way, but I would, at least, like to make one or two distinctions clear. Unlike Muslim, Christian or other polemicists, I did not start out unsympathetic to Baha'ism for ideological or other reasons. On the contrary, I was for a great many years an active and enthusiastic supporter of the movement, if anything more dedicated to its propagation and defence than even Moojan himself. In the end, however, academic research and increased experience took their toll and caused me to become disillusioned and -- yes -- 'hostile and unsympathetic'. But this does not place my work in the same category as that of anti-Baha'i polemicists, since it is based, not on a priori assumptions about the movement formulated from existing beliefs, but on close study and observation followed by careful analysis. Had I overcome initial biases of hostility to reach favourable conclusions about Baha'ism, no doubt Moojan would hold me up as a model of academic method. It is, I fear, merely because the biases I had to overcome were those of allegiance and the results I reached were, in many cases, unfavourable, that he finds cause for complaint.

In this, I feel that Moojan displays much of the selectivity to which I refer more than once in my article. Were I writing critically about, let us say, the Moonies or Scientologists or Jehovah's Witnesses, I doubt very much if he would find fault with either my style or my method. Why does Moojan not apply his eirenic principles to 'Abd al-Baha' when he calls the Protestants 'the most fanatical of all sects' (Makatib vol.2 p.119) or makes vehement accusations against the Papacy (Some Answered Questions, ch.34); why does he not describe Baha' Allah as 'hostile and unsympathetic' when he refers to the Shi'is as 'the most wretched of sects' (Ma'ida-yi asmani vol.7 p.182) and their leaders as

'false, cruel and cowardly' (quoted Promised Day is Come p.88); why does he not speak of the 'basic hostility to Islam' of Shoghi Effendi, who writes in the most extreme and abusive of language about the fate of that religion in the modern world (see, for example, *ibid* pp.93-98)?

To be frank, I see no reason why Baha'is or Baha'ism should be given preferential treatment in this respect. Simply because a movement claims to be a 'world religion' or whatever does not automatically entitle it to nothing but favourable comment. Baha'is do seem to want things very much their own way. They demand the right to preach their religion freely and widely, and to seek converts on as large a scale as possible. In the end, they aim to bring the whole world under their system. But should anyone attempt to present alternative versions of the movement or its aims to the public, in speech or writing, they often become hysterical and accuse their critics of 'bias', 'hostility', and so forth, being particular happy to appeal to western liberal notions of religious tolerance that are sometimes conspicuously absent in the Baha'i scriptures themselves. They may often be right. But the very act of making claims for a religion (especially claims based on the assumption that the existing order of society is defunct and must be replaced by a new system) must necessarily expose it and its adherents to criticism. The public has a right to hear all sides. It would be naive to imagine that all religions and all doctrines are somehow 'good' or 'beneficial', and it is disingenuous to argue that a hostile or cynical approach to a particular movement is a sign of hostility or cynicism towards religion itself. There is a difference that Moojan has yet to learn between deliberate and uncalled-for abuse and forceful language based on careful consideration of the facts. Critical accounts may be embarrassing, even damaging, to a given movement, but they may be of considerable benefit to society at large, whose well-being must be the scholar's primary concern. This principle is, I think, being more widely recognized since the advent of new religious movements like the Moonies and Scientologists, whose activities are readily recognizable as harmful to society as a whole.

When he suggests that I should divert my intellectual talents into 'another field' (p.59), what Moojan is really saying is that I should either write pleasant things about Baha'ism (i.e. things with which he agrees or with which he is told to agree by those above him) or avoid making waves. This would, of course, be convenient and tidy from the orthodox point of view, but as a suggestion it has no place in a debate on the question of academic scholarship within the Baha'i context. What does Moojan really want to happen? That every time a scholar writes critical or demythologizing or otherwise awkward comment about Baha'ism, he should be persuaded to abandon the subject? Or perhaps anyone, not just a Baha'i, wanting to write about the religion, should be required to submit his work to a Baha'i reviewing committee. It seems to me that Moojan would like to restrict scholarship in this field to those who are willing to play by rules established by him. Even some seminars recently organized by him have been notable for the restrictions placed on those invited to attend. Such developments are decidedly a backward step for scholarship in this field. It was always the pious but genuine hope of earlier seminars in this country that we might encourage 'non-Baha'i' academics, whatever their opinions, to attend and to contribute, thereby expanding the range and quality of viewpoints expressed and exposing internally-acceptable views, which might not go observed, to useful criticism. Now, it seems, seminars are to remain closed to all but the faithful, or to be open, perhaps, to carefully-selected outsiders who can be relied on not to present opinions that could prove disturbing. These are excellent defensive tactics, but they are unlikely to reassure the academic world about the real intentions of Baha'i scholars.

To return to the question of my supposed ignorance of contemporary developments in scholarship, I would suggest that it is, in fact, Moojan himself who displays a curious lack of knowledge in his discussion of the development of Islamic studies (pp.59-60), where he draws a contrast between 'many 19th Century (sic) orientalist towards Islam' (p.59) and modern scholars, whose 'references to Muhammad are courteous and respectful' (p.59). I fear Moojan is sadly ill-informed about what has happened in the modern period in this field. Modern scholarship has certainly become increasingly scientific and open-minded, and no

competent Islamicist today would dream of proceeding from the a priori assumptions of many of his nineteenth-century predecessors. But if Moojan imagines for a moment that this has made modern western writing on Islam acceptable to Muslims, he is seriously out of touch with the subject. He need only read Edward Said's Orientalism to see that many Muslims are, if anything, even more violently opposed to the work of contemporary 'orientalists' than that of earlier writers. These latter could often be dismissed as polemicists writing with a missionary or related intention, but modern writers employing the methods of contemporary scholarship are seen to be infinitely more dangerous to orthodoxy precisely because they have broken away from overt religious or cultural biases. Moojan may be correct in suggesting that the object of modern Islamicists 'is not to cast doubt on Muhammad's integrity or indeed upon his claims' (p.59), but the result of their work may, from the orthodox Muslim point of view, do just that. Here again, Moojan reveals that his true criteria are not integrity, accuracy, consistency, or whatever, but 'courtesy' and 'respect'. That is fine, but just how far does it take us? I would never deliberately set out to 'prove' to my students that Muhammad was a false prophet; but I would not, at the same time, conceal from them any doubts I might personally entertain about the nature of his claims. There has to be respect for honesty as well.

There are, indeed, obvious limits to how far a scholar can or ought to go in seeking to mollify the feelings of orthodox believers. I think Maxime Rodinson expresses this well in a passage that follows a somewhat critical description of the Qur'an in his life of Muhammad:

'May any Muslims who happen to read these lines forgive my plain speaking. For them the Koran is the book of Allah and I respect their faith. But I do not share it and I do not wish to fall back, as many orientalists have done, on equivocal phrases to disguise my real meaning. This may perhaps be of assistance in remaining on good terms with individuals and governments professing Islam; but I have no wish to deceive anyone. Muslims have every right not to read the book or to acquaint themselves with the ideas of a non-Muslim, but if they do so, they must expect to find things put forward there which are blasphemous to them. It is evident that I do not believe that the Koran is the book of Allah. If I did I should be a Muslim. But the Koran is there, and since I, like many other non-Muslims, have interested myself in the study of it, I am naturally bound to express my views' (pp.217-18).

From this point of view, the passage quoted by Moojan from Cantwell Smith to the effect that 'anything I say about Islam as a living faith is valid only in so far as Muslims can say "Amen" to it' (quoted p.60) needs serious qualification. First of all, what is meant here by 'Muslims'? Are they orthodox Sunnis, liberal Sunnis, members of the Muslim Brotherhood, Ahmadis, orthodox Shi'is, Isma'ilis, Sufis, English converts, Black Muslims, Indonesians, Africans? Can we simultaneously obtain the approval of the western-educated Muslim scholar and the illiterate believer in a traditional society? And can we really put our own views so wholly at the mercy of the opinions of others?

Something of this difficulty has been expressed by Joachim Wach in another way:

Is it not necessary to be a member of a religious community to understand its religious notions and customs? But what does it mean to be a "member"? Could it be seriously maintained that a great scholar belonging to Group A would be less capable of understanding the religion of Group B than any ignorant and humble person belonging to the latter?' (The Comparative Study of Religions p.10).

The same writer, indeed, condemns the kind of extreme indifference implied in the quotation from Smith: 'To me,' he says, 'there is something pathetic about the modern historian of religion who uses strong words only when he wants to convince us that he has no convictions.... Ernst Troeltsch has characterized an "unlimited relativism" by stating that a weakly constituted natural history has become identified with empathy (Nachföhlung) for all other characters together with a relinquishing of empathy for oneself, with skepticism and playful intellectuality, or with oversophistication (Blasiertheit) and a lack of faith. It could be asked if an open hostility is not more appropriate to the subject of religion than this noncommittal attitude' (ibid p.8). Significantly, in view of Moojan's earlier remarks, Wach continues thus: 'All this is not to say that the ideal of objectivity should be abandoned by those engaged in comparative studies' (ibid).

There is, however, a further dimension to this discussion, to which I wish to draw particular attention. This is that Moojan's attempt to portray me as a positivist is, in a sense, little more than a projection of his own positivism. I have already drawn attention, in my recent review in Religion of Moojan's Babi and Baha'i Religions, to his insistence on the 'inaccuracies' of early writers and their eventual replacement by 'accurate accounts' published by Baha'i communities in the West. This same attitude informs much of his refutation, where my views are described as 'distortions of the Baha'i Faith and its teachings' (p.65) or in his assumption, previously referred to, that there are definite matters about which Baha'is will agree or disagree. Far from my attempting to 'impose upon the Baha'i Faith' a perspective of my own, 'whether the facts fit or not' (p.57), it is Moojan himself who seeks to maintain an ideal image of Baha'ism, which he feels it to be his sacred duty to protect from misrepresentation. The actual circumstances of the Baha'i community are, for him, merely 'distortions and deviances from Baha'i teachings' (p.64), which will, in the end, be eliminated and replaced by the 'true' practice, based on scriptural ideals. It is, to put it simply, the Wahhabi ideal in Baha'i garb.

The results of this insistence on the priority of the ideal over the actual can be clearly seen in Moojan's method of selecting the material used in The Babi and Baha'i Religions. Although he dismisses much early writing as replete with errors, he is quite happy to use any quotation that happens to support his idealized view. Thus, for example, he quotes from an article entitled 'Bab and Babism' (1869) by Edward Evans. The first passage cited indicates just how little Evans actually knew about the subject: 'It is a singular fact, that during the last quarter of century there should have sprung up in Central Asia a new religion which already numbers its adherents by millions' (p.24). And yet Moojan goes on to quote as 'significant' Evans's statement that 'Babism, in fact, has passed through all the phases of the other great historic religions, and is entitled henceforth to a place by the side of them' (p.25). Why should this particular piece of historical balderdash (note the date) be deemed 'significant' when other, equally inaccurate statements are dismissed by Moojan out of hand? The answer is, I think, obvious.

Something of the ambiguity in Moojan's position can be seen in his discussion of religion and science on page 62. There, he argues that human interpretation of revealed truth is necessarily imperfect and that, therefore, there can be no access to absolute truth by this means. While this is perfectly correct as an expression of the Baha'i position as regards personal interpretation, it leaves aside two features of Baha'i doctrine which are crucial to the arguments I originally advanced. The first of these is the emphasis which Baha'i scripture gives to the notion that, whereas the word of God had previously been revealed in opaque or ambiguous language, in the present day it has been made known without veils or ambiguity. Having referred to the corruption of Christianity and Islam because of a lack of clarity in their scriptures, Shoghi Effendi writes: 'Not so with the Revelation of Baha'u'llah. Unlike the Dispensation of Christ, unlike the Dispensation of Muhammad, unlike all the Dispensations of the past, the apostles of Baha'u'llah in every land... have before them in clear, in unequivocal and emphatic language, all the laws, the regulations, the principles, the institutions, the guidance, they require for the prosecution and consummation of their task' (The World Order of Baha'u'llah p.21). The matter is not, of course, as simple as I make it seem, but the general tendency is to regard the writings of Baha' Allah as unusually clear and to accept the revealed text at its face value, wherever possible. From the rational point of view, this has serious implications, since Baha' Allah stresses the supreme authority of the word of God and demands wholesale acceptance of it:

'On a number of occasions, the people of the Bayan have asked the following question: David, the author of the Psalms, lived after Moses... but the Primal Point (the Bab)... refers to him as having lived before him. This is in contradiction to the books and what the prophets have taught. We have replied: fear God and do not oppose him that God has adorned with the most great infallibility.... The servants must confirm the dawning-place of the divine command in whatever is manifested by him' (untitled letter, in Ishragat, p.18).

Not only must men agree to what has been stated by the prophet, they must also conform their own statements to his: 'Words too must be in conformity with what has issued from the mouth of the will of God in the tablets, in the most

outward sense' (untitled letter, in *ibid*, p.103). There is not much room in any of this for the exercise of independent reasoning.

The second relevant feature is the notion of infallible powers of interpretation vested in 'Abd al-Baha' and Shoghi Effendi. The effect of this doctrine is to restrict even further the latitude for discussion and the expression of personal opinion so as to prevent the development of any rational theory. The following quotations from 'Abd al-Baha' illustrate this point quite clearly, I think:

'If a soul shall utter a word without the sanction of the Covenant, he is not firm.... No one shall speak a word of himself' (Promulgation of Universal Peace, p.317).

'Abdu'l-Baha is the interpreter of the aims, intents, and purposes of the words of the Blessed Perfection, and is the interpreter of his own written words; and none can say that this or that is the intention conveyed therein, save 'Abdu'l-Baha' (Star of the West vol.6, p.44).

'Firmness in the Covenant means obedience, so that no one may say this is my opinion. Nay rather, he must obey that which proceeds from the pen and tongue of the Covenant' (SW vol.10, p.251).

'Not one soul has the right to say one word in his own account, or to explain anything or to elucidate the text of the Book whether in public or in private' (SW vol.8 p.223).

'Should there appear the least trace of controversy, they must remain silent, and both parties must continue their discussions no longer, but ask the reality of the question from the Interpreter' (Baha'i Scriptures p.544).

