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BAHA'I STUDIES SEMINAR
ON ETHICS AND METHODOLOGY

Cambridge 30 September - 1 October 1978

In the course of the second Baha'i Studies Seminar held at the University of Lancaster in April 1978, it became apparent to many, particularly those actively engaged in full-time research on the Baha'i faith and proposing to publish studies on the subject in the near future, that an interim seminar on the ethics and methodology of such research was needed before the third Lancaster seminar in 1979. Several major issues, many of them controversial, are faced by contemporary Baha'i scholars, ranging from that of justification for their work as such to the refinement of a methodology which may prove acceptable both within and outside the Baha'i community. At the present time, when those involved in Baha'i studies are principally Baha'is, issues of faith, value-judgment, and relations with the Baha'i community at large are apparent to a degree much greater than may be expected as non-Baha'i scholars enter the field in larger numbers. The university seminars at Lancaster necessarily provide little opportunity between the reading of papers for the discussion of such issues, and their academic nature and intent make it inappropriate to enter fully into issues of concern only to Baha'is. A further need was felt to exist for increased co-ordination of effort, exchange of ideas, and organization of activities in the field, all areas into which there was felt to be no opportunity to enter at Lancaster.

Following the Lancaster seminar of April, therefore, Moojan Momen and Denis MacEoin were requested to organize an ethics and methodology seminar in Cambridge, to which both full-time researchers and others with a serious interest in the issues under discussion might be invited. Originally planned for the weekend 23/24 September, a Baha'i conference in London later arranged for that same weekend made it necessary to change the date to 30 September - 1 October. Unlike Lancaster, where the seminars are held under the auspices of the Departments of Sociology and Religious Studies

in the University, it was felt to be inappropriate to seek the auspices of any of the university departments in Cambridge. Arrangements were eventually made to locate the seminar in Sidney Sussex College, under the aegis of the Local Baha'i Assembly of Cambridge and Cambridge University Baha'i Society. Programmes and invitations were sent to individuals throughout North America, continental Europe, and the United Kingdom, and the National Assembly of the Baha'is of the U.K. was notified.

A total of 18 individuals attended most of the seminar, including Anthony Lee from Los Angeles, Loni Bramson from Louvain in Belgium, and Marion Hofman from the World Centre in Israel. A telegram was received (too late, unfortunately, to be read to the assembled participants) from the Canadian Association for Studies on the Baha'i Faith, Toronto, as well as several letters from individuals wishing us success. On Friday evening, an informal gathering of the earliest arrivals was held at the home of Beth and Denis MacEoin, at which plans for the weekend were finalized.

The first session began at 10-00 a.m. on the Saturday morning, under the firection of Peter Smith (Lancaster). The theme was 'Justification for Baha'i Studies', and suggested topics included: Are different areas more justifiable than others at present?; are there areas into which it may not be appropriate to enter now?; and 'how can we justify the use of sensitive biographical and other materials? Before leading a discussion on the above theme, Peter presented to the seminar a set of four 'ground-rules' which had previously been drawn up for the Baha'i Study Class in Los Angeles. These were:

1) There should be no topics which are barred from discussion, no questions which cannot be asked and no opinion which cannot be put forth openly. No subjects will be regarded as taboo. Rather, the floor will be open to all themes.

2) During the course of the discussion it will be regarded as improper for anyone to question another speaker's faith in Baha'u'llah, his commitment to the Covenant or his devotion to the Faith or its Central Figures. We all enter the

discussion as Baha'is with a common commitment to beliefs which is beyond challenge or suspicion.

3) Ideas and points of view will inevitably differ. Everyone who speaks should expect that his ideas will be challenged and should be prepared to support them with evidence which will be acceptable to others.

4) The discussion will be intellectual (in the best sense of the word). This is not to say that we will not discuss feelings or that the discussion will be pedantic or obscure. Rather is meant that we are interacting with each other on a level of ideas (not of personality or emotion) and that the goal of the discussions will be an exchange of ideas, not emotions (though such an exchange will hopefully prove to be meaningful and emotionally satisfying).

