



The future has several challenges and avenues:

Diversification. There will be a greater diversity of scholarship, at many levels of quality and professionalism. The more there is, the less likely that any one contribution will be seen as having an inordinately high influence, and therefore the less likely to provoke negative response. 'The solution to pollution is dilution'.

Scholarly Study by Non-Bahá'ís. A harbinger of the future is the establishment of the Chair in Bahá'í Studies at Hebrew University, held by Professor Moshe Sharon, and the stated intention to found a Centre of Bahá'í Studies in Jerusalem in which scholars will translate Bahá'í texts into Hebrew. Prof. Sharon is already working on an annotated translation of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas into Hebrew. Such efforts are not under Bahá'í control. They require reciprocal relations that will involve non-Bahá'ís and Bahá'ís learning from each other. Delicacy is required for the study of any living community and its belief system. It does not pay for the academic to alienate the object of study, and it does not pay for the religious community to ignore or discount the value of scholarly study.

Albert Lincoln, Secretary-General of the Bahá'í International Community, spoke at the dedication of the Chair in Bahá'í Studies words of singular appropriateness to our endeavour at this conference:

Whether we like it or not, our understanding of our religion and our community will be affected by the work of this Chair, just as the scholars involved in the endeavour will frequently be puzzled, perplexed, challenged and disturbed by their findings. Despite these legitimate grounds for anxiety, we have no choice but to plunge ahead given the unequivocal commitment in the teaching of the Bahá'í religion to dialogue, openness and the unfettered search after truth. (Albert Lincoln 2000 'Dedication Address on behalf of the Bahá'í World Centre', Proceedings of the Dedication of the Chair in Bahá'í Studies, 5).

Professor Sharon also spoke in terms that augured well for sympathetic investigation by scholars in the proposed Centre for Bahá'í Studies:

From its very inception to this day, the main enemy of the Bahá'í faith has been ignorance. Ignorance can be ridiculous, but when it is accompanied by intolerance, it breeds hatred and hatred breeds persecution and bloodshed of the innocent ... The aim of this chair is to fight ignorance, applying to the study of the Bahá'í faith the strict rules of scholarship. The work ahead is tremendous, the material awaiting the researchers is staggering. (Moshe Sharon 2000 'Inauguration Speech', Proceedings of the Dedication of the Chair in Bahá'í Studies, 8-9).

Scholarship and Art. Scholarship often tends to be an analytical left-brained activity. The development of a connection to the artistic right brain is something that requires further development. A Bahá'í actress to whom I put the question 'What is the future of Bahá'í studies?' answered 'Art'.

I suggest that increased focus on poetry, literature, music and art is an essential component of Bahá'í studies, and a necessary integrative balance to the still overwhelmingly analytical quality of much of our discussion.

Popular Culture. Scholarship has been a rather elite activity historically. In Bahá'í scholarship this has sometimes led to what one might call 'Acceptable' (i.e. elite) topics. We choose not to address some things. What is the Bahá'í connection to and relationship with popular culture? We are fortunate to have David Piff whose dissertation on 'The Kitáb-i-Hearsay: Oral Lore in the Bahá'í Community' is a groundbreaking effort, published this year by George Ronald. Why does Bosch Bahá'í School in California have Star Trek weekends that are extremely successful? Who will study the inclusion of Bahá'í references in works of science fiction? Why are there no studies of Bahá'í humour (despite assertions that there is no such thing)? What about additional studies on the connections between the Bahá'í Faith and Sherlock Holmes, several articles on whom have already appeared? (William P. Collins 1981 'It Is Time That I Should Turn to Other Memories: Sherlock Holmes and Persia, 1893', *The Baker Street Journal* 31(4): 213-223; William P. Collins 1990 'Sherlock Holmes and the Bahá'í Faith', *Herald of the South* 24: 37-42.

Writing in a Vigorous and Living Voice. Too much scholarly writing is dry, informed by a sometimes misplaced desire for constant objectivity and detachment. Part of the future of Bahá'í studies is to infuse into the products of our study greater life, humour and literary quality. I still remember a passage from *The Kenosha Kicker*, a late 19th-century newspaper in Kenosha (Wisconsin) that made no effort at objectivity in its reporting, and which I delighted in quoting in an article about the Bahá'í community of Kenosha. A Christian missionary, Stoyan Krstoff Vatralsky, had been hired to preach against the Bahá'í Faith from pulpit in the city. After one such speech, a Bahá'í arose to refute Vatralsky, reported in colourful terms:

And when he finally concluded and invited questions there arose, in all his glory, from his seat in the parquette, a mighty follower of the faith of Báb, who proceeded to smite him, hip and thigh. (Quoted in William P. Collins 1982 'Kenosha, 1893-1912: History of an Early Bahá'í Community in the United States' in Moojan Momen ed. *Studies in Báb' and Bahá'í History*, vol. 1: 237).

The Unity Paradigm. Academic inquiry must become aware of the central place that the Bahá'í community and its institutions give to the unity paradigm so frequently mentioned in the Bahá'í sacred texts. It is at the heart of the many statements from the Universal House of Justice about scholarship and the particular approaches taken by individual scholars. Fundamentally, this paradigm insists that unity is a higher principle than being 'right'. If the recent past is any indication, scholars will have a deep encounter with the essential value placed on the paradigm of unity. Bahá'í scholars have to come to terms with issues of public discourse, tone and attitude, and how to communicate new findings while preserving unity, connection, respect and

reciprocal relationship with other Bahá'ís. Bahá'u'lláh's own cogent words need to be constantly in the mind of those engaged in Bahá'í studies as they prepare their work for public unveiling: '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'. (Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh LXXXIX).

Coordination of Activities. One attendee has asked how information about Bahá'í studies, news of scholarly activities and controversies, and institutional and community response to issues, will be communicated. In addition to current Associations for Bahá'í Studies, two institutions that are to be formed at the World Centre in the future will have a direct and significant bearing on the carrying out of Bahá'í studies. The Centre for the Study of the Texts will involve resident and visiting scholars who will carry out textual studies of Bahá'í sacred scripture and important historical archival documents. It can be foreseen logically that it will network and communicate among scholars who carry out this kind of work. Likewise, the International Bahá'í Library, as the 'kernel of great institutions of scientific investigation and discovery', will promote increased interaction among scholars, scholarly associations, and Bahá'í institutions.

Faith and Process. In Star Trek VI, Spock speaks to his Vulcan colleague about faith. When her traitorous actions betray her lack of faith, she asks him what he meant. His explanation is so appropriate that I close with it, because I think the future of Bahá'í studies depends as much on our faith as on our scholarly abilities and the following of any academic methodologies. Spock told her that she should 'have faith that the universe is unfolding as it should'. therefore ask that you consider, whatever is happening now and in the future for Bahá'í studies, that the universe of is unfolding as it should.

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