'In this day, the gates of contention must be closed and the causes of strife prevented. This cannot be done unless all follow an interpreter and obey the appointed centre of the covenant. That is, they must cling to his clear explanations and hold firm to his lucid interpretations, in such wise that their tongues will speak on behalf of his tongue and their pens transmit whatever he utters. They must neither add nor subtract a letter, nor provide a word of interpretation or implication or explanation' (Letter in Makatib vol.2 p.249).

I do not wish to seem to be deliberately obtuse in this matter. I am well aware that permission to offer private interpretations exists and that, to some extent, there is encouragement to do so. Nevertheless, it is evident that freedom of interpretation is seriously restricted by passages such as those just quoted and that, in practice, Baha'is prefer to follow the system of 'imitation' (taglid) by referring contentious (or even minor) matters to Haifa or to Hands or Counsellors. In my own experience, the existence of scriptural passages such as the foregoing stressing strict obedience to authoritative interpretations provides a powerful weapon for those who wish to suppress uncomfortable ideas. By defending one's own views as 'the Baha'i teachings' it is possible in practice to put one's opponents on the defensive and to render nugatory any support they may have.

It should, I think, be added in passing that Moojan's diagram (p.61) offers a reasonable paradigm for the development of internal, largely theological scholarship, but is of little value once non-believers are brought into the situation. A Muslim or Christian might have very different ideas about the 'revealed' side of the system, an atheist misgivings about the provision of 'natural laws' by the same 'Absolute Truth' responsible for 'revealed religion'. To insist on such a representation of the relations between faith and reason in such a context can only lead, I think, to further confusion.

To return to the text of Moojan's response, I am not sure that I have understood his reference to the 'contradiction' which, he claims, 'spans almost the entire length of (my) paper' (p.57). He seems to be saying that there is a contradiction between my view, on the one hand, that Baha'i anti-intellectualism and dogmatism are due to the sectarian character of Baha'ism, and my pessimism, on the other hand, with respect to future Baha'i dogmatism and authoritarianism. I take it that Moojan sees a contradiction here because, as he maintains on page 58, Baha'ism is 'very clearly in the process of evolving towards being a church' and because, as he argues, such an evolution involves a 'corresponding liberalization of many aspects of authoritative control and a decrease in anti-intellectualism' (p.58).

Now, Moojan may be right either in saying that I am wrong in defining Baha'ism as a 'sect' or in arguing that my pessimism about future developments is misplaced, or, indeed, he may be right in both cases; but this is not logically the same thing as demonstrating the existence of a contradiction between my two assertions. There are several reasons for this. First of all, I may be correct in thinking that Baha'ism may very well continue in most places to remain closer to a sect-type than a church-type organization, although I am very aware of changes in structure and so forth that are bringing it closer to the latter end of the spectrum. I shall return to this question in a moment. Secondly, I have nowhere suggested that Baha'ism will remain dogmatic, authoritarian, and so on because it will retain sect-type characteristics. It may be true that the larger a religious movement grows, the more liberal it becomes, but that is not axiomatic (any more than the notion that a small-scale group must be dogmatic etc.). The Roman Catholic church remains heavily dogmatic and authoritarian, all the more so because of the size and complexity of its organizational structure. Islam is, in all respects, a universal religion, yet it has been and is essentially doctrinaire, authoritarian, and, in contemporary terms, anti-intellectual.

When Moojan talks about 'liberalization', what he is really referring to are precisely those features of some churches which Baha'is most strongly condemn: toleration of secular ideas and practices, a readiness to compromise on points of doctrine, laxity in many areas of religious life, and so on. Baha'ism is founded on a belief in a canon of authoritative scripture infallibly interpreted, in legislation handed down by God through His prophet or the Universal House of Justice, in a divinely-ordained administrative order, in a covenant designed to preserve total unity and to exclude all deviant beliefs or practices, in a system destined to replace all existing secular and religious systems, and so forth. I really cannot see in any of this very much room for the kind of liberalization normally associated with church-type religion. Moojan, I fear, would be the first to protest if the doctrinal purity he is so eager to preserve from 'distortions' were to seem in danger from liberalizing, compromising tendencies, especially if this seemed to threaten the covenant he feels compelled to defend so strenuously.

Moojan's thinking about such concepts as 'sect' and 'church' (on which I do not personally insist, aware as I am of their empirical limitations) seems to be both confused and dictated less by observation of real developments than by his ideal image of Baha'ism. Thus, for example, he describes certain developments that 'demonstrate a move of the community away from a sect-like attitude and towards exhibiting the attitudes of a church' (p.57) and then goes on to say that 'even some of the recent decisions of the British National Spiritual Assembly have some elements of this move in them' (ibid). There may be a certain truth in this, but there are evident dangers in arguing about empirical developments on the basis of abstract decisions. This tendency to argue from the ideal towards is even more evident in Moojan's quite extraordinary statement that Baha'ism is 'very clearly in the process of evolving towards being a church even in areas where there are not many Baha'is' (p.58; my emphases). This reminds me of a quite remarkable statement issued in 1981 by the British Baha'i Public Information Committee: 'Don't play the "numbers game" with Assemblies in this country. Try and avoid stating actual numbers in communities unless asked outright. Non-Baha'is would probably not believe the fewness of our numbers in view of the status the Faith has obtained as one of the eight major (non-Christian) religions in the U.K.' (Baha'i Monthly News Service 2:7, February, 1981). The committee has got it wrong, of course: non-Baha'is would not believe the status of the Baha'i faith as one of the eight major religions in the U.K. if they knew of the fewness of its numbers. So long as potty thinking like this dominates the Baha'i self-image, it will be useless to attempt to generate meaningful discussion about sociological developments in the movement.

The tension between 'authenticity' and 'actuality' in Moojan's presentation is particularly marked in his discussion on page 60 of my own views on this topic. After quoting -- in the first instance inaccurately -- two of my statements concerning the gulf between what the Babi and Baha'i scriptures actually teach and what Baha'is think they do or are told they do, Moojan dismisses these as 'assertions... which have little substance to them'. He then

proceeds to argue that a knowledge of Shoghi Effendi's writings enables western Baha'is to judge their faith for themselves, 'with no fear of any major hidden surprises'.

In a sense, this is perfectly true, since Baha'is, like the members of other religions, 'make' their own living tradition and engage in hermeneutical activity. But this is, nevertheless, a disingenuous response to my criticism, ignoring as it does the role and significance of scriptural texts in Baha'i consciousness and praxis. Baha'ism is first and foremost a 'religion of the book', and it is such in special ways. Whereas the hadith canon in Islam emerged out of the discussions and theories of the first two centuries, creating a large body of unauthentic material alongside the Qur'an, Baha'ism has always stressed the priority of the word of God in absolutely authentic texts mediated and interpreted only by the writings of 'Abd al-Baha' and Shoghi Effendi.

It is axiomatic that, within such a system, scriptural texts will play a disproportionately important part in shaping and directing the development of the community. This is already obvious in the use of quotations in the writings of Shoghi Effendi and, more particularly, in replies to questions from the Universal House of Justice, or in the compilations of scripture produced under the aegis of the latter body. As in Islam, the sacred text is used as a source of authority for the establishment of the norm, of what is sunna and what is not. It is a widely-recognized fact within the Baha'i community that there are many laws and teachings presently unknown which will, in due course, be made available and implemented in the West, and there is every reason to believe that, as time passes, Baha'i communities will be required to conform more and more to the requirements of scripture. Historically, this has already taken place to a large extent. There is a significant difference between the early development of Sunni Islam, with its notions of ijtihad and ijma^c, and that of Baha'ism, with its wholly prescriptive approach to law and doctrine. It is arguable that many early western Baha'is would be distressed by a great many contemporary views and practices, and there is every reason to believe that many Baha'is alive today would find future developments disturbing. This is, in fact, not mere speculation or assertion on my part: I have seen it proved in practice many times, when western Baha'is have reacted with considerable agitation when introduced to a law or doctrine or historical fact previously unknown to them, particular when the item of information in question contradicts what they have always been led to believe to be the truth. Moojan may regard it as something of a dirty trick to reveal such things to the innocent masses; I am inclined to think that the dirty trick lies in concealing them from in the first place, in winning converts under false pretences.

Obviously, there is no space here for me to provide in detail the kind of examples necessary to prove just how much substance there is to my 'assertions'. But I would have thought the point was obvious to anyone who, like Moojan, is well-versed in both original Babi and Baha'i texts and in the published materials available in English. Of course western Baha'is can read the writings of Shoghi Effendi in English 'without any need for translation and hence any supposed bowdlerization and expurgation'. But the same does not hold true of the writings of the Bab, Baha' Allah, and 'Abd al-Baha', nor does it apply to the fairly extensive Persian correspondence of Shoghi Effendi. The vast majority of western Baha'is have to rely on translations, and these are frequently bowdlerized and expurgated.

Surely it is no coincidence that the laws and teachings of the Bab and Baha' Allah that have never been made available in translation are precisely those which a reasonable person might suppose likely to disturb the majority of western converts. Why have some of the laws of the Aqdas been made available and not others; why does the Synopsis and Codification skirt very carefully and precisely round those laws most likely to cause upset or offense; why has the text of the 'Most Holy Book' not been made available to believers in its entirety, even in Iran (for some time)? Surely Moojan himself cannot be unaware of how very carefully the texts in Selections from the Writings of the Bab were chosen, nor would it take a great intellect to guess just why certain passages of certain works were omitted. To anyone who knows the writings of the Bab in the original, the book is seriously unrepresentative in terms of style and content, both of which have been chosen to make the material acceptable in a Baha'i context.

I do not wish to exaggerate this point. To a large extent, the way in which 'Abd al-Baha', Shoghi Effendi, and the contemporary Baha'i leadership have presented their faith has been dictated by a need to concentrate on its most attractive features, to find an image consonant with the mood and needs of the public. We are, after all, in a religious 'market situation', as Berger and others have pointed out. I have no desire to impute base motives to any of these people, merely to suggest that, in their eagerness to win converts, they have allowed themselves to compromise a little with the truth. Nevertheless, I do find it disturbing, for example, that both Baha' Allah and 'Abd al-Baha' took pains to stress the radical differences between Babism and Baha'ism, but that Shoghi Effendi not only played this down, but even suggested the opposite in his writings; and I certainly feel concerned when Moojan, in the introduction to his Babi and Baha'i Religions, deliberately and knowingly attributes to the Bab teachings he never expounded in an attempt to conflate the two movements for obviously apologetic purposes. I also find it worrying that sweeping statements are made in Baha'i literature about, let us say, the principle of equal rights for men and women, when Baha'i law does not, in fact, offer such equality at all.

There are 'major hidden surprises' for uninformed converts, and there is no reason to suppose that, as time goes on, they will not be sprung in various ways. I may be overstepping the mark when I suggest that such revelations will lead to mass withdrawal -- that has not happened with Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Moonies, or whatever -- but I think it would be reasonable to suggest that it will cause problems for the Baha'i movement. Baha'is may, in the end, be able to overcome these problems, but I cannot believe they will do so by an ostrich-like refusal to recognize their existence or by specious attempts to side-step them by trotting out unimaginative phrases of loyalty and obedience. Such methods have never worked in previous religious communities, and I see no reason why they should work in Baha'ism. As the saying goes, you can fool some of the people some of the time....

Let us turn from this to the question of review, raised by Moojan on his second page, where he argues that the appearance of my article in this Bulletin is an effective negation of my criticism of the reviewing process. I wonder if Moojan is really as naive as he seems. Although the Bulletin has been approved by the British National Assembly and has been tolerated for three issues, there can never be a guarantee that this approval will continue no matter what appears in these pages. Something like this happened to the now-defunct Los Angeles Newsletter, tolerated then suppressed by the US National Assembly. If pressure should be applied from other quarters, the life of this Bulletin could be very short indeed. Would the Baha'i authorities be quite so tolerant if it had a circulation in hundreds or thousands, instead of a couple of dozen? It is quite intolerable to me that a scholarly effort of this kind, whatever its initial shortcomings, should be subject to this sort of threat at all. What was most disturbing about the Los Angeles fiasco was the signal failure of the would-have-been radical elite of the U.S. Baha'i community to resist in any very serious way the edict of the National Assembly -- a potent indication of just how powerful a deterrent the reviewing process can be to independent discussion. Of course, I sympathize with those who were involved: it would have taken considerable moral courage to resist the pressures brought to bear on them. After all, a persistent refusal to toe the line could easily have resulted in their excommunication, something which would have run counter to their aims. And that is the crux of the matter: the Baha'i authorities can seem very tolerant when they wish to do so, but they do hold the major sanction of excommunication or even simple removal of the right to vote or hold office.

Moojan also mentions in this context Avara's history. Perhaps my phrase 'dropped like a hot brick' was too forceful ('put down like a very warm brick' might, perhaps, have been better); nevertheless, my basic argument remains. Shoghi Effendi had originally described the book as 'beyond any doubt the most graphic, the most reliable and comprehensive of its kind in Baha'i literature'. If this was correct (and I presume that Moojan feels compelled to concur), I have to ask why the book has for a very long time been almost unobtainable (the fact that Moojan mentions it in his bibliography is hardly earth-shaking). What

I am trying to say is that even indirect suppression of this kind does have a harmful effect on the normal development of scholarship. Thus, to use another example, modern accounts of the development of Baha'ism under Shoghi Effendi (e.g. The Priceless Pearl) make virtually no references to Mason Remey, in spite of the highly important role he played during that period. The technique is one well known in Soviet Russia. How can serious historiography proceed when extreme biases of this kind are introduced into published material.

As regards the question of Sohrab's book and Shoghi Effendi's permission for it to be advertised, I have to ask why, in spite of this, the book did not continue to be published. It was obviously 'safe' reading (though admittedly quite boring -- not that that would have deterred Baha'is), since it had 'already been reviewed and corrected'. What is slightly more disturbing, however, is the final sentence in the letter to which Moojan refers: 'In view of the above quotation the Universal House of Justice states that it would be permissible for you to quote from "Abdu'l-Baha in Egypt" (p.83). That anyone should require permission before quoting from anything, and that that permission should be conditional on the availability of quotations from Shoghi Effendi, is wholly outrageous. Does Moojan really imagine that genuine and honest scholarship is furthered by authoritarianism of this kind? Far from this letter 'refuting' my 'assertions', it seems to me to back them up more than a little.