Mr. Smith then read an introductory statement which he had drawn up for the seminar, including a brief account of the historical background to the occasion. Since this statement was of considerable interest, it is reproduced here in full:

'It may not be inappropriate to begin this seminar with a brief review of its history. Advance preparations began in 1972 when Moojan and Wendi Komen invited a number of us to a weekend gathering at their house in London. Compared with today's meeting this first "seminar" - I don't think we'd fixed on a definite title at that stage - was far less specific in its purpose. Essentially it afforded opportunity for a group of young Baha'is to meet and discuss a number of topics in a somewhat academic manner. Five of us - Moojan, Denis, Paul and Bahiyih Adams and myself presented papers which ranged widely over such topics as the prophetic status of Joseph Smith in the light of Baha'i teachings; the Word of God; an approach to the Faith from the standpoint of social anthropology - including a consideration of Shoghi Effendi's ministry in terms of Levi-Strauss's concept of the "bricoleur"; Medieval love poetry; and a comparison of the role of education and its status in Islam and Baha'i.

'That first seminar had no clearly stated objectives,

perhaps we just envisaged it as a means of shedding some light on the world by a consideration of Baha'i criteria whilst at the same time increasing our understanding of the Faith by means of various academic disciplines. It was an informal meeting of friends, enjoyable, but regarded by most of us, I think, as a luxury. We agreed that the weekend had been useful and that we should repeat the venture.... The urgency of our intent can be judged by the fact that it was more than two years later before we held the second seminar - this time in Durham - with the format much as before. This was followed by several more such meetings in various parts of the country.

'These meetings, infrequent and diffuse as they were, served to heighten our awareness of the need for Baha'i studies and to increase our critical understanding of their nature. As individuals, our commitment to Baha'i scholarship was increased and in 1975 Denis and myself were both accepted for post-graduate research on Baha'i subjects, whilst Moojan had his first book, his study of Dr. Esslemont, published. In 1977 the Departments of Religious Studies and of Sociology at the University of Lancaster lent their support to the first Baha'i Studies Seminar of a fully academic nature held in this country. The success of this venture prompted a second seminar in 1978 and a third is planned for 1979. At the 1978 Seminar the "unholy trinity" of British Baha'i studies was joined by other contributors from Finland and the United States as well as from the United Kingdom; plans for more extensive contacts with academics in other countries who were involved in Baha'i Studies were also made.

'Various issues have come into clearer focus during the six-and-a-half years in which these seminars have developed. The unease which several of us felt when we discussed the original 1972 Seminar in terms of the potential elitism and luxury nature which we perceived in the venture has been replaced by a firm commitment to "Baha'i Studies", both in terms of a belief that the Baha'i Faith is a fit subject for academic study and that such study is essential for a proper understanding of the Faith by believer and non-believer alike, and in terms of our individual commitment as academics. Our original methodologies - and I trust I do not misrepresent my colleagues here - were based on

the firm assumption that the Baha'i Faith was correct; that its teachings could be used to validate and comprehend other areas of reality, and that faith aided by reason was sufficient for the fuller understanding of the Baha'i religion which we all sought. If there is a common methodology at the present time then it is perhaps best described as methodological agnosticism - an increase in critical awareness has naturally led to the abandonment of a priori theological assumptions for research purposes. The position of methodological agnosticism is obviously an attractive one for the individual scholar who wishes to combine honest scholarly research with the maintenance of a personal supra-rational faith. Whether such a position is the correct stance for the scholar who is also a Baha'i by religion to adopt can be discussed this afternoon. A third issue of which we have become aware in these years is the relationship between Baha'i scholars and the wider Baha'i community. At a theoretical level it might be argued that modern scholarship is compatible with Baha'i religious beliefs and purposes - the stated principle of the harmony between science, religion and reason and so on.... In practical terms, however, it is not always easy to escape the prejudices which exist in most societies, religious and secular, between academics, or more generally, intellectuals, and the general populace, and, in the case of religions, those traditional authorities which act as the protectors of religious orthodoxy. Is there then a danger that the Baha'i academic in his attempt to come to a more objective understanding of his religion may find tensions developing between himself and his co-religionists?

These three issues: the justification for Baha'i Studies; methodology; and the relationship between Baha'i scholars and the wider Baha'i community, provide the central themes for this seminar. Whether or not there are easy answers to the various questions raised, their consideration must constitute an essential part of the development of Baha'i scholarship and a fundamental matter of concern for the individual Baha'i scholar.' (Peter Smith. 24 June 1978)