The essentially authoritarian nature of Moojan's thinking and his extreme readiness to accept the authoritarianism of the Baha'i system is, I think, reflected in yet another significant misrepresentation of my position on page 63. He writes, 'from his (i.e. my) statement that he would like to live in a system where he is free to abandon any rules with which he does not agree (p.65), one wonders whether he is advocating anarchy'. Here, as before, I am interested in the way Moojan has chosen to read my text, in how he proceeds to comment on his own presentation of it. What I actually wrote was: '(these questions) can only hope to be solved where men are free to change and direct their lives as they themselves see fit, to make their own laws and rule themselves through their own institutions, to question and, if need be, abandon any rules and dogmas and systems under which they do not wish to live'. I fail to see how Moojan interpreted this as he did, to mean that I mean the abandonment of rules by individuals on the basis of personal disagreement. It is wilful of Moojan to fail to mention my references to 'men' as a collectivity, to the making of 'laws' and rule through 'institutions', and to 'dogmas' and 'systems', all of which make it abundantly clear that what I am talking about is not personal authoritarianism but collective social change and organization through consensus -- something not far removed from the traditional British parliamentary system. That Moojan seems incapable of seeing anything between order on the one hand and anarchy on the other, and that he can equate the democratic process with the latter is both significant and disturbing. To the extent that Moojan is representative of widely-held Baha'i attitudes, his views on this matter are far from reassuring in the present context.

May I finally refer to one or two small points that do not fit into a more organized framework? I realize that the term 'Baha'ism' may seem offensive to some people, but I really see no reason why Moojan should feel it necessary to use the abbreviation 'sic' when quoting my use of it. Baha'i literature consistently uses the terms 'Judaism', 'Hinduism', 'Buddhism', and 'Zoroastrianism' without any derogatory intention. In the world at large, '-ism' is a perfectly neutral suffix which allows the formation of single-word terms for doctrines and movements, and I cannot see any useful objection to its use for both the Babi and Baha'i religions. This is not quite so minor a point as it may appear, since I feel that, here again, the special pleading indulged in by so many Baha'is is in evidence.

In his footnote to page 65, Moojan argues that my objections to the term 'non-Baha'i' are based on 'an unwillingness to accord the Baha'i Faith recognition on an equal basis with the other world religions'. To a large extent, Moojan is correct in this. The easy assumption implied in the phrase 'the other world religions' is not really very evident to anyone but Baha'is or others who have been given and have accepted a false impression of the size or influence of Baha'ism. I know of no reputable scholar in the field of religious studies who,

knowing the true situation, would accord Baha'ism the status of a 'world religion', in the sense the term is applied to, let us say, Christianity or Islam. Baha'ism has no historical tradition to speak of, it is not and has never been the religion of any sizeable community, people or nation, there has never been a Baha'i civilization, and there are fewer Baha'is in the world than, say, Mormons or Jehovah's Witnesses. The process of making Baha'ism into a 'world faith' by spreading it through consciously-planned campaigns is almost wholly artificial and is unlikely of itself to impress the better-informed. I do not wish to suggest that one should deride Baha'ism for its lack of influence or size, simply to say that one should recognize the reality of the situation and not go on talking nonsense about it being 'one of the eight major religions in the U.K.' or whatever. It is one thing to accept Baha'ism as a 'world faith' in the minds and hopes of Baha'is -- that seems to me to be significant, since it influences how they think and act about their religion -- but it is quite another to transfer this metaphysical 'truth' onto the realm of empirical reality. From the point of view of how things really stand, I will admit that it does seem absurd to me that an insignificant minority such as the Baha'is should create major divisions like 'Baha'i' and 'non-Baha'i'.

More to the point, however, is the following comment by Cantwell Smith in the essay to which Moojan seeks to refer me, in a footnote he may have overlooked: 'This term ("non-Christian") is used advisably here, to designate the nineteenth-century attitude. As a matter of fact, I would suggest that there is hardly a more fruitful way towards misunderstanding a Muslim, a Hindu, or a Buddhist than that of thinking of him as a "non-Christian". By the use of such negative concepts it is possible to miss altogether the positive quality of another's faith' (Eliade and Kitagawa ed. The History of Religions p.33 f.n.5).

I am sorry that Moojan does not think highly of my recent work on Babism and Baha'ism. Here, perhaps more than at any other point in his response, I fear he reveals the true standards by which he wishes to judge scholarship in this field. Leaving aside all questions of whether they are any good at all, I would have thought it was obvious that my later writing is academically an improvement on earlier work. Objectively considered, the response of publishers, editors, fellow academics and so on would indicate that this is true. Would Moojan seriously wish to suggest that my World Order articles on 'Oriental Scholarship and the Baha'i Faith' or 'The Concept of the Nation in Islam' are in any sense superior to my present writing? From my own point of view, they are embarrassments, seriously marred by the extreme biases of religious commitment and academically quite worthless. It is clear that, for Moojan, the criterion of quality is how favourable or unfavourable a writer shows himself to be towards Baha'ism and that, in the end, all other considerations of accuracy, penetration, lucidity, lack of bias, or whatever take second place -- or, perhaps, none -- for him. I hope that he is happy and fulfilled in this, if it is what he really wants. But I am personally saddened and disappointed. There was another Moojan Momen once, who had ideals and talked of academic values; I had hopes of him, just as he, perhaps, had hopes of me. It is sad that we have disappointed one another so much. Sad, but, in the way of all things human and mutable, perhaps inevitable.

Denis MacEoin
 Department of Religious Studies
 University of Newcastle Upon Tyne
 April 1983

NOTES, REVIEWS AND COMMUNICATIONS

1. Letter of Shoghi Effendi to Dr. J.E.Esslemont dated 17th Feb. 1921.

Junior Common Room

Balliol College
Oxford

17.2.21.

Dear Doctor,

I Have received your letter enclosing the essay which you have so carefully and wisely corrected. I feel much indebted to you for all the suggestions you have made and the minute corrections which you have so fully effected.

I have sent a copy to the Master and shall see what his comments will be before any attempt at publication. I have been requested by the Oxford University Asiatic Society which is representative of some twelve different nationalities and of which I am a member to send a paper on the Baha'i Movement. I have gladly accepted and have a long, comprehensive and elaborate paper which I hope to read this Monday. It is the custom of the Society to invite at every meeting an official of the University or an outsider who will be fully acquainted with the subject under discussion and who will address the society after or before the discussion is made on the paper.

I understand that the Society has requested Dr. Estlin Carpenter to act as their distinguished visitor on that occasion but he seems to have been unable to respond to their invitation. They have now written to Prof. Browne and presumably they have intimated to him the nature of the subject and the name of the speaker. I presume he will be present but notwithstanding the attitude he will probably take in the discussion I have decided not to modify the tone of my speech and have preserved my quotations of his account when he visited Baha'u'llah in Acre. I don't know what will ensue in the meeting and what will be the atmosphere of the discussion in his presence. It is quite an unexpected turn and we hope for the best.

I hope your book will be soon received by the Master and I do not think you will have any difficulty in disposing of the volumes to be printed as the demand for such a magnificent work is bound to be wide and lasting.

My sister is not satisfied with her stay at Scotland and she is feeling depressed and again disappointed.

I don't know whether I have sent you with my essay some of the Hidden Words which I have translated. If not tell me that I may send them to you.

Lovingly

Shoghi

That the Doctor addressed by Shoghi Effendi in this letter is Dr. J.E. Esslemont is clear from the mention of his book, namely, Baha'u'llah and the New Era which he was writing at this time. A photocopy of the original letter of Shoghi Effendi in his own hand is in my possession (Ed).

2. Extract from a letter of (or written on behalf of) Shoghi Effendi to Emerica Sala dated Feb.19th 1947 concerning future Guardians and abrogation.

"Future Guardians...cannot 'abrogate' the interpretations of former Guardians,as this would imply not only lack of guidance but mistakes in making them; however,they can elaborate and elucidate former interpretations,and can certainly abrogate some former ruling laid down as a temporary necessity by a former Guardian."

3. Extracts from letters of Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice on birth control and related subjects.

A. Birth Control

"As to the problem of birth control,neither Baha'u'llah nor 'Abdu'l-Baha have revealed anything direct or explicit regarding this question. But the Baha'i Teachings, when carefully studied imply that such current conceptions like birth control,if not necessarily wrong and immoral in principle,have nevertheless to be discarded as constituting a real danger to the very foundation of our social life.For Baha'u'llah explicitly reveals in His Book of laws that the very purpose of marriage is the procreation of children who,when grown up,will be able to know God and to recognize and observe His Commandments and Laws as revealed through His Messengers.Marriage is thus,according to the Baha'i Teachings, primarily a social and moral act.It has a purpose which transcends the immediate personal needs and interests of the parties.Birth control, except in exceptional cases,is therefore not permissible." (From a letter dated October 14,1935 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer).

"The Guardian has...given careful consideration to your question regarding the Baha'i view of birth control.

...there is no reference whatsoever in the Writings on this subject.The utmost we can say is by way of reference from what Baha'u'llah has revealed regarding the nature,purpose and character of marriage.We,as Baha'is,are not therefore in a position either to condemn the practise of birth control or to confirm it.

Birth control,however,when exercised in order to deliberately prevent the procreation of any children is against the Spirit of the Law of Baha'u'llah,which defines the primary purpose of marriage to be the rearing of children and their spiritual training in the Cause.The Universal House of Justice will have to consider this issue and give its verdict upon it." (From a letter dated February 4,1937 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer).

"The Universal House of Justice feels that the time has not yet arrived for legislation on this matter,and that these instructions provide sufficient guidance for the friends for the time being." (From a letter dated July 13,1967,written by the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly).

B. Abortion

" The practise of abortion-which is absolutely criminal as it involves deliberate destruction of human life- is forbidden in the Cause." (From a letter dated August 25th,1939,written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer).

"The practise of abortion merely for the purpose of getting rid of unwanted children is absolutely prohibited in the Faith. However, circumstances might exist in which abortion could be justified. Such a situation is not dealt with in the Sacred Text and the Universal House of Justice does not wish to legislate upon it at present, individual believers needing to make such a decision will have to be guided by the general principle stated above, the best professional advise available to them, and their own consciences." (From a letter dated May 5, 1971, written by the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly).

C. Sterilization

"... when the beloved Guardian was asked by an individual believer whether it was permissible to effect a surgical operation on the mother of a number of children to prevent further conception, the Guardian stated that such action is not permissible and renders the person that commits it responsible before God." (From a letter written August 14, 1967 by the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly).

" Regarding your question of whether you should have more children or not, the Guardian feels that this is a matter for you and your husband to decide. However, we must always bear in mind that God will protect His own, and that Baha'i children are the future servants of mankind who will help to carry the world forward into the glorious New Order which Baha'u'llah has prepared for it in this day of days. We should not face the future with fear, but with glad and assured hearts."

[Communicated by Loni Bramson-Leache]

4. Miscellaneous Letters of the Universal House of Justice to individual Baha'is.

A. Letter from the Universal House of Justice dated 11 May 1982 to Mr. Peter T. Terry Jr. of Bridgton, Maine, USA.

Dear Baha'i Friend,

The Universal House of Justice has instructed us to thank you for your letter of 17 March 1982 and to send you the following comments.

There is definitely a grey area between publication on the one hand and the sharing of notes and manuscripts between friends and fellow-scholars on the other. Recognizing this distinction the House of Justice has made several decisions over the years which have a bearing on your question.

1. It has been decided that doctoral theses and similar treatises submitted to institutions of learning for the obtaining of a degree and not subject to Baha'i review unless they are to be published more widely than is required for the degree in question.
2. A Believer who wrote and circulated to a number of believers a treatise he had written giving his views on an obscure and delicate matter relating to the Covenant was told that, whereas he is fully entitled to hold and express his views on the subject, he should not be circulating treatises on it, since it would merely serve to foster contention among the friends to no good purpose.

3. A study group which was holding meetings where many views were strongly expressed, some revealing a serious lack of understanding of the Teachings, was circulating notes of its discussions far and wide. It was told that it should circulate these notes only to those who had been present at the discussions and who would be fully familiar with the background.

Thus, while the exchange of information and manuscripts among friends is entirely permissible, the House of Justice feels that a dissemination as wide as the one you are engaged in constitutes publication and that you should not include on your lists documents by Baha'is which have not been reviewed. For example, some of the items you list, such as Fareed's translation of the *Lawn-i-Aqdas*, are old translations which have been superseded; some, such as Cole's translation of the "Ode of the Nightingale" are new translations which have not yet been approved for publication; others are books or pamphlets on the Faith written by Baha'is but not yet passed for publication by a reviewing committee; others show such a lack of grasp of the essential teachings of the Faith that they present a serious distortion of both its history and nature. You should certainly not promote the circulation of books by avowed enemies of the Faith, such as William Miller. Among the items on your list are undoubtedly some, such as Nicholas's translation of the Persian Bayan, that are published but out of print, and that Baha'is would be glad to have access to.

The House of Justice notes that you are now aware of the problem of copyright. This is important. Violation of these laws, depriving authors of their due royalties, could possibly incur opprobrium for the Faith and the good name of Baha'i scholarship.

The final problem concerns the consent of authors of unpublished manuscripts. Some may have strong objections to the circulation of their works in this manner. The House of Justice therefore requests you, if you wish to continue to give this service, to weed out from your lists all those items which are of doubtful character or are unreviewed manuscripts by Baha'is, and to be sure to obtain clearance for copyright and royalty payments where applicable for those which remain.

with loving Baha'i greetings,

[signed _____]

For Dept of Secretariat.

B. Letter from the Universal House of Justice dated 1 July 1982 to Mr. Peter T. Terry Jr.

Dear Baha'i Friend,

The Universal House of Justice has received your letter of 25 May 1982, and notes that you have decided to stop circulating your entire list of titles since most fail to satisfy the conditions expressed in the letter of 11 May 1982. So that there shall be no misunderstanding, the House of Justice asks us to emphasize that it was not its intention to prevent your circulating lists altogether, and therefore if you should find items which do qualify and which you feel it would be valuable to share, you need not hesitate to circulate them.

The House of Justice warmly appreciates the loyalty of your response. There are great fields of the history and teachings of the Faith open before Baha'i scholars and almost unlimited areas of research the surface of which has been barely scratched...."

with loving Baha'i greetings,

[signed _____]

For Dept of Secretariat.