The discussion which immediately followed this introduction highlighted a basic problem which affects Baha'i

studies at the present time, namely the problem of achieving agreement in an interdisciplinary situation. Methodological agnosticism and the effort to achieve a degree of value freedom, for example, were felt to be largely valid for historians and sociologists, but less useful or appropriate for scholars adopting a theological or philosophical standpoint in which values per se have more importance. It was, however, pointed out at a later stage in the seminar that a phenomenological approach provided a suitable method for scholars in these latter fields as well as for others in more 'scientific' disciplines. An important distinction was also made, using an approach originated by Professor Ninian Smart, between studies which represent the subjective 'expression' of a religion (primarily theology), and those which seek to objectively describe or 'study' it (such as history). (For a full discussion of this distinction, see Ninian Smart The Phenomenon of Religion (Oxford 1978) chapter 1 'Exploring Religion'.) The non-academic approach was defined as essentially a priori or deductive, seeking to find in historical or other research evidence to support a belief already held, whereas the academic approach, generally thought to be more appropriate to our work, was seen as a posteriori or inductive. Speaking in terms of the particular position of the Baha'i community, it was agreed that it is commonly believed that the 'answers' to most or all questions can be obtained in a straightforward fashion from, for example, Hands of the Cause or Counsellors, whereas, quite apart from the question of actual individual knowledge, the scholar is aware that answers must be sought through a complex process of research, an 'unfettered search after truth', and that, even when that has been carried out for some time, there may prove to be many possible 'answers', or partial answers, or none at all.

Returning more directly to the question of justifying Baha'i studies, a task which is essential vis a vis both Baha'is and non-Baha'i academics, it was readily agreed that there is ample scriptural justification for work of this kind. Scholarship is constantly extolled in the Baha'i writings, as exemplified in the following passage from a tablet of 'Abdu'l-Baha: 'The solid foundation of the religion of God is built upon clear and manifest pillars. The greatest of all these pillars is that of

knowledge and learning, reason, intellect, and the understanding of material realities and divine mysteries. It is, therefore, strictly incumbent on each one of the believers to engage in spreading both material and spiritual knowledge' (Makātib-i 'Abdu'l-Bahā Cairo 1910 p.336). Nevertheless, it was recognized that many Baha'is are not yet aware of this fact and that scholars continue to face often serious misunderstanding and criticism from the community at large. Since the correction of such misunderstandings is itself part and parcel of the wider task of generally raising the level of knowledge and awareness of the writings among the believers, and since scholarship, by its very nature, must almost invariably excite controversy, it was felt to be most appropriate at this stage for Baha'i scholars, protected by a knowledge of what is actually in the writings, to seek to explain their position and clarify their approach to their co-religionists, while refusing to allow themselves to be discouraged or diverted by criticism, pressing on instead with the task of developing Baha'i scholarship at all levels. As long ago as 1949, at about the time the present generation of Baha'i scholars was being born, the Guardian wrote that 'what we need now is a more profound and co-ordinated Baha'i scholarship...' (The Gift of Teaching London 1977 p.25).

In wider terms, it was agreed that the Faith presently faces something of a crisis both in terms of consolidation and teaching, centring on the question of whether the various communities throughout the world will prove capable of making the difficult transition from obscure movement to small world religion. The point was made that Baha'i scholars at the turn of the century had advanced fairly progressive and intellectually stimulating ideas - a fact which helps explain the widespread interest in the Faith shown in intellectual circles of the period - but that from the twenties until recently, there had been an almost total absence of Baha'i scholarship, resulting in disinterest in or ignorance of the Faith in the academic and intellectual world. In a passage, part of which has just been quoted, written in 1949, Shoghi Effendi wrote: 'The world has - at least the thinking world - caught up by now with all the great and universal principles enunciated by Baha'u'llah over 70 years ago, and so of course it does not sound "new" to them. But we know that the deeper teachings, the capacity

of His projected World Order to re-create society, are new and dynamic. It is these we must learn to present intelligently and enticingly to such men!'

With respect to the non-Baha'i academic world, the Baha'i scholar frequently encounters derision, suspicion, and the charge of bias. It is essential both to demonstrate the validity of the Baha'i faith or aspects of it as subjects worthy of serious study and to show our ability to work within the framework of contemporary academic standards and methodological criteria. It is this latter aspect of our work as scholars which most commonly evokes suspicion from our fellow Baha'is, who may misinterpret our motives and aims in speaking and writing of the faith in a detached and analytical or critical fashion. It was, however, pointed out that, by the use of a scientific approach, in the spirit of the principle of the harmony between reason and faith, it may frequently be possible for the Baha'i scholar to arrive at a deeper and more valid understanding of aspects of the faith. In popular practice, science and religion are held to be in harmony unless the former appears to be in disagreement with the latter, whereupon it is discarded. Our approach, by applying this principle much more rigorously, would seek to demonstrate its validity by refusing to discard rational principles for the sake of easy solutions. Popular ideas as to what the faith teaches will thus be frequently corrected by scholars as they further their own understanding and that of the community.

It is often remarked that this is not the time to study the faith and that Baha'is should rather be teaching and pioneering. Participants at the seminar felt strongly that this view is extremely narrow and has had a baneful influence, above all on the teaching work itself. In the first place, it was commented, we are expected to proclaim the faith to all strata of human society: unless there are some at least who are able to address the important intellectual strata in their own language, these people will remain alienated from the faith. Again, it was pointed out that there is a crying need at present for new and better Baha'i literature, and that this will not be developed without some form of scholarship; even extremely

simple literature is often best written by academics who are better able to organize their concepts, distinguish important from trivial issues, and use words lucidly and correctly. As the cause comes under increasing attack from without, the community will more and more come to recognize the need for knowledgeable, deep, and scholarly believers well-versed in the history and teachings of the faith. Above all, it was noted, there exists at present a general air of stagnation in many places; innovation is needed to enable the faith to develop, but many of the friends are afraid to be creative: the kind of inspiration need to revitalize and redirect the community will be found in the new ideas which Baha'i scholars are beginning to generate.

The Saturday afternoon session was opened and led by Moojan Momen (Cambridge). The theme was 'Methodology of Baha'i Studies', under which heading the following topics were suggested: 'Baha'i' or 'academic' standards?; possible variations in approach between Baha'i and non-Baha'i scholars; discussion of the central figures of the Baha'i faith; methodological problems in cases of co-operation between Baha'i and non-Baha'i scholars; double standards in Baha'i and non-Baha'i work?; linguistic style and its bearing on method; and the use of confidential archives of LSA's, NSA's, etc.

One of the earliest points discussed here was whether we are actually in a position to carry out advanced analytical studies in view of the paucity of data (historical and scriptural) currently available for such work. Since we are living in the 'Formative Age' of the faith, our conclusions may be more than usually tentative and incomplete. It was suggested that the work of contemporary scholars might best be restricted to the accumulation and organization of data, and that the task of analysis and critical evaluation be left to future historians, sociologists, theologians, and so forth. This view was objected to by a number of participants on several grounds. It was pointed out that much more data exists than is often supposed - it has either not been identified as such or been made use of correctly before this: even standard historical and scriptural works need to be reconsidered in terms of modern academic theory. It is in

any case axiomatic that scholarship is always in a state of development and that, as new criteria are established, fresh data will always be brought to light. Without theory to sustain the direction of research, data may not be recognized as such, nor will useful questions be asked, leading to fresh conclusions.

Controversy surrounded the question of how far it might be proper to reveal information which might prove embarrassing or damaging to the faith in certain contexts. The principle of protection of the faith, in particular in a political sense, was clearly agreed upon by all present, but views differed as to how this might be interpreted in specific situations. It was commented that suppression of certain historical details, for instance, at this stage might lead to more serious repercussions if and when they should fall into the hands of enemies of the faith or, indeed, even those of perfectly neutral scholars. Used wisely by Baha'i scholars, potentially controversial information could be defused of much or all of its capacity to do harm in less scrupulous or more naive hands. Nevertheless, the final decision in such matters would have to rest with the institutions of the faith, presumably in a context of consultation with scholars on specific issues.

Some time was spent in discussing the need for financial support for Baha'i scholars. The lack of academic respectability vis a vis the faith and the common view that it scarcely merits study make it difficult for some young Baha'i students to obtain grants or scholarships to facilitate their research. Assistance of this kind from wealthy Baha'is would provide one element in what it is hoped will become a two-way relationship between Baha'i scholars and the community; in return, scholars would serve the various intellectual needs of the community. It was felt to be premature to press ahead with ideas for the establishment of an Institute for Baha'i Studies, although no-one doubted that such a project would before long become vital to the organized development of Baha'i studies. Several individuals felt that there were risks in carrying out studies under explicit Baha'i auspices, since this might well damage the academic reputation of individual scholars, leaving them open to the charge of being under the influence of official

Baha'i institutions, rather than working independently. The principle of academic freedom remains essential to the fostering of sound scholarship.