C. Extract from a letter of the Universal House of Justice to Mr. Steven Scholl dated March 4th 1979.

" The Research Department at the World Centre has not come across any text calling on the friends not to make use of Nicolas's French translation of the Bayán, and there is no objection to your doing so."

D. Letter of the Universal House of Justice to Mr. Steven Scholl dated May 30th 1980.

" Dear Baha'i Friend,

We have been asked by the Universal House of Justice to respond to your letter of 22 February 1980 to the Research Department and to convey the following comments to you.

There is nothing explicit in the writings to support the view that the high praise given by Baha'u'llah to the Imams may be regarded as having been actually directed by Him only to a handful of them. In one of His Tablets, 'Abdu'l-Bahá confirms that all of them were divine luminaries, and Shoghi Effendi, in his "Dispensation of Baha'u'lláh", clearly states that the institution of the Imamate continued for a period of 260 years to be the recipient of God's guidance. You have yourself quoted this passage in your thesis, copy of which has just been received.

The picture on page 83 of William Miller's book is a portrait of Baha'u'llah, but different from the one displayed in the International Archives.

Rúhí Afnán's behaviour towards the Covenant was described by Shoghi Effendi as "rebelliousness" and "disobedience", and he referred to him as "treacherous Rúhí Afnán" who was "misrepresenting the teachings" of the Faith, "deliberately causing confusion", and "claiming to be its exponent". The friends may of course regard Rúhí's writings prior to his becoming a Covenant-breaker as free from the effects of his subsequent rebellious spirit, but the book he published after his expulsion should be considered with caution, in the light of Shoghi Effendi's statement about his misrepresentations of the teachings of the Faith. For more details about Rúhí's activities as a Covenant-breaker, you are referred to "Messages to the Baha'i World, 1950-1957", pp. 16 and 48.

Like other Departments at the World Centre, the Research Department consists of a body of staff workers residing in the Holy Land and serving under a Committee of members of the House of Justice. If work can be accomplished for the Department, such as indexing and translation, by friends elsewhere, these projects are referred to designated individuals living outside the Holy Land.

.....

with loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed _____]

For Dept of the Secretariat.

E. Extract from a letter of the Universal House of Justice to Mr. Richard Hollinger dated 21st June 1982.

"As to the material you have requested from the archival files at the World Centre, although there are a few documents of the kind you have described in your letter, you will appreciate the fact that it would not be fitting for letters reflecting the personal relationships of individual believers to 'Abdu'l-Baha and Shoghi Effendi to be made generally available to the friends or to the public. If these friends had kept copies of their letters in their personal files, the use of these in writing a book or an article about them would be left to the discretion of the persons or institutions in whose custody such papers are held. Even under such circumstances, careful consideration should be given to the fact that the information, if disclosed, should not inadvertently harm the interests of the Faith.."

F. Letter of the Universal House of Justice to Mr. Richard Hollinger dated 23 March 1983.

Dear Baha'i Friend,

The Universal House of Justice has instructed us to acknowledge your letter of 11 January 1983 and to send you the following reply.

The House of Justice notes that some of your statements about anomalies in review are inaccurate; for example it is assured that "To Move the World" was fully reviewed. However, it agrees with you that the process of review is often irksome, frequently takes far too long and is subject to many problems in implementation. Nevertheless, it is convinced that this is not the time to remove or modify this temporary restriction on the freedom of Baha'i authors to publish whatever they wish about the Faith and its teachings. National Assemblies responsible for administering the reviewing procedure have been urged to do all they can to improve and expedite its operation, and efforts are being continually made to this end.

Three different categories of publications are subject to different procedures. Manuscripts written by Baha'is about the Faith or its teachings are subject to review. Translations of Baha'i books that have already passed review are subject to checking to ensure that the translation is accurate and of proper quality. The publication of a historical document, such as the Salmani memoirs, requires review of the entire book to ensure that the document is properly presented and is supplemented, where necessary, by accurate and adequate annotations and commentary, and, when appropriate, the translation of the document itself must be checked. In this last category, moreover, questions of wisdom and timeliness are of prime importance.

There is a basic difference between a document's being published by a non-Baha'i agency and its publication by Baha'is. Baha'is owe it, in loyalty to Baha'u'llah, to present the material in a manner that will neither distort the true character of His Faith nor the truth of the historical record. There are many historical documents, some in the possession of the Faith and some not. Much highly meritorious research is being done by Baha'i scholars in tracing material relating to the early history of the Faith in government archives, public libraries, private collections etc. This is extremely important because the dangers facing mankind cause one to fear that much of this material could be irretrievably lost if not located and copied now. The archives of the Faith at the World Centre and in Iran, and indeed in most national communities, are as yet in no condition to permit access to just anyone who wishes to study them. Most of these archives still need to be studied, sorted,

preserved and catalogued by competent archivists so that vital historical evidence is not lost and so that easy access will be possible in future.

Since it is impossible for researches to have access to all the historical material at the present time, the question arises as to which portions of that material in the possession of the Faith should be made available, when, and in what form. Up till now the House of Justice has not hesitated to make facsimilies of original documents available to Baha'i scholars in whom it has confidence, for their use in research work. Thus extracts which have been published have been presented in their proper settings.

Decisions to withhold the publication of certain documents, or to publish only excerpts initially, for the protection of the Faith and the believers have numerous precedents. For example, as is mentioned on pages 3 and 4 of the Introduction to the "Synopsis and Codification of the Kitab-i-Aqdas", Baha'u'llah Himself withheld the Most Holy Book for some time after its revelation before sending it to the friends in Iran. This, He explained, was because it contained the Law of Huququ'llah. The Guardian, moreover, after the passing of the Master, at first published translations of only excerpts of the Will and Testament. It lies with the Head of the Faith at any period to make such decisions, for the Cause of God is surrounded by dangers of many different kinds which only the World Centre can correctly evaluate. Nor should this be a strange concept to Baha'is, for did not Baha'u'llah quote with approval the statement that "Not everything that a man knoweth can be disclosed, nor can everything that he can disclose be regarded as timely, nor can every timely utterance be considered as suited to the capacity of those who hear it."

The House of Justice feels that Baha'i scholars must beware of the temptations of intellectual pride. 'Abdu'l-Baha 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 Baha'i who rises to eminence in academic circles will be exposed to the powerful influence of such thinking. One of the problems of modern times is the degree to which different disciplines have become specialized and isolated from one another. Thinkers are now faced with a challenge to achieve a synthesis, or at least a coherent correlation of the vast amount of knowledge that has been acquired during the past century. The Baha'is must be aware of this factor and of the moderation and all-embracing nature of this Revelation. In a letter written on 5 July 1947 to an individual believer the Guardian's secretary wrote on his behalf:

"One might liken Baha'u'llah's teachings to a sphere; there are points poles apart, and in between the thoughts and doctrines that unite them. We believe in balance in all things; we believe in moderation in all things- we must not be too emotional, not cut and dried and lacking in feeling, we must not be so liberal as to cease to preserve the character and unity of our Baha'i system, not fanatical and dogmatic."

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 Baha'i scholars. The great advances in knowledge and understanding in the vital field of Baha'i 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 teaching:

with loving Baha'i greetings,
[signed _____]
For Dept of Secretariat.

5. Extracts from two letters of the Universal House of Justice written in connection with the publication of the memoirs of Ustād Muhammad ^ḤAlī-yi Salmānī [ET. Marzieh Gail, My Memories of Baha'ū'llah, Kalimat Press, Los Angeles, 1982].

- A. Extract from a letter of the Universal House of Justice to Kalimat Press dated December 2nd 1982.

Dear Baha'i Friends,

The Universal House of Justice has instructed us to thank you for your letter of 1 October 1982 and the copy of "My Memories of Baha'u'llah", as well as the copy of correspondence that you had on this matter. As was expressed in the letter written on its behalf on 20th September 1982, the House of Justice greatly regrets the confusion which unfortunately arose over the publication of this book and the problems that have been caused to your firm through no fault of yours.

Enclosed for your information is a copy of a letter written to Mr. Juan Cole [see below] on the instructions of the Universal House of Justice. From this you will see why the House of Justice feels that the publication of such a manuscript in such a form is untimely and unwise. It is sensitive to these points. Indeed it is apparent that you yourselves misconstrued the reasons behind the ad hoc committee's requests for the deletion of certain passages.

In view of this experience the House of Justice has decided that it will have to review all such documents itself in future before permitting them to be published.

Since the English translation of the Salmani memoirs is already in print, the House of Justice has decided that it may remain so, but in any reprinting you should not re-introduce any of the passages that you have omitted. The House of Justice does not wish the Persian text to be published at this time. However a well written version of the text would be useful at the World Centre and therefore the House of Justice will be glad to purchase from you, for the price you are paying, the calligraphic version that you have commissioned.

....

with loving Baha'i greetings

[signed _____]

For Dept. of the Secretariat.

- B. Extracts from a Letter of the Universal House of Justice to Mr. Juan Ricardo Cole dated 2 December 2nd 1982.

Dear Baha'i Friend,

The Universal House of Justice has now been able to compare the published edition of the Salmani memoirs with the Persian manuscript and to consider the passages which the ad hoc committee had marked for deletion... The House of Justice has instructed us to send you the following comments on the points raised in your letter of 13 August 1982.

When the early correspondence took place between the World Centre and Kalimat Press concerning this publication, the House of Justice was relying on the discretion of the appropriate committee in the United States to check not only the normal review aspects, but also the

timeliness and wisdom of such a publication. It did not itself check the manuscript. If it had done so it now concludes that it would not have given permission for its publication or translation at this time, for reasons which will be explained below.

In June 1982, concern was expressed to the Universal House of Justice about the possible publication in full, in Persian, of these memoirs, and action was taken in July, in great haste, to eliminate the most harmful passages so that the publication of the book, which was already at the press, could proceed. Unfortunately at that time the ad hoc committee was unaware of the earlier correspondence and of the fact that certain passages had already been quoted in translation in books by Mr. Hasan Balyuzi and Mr. Adib Taherzadeh.

Kalimât Press, in its turn, knowing of the prior publication of these passages, and not understanding the reasons for the proposed deletions, has, in fact, retained the larger part of the objectionable passages. The publication is a fait accompli and the House of Justice has therefore decided to permit it to stand, but not to permit the publication of the Persian text which, in fact, would be more damaging than the English version.

To the points of substance which you have raised concerning the publication of historical texts, the House of Justice instructs us to explain the following.

In order to preserve basic information and historical materials for the use of future historians, the beloved Guardian instructed the communities throughout Iran to record the history of the Faith in their localities, and also gave instructions for the memoirs of a number of early believers to be written down and preserved. This was not a new advice and many friends, eyewitnesses of certain events in the lives of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, had already committed their reminiscences to writing. The memoirs of Ustád Muḥammad-'Alfí-i-Salmání are among these and were written down from his spoken recollections in his old age. There is no question whatsoever of suppressing such records - on the contrary, the whole purpose of having them made was to preserve them, and they have been made available to Bahá'í historians such as Mr. Balyuzi and Mr. Taherzadeh for use in their work. When excerpts are translated and published in such works, they are placed in context, related to other records and, where necessary, annotated and commented on. You will readily agree that such a use is not the same as publication in full, even if supplementary footnotes are added, and does not carry the same implications.

In time entire collections of early documents of the Faith will be published in scholarly editions for general use. An initial step in such a process is Dr. Moojan Momen's admirable book "The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions, 1844-1944 - Some Contemporary Western Accounts". Additional considerations, however, have to be weighed in publishing texts by Bahá'í writers.

At the present time the general public, even if it has heard of the Faith, is largely uninformed or misinformed. An increasing amount of misinformation is continually being disseminated by opponents of the Faith, both in the east and in the west. The principal task of the Bahá'ís at the present time - and especially of Bahá'í scholars - is to present a true picture of the Faith to the general public and to relate the Bahá'í teachings to the concerns and problems of mankind. When a Bahá'í publishing house issues a translation of a document such as Salmání's memoirs, the implication to an average reader is that the Bahá'ís consider this

particular account worthy of publication, and, in the absence of adequate footnotes or commentary to the contrary, the reader will assume that Salmānī's actions and statements are approved by Bahá'ís and are accurate portrayals of the Faith. After all, Salmānī was a close companion of Bahá'u'lláh, comparable in the eyes of a Christian reader with one of the early disciples of Christ.

Viewed in this light, certain of Salmānī's accounts are misleading or unworthy and, apart from distorting the Faith for the average reader can provide material for the enemies of the Faith who at the present time are seizing every opportunity to attack the Cause and blacken its reputation.

To take a few examples from the passages queried by the ad hoc committee:

1. p.17. There is a brief account of some believers from Sulṭánábád saying to Bahá'u'lláh "You being God, Uncle, why do You give us such a hard row to hoe?" It is an old accusation against the Bahá'ís, especially from Muslims, that we regard Bahá'u'lláh as God. To print such a story without an appropriate commentary gives fuel to our Muslim enemies and makes the Faith look ridiculous to a western reader. Unfortunately Kalimát Press, not realizing the reason for the objection, let the objectionable part stand and deleted a parenthetical comment "The Shí'ís, however, were very hostile", which is entirely innocuous.
2. p.30. There are some virtually incomprehensible comments about Mírzá Áqá Ján's head, which are of no historical importance but are unpleasant and unworthy.
3. pp.31-34. There are three unpleasant stories recounted by Salmānī to illustrate Azal's gluttony. Shoghi Effendi was always very careful in his accounts of Azal to confine his strictures to his truly infamous conduct. He never stooped to making personal criticisms of such a nature, which are unworthy. Publication of such stories in the context of an annotated edition of a historical document for scholarly study is one thing; publication in a book for the general reader is quite another. Again, unfortunately, Kalimát Press did not appreciate the reason for the committee's objection and published the whole passage apart from a couple of brief deletions which were of no significance.
4. p.34. There is the account of a disagreement between Bahá'u'lláh and Azal over the shaving of Azal's son's head--another unworthy story, the point of which is obscure.

There are others of a similar character.

The passages which have already been published in translation, such as Azal's attempt to persuade Salmānī to murder Bahá'u'lláh, provide striking examples of the profound difference between publication in the context of a properly balanced historical exposition, and publication as unadorned parts of a narrative.

In sum, to a knowledgeable Bahá'í reader, Salmānī's memoirs are a graphic illustration of the overwhelming problems with which Bahá'u'lláh had to deal both from His enemies and because of the actions of some of His own faithful followers; but to an uninformed reader they give a misleading and distorted picture of the Faith and of Bahá'u'lláh Himself.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[Signed _____]

For Dept. of the Secretariat.

WEST AFRICAN CENTRE FOR BAHAI STUDIES

The West African Centre for Baha'i Studies has been recently founded by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Nigeria. The following are extracts from its constitution:

Purpose: The general purpose of the Centre shall be to contribute to the establishment of world unity and international cooperation through the fostering, in the light of the Baha'i teachings, of paradigms appropriate for world civilization.

Affiliation:

- 1) Categories of affiliation shall consist of regular affiliation, student affiliation, and institutional affiliation, and any other categories the Board shall see fit.
- 2) Regular affiliation is open to practising academics, graduate students, or others of recognised scholarly interest, ability and experience. Other affiliations shall be open to individuals as the Board shall see fit.
- 3) The rights of regular affiliates shall be listed in the Directory of the Centre, to receive the Directory, to receive Centre Newsletters, and to be invited to participate in Centre activities. The rights of other categories of affiliates shall be as the Board shall see fit.

Objectives:

- to prepare a Directory of Affiliates
- to establish and administer a lecture bureau and programme
- to publish a Newsletter and Journal
- to encourage and coordinate research and its publication
- to organize conferences, study groups, seminars, and workshops
- to encourage and coordinate the development of curricula and educational material
- to create consultative and cooperative association with institutions of related interest.

The address of the Centre is: P.O.Box 2029, Lagos, Nigeria.

The rate of regular affiliation for people outside of Africa will be approximately US \$ 20 (this includes airmail postage for all Centre communications). Applications may be obtained from the above address. Please note that the Centre especially wishes to encourage non-Baha'is to join.

[Communicated by Loni Bramson-Lerche]

BAHA'I STUDIES SEMINARS AT THE

UNIVERSITY OF LANCASTER

1977 - 1980

From 1977 until 1980 (16-17 April 1977; 15-16 April 1978; 7-8 April 1979; 11-13 April 1980), the Departments of Religious Studies and of Sociology at the University of Lancaster lent their support to a succession of four annual Baha'i Studies Seminars held under the convener'ship of Peter Smith, then a post-graduate student in the Department of Sociology. Designed to further academic research into the Babi and Baha'i religions, these seminars afforded opportunity for a number of post-graduates from Europe and America to present and discuss papers on various aspects of "Baha'i Studies". Most of the substantive papers presented at the seminars have since found their way into print or been incorporated into the participants' doctoral theses.

The papers presented were as follows:

Bramson, Loni (Louvain)

(1979) Internal opposition to ^cAbdu'l-Baha's Will and Testament and the establishment of the Guardianship.

- See Bramson's Ph.D. thesis, "The Baha'i Faith and Its Evolution in the United States and Canada from 1922 to 1936" (Université Catholique de Louvain, 1980).

Cole, Juan Ricardo (U.C.L.A.)

(1980) Rashid Ridá on the Bahá'í Faith in Egypt, 1897 - 1921.

Lambden, Stephen (Newcastle)

(1980) Divine splendour motifs in the Bible and writings of Bahá'u'lláh: Kábód in the Old Testament, Doxa in the New Testament and aspects of the 'theology of Bahá' and the Sinai epiphany motif in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh.

Lee, Anthony (U.C.L.A.)

(1978) The Bahá'í community of ^cIshqábád from the beginnings to the Russian Revolution.

- Published in slightly revised form as "The rise of the Bahá'í community of ^cIshqábád". Bahá'í Studies 5 (1979):1-13.

MacEoin, Denis (Cambridge, 1977-79; Fez, 1979-80)

(1977) The late eighteenth century reformation in Shi^cism: Its background and influence.

(1978) The Shaykhí reaction to Babism in the early period

- To be published in Studies in Bábí and Bahá'í History, ed. M. Momen (Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1983).

- For both the 1977 and 1978 papers see MacEoin's Ph.D. thesis, "From Shaykhism to Babism: A Study of Charismatic Renewal in Shi^cí Islam" (University of Cambridge, 1979).

- (1979) The concept of jihád in the Bábí and Bahá'í movements.
- Published in part as "The Babi concept of holy war". Religion 12 (1982):93-129.
- (1980) Ritual and semi-ritual observances in Babism and Baha'ism.
- Momen, Moojan
(1977) Some problems connected with the Yazd episode of 1850.
- See pp.106-13 in Momen, The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions, 1844-1944: Some Contemporary Western Accounts (Oxford: George Ronald, 1981).
- (1978) Early contact between Bahá'ís and Christian missionaries.
- To be published in Studies in Bábí and Bahá'í History, ed. M. Momen (Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1983).
- (1979) The social basis of the Bábí upheavals: A preliminary analysis.
- To be published in International Journal for Middle East Studies 15 (1983):157-83.
- (1980) The trial of Mullá ^cAlí Bastámí: A combined Sunní-Shí'í fatwá against the Báb.
- Published in Iran 20 (1982):113-43.
- Mossop, Denise
(1978) The mediatory role of Bahá'í: A comparison of Sufi and Bahá'í mysticism.
- Peltola, Harri (Helsinki)
(1978) The history of the Bahá'í Faith in Finland: A case study in the sociology of countercultures.
- Scholl, Steven
(1980) Imámí Shí'ism and the Baha'i Faith.
- Smith, Peter (Lancaster)
(1977) The routinization of charisma? Some comments on Peter L. Berger's "Motif messianique et processus social dans le Bahá'isme".
- Published in shortened and amended form as "Motif research: Peter Berger and the Bahá'í Faith". Religion 8 (1978):210-34.
- (1978) The American Bahá'í community, 1894-1917.
- To be published in expanded form in Studies in Bábí and Bahá'í History, ed. M. Momen (Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1983).
- See also Smith's Ph.D. thesis, "A Sociological Study of the Babi and Baha'i Religions" (University of Lancaster, 1982).
- (1979) Millenarianism in the Bábí and Bahá'í religions.
- Published in amended form as "Millennialism in the Babi and Baha'i religions", pp.231-83 in Millennialism and Charisma, ed. R. Wallis (Belfast: The Queen's University, 1982).

For short accounts of the Seminars see the following: For the 1977 and 1978 Seminars, the United Kingdom Bahá'í Journal 245 (June 1978):16-17 (See also the erratum in issue no.248 (Jan. 1979):11); for the 1979 Seminar, the Bulletin of the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies 6 (1979):119-23.

Report of the Baha'i Studies Seminar on Baha'i Scholarship .
held at the Momen residence, 26-27 January 1983.

An informal seminar, loosely oriented around Baha'i scholarship , was held at the home of Moojan and Wendy Momen in Biggleswade (Beds.England) over the weekend of January 26-27 1983.The participants were-:

Dr.Moojan Momen (MM)	Robert Parry (RP)
Dr.Wendy Momen (WM)	Stephen Lambden (SL)
Todd Lawson (TL)	Viva Tomlin (VT)
James Taylor (JT)	
Harry Docherty (HD)	

Session 1 (Saturday morning).

This first session was oriented around Dr.Denis MacEoin's paper Problems of scholarship in a Baha'i Context in Baha'i Studies Bulletin Vol.1.No.3. (December 1982),pp.44-68. MM opened the discussion by summarizing his own feelings about MacEoin's perspectives.These he has written up for this issue of the Bulletin (see below,pp57 - 65)and need not be set down again here. Lively discussion followed MM's preliminary remarks about MacEoin's paper. Several participants felt that MacEoin so elevated occidental academicism as to leave little room for the 'theological' or 'intuitive' side of Baha'i scholarship.The question of the Baha'i reviewing process was then briefly discussed.Reference was made to Shoghi Effendi's words in The World Order of Baha'u'llah (2nd Rev.Ed.Wilmette,Illinois, 1974),p.9, " I need not enlarge at the present moment upon what I have stated in the past..that the present restrictions imposed on the publication of Baha'i literature will be definitely abolished"(written Feb. 27th., 1929).This passage,it was felt, indicated a future move away from authoritarianism.MacEoin's pessimism about future Baha'i 'totalitarianism' was thought to be extreme.WM pointed out that the attitude towards review in this country (UK) had become more liberal in recent times. JT spoke of the changing attitudes within society towards sex and of the embryonic nature of the Baha'i Cause-- there will,he felt,be a move towards greater liberalism.TL wondered just when this move towards greater liberalism would be made: 'When will the review process be abolished?' .There will be a stagnation if there is not soon a greater liberalism.MM then commented, ' The administration does not exist for the benefit of scholars but for the whole Baha'i community.Scholars must bide their time for the benefit of the community'. WM added that the progressive scholarly element within the Baha'i community 'drags the administration along' and pointed out the great

service Denis MacEoin had done in this respect. He was referred to as a 'key liberalizing factor' and one who has helped to widen the attitudes of the British NSA. TL then stated that 'other NSA's do not have this liberal attitude'. MM responded by setting forth his view that scholars should not 'kick against the administration' but 'approach it positively in such a way as to enlighten the whole community.' 'But when?' TL asked, 'will the present attitude towards (Baha'i) review pass away?' MM replied by saying that 'It is already passing' and argued that it has to do with the evolution of the Baha'i community from 'sect' to 'church'. TL then observed that many Baha'is have 'strong personalities' and that 'totalitarian attitudes' should not be simply 'put up with'. MM again responded by arguing that too much liberality within the Baha'i community-- which might lead to a 'loss of control'-- would not be healthy. That some people leave the Baha'i community as a result of supposed 'totalitarianism' is inevitable.

The 'Baha'i principle' of the 'independent investigation of truth' was next briefly discussed. It was felt that this 'principle' applied particularly to the spiritual search for the Manifestation of God.

The nature of Shoghi Effendi's history writing called forth several comments at this point. It was generally agreed that a greater awareness of the non-infallibility of Shoghi Effendi in this area should be fostered in a tactful manner. HD thought this would be difficult to achieve in the light of 'ingrained ideas' about the infallibility of Shoghi Effendi. MM noted that the Universal House of Justice had pointed out the non-infallibility of Shoghi Effendi in the sphere of history and mentioned that it would take time for the community to learn about and come to terms with this 'established fact'. Scholars however, should be careful about the way they correct certain historical errors in say God Passes By. There is no evidence for 'intentional fabrication'.

MacEoin's assertion that Avarih's Kawāḳib.. was dropped by Baha'is was criticised. It has been available in Iran and elsewhere after his excommunication. Shoghi Effendi's use of 'covenant breaker sources' was also mentioned in passing as was his alleged failure to set forth in his God Passes By the militant nature of Babi jihād. Several participants felt that Shoghi Effendi had not radically toned down Babi militancy.

In connection with textual authority and 'absolute truth' RP asserted that it is the 'truth underlying things' that is important for many Baha'is. VT also drew attention to the centrality of the Baha'i experience and the theological dimension of the content of revelation. SL though, argued that the

Baha'i Faith is a 'religion of the Book' and that the experience of it cannot be divorced from the content of revelation.

Session 2 (Saturday afternoon)

This session consisted of a discussion of points made by MM in his unpublished paper, Scholarship and the Baha'i Community.

The inability of rational scholarship to penetrate the 'heart of religion' was underlined by several participants. Whether or not 'concepts' mirror the 'heart of religion' was debated. RP pointed out that faith has a non-conceptual aspect which scholarship cannot reach. MacEoin criticises Baha'i propositions and 'leaves out' the 'experiential element'. MM in this light argued that the publication of Baha'u'llah's al-Kitab al-Aqdas would not result in a 'mass apostasy' inasmuch as 'most Baha'is do not relate to their Faith in terms of doctrine'. RP then added that religious truth is essentially something to be 'lived in time' and not a 'frozen reality'; 'concepts do not capture what religion is all about'. There must be an awareness of the 'limitations of concepts'. SL again expressed the opinion that the concrete conceptual dimension of the Baha'i Faith cannot be spirited away in the hope of solving concrete doctrinal problems. The Baha'i experience is partly an experience of concepts or doctrines.

In connection with the 'dangers of Baha'i scholarship' mention was made of the need for humility and spirituality. The Baha'i scholar should not consider himself superior to his fellow believers. An academic knowledge of the Baha'i Faith, it was felt by most participants, should be accompanied by that spiritual knowledge and confirmation that is a result of meditative deepening. A distinction was made between academic study and deepening. VP however, held that her academic theological work was not divorced from spirituality. SL agreed that academic study might at times foster spiritual insights or lead to spiritual experiences. RP stated that there can be a 'concept experience'. MM stressed the need for academic study to be supplemented by spiritual reflection on the Baha'i Faith. Time should be set aside for prayer, meditation and deepening. JT stated that the simple believer is often more spiritual than the accomplished scholar and TL referred to the example of Abu al-Fadl Gulpaygani who is said to have been converted by a simple Baha'i but who yet attained great humility. The point was also made by TL that since 'work is worship' academic research is also a form of worship. MM added that it must be 'work performed in the spirit of service'.

The problem of scholars losing a balanced perspective of the Baha'i Faith in its wholeness was next discussed in the light of the scholarly focus on doctrinal details. An introverted and abstracted focus on detailed

problematic issues can lead to a loss of Baha'i perspectives. HD thought that scholars who had this problem were like people who take a clock apart but forget how to put it back together. Association with other Baha'i scholars would be a safeguard against this danger of loss of perspective. MM asked, 'Is this the problem?' and RP asserted that it is a problem and referred to the fact that there are very few if any references to Buddha or Krishna 'in the Tablets'. There are concrete problematic issues which need to be considered by Baha'i apologists.

Session 3 (Sunday morning)

A number of issues relating to Baha'i scholarship were discussed in this session. The question of 'Baha'i bias' in scholarly work and the appropriate Baha'i approach to scholarship were considered. Then, in connection with what constitutes the 'field of Baha'i scholarship', some remarks were made about what topics might at this stage be usefully studied. Reference was made to the history of the Baha'i Faith in Russia (TL) and to the importance of an analysis of the mystical aspects of the Baha'i revelation (MM) as well as to the need for a study of the Baha'i Faith and Eastern religions - Hinduism and Buddhism (RP). It was felt that a seminar on the mystical dimension of the Baha'i Faith would be useful; perhaps oriented around Baha'u'llah's Seven Valleys.