Following a short coffee break, a letter from the House of Justice to one of the believers in the USA was read. This letter referred to three main points of very real interest to every Baha'i historian: that the sphere of the Guardian's infallibility was defined and limited, being 'confined to matters which are related strictly to the Cause and interpretation of the Teachings', to 'interpretation of the revealed word and its application', and 'the protection of the Faith'; that 'in the matter of accuracy of historical fact, Shoghi Effendi had to rely on available information'; and that 'Abdu'l-Baha similarly relied in certain cases on the receipt of information concerning historical events. These statements were felt to be important in view of the fact that both 'Abdu'l-Baha and Shoghi Effendi wrote histories of the faith, some of the details of which are disputed by certain historians.

Discussion on this whole issue was among the most spirited and wide-ranging of the weekend. The distinction between empirical and transcendent views of history was crucial to this debate; the historians present tended to favour the former approach and were generally eager to remove mythical elements from Baha'i historiography. Others emphasized that myth could have powerful significance for men and that the judgment of historical events did not rest merely with observation of empirical evidence. Nevertheless, it was agreed that it did, in fact, matter whether, for example, the works of Baha'u'llah were actually written by him and not someone else, or that the Bab was really martyred and not just reported as such.

Since academic historians tend not to write in the black and white terms suitable to the hagiographer or someone in the position of 'Abdu'l-Baha or Shoghi Effendi, some degree of tension might at times exist between the two approaches. Nabil's Narrative was discussed in this context, it being generally agreed that it ought not to be regarded - as it is by many - as, in some sense, an 'infallible' version of Babi

history. Attention was drawn to the existence of a number of errors in the text of Nabil, including internal inconsistencies and disagreements with statements in the writings. It was, at the same time, stressed that the importance accorded Nabil by Shoghi Effendi was probably more because of the spiritual insight of the work than its historical accuracy. It was emphasized that the core of the faith is mystical and rests in moral and ethical teachings rather than in history. At the same time, it was objected, the faith is a historical religion in the tradition of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, rather than metaphysical and a-historical like Hinduism or Buddhism. Since Baha'is claim to have rejected myth, legend, and man-made versions of truth, it is important that the attempts of modern historians to eliminate such elements from earlier Baha'i historiography not be attacked as opposed to the spirit of the teachings. It was agreed that Baha'i scholars must be more zealous than their non-Baha'i colleagues in striving after an ideal objective of truth, even if they recognize that truth is relative and cannot be attained in an absolute sense even in the physical sciences.

Following dinner at a city centre restaurant, we returned to Sidney Sussex for an unprogrammed informal discussion. This centred largely on linguistic issues. A lengthy debate raged over the question of whether the term 'Babism', for example, might be legitimately used by a Baha'i scholar. Some objected that the term in question had been tacitly rejected by most Baha'is as unsuitable, while others pointed out that it might well be used on a par with 'Judaism', 'Hinduism', or 'Buddhism', carrying no intrinsic connotations of pejorativeness, and that, in certain contexts, it provided an eminently useful term in discussions where 'Babi faith' and so forth seemed inappropriate, or as a simple variant. Several other problems connected with the use of language were discussed, particularly with regard to the expression of Baha'i terms such as 'Manifestation' in works directed to a non-Baha'i readership, or the use of standard Christian theological terminology such as 'salvation' or 'atonement' in a Baha'i context.

The Sunday morning session was introduced by Denis MacEoin (Cambridge) and dealt with 'Relations between Baha'i

scholars and the Baha'i community'. Suggested topics were: prejudice against scholarship - its removal'; attacks on scholars - what means can be taken for protection?; the responsibility of scholars to other believers; the review of scholarly works for publication; the role of scholars in fixing limits to the growth of myth and legend in popular Baha'i historiography. Discussion began by considering the responsibility of scholars not to undermine the faith of others in expressing controversial or difficult ideas. It was objected that this was, to some extent, unavoidable: so many of the believers hold popular notions which are incorrect, either in respect of what is actually in the writings, or with regard to science and reason. The scholar can only try to bring the community as a whole nearer to the true teachings. The Guardian himself has stated that 'there are many who have some superficial idea of what the Cause stands for. They, therefore, present it together with all sorts of ideas that are their own.... There is no limit to the study of the Cause. The more we read the Writings, the more truths we can find in Them, the more we will see that our previous notions were erroneous' (Principles of Bahā'ī Administration London 1973, p.11). Problems arise when individuals or groups object to being shaken out of their ignorance or even to being guided to what is in the writings. Several telling anecdotes on this theme were shared, among them an instance where an individual who had pointed out a statement of the Guardian's on a particular topic had been told that the hearer preferred not to know what Shoghi Effendi had to say on the matter. In general, it was felt that, as long as people turned to charismatic individuals or individuals with formal positions, rather than to the writings or, less ideally, to scholars, for all their information on the Faith, many popular misconceptions would continue to be spread through the community, becoming harder to eradicate with every generation.