Session 4 (Sunday afternoon)

The relationship between the Baha'i scholar and the Baha'i community was discussed in this final session. MM opened the session by proposing that the Baha'i community has the responsibility of allowing the scholar the freedom to undertake research and providing him with a 'spiritually encouraging environment'. Baha'i scholarly activities are relevant to the community and must therefore be encouraged. WM added that it is an obligation of the Baha'i administration to provide a forum for legitimate discussion. TL spoke of the problems of the relationship between Baha'i scholars and the Baha'i administration outside the UK where a more liberal atmosphere prevails. He felt that Baha'i scholars should not be too passive towards administrative institutions which attempt to suppress Baha'i scholarship in an unreasonable manner. WM noted that the administrative bodies are traditionally conservative and should be 'stimulated' by Baha'i scholars.

This session ended with a lengthy debate about the importance of the Baha'i scholar keeping in touch with and leading an active Baha'i community life as a safeguard against scholarly introversion and loss of faith. It was agreed that the Baha'i scholar should lead a balanced Baha'i life. The Baha'i engaged in academic research should be both a scholar and a Baha'i.

Stephen Lambden.

The Baha'i Societies Conference on the 'Academic Study of the
Baha'i Faith.'

The University of Warwick (Coventry,
England), February 19-20th. 1983.

A number of Baha'is engaged in the academic study of their faith were invited by the British National (University) Baha'i Societies Committee to speak about their work at the University of Warwick over the weekend February 19-20th 1983. In all five lengthy sessions were held each being followed by questions and discussion:-

(1) Dr. Moojan Momen (Saturday morning) spoke on the history of the academic study of the Baha'i Faith and certain methodological and historical issues arising from such study. He spoke of 'two spheres' of the 'academic study' of the Babi-Baha'i religions, the oriental and the occidental, and made a distinction between the Baha'i and the non-Baha'i scholar in organizing his speech. In his review of the oriental academic or scholarly tradition Dr. Momen first spoke about the kind of training undergone in 19th century Iran and noted that the Babi-Baha'i 'academic tradition' is rooted in Shaykhism: most of the 'Letters of the Living' were former Shaykhis. The Bab wrote commentaries on certain suras of the Qur'an-though their form and style are illustrative of a break with the Islamic tradition-and some Babis composed polemical works in defense of the Babi Faith (around 1848-9)-these being the first-fruits of the Babi-Baha'i 'academic' or learned tradition.

Dr. Momen, in speaking of the oriental Baha'i scholarly tradition, noted its Islamic roots and spoke briefly about Nabil-i Akbar, Abu al-Fadl Gulpaygani, Fadil-i Mazandarani and Ishraq Khavari. The apologetic orientation of the works of these learned Baha'is was underlined and distinguished from modern western academic study. Their learned writings remain however, highly important sources of information of great value to future generations of scholars. Had they not put pen to paper valuable information would have been lost. They put highly important questions to Baha'u'llah and ^cAbdu'l-Baha and were the recipients of illuminating Tablets. In this respect their Islamic learning has yielded great benefits.

With respect to 'non-Babi[-Baha'i]' writing among orientals in the above connection Dr. Momen mentioned its polemical nature and thought it unworthy of detailed mention since he felt that it contributed little or nothing to the scholarly study of the Babi-Baha'i religions. Such polemic remains a 'growth industry' in present-day Iran.

In reviewing the history of western non-Baha'i study of the Babi-Baha'i movements Dr. Momen singled out Dr. Austin H. Wright's article, 'Bab und seine Secte in Persien (ZIMG, Leipzig, 1851) as the first article to appear in an academic journal. He went on to speak of the work of Gobineau, Les Religions. (Paris, 1865), Mirza Kazem-Beg, Bab i Babidui. (St. Petersburg 1865 + Journal Asiatique Paris, 1866) and others. The work of E.G. Browne was regarded as being 'more accurate' especially inasmuch as Browne 'revealed' the Baha'i dimension of the supposedly monolithic Babi phenomenon. He carried out important work in correctly identifying manuscripts and was the first to write about Baha'u'llah. A.L.M. Nicholas' efforts in translating certain of the Bab's major works was mentioned along with the fact that Shoghi Effendi thought highly of them. The work of such Russian scholars as A. Tumansky and V. Rosen is of importance and interest especially inasmuch as they were working with Baha'i materials. Tumansky, Dr. Momen stated, had not only translated Baha'u'llah's al-Kitab al-Aqdas into Russian but had written 'the best academic account of the Baha'i Faith to this day'.

Dr. Momen expressed the view that scholarship on the Babi-Baha'i religions 'died out' in the 1920's but spoke of a rebirth of interest among non-Baha'i scholars in the last '2-3 years'.

Next Dr. Momen spoke briefly about western Baha'i scholarship. He noted the difficulty of sorting out what might be considered 'teaching material' and what 'academic study' and went on to say a few words about the scholarly essays of the French Baha'i writer Hippolyte Dreyfus. The late Hand of the Cause Mr. Hasan Balyuzi was described as the first really scholarly writer since E.G. Browne. His important work has served to inspire a new generation of Baha'i scholars. In Dr. Momen's opinion the Canadian based Association for Baha'i Studies carries out important work but has shifted from its earlier more academic orientation. Many people are now engaged in Babi-Baha'i studies. Some have gained their Ph.D. It will however, take 5 years or more before academic Baha'i studies begins to be more widely known and bears its fruits. There are signs of maturity and of a move from the writing of purely polemical or 'teaching' materials to more objective scholarship. This though is not to say that there is not much to be done in presenting the Baha'i Faith to the thinking world and making it truly relevant to the age in which we live. The thinking world will not be content with simplistic answers. Scholars must take the lead through their detailed study of the Baha'i writings.

Having sketched and commented on the history of the study of the Babi-Baha'i religions Dr. Momen spoke on some aspects of his view of the meaning of Baha'i scholarship. He first underlined the importance of Baha'i scholars breaking away from the notion that learning implies spiritual superiority. This false notion which has 'infiltrated the Faith as well' is pronounced in Christian and Islamic circles. 'In Islam', it was stated, 'learning made people focal points of imitation' (cf. the marja'-i taqlid in Shi^Ci Islam) such that respect was given to people purely as a result of their learning. Corruption, lust for leadership, power, wealth, etc., often resulted. Baha'u'llah has warned his followers to avoid these pitfalls though knowledge and learning are not condemned. It is service that is important. Individuals are often influenced by their environment. Any sense of 'spiritual superiority' must be absent from the Baha'i scholar. Respect for the learned has its place but should not be overdone. There are dangers in showing the learned too much respect. There is likewise, Dr. Momen continued, a danger in being antagonistic to learning out of a 'fear of the unknown'. This might lead to a retreat into unbalanced fundamentalism. If it is said, 'We have the writings, that is enough' there are 'dangers' in this attitude.

Dr. Momen finally turned his attention to the tensions which may result from Baha'is working within the western academic tradition. He felt unhappy with anti-religious reductionist approaches and mentioned the serious consequences this may have upon faith. Though he did not feel that the academic study of the Baha'i Faith should be discouraged he did exhort his hearers to think carefully about the pitfalls involved in such study. The university undergraduate should 'absorb the discipline' and the postgraduate student 'learn the methods of research'. It would, he stated, be better not to do postgraduate research into the Faith. The postgraduate student is 'not a free agent'. His findings will not be taken seriously in that he has not made a reputation for himself and may be unduly influenced by his supervisor. Baha'i scholars studying in universities would be well advised to do research in a discipline 'parallel to the Faith' and thereby establish their reputations in a field in which they will not be accused of bias. Later the field of Baha'i studies might be entered into. Those engaged in Baha'i studies it was also mentioned, have, as Baha'is, the duty to live the Baha'i life by attending feasts, etc., and keeping in touch with community activities. Doing this would prevent many problems. The values of the academic world are not the same as Baha'i values.

(2) Peter Smith (Saturday afternoon) spoke about certain aspects of methodology and commented on issues arising from a sociological approach to Babi-Baha'i studies. He began by referring to the important question of the relationship between religious authority or religious claims and 'scientific knowledge'. The 'crucial issue'

of the relationship between 'revelation' and 'reason', 'science' and 'religion' is highly problematic and will not be solved by merely repeating the Baha'i principle of their 'essential harmony'. There are no easy answers. The 'reason' 'revelation' clash or relationship will not be solved by Baha'is alone. The question of 'religious authority' concerns members of all religious movements.

Smith went on to mention some of the 'ultimate sources of reference'. He referred in connection with the Bab's claims, to the notion that the power to reveal verses constitutes a proof apart from knowledge and the fulfillment of prophecies. In the Qur'an similarly, the claim is made that neither men nor jinn are capable of producing its like or of bringing a sura like it. Then there is the claim to be capable of working miracles. The miracle is again divorced from proof claims connected with knowledge. Such proofs or truth claims tend to make the rational approach to religion irrelevant. If authority resides in the 'fact of revelation' or the working of miracles it can be said that it 'doesn't matter whether or not authority clashes with reason'. In this way some of the problems involved in the 'revelation' - 'reason' relationship were highlighted.

Having said this— and much more besides—Peter Smith observed that within the 'paradigm religion' the claim to authority is central resulting in a tension with other sources of knowledge and authority. Baha'is should not blandly assume that this tension has been resolved for it is 'unlikely to be resolved in the immediate future'. They should be cautious in claiming that their Faith is a 'scientific religion'.

Peter Smith next turned his attention to the various 'approaches to Baha'i studies'. He mentioned—: (1) Detached positivism in which it is thought that man's apprehension of the world enables him to come to a 'single and unambiguous knowledge of things'. This approach was criticised. Scientific knowledge is not exactly cumulative but establishes itself through a series of 'scientific revolutions'. Though some sociologists have such a positivistic approach others have criticized it. (2) The humanistic hermeneutic approach. Here the observer or researcher attempts to understand the object of his enquiry with 'an eye to understanding the perspectives of the people involved'. (3) Honest polemic in which there is an awareness of 'scientific problems' and faith perspectives are not deliberately distorted. (4) Uninformed or mis-informed polemic which is of little value and often counter-productive. There are thus, it was added, two kinds of attacks on the Baha'i Faith, 'honest attacks' and 'dishonest attacks'. Covenant breaker material is largely 'dishonest polemic'.

At this point Smith turned his attention to issues central to the sociology of religion. At one time it was noted, in contrasting modern scientific knowledge with 'medieval religious concerns', religious thinkers claimed authoritative knowledge in all spheres. Then came the tension caused by the emergence of 'secular knowledge'. Gradually Christians abandoned the claim to be able to make scientific statements about the physical universe. The church 'lost out'. With the removal of the monopoly on knowledge came competing theories of knowledge. Religionists responded in a variety of ways. Some 'joined in' or became secularized-- religion could be explained away in terms of psychological or sociological theories. Others reaffirmed traditional authority in defiance of secular theories, etc. i.e. certain Catholic thinkers or American fundamentalists. When the traditional world crumbles some insist that what was always believed is right. They turn their back on the modern world. A third category of people attempt to retrieve and uncover what exists in the religious tradition. The question 'What is it that I can accept?' arises. In a Baha'i context such questions are important or will have important consequences. There could be 'Baha'i fundamentalists' and those who are ready to 'bargain away' a part of religious knowledge or tradition. Many will ask the question, 'What elements of tradition need to be uncovered and retrieved?' In the Baha'i context it might be said that the essential element is the 'response to the existential call of religion' -- the change of one's self.

The 'issue of the Baha'i Faith in the West' was also raised by Peter Smith. It was pointed out that the way in which people respond to religion is related to their 'social location' and the 19th century development of European and American 'control over the rest of the world' was outlined. In the 1890's the 'economic unification of the world' found realization and was accompanied by political and cultural domination. Around the same time religious teachers or missionaries from the orient, including Baha'is and Ahmadis, came to the West. The response to this western domination varied. Some tribal peoples looked for the eschatological overthrow of the 'whites' and rebelled. In Africa and elsewhere in the middle East a plethora of Mahdis appeared. Babism however, cannot be adequately explained as a response to Western impact in 19th century Iran as by N. Keddie. It is essentially a religious phenomenon. Yet the Baha'i Faith is related to European impact in Iran and the middle East in general. It represents, in part, a response to the question of the West and traditional religious values. The Baha'i Faith in late 19th century Iran was able to accommodate both deeply religious individuals and others who were greatly influenced by European values..

In response to a comment from a Baha'i present to the effect that people become Baha'is as a result of a 'heartfelt attraction' Peter Smith pointed out that most Baha'is are not profoundly religious--though there are a small minority who are deeply religious. Relatively few are 'converted' for religious reasons alone.

The question of persecution and violent actions against Baha'is was raised. In this connection Peter Smith mentioned that Iranian 'religious fanaticism' is not just 'religious fanaticism' but has a social and economic dimension.

In conclusion Peter Smith said a few words about the future of the Baha'i Faith, though he declined to suggest -- in response to a question-- what 'changes would make people accept the Faith in Europe'. He did though, suggest that the future of the Faith lie in the 'third world'.

(3) Stephen Lambden (Saturday afternoon) spoke on the subject of 'Deepening and the academic study of Baha'i doctrine'. He began by asserting that, like say Judaism and Islam, the Baha'i religion may be characterized as a "religion of the Book" in the sense that the locus of Baha'i doctrine is contained in scripture believed to be divinely inspired. The attempt to understand and experience the Baha'i sacred writings may be said to lie at the heart of the Baha'i concept of spirituality. Reference was made in this connection to passages in the *Kitab-i Iqan* and *al-Kitab al-Aqdas*. Yet, despite the importance of scripture in the Baha'i Faith, the scholarly study of the Baha'i writings has hardly begun. Many issues are raised by the academic study of Baha'i doctrine which are not commonly raised in the 'deepening situation' as usually experienced or indulged in by Baha'is.

After such preliminary remarks Lambden attempted to indicate some of the issues raised by the scholarly study of Baha'i scripture at the same time mentioning certain scholarly tasks which have yet to be carried out.

Textual criticism, it was first remarked, has hardly begun. Critical editions of the writings of the Bab and Baha'u'llah have not appeared. The nature (i.e. autograph or otherwise) and MSS source(s) lying behind printed editions is not usually indicated. No critical apparatus indicating variant readings -- bearing in mind the fact that Baha'u'llah not infrequently quotes himself in a different way--is set out. Much work needs to be done in collecting and collating MSS and expert knowledge of the handwriting and style of the Bab, Baha'u'llah, ^CAbdu'l-Baha and their scribes or secretaries needs to be developed. This is important in connection with the establishment of the authenticity or otherwise of Babi-Baha'i literature along with its dating, etc. Then also, there is the task of finding the original texts of many letters of Abdu'l-Baha, for example, that exist in English (or German, etc) translation.