An important concept was raised in the view that there is not and has never been absolute homogeneity in Baha'i belief and practice, and that the believers at many times and in many places have held and hold views divergent from the teachings, which are popularly held to be absolutely correct. It is a mistaken belief that one and only one version of, say,

Baha'i history has ever existed or ever will exist and that the task of the scholar is not to analyse or reinterpret but simply to repeat existing information in a new form or to collect fresh data. At least one individual was concerned that many of the believers held that there could be no interpretation within the Faith and that new ideas were being suppressed on this basis; attention was drawn, however, to statements of the Guardian and the House of Justice on this matter, indicating that individual interpretation was both possible and desirable, provided the person concerned made it clear that the views expressed were his or her own and that they were in no sense authoritative. The Guardian has stated that 'at the very root of the Cause lies the principle of the undoubted right of the individual to self-expression, his freedom to declare his conscience and set forth his views' (Bahā'ī Administration Wilmette 1960, p.63), and again that 'we should not restrict the liberty of the individual to express his own views so long as he makes it clear that these views are his own. In fact, such explanations are often helpful and are conducive to a better understanding of the teachings. God has given man a rational power to be used and not killed' (Bahā'ī News No.68 p.3) (cf. The Universal House of Justice Wellspring of Guidance pp.88-89). It was stressed that a successful relationship between the Baha'i scholar and the community of which he forms an important part can best be ensured by the development of toleration for divergent or unorthodox views, in the spirit of the Guardian's statement that 'we all have a right to our opinions, we are bound to think differently' (Bahā'ī News No.202, p.3).

A lengthy discussion followed on the question of the review of academic works on the faith written by Baha'is. A view which attracted some support at first was that the purpose of review is the protection of the Cause rather than the censorship of ideas; according to this view, the correctness of particular statements is irrelevant and that the only question which needs to be considered is whether danger may be threatened to the Cause. A number of people felt, however, that protection necessarily involved the question of how accurately the teachings are presented, and it was pointed out that the requirements laid down for review by the House of Justice include the accuracy

and dignity of presentation. Nevertheless, it seemed important to distinguish between the review of scholarly and popular works. Even from the purely practical point of view, it would be impossible for someone to review a detailed full-length study based on perhaps several hundred sources, many in manuscript, without several years work, not to mention the years of study necessary to obtain the general background in the subject possessed by the author. In a situation where numerous and divergent views of, for example, Christian doctrine, Islam, Iranian history, and so forth exist side by side, it would be clearly invidious if the views of one scholar, based on a particular background of reading and experience, were to prevail over those of his colleague with a different set of ideas and values, merely because of a process of review on the grounds that they happened to be nearer to the popular viewpoint. Academic scholarship is based, to a large extent, on the recognition that more than one view of reality can be held and that it is the very divergence of theories which produces an atmosphere of debate and inquiry leading to fresh discoveries.

Even where a manuscript is presented to another scholar in the same field, there is no real reason why the opinion of the second scholar should be regarded as more authoritative than that of the first. Within academic circles, it is even recognized that a professor of considerable experience may well lack the specific knowledge in a specialized area possessed by one of his research students. If the decision as to the academic worth of a particular manuscript returns in the end to an individual or group of people lacking the professional expertise to evaluate it, then we remain in a situation similar to that which would exist if students with 'O'-levels were asked to evaluate a Ph.D. dissertation. From this point of view, it was felt by some individuals that it might be better if review could be abolished entirely in the case of academic works.

There was general agreement that it was a healthy thing for a variety of approaches and interpretations to co-exist in serious Baha'i literature and that it would be harmful if Baha'i institutions sought to impose a single set of

facts, values, and conclusions on scholars. Generally, there was a spirit of optimism that the Institutions of the Faith would recognize the nature of priorities here and that unduly restrictive considerations would not impede the development of research and the exchange of ideas. Others were less optimistic and felt that further dialogue between scholars and institutions was called for in order to make clear the particular problems of academics in this respect.