In the deepening situation awareness of the nature of English translation, Lambden continued, is seldom present. Meanings are sometimes derived from the translation which are not indicated in the original Persian or Arabic. Reference by way of example was made to the line in Some Answered Questions (London, nd.p. 113), "Adam signifies the spirit of Adam (روح آدم) and Eve his soul (نفس)". That Eve symbolizes the "soul" of Adam might be thought to mean that Eve represents Adam's immortal higher nature. A more accurate translation of nafs though, implies that Eve represents Adam's (man's) lower or possibly carnal nature which induced him (mankind) to 'fall' or enter the realm of materiality. Karim Khan Kirmani, the "third Shaykh" and an enemy of the Bab and Baha'u'llah, wrote a book entitled Kitāb-i Nusrat al-Dīn in 1266.A.H./1849-50.A.D. in which he, in the course of commenting on Gen 2:21f, states that woman (زن) is the nafs of man (مرد) in the archetypal world of humanity. That woman was created from the "left side" of man means that woman should be obedient to man as the intellect operating in the "right side" of truth should control the lower nafs of man (pp.18-19).

Brief mention was then made of the sometimes paraphrastic nature of Shoghi Effendi's translations. The fact that for Baba'is his translations represent interpretation was compared with the Targum of the Jews and the Greek LXX (Septuagint) translation adopted and believed to be divinely inspired by early Christians (along with the Massoretic text—received Hebrew text). The point was then made that good translation requires an overall knowledge of many aspects of Babi-Baha'i history and doctrine and of its background, etc. As an example of a faulty translation borne of inadequate knowledge Lambden referred to a German translation of a Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Baha to Ethel Rosenberg on the chronology of the Lawh-i Hikmat of Baha'u'llah (original text printed in Ishraq Khavari, Ed. Māida-yi Āsmānī Vol.2 pp.64-7). 'Abdu'l-Baha refers to the divergent chronologies in the various texts of the Pentateuch (Torah)—: (1) the Massoretic text, (2) the Septuagint (Greek, LXX), and (3) the Samaritan Pentateuch. The German translation has, not "Samaritan Pentateuch" (for تورات سامری) but "Sumerische Pentateuch" or non-existent "Sumerian Pentateuch". In the same Tablet there is reference to a certain هنری اسکات (apparently at first sight Henry Scott) who wrote a commentary (tafsīr) on the Torah. This person may in fact be two persons or a reference to an edition of the Bible Commentary of Matthew Henry (1662-1714) and Thomas Scott (1747-1821) which went through many 19th century editions.*

* This Commentary was probably known to 'Abdu'l-Baha through the writings of Maulana Rahmat Allāh Kairānawī (1818-1890) the author of the well known Izhār al-Haqq though this same writer also mentions the Pentateuchal commentary of the great Henry Wescott () and I am now inclined to think that the reference in 'Abdu'l-Baha's Tablet to E. Rosenberg is to his Commentary. (Ed).

In the deepening situation, Lambden continued, little attention is paid to the chronology and Sitz -im-Leben ('setting in life') of the Babi-Baha'i Scriptures knowledge of which is essential in academic study. The meaning of certain Tablets is not at all clear outside a knowledge of the circumstances of its revelation, to whom it was addressed, and its place in the chronology of the writings of its author. The task of arranging the Tablets of Baba'u'llah in chronological order has not yet been achieved save in its barest outline. It is not always clear whether a certain Tablet belongs to the Baghdad, Adrianople or Akka periods or to which subdivision of these periods. The chronological order of Baha'u'llah's 'Tablets to the Kings' has not yet been worked out in detail. Much study of historical events and persons alluded to or mentioned in these Tablets needs to be carried out. In dating Baha'i scripture both internal and external data should be taken into consideration. Different Baha'i scholars have assigned certain Tablets to different periods. i.e. A. Taherzadeh in his The Revelation of Baha'u'llah and Ishraq Khavari in his Ganj-i Shaygan. The more detailed working out of the chronology of the writings of the Bab, Baha'u'llah and ^CAbdu'l-Baha as well as Shoghi Effendi will enable the developments in a 'progressively revealed' Baha'i Scripture to be studied and influences upon the minds of its authors to be registered. Divine Revelation, it was argued in passing, may be seen as a creative interaction between the authors of 'divine revelation' and 'interpretation' and their intellectual and social Sitz-im-Leben. The central figures of the Baha'i religion all read books and sometimes drew on the insights of their followers. Baha'u'llah for example, read the Bible in Arabic translation—probably a Christian version—quoting it in his Javahir al-Asrar (c.1860?) and a number of subsequent writings.

In the academic study of the Babi-Baha'i writings the background, historical context and general milieu must be considered. Shoghi Effendi called Baha'is to pay special attention to the Islamic roots of their Faith in order that they might gain an adequate understanding of its message. For the scholar attention should not only be paid to the 'orthodox' Shi^Ci roots of the Faith along with the Shaykhi influences but also to the possible impact of Sufi, Hurufi, ^CAli Ilahi, Isma'ili and Druze ideas. Both Babi and Baha'i terminology it was pointed out shows the influence of Islamic movements generally labelled 'extremist'. Liberal Arabic thought in the modern liberal age as diffused throughout the Ottoman Empire as well as Iranian modernist thought and more direct Western influence upon the thought of Baha'u'llah and ^CAbdu'l-Baha should be investigated. Such study shows that care must be taken in claiming that certain seemingly modern 20th century perspectives were first voiced by the central figures of

the Faith. Before 'Abdu'l-Baha, it was pointed out, spoke of the need for universal education and its being the same for boys and girls, a certain Rifā'a Badawī Rāfi' al-Tahtāwī (1801-73) of the first generation of Egyptian modernists had made the same points in his al-Murshid al-Amin li'l-Banāt wa'l-Banīn (Cairo, 1289 A.H./1872-3, pp. 62ff, 104, 128, 148). Indeed, 'Abdu'l-Baha was well read in such literature. It is possible to trace the origins of certain stories and ideas he mentions in his Tablets— he himself occasionally mentions their source. The "story of the dead dog" told of Jesus and his disciples by 'Abdu'l-Baha, Lambden further asserted, is found in a poem of the Persian poet Nizami (he devoted a whole poem to the story) and in Ibn al-'Arabi's 'Meccan Revelations'—which was known to Baha'u'llah and probably 'Abdu'l-Baha also. Source criticism is an important scholarly task. The knowledge of the sources of certain themes and motifs in the Baha'i writings often throws considerable light on their meaning. It is not an 'heretical task' which is contrary to a belief in 'divine revelation'. Even a knowledge of the history or nature and development of literary forms can help in understanding the Baha'i Revelation. The form of the '7 valleys', as is well known, was much used by Sufi mystics and 'Attar's 'Conference of the Birds' throws light on the meaning of Baha'u'llah's 'Seven Valleys'. But, more interestingly, the form of the individual 'Hidden Words' is that of the 'Divine Saying' or Hadith Qudsi in Islam some of which were collected together and called 'The Hidden Book of Fatimah' by Shi'ci Muslims the 'Hidden Words' once being so designated.

In concluding his lecture Stephen Lambden mentioned a few of the differences between 'deepening' and academic study—: (1) Deepening tends to revolve around well known and familiar or oft repeated themes and passages of scripture while academic study necessitates the study of lesser known— and often extremely important— or neglected topics and texts; (2) Deepening or those involved in it often consciously or unconsciously attempt to avoid deeper or controversial issues which cannot be ignored in academic study; (3) Deepening often fails to raise questions which academic study necessitates asking. i.e. obscure passages in texts such as the Kitab-i Iqan cannot be simply passed over in silence in academic study; (4) Academic study must concern itself with historical context or Sitz im Leben and 'source criticism', etc, though deepening need or often does not. Deepening though, need not be academically oriented but it would be better if its present level were improved.

(4) Todd Lawson (Sunday morning) from Montreal Canada who was visiting England in connection with his proposed post-graduate study of the Bab's writings, agreed to speak for a short while— without preparation— on the subject of

Tafīr (Islamic Qur'ānic commentary) on which he had already undertaken post-graduate research with particular reference to the Qur'anic account of Jesus' crucifixion.

After outlining the history and nature of Islamic Qur'anic commentary, Lawson noted that Muelime have, on the whole, denied that Jesus was crucified or died on the cross (refer, Qur'an 4:155-162). Baha'is on the other hand, assert— and this is remarkable—the historicity of Jesus' crucifixion. Coming from a non-Muslim background western Baha'is are seldom aware of the innovatory nature and importance of the Baha'i position with respect to the crucifixion of Jesus

Qur'an 4:155f is quite ambiguous about the crucifixion and could be translated in various ways, the phrase shubbiha lahum being at the centre of the controversy. Early Muslim story tellers such as accompanied the invading Muslim armies attempted to make these verses meaningful to their hearers who wanted to be entertained with a good story. Qur'anic stories and verses were sometimes made meaningful by the 'on the spot' invention of expository tales. Addressing a Christian audience to which the Qur'anic verses and the phrase shubbiha lahum had to be made meaningful such story tellers seem to have taught that it only "appeared to them" (the Jews) that Jesus had been crucified and died on the cross. Some asserted that Jesus had not been crucified but that one of his disciples took on his appearance and was crucified in his stead. Quite fanciful stories were concocted. Yet, in the Qur'anic passage in question it is stated that "God raised him (Jesus) unto Himself". This created a problem and a story was invented to the effect that God raised Jesus up to heaven from a house before the crucifixion of another in his stead. These stories about Jesus' non-crucifixion became popular and may have their roots in the Christian gnostic tradition. They became crystallised in the Hadith literature though they are not always traced back to the Prophet Muhammad himself. The Qur'an commentator Tabari, after recording and discussing various traditions about Jesus' crucifixion, ends by saying 'And God knows best how it was'. By the 19th century however, it was practically an article of faith that Jesus was not himself crucified on the cross.

The first major Qur'anic commentator to look beyond the various traditions back to what the Qur'an itself says was Zamakhsharī (12th century A.D.). He argued that the grammar of the Qur'an does not support the substitution theories found in the Hadith literature.

The following is an extract of a Tablet of ^CAbdu'l-Baha to Mr. Thornton Chase translated by Mirza Ahmad Sohrab on June 8th 1911 referring to Qur'an 4:155f:

"In regard to the verse, which is revealed in the Koran, that His Highness Christ, was not killed and was not crucified, by this is meant the Reality of Christ. Although they crucified this elemental body, yet the merciful reality and the heavenly existence remain eternal and undying, and it was protected from the oppression and persecution of the enemies, for Christ is Eternal and Ever-lasting. How can he die? The death and crucifixion was imposed on the physical body of Christ, and not upon the Spirit of Christ." (Star of the West 2:7/8.p.13) (Ed).

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Razī also discarded the crude substitution theories. He argued that if God operated in this way Muslims could not be sure even of the fundamentals of their Faith. His views were however, forgotten or ignored though, Lawson also noted, the Brethren of Purity affirmed Jesus' crucifixion or the reality of his death on the cross.

Finally in connection with the subject of Jesus' crucifixion, Lawson raised the question as to why Muslims came to deny this event. He proposed that the denial of Jesus' death on the cross originated among the early Muslim story tellers in view of its 'entertainment value'. In the course of time it was understood to be the Muslim view by Christian writers such as John of Damascus and in the course of Muslim-Christian dialogue became the standard Muslim position. Soteriological concerns such as are entertained by Christians in connection with the death of Jesus were not uppermost in the minds of Muslims.

In concluding his brief talk Lawson referred to the Bab's commentaries on the Qur'an noting that tafsir is the 'most Muslim of all literary pursuits'. He stated that it is important to determine where the Bab stands in this tradition in view of the fact that the Bab often gives qabbalistic interpretations to Qur'anic texts--in, for example his commentary on the Surat al-Kawthar-- and that his tafsir is not exactly commentary as commonly understood, i.e. not exactly 'exoteric' or historically oriented commentary.

(5) Viva Tomlin (Sunday afternoon) introduced those present to the theological dimension of Baha'i studies. She read a paper designed to raise the kinds of questions which the student might encounter or should ask on the 'long journey' towards understanding the 'theology of the Baha'i Faith'. What, she asked, does it mean when it is said that we were created 'to know and to worship God'; does this involve the intellect? The emotions? Adoration? Why were we created to know God? Does this statement make sense? Is there a God?..etc. How do I find out about God? Many such questions were raised in the first part of Tomlin's paper.

'What is theology?' was also a question that was raised and discussed. Theology, Viva Tomlin pointed out, is vast and many-faceted. Classical theologians study the 'Word of God' which has been identified with Christ who has been identified with or represents the Godhead. They consider what God said 'in Christ' and the 'being of Christ' all of which has implications for man, etc. In the Baha'i Faith though, the central figure is not Christ but the 'Glory of God'. In the light of this we must ask many questions: 'Who is man?' 'Why was he created?', etc. The theologian may also ask why man and the creation

exist. Why? What is it all for? What is the reason behind the universe? Is life random or has it a purpose? If we make God our starting point for theological reflection then the questions arise; 'What is God like'? If God is transcendent how can we understand him and his purpose? What questions should we ask? Does the problem of God's transcendence mean that theology is a 'cry to the unknown' or an attempt to read an 'unreadable Book'? The theologian tries to read the 'Book' as God wishes it to be read. The 'Why?', and 'What?' and other questions are asked about God and man as well as questions about the future destiny of things.

Theology once embraced all spheres of learning offering authoritative answers to questions about God the universe and man. A primary source of affirmation was that God had made Himself known in history. Again though, 'What does this mean?' 'What does it mean to be a believing creature?', etc.

At several points in her paper Tomlin referred to herself as a 'liturgical theologian' or 'liturgical theologian / philo-theologian of liturgically derived doxology' which implies a love for the 'Word of God' in connection with worship and glorification. She also commented upon and listed many questions which the theologian might ask in connection with Baha'u'llah's 'Short Obligatory Prayer': What does 'I bear witness' mean? Does 'my God' refer to a personal God? If so what does 'to know and to worship' Him mean? What are the implications of 'to know and to worship (God)'?