Some concern was expressed about the possible harm which may be done the Faith within the academic community at large if and when it becomes known that the work of Baha'i scholars is subject to review by less qualified persons. A related problem was the need to distinguish between 'official' Baha'i publications which may be understood to represent a 'correct' or 'orthodox' version of Baha'i history and doctrine, as distinct from more personalized accounts by individual scholars. In the end, it seemed to be agreed that many people would never be able to make such a distinction, although it would be useful to make it known. Scholars should take care in their presentation of the history or teachings, but the demands of academic honesty would probably take precedence over other considerations. It was recognized that, in any case, even the writings have been used by enemies for their attacks and that, in the end, we cannot be certain as to what will and what will not protect the faith, other than to say that conscious dishonesty in the presentation of information must always be harmful in the long run.

There was some discussion of the claim made by most enemies of the faith, that the Baha'is have produced an 'official' history, distorting earlier versions, particularly of Babi history, in the process. Many felt that the best refutation of this view would be the gradual appearance of fresh historical studies by competent Baha'i scholars and the development of a more complex series of interpretations of Baha'i history. The role of the scholar in interpreting and, in a sense, creating Baha'i history was discussed in terms of the 'dialogue' theory of that history, in which the world, mankind, and the believers in particular engage in a dialectical interaction with the Manifestation of God, as opposed to the

'monologue' theory which views the Manifestation as the sole actor in a passive and malleable universe. The importance of dialectic, in particular with regard to its function in the relationship between spiritual and material, transcendent and earthly, divine and human (as most fully expressed in the nature and life of the Manifestation) was stressed as a critical element in achieving a compromise between the extremes of 'spiritualized' and 'materialized' history.

Sunday afternoon was given over to more practical issues facing the present generation of Baha'i scholars. Topics suggested were: Progress reports from individuals; sharing of ideas and problems; production of a bibliography; difficulties of obtaining materials in various languages; international co-ordination of efforts; oral and manuscript history projects; concrete proposals for future development; establishment of an International Institute for Baha'i Studies; the sharing of costs on published theses; the establishment of an Association for Baha'i Studies in the U.K. Before the presentation of progress reports, Peter Smith made available to the seminar his recently-compiled 1978 Register of individuals 'currently involved in "Baha'i Studies" at an academic level, giving details of their publications and research interests'. It is hoped that the total of 17 entries in the present Register will be greatly exceeded in the 1979 edition. A modified version of the 1978 Register will shortly be produced for wider distribution, in particular to non-Baha'i academics and institutions. Mr. Smith also shared with us a short bibliography of 'Doctoral and Masters Theses on Baha'i Subjects', containing a total of twenty-two entries dating from 1923 to 1977. Denis MacEoin noted that he is currently engaged in soliciting information for an article on the development of Baha'i Studies which it is planned to publish in volume XVII of The Baha'i World.

Viva Ferdu was the first to present a progress report. Previously a tutor in Christian theology at King's College, London, she is intending to continue her research at Oxford. The subject of her doctoral thesis will be the kingdom of God and the concept of atonement in Christian and Baha'i doctrine. Her other work includes a book on Christian

theology and a study of the English language in international communication. She plans to submit her thesis in 1979.

Loni Bramson, an American, is currently carrying out research at the History of Religions Department in the Catholic University of Louvain, Belgium. Her doctoral work deals with the transformation brought about in the North American Baha'i Community by Shoghi Effendi and a study of internal dissension in opposition to his policies. Other work being done by her includes the preparation of materials for a history of the Baha'i faith in Belgium up to 1961. She also plans to submit her dissertation in 1979.

Peter Smith is currently engaged in research at the Department of Sociology in the University of Lancaster. His Ph.D. deals with the sociological study of the Babi and Baha'i religions, and relates particularly to the earlier work in this area by Peter Berger. His thesis, which he plans to submit in 1979, will be in three main parts: Babism as a millenarian movement; the routinization of charisma; and the rise of the American Baha'i community.

Denis MacEoin is at present doing research in the Oriental Studies Faculty in the University of Cambridge, where he is a member of King's College. His doctoral research deals with the background of the Babi religion, concentrating on the transition from Shaykhism to Babism, the emergence of the Babi community of Karbila, the reaction of the Shaykhis to the Babi movement, and a comparison of certain doctrinal themes in the works of Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i, Sayyid Kazim Rashti, and the Bab. He likewise plans to submit his thesis in 1979. At the moment, he is also engaged in the completion of a full-length biographical study of Qurratu'l-'Ayn and a serious introductory work on the Baha'i faith aimed at educated non-academics.