Some attention was also given to asking questions about the source of authority implicit in or lying behind such texts as the 'Short Obligatory Prayer'. By what authority does the individual know that these are authoritative statements? Where are the manuscripts? etc...etc.. The 'Short Obligatory Prayer' originates with Baha'u'llah... These questions are important though the 'philo-theologian of liturgically derived doxology' is concerned primarily with the implications of belief or 'what is believed'.

In the course of the discussion following Tomlin's paper-- which I have only barely outlined here--the question of religious doubting arose. It was felt that doubts should be expressed openly and regarded as stepping stones to spiritual maturity. Much more attention should be paid to the open-minded consideration of and grappling with doubts.

Concluding note

This report only represents my own recollection of some of the ground covered and statements made by the speakers who addressed what turned out to be a wholly Baha'i audience of perhaps 50-100 persons. I may well have misrepresented the speakers at certain points or failed to record important statements. The event was, I think, successful. A comforting maturity and openness was shown by those present. Many thoughtful questions were asked only

a few of which are mentioned above. The organization was good and several persons expressed the desire for more such communication between those engaged in Baha'i studies and the Baha'i community at large.

Stephen Lambden

ANNOUNCEMENT OF FORTHCOMING BAHAI STUDIES SEMINAR

UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE

DEPT. OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES.*

SAT. 17th AND SUN. 18th SEPT.

1983.

It is hoped that at this forthcoming Baha'i Studies Seminar papers will be read which fall into one of the following four (obviously-loosely defined) categories:-

- 1) The study of Babi-Baha'i texts;
- 2) The study of Babi-Baha'i history;
- 3) The study of Babi-Baha'i doctrine;
- 4) The study of the Babi-Baha'i movements.

Offers of papers and enquiries should be addressed to either Dr. Denis MacEoin, Dept. of Religious Studies, University of Newcastle upon Tyne, NEL 7RU, England, U.K., or Stephen Lambden (same address).

* Venue and sponsorship subject to confirmation.

Letter to the Editor: A Note by Christopher Buck on Jesus' Cry
From the Cross.

Exemplary for Baha'i scholarship is Lambden's treatment of Mark 15:34. In making full use of critical apparatus available to him, Lambden has been able to test a scriptural "emendation" such as Backwell (and possibly the Master) has hazarded. Though I do not have Lambden's linguistic command, perhaps I might try to evolve the methodology he has trailblazed, by introducing iconographic as well as a few further textual and extra-biblical considerations.

E.R. Goodenough has stated that " religious symbols remain as the greatest unexplored body of historical data." ¹. The late Cardinal Danielou in his Primitive Christian Symbols reviews the important archaeological data surrounding the symbolism of the Cross, which I shall not reduplicate here. If trust may be placed in Danielou's digestion of the unearthed symbols, his conclusion could prove crucial to Lambden's discussion: " The conclusion reached by our inquiry is this. The sign of the cross is seen to have its origin, not in an allusion to Christ's passion, but as a signification of his divine glory." ².

I submit that one's Christological persuasion in primitive times did, to a remarkable extent, condition tradition. Jesus says not only what vibrated the air but also what oral and written tradition redactionally filtered. Let us ponder the fact that the tradition of Mark 15:34 has only Matthew 27:46 as a parallel, which means that in the New Testament alone, these words were accepted by only 50% of the fourfold evangelists who transmitted traditions of Christ's life. The other Christian traditions, as evidenced by archaeological data, wished to convey the consciousness of the glory of martyrdom, how can we be so certain that Jesus was not audibly elated during the final moments of his unthinkably painful exaltation, as were so many of our Baha'i martyrs, who afford us a "phenomenological" parallel?

John the Evangelist is a case in point: he presents no close parallel for Mark 15:34, yet obliquely (to hire Lambden's word) " rewrites" the verse or at least its purport, to conform to the idea that Jesus was conscious of the glory of martyrdom. Since the Johannine Jesus is so laconic upon the Cross, one might wonder if John has not in fact dislocated the saying, transferred it to chapter 12 and conflated it with the Voice from heaven in verse 28 ! After all, patristic exegesis is not unanimous in ascribing the utterance of Mark 15:34 to Jesus: Origen, among if not the first of Christian scholars, is anxious to avoid this idea of utter angst in loss of faith on Jesus' part, and insists that when Matthew and Mark report a "loud" or "great" voice, they are referring to the "divine voice" by which the cry was augmented. ³.

But if the Cry of Dereliction was indeed evocative of Psalm 22, the Cry need not have been one of abandonment at all, but rather a Cry of Victory. This is quite probably what was reflected in the Ebionite Christian tradition, for the Ebionite scholar Symmachus entitles the Psalm, "A Song of Victory"; while Theodotion (whom Jerome identifies also as an Ebionite) offers the heading, "To the Victory," with Jerome closely following with "To the Victor". ⁴.

Refer S. Lambden, "My God, my God why hast thou forsaken me?" or "My God, my God, how thou hast glorified me!" ? in Baha'i Studies Bulletin Vol. 1. No. 1. (June 1982), pp. 27-42. cf. also Baha'i Studies Bulletin Vol. 1. No. 3. (Dec. 1982), pp. 81-2.

Thus we can see indications that even if Backwell's/'Abdu'l-Baha's emendation is without textual foundation, it is certainly not without iconographic or exegetically-textual foundation. We see of course St. Peter in Acts 3:13 proclaiming the crucifixion in terms of glorification. The two events of crucifixion and glorification may even be unified as simultaneous in an extra-biblical verb, Palestinian Aramaic izd^eqéf, which could signify "to be glorified" as well as "to be crucified".

Apart from Matthew 28:19, no other evangelical saying of Jesus may be so capable of variation. Not statistically in terms of manuscript witnesses necessarily, but in terms of the entire tradition itself. For variants to Mark 15:34 were first introduced by the very eyewitnesses of the Crucifixion, who could not all agree on just what Jesus has said!

In addition to the textual variants which Lambden lists, several more come to the fore:

k (Codex Bezae Cantabrigiae) = maledixisti ("taunted")
 c (Codex Colbertinus) = maledixisti ("taunted")
 i (Codex Vindobonensis) = maledixisti ("taunted")
 Porphyry (Macarius Magnes, Apocriticus) = "reproached"
 Peshitta New Testament = ("spared")
 Other witnesses (not specified by NEB) = ("shamed").

These variants are significant to the discussion only in that, though they do not confirm "glorified" as a reading, neither do they confirm "forsaken". Thus the whole thing is still a relatively open question.

Among the theological debates I have cursorily followed, Schreiber stands out as the foremost exponent of the view that the so-called Cry of Dereliction was in fact a cry of Triumph. Schreiber argues that the Cry was one of exaltation or glorification and that this is demonstrated by the response in verse 39 of the centurion, who ironically is the symbol of earthly might and power. That the centurion interprets the cry in terms of glorification is more intriguing since the Markan text states that the centurion saw the Cry of Jesus. Some manuscripts of Mark omit heard his cry, and I wonder if Schreiber's arguments should be seen and heard by Mr. Lambden.

I have so far offered no textual ground for arguing the possibility that Jesus might have uttered something other than what the majority of the Greek manuscripts transmit. This has been a weakness in my argument, just as the lack of any real redaction criticism has posed its own "Christological difficulty" in Mr. Lambden's argument. But recently with perfect timeliness, I have come across a textual argument for the reading of šabbāhtānī ("praised") in Rabbi Cohn-Sherbok's "Jesus' Cry on the Cross: an Alternative View", (in Expository Times 93/7 (1982), pp. 215-217).

The Rabbi at University of Kent at Canterbury states that, assuming Jesus spoke Aramaic, it is possible to construe the words of Jesus, not as an Aramaic translation of Ps 22:1 (š^ebaqtānī), but rather as the rhetorical question, "My God, My God why have you praised me?" (šabbāhtānī) which is transliterated into Greek in exactly the identical way as the rendering of Ps 22:1. This linguistic possibility has sparked in me a further memory of 'Abdu'l-Baha's reported textual emendation which I myself had read several years ago, but at the time did not write down: The Master was reported to have said that through the change of one single letter, the text was altered to read "forsaken" instead of "glorified". I distinctly remember this sequence of textual basis for the Master's reported emendation, which Mr. Lambden does not transmit in his paper.

Cohn-Sherbock concludes: "Given this interpretation, Jesus' words should not be understood as a cry of... desolation..., but rather as a prayer for the dawning of the reign of God. Hanging on the cross, Jesus would have seen his life as a fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy (Isa 52-53)... Thus in the cry 'elahi' elahi lammah sabbahtani Jesus would have invoked the image of the glorified servant of the Lord who, despite his suffering, is 'full of God's spirit', 'honoured in the eyes of God', 'exalted', and 'lifted up high' (Isa 42, 49, 52)."

Naturally the manuscripts to which Mr. Lambden refers cannot be summoned as impartial witnesses against the reading of "praised" or "glorified", since the manuscripts themselves come into existence and attest to a primarily canonical tradition! The destruction of rival gospel traditions is a sad fact of Christian history, so the real variants are simply not extant. And how can appeal to patristic writings, which Mr. Lambden makes, hope to give us any independent textual witness?

I wish to state that, has 'Abdu'l-Bahā actually proposed such an emendation of Mark 15:34, I would hope that Baha'i scholars would seriously entertain the idea that he may well have been right, as a working hypothesis to test out, rather than the opposite, no matter how many manuscripts may at first be invoked as cards stacked against him. Although the evidence presented here is slender and tentative, the theology, if not the text, is not lacking in order to support the conjecture that Mark 15:34 may indeed have yielded a sense of glorification alongside a very real Promethean passion.

Christopher Buck
Bellingham Washington
20th March 1983.

Notes

1. E.R. Goodenough, "Symbols as Historical Evidence" in Diogenes 44(1963), pp. 19-32.
2. J. Danielou, Primitive Christian Symbols (Baltimore: Helicon, 1964), "The Taw Sign", p. 145.
3. Origen, Commentary on Matthew, 135., cited Robert M. Grant The Earliest Lives of Jesus (N.Y.: Harper, 1961), p. 97.
4. cited by L. Paul Trudinger, "Eli, Eli, Lama Sabachthani: A Cry of Dereliction? or Victory?" in Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 17(1974), pp. 235-38.
5. X. Leon-Dufour, Dictionary of the New Testament (Harper and Row, 1980), p. 152.
6. J. Schreiber, Theologie des Vertrauens (Hamburg: Furche-Verlag H. Rennebach K.G., 1967), pp. 24-49, 66-82; cited T.J. Weeden, Mark--Traditions in Conflict (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), pp. 146, 166-7.

A Brief response to Christopher Buck's Note...

I am grateful to Chris Buck for taking the trouble to respond to my article on Jesus' cry from the cross and for drawing attention to some further interesting articles on this theme. When I wrote my original article I was fully aware of the post-Markan understanding of crucifixion as exaltation and glorification which tradition it was not my intention to minimize or deny. It is debatable however, whether this understanding of Jesus' crucifixion or the proposed reading sabbahtani can be made to overrule the Marcan note of forsakeness. Though Buck seems to think that the Baha'i theological position must deny Jesus' uttering a cry of dereliction -- which is difficult text critically to maintain -- passages within the Baha'i writings by no means demand this. He indirectly accuses me of taking a position opposite to that of 'Abdu'l-Bahā's supposed interpretation (his last paragraph above which was not in fact my intention at all. In my original article I quote 'Abdu'l-Bahā (and a pilgrim note recording Shoghi Effendi's words) to the effect that Jesus did utter a cry of forsakeness during his last moments on the cross.

S. Lambden.

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Works of Stanwood Cobb (b. 1881) available from Avalon Press, P.O. Box 9941, Washington, D.C. 20015.

Sage of the Sacred Mountain, A Gospel of Tranquility, Avalon Press [=AP], Wash. D.C. 1953. pp. 92.

A Saga of Two Centuries, Autobiography [Copyright S. Cobb] pp. 172.

Radiant Living, Spiritual Keys to Vital, Happy and Successful Living, AP. 1970. pp. 310.

Our Planetary Destiny, AP. 1978. pp. 138 [Orig. Pub. as, The Essential Mysticism, The Four Seas Company, 1918].

Wings of the Spirit, AP. 1971. pp. 98.

Request for Turkish Newspapers.

Can anyone send to Dr. Kent D. Beveridge, Beethovenstrasse 68/1/4 A-2380 Perchtoldsdorf, Austria, copies of one or more of the following 'Turkish newspapers' which

contain articles regarding Babi persecutions and the exile of Baha'u'llah from Adrianople to Akka-:

- 1) Journal Du Constantinople, Oct/Nov 1855+ August 1868.
- 2) Journal D'Orient detto
- 3) Courrier D'Orient detto
- 4) Levant Times and Shipping Journal detto

Request for miscellaneous Baha'i publications

I should be most grateful if anyone could loan or supply me with photocopies (cost obviously refunded) of any of the following items-:

- 1) Arthur Pilebury Dodge, The New Holy City, A Notable Seventh[sic] Day Pilgrimage, Mutual Publishing Company, New York, 190__? .
- 2) Wilhelm Herrigel, Die Zeichen unserer Zeit im Lichte der Bibel und der Baha'u'llah, Stuttgart.1916.
- 3) Shaykh Muhammad(°Abd al-) Husayn Tihrañi, Fādl-i Tihrañi, Kitāb-i Mūnadarāt al-Dīniyya, Cairō, nd.
- 4) The Bāb, Letter in reply to questions of Mīrzā Muhammad Sa'īd Ardistañi in Iran National Baha'i Archives, Private Publications Vol.No.69.around p.420ff.
- 5) Sahifa fī Sharh Du°āñi fī Zamān al-Ghayba, in Iran National Baha'i Archives, Private Publications, Vol.98, pp.87-94.
- 6) Hasan Fu°adī Bushrū°i, Tārīkh-i Amrī-yi Khurasan (MSS).
- 7) Baha'u'llah, Kitāb-i Badī°, np.nd.

Stephen Lambden(Ed), 77 Rothwell Rd.Goeforth, Newcastle upon Tyne.

Change of address

Dr.Peter Smith's new address is-: Sheep Fold, Borwick, (near) Carnforth, Lancs., LA6 1JS, England, U.K. Tel. [0524.] 732757.