Among others not formally engaged in the academic study of the faith as such was Moojan Momen, a medical graduate of Cambridge, who is presently studying Arabic for a two-year period at St. John's College, Cambridge. Dr. Momen has done

extensive private research in the Public Records Office, London, and elsewhere, in the course of which he has compiled a vast quantity of diplomatic, missionary, and other contemporary materials relating to the faith; a selection of these documents will be published in his forthcoming book The Babi and Baha'i Religions, 1844-1944: Some Contemporary Western Accounts. He is presently working as research assistant to Mr. Hasan Balyuzi in the preparation of the latter's biography of Baha'u'llah and is editing a collection of essays on Babi and Baha'i history. Proposed research includes a bibliography of books and articles relating to the faith and a reference book on Baha'i history.

Robert Parry has begun work on his doctoral thesis on an analysis of faith in Eastern and Western religious thought, at the Department of Religious Studies in the University of Lancaster. He is also concerned with philosophical questions regarding 'revelation', the language of transcendence, and ethical statements, as well as the relationship between the Baha'i faith and Eastern religions.

Stephen Lambdon has commenced an undergraduate course at the Department of Religious Studies in the University of Newcastle, specializing largely in Hebrew and Semitic Religions. His earlier, private research has included studies on aspects of Christian doctrine and their relationship to Baha'i doctrine, Semitic eschatology, and scriptural hermeneutics.

Anthony A. Lee is at present enrolled in the graduate program in African history with the Department of History at the University of California, Los Angeles. His study on 'The Baha'i community of 'Ishqabad: from the beginnings to the Russian Revolution' is to be printed in the journal of the Canadian Association for Studies on the Baha'i Faith, Etudes Bahā'ī Studies. He is also concerned with further research on the 'Ishqabad community between 1918 and 1936, and the early history of the Los Angeles Baha'i community. Much of his research is in the field of oral history, and he is building up a record of transcripts of oral reminiscences from early Baha'is. With another Baha'i from California, he has recently founded the Kalimat Press, a publishing house which aims to produce a wide range of Baha'i literature in English and Persian.

Dr. Wendi Momen, who recently completed her Ph.D. in International Relations at the University of London and is currently resident with her husband in Cambridge, indicated her plans to carry out a survey of Baha'i elections.

It should also be noted here that 'Abbas Amanat, who was unable to be present at the seminar, is currently working for his Ph.D. in Oriental Studies at Oxford, the topic for his thesis being the early history of the Babi movement. Like the others mentioned above, he also plans to submit his work in 1979.

A lengthy and inconclusive discussion followed on the merits and demerits of establishing an Association for Baha'i Studies in this country. It was agreed that a need exists for an academic association of some sort which would be able to attract both Baha'i and non-Baha'i academics on the basis of formal qualifications, but it was felt that it may be premature to establish such an association at present. A need was also expressed for a body closer in aims and function to the Canadian Association, in order to cater for non-academics within the community who seek to deepen and expand their knowledge of the faith. Feelings were divided as to the desirability of such a body at the present time, but it is generally hoped that the NSA will continue to be sympathetic to serious efforts to provide opportunities to Baha'is requiring more than the standard intellectual fare offered at summer and winter schools. In the interim, it was agreed to organize an informal 'Baha'i Studies Group', whose annual membership would be £3. This group would take care of the production of a yearly report on the Lancaster and Cambridge seminars, together with progress reports on individual work, and generally help to co-ordinate Baha'i studies in this country.

On Sunday evening, those remaining in Cambridge met informally at the Momen's home to discuss some issues outstanding from the afternoon. Among these were the possibility of co-ordinating several ongoing projects for the production of a bibliography of Western language materials relating to the Baha'i faith, as well as methods of oral history research. By

this time, however, the seminar had broken up into scattered groups, and it becomes impossible to carry this report further.

In general, participants seemed to feel that much had been aired, and that, even if nothing else had been achieved, we had learnt more of one another's hopes, fears, doubts, and anxieties. Those who had been largely isolated felt the support of having their views sympathetically received for a change, and those just embarking on Baha'i studies were given encouragement, guidance, and stimulation. Many topics received inadequate discussion, and several new areas for future consultation were raised. In conjunction with the more formal Lancaster seminars, a series of general seminars such as this may prove an invaluable meeting ground for all those involved in Baha'i studies for some time to come. To all those who helped organize and run the weekend, we are immensely grateful.

Denis MacEoin
King's College
Cambridge
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