Scholarship: A Baha'i Perspective

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Abstract
This paper defines scholarship as disciplined intellectual activity undertaken to help determine the truth of some matter or else to apply in a practical way some previously determined truth. More specifically, Bahá'í scholarship seeks to understand and/or apply truths contained in the writings of the Bahá'í Faith; it may also involve historical/critical studies of the Bahá'í Faith as a social phenomenon. With regard to the first type of Bahá'í scholarship, we examine certain passages in the Bahá'í writings which comment on these writings themselves and which describe the kinds of truths they contain. In particular, it is seen that the Bahá'í writings contain important propositional truths and not just moral injunctions (so-called normative propositions). The relationship between scholarship and other human enterprises is also discussed. The Bahá'í conception of scholarship is seen to be unusually broad in scope and to provide thereby the basis for a much greater harmony between scholarship and the various other activities carried on within the Bahá'í community.

Résumé
Cette étude définit l'érudition comme une activité intellectuelle disciplinée entreprise dans le but de déterminer la vérité d'une chose ou alors dans le but d'appliquer de facon concrète une vérité préalablement prouvée. Plus spécifiquement, l'érudition bahá'ìe s'efforce de comprendre et/ou d'appliquer les vérités contenues dans les écrits de la foi bahá'íe; elle peut également comprendre des études historiques ou critiques de la foi bahá'íe en tant que phénomne social. Par rapport au premier type d'érudition bahá'ìe, nous examinons certains extraits des écrits bahá'ìs

qui portent des commentaires sur ces écrits mêmes et qui décrivent les vérités qui y sont contenues. En particulier, nous constatons que les écrits bahá'ís contiennent d'importantes vérités propositionnelles et non seulement des injonctions morales (appelées propositions normatives). La relation entre l'érudition et d'autres activités humaines est également examinée. Le concept bahá'í d'érudition est perçu comme ayant une perspective exceptionnellement vaste, permettant ainsi une plus grand harmonie entre l'érudition et les diverses activités qui ont lieu au sein de la communauté bahá'íe.

Resumen
Este artículo define la erudición como una actividad intelectual disciplinada llevada a cabo para ayudar a determinar la veracidad de un asunto o para aplicar de una forma práctica una verdad ya determinada. Más específicamente, la erudición Bahá'í trata de entender y/o aplicar las verdades contenidas en las escrituras Bahá'ís; también puede implicar estudios históricos/críticos sobre la Fe Bahá'í como unfenómeno social. Concerniente a la primera clase de erudición Bahá'í, nosotros examinamos ciertos pasajes en las escrituras Bahá'ís que comentan sobre estas mismas escrituras y que describen las clases de verdades que ellas contienen. En particular, se puede ver que las escrituras Bahá ís contienen importantes verdades proposicionales y no solamente entredichos morales (llamados proposiciones normativas). También se examina la relación entre la erudición y otras actividades humanas. Se ve el concepto Bahá'í sobre la erudición como extraordinariamente amplio en alcance y por lo tanto proveyendo la base para una armonía mucho mas estrecha entre la erudición y las muchas otras actividades llevadas a cabo dentro de la comunidad Bahá'í.

Introduction

T he value and importance of scholarship within the total human enterprise is generally recognized and accepted. However, the relationship between scholars, or communities of scholars, and society at large has never been easy. In many societies, the public image of the scholar contains a number of negative features, typically evoking the picture of an impractical dreamer obsessed with trivia and minutiae interesting only to others of their kind. Where cultures have a strong pragmatic bent, as in contemporary North America, this negative image has become an entrenched caricature, but it prevails in European and Asian milieus

as well.
In the religious context, scholarly activity can be perceived not only as impractical but also as a threat.
Especially when religious beliefs are held primarily on an uncritical, emotional basis, scholarship may appear as an
unwelcome intruder seeking to undermine the integrity of the belief system in the eyes of its adherents.
However, we should beware of concluding too hastily that the uneasy relationship between scholars and society
is principally attributable to ignorant or defensive attitudes on the part of non-scholars. Scholars and scholarly
communities have often been their own worst enemies. With discomforting frequency they have exhibited
arrogance, a repugnant sense of their own importance, and a complacent insularity with regard to the everyday
struggles that are the lot of the vast majority of humanity. Traditionally, scholarship has been viewed as an
intrinsically elite activity which can be carried forward only by that small segment of society having the ability and
inclination to do so. Thus, scholarly communities have traditionally been elite communities, and elite communities
tend to be either unreasonably privileged or unreasonably persecuted. Clearly, either of these extremes represents an
unhealthy situation.
In the light of these considerations, there are several reasons why a Bahá'í perspective on scholarship is of
potential interest. The Bahá'í Faith is historically recent, having come into existence in the mid–nineteenth century
when the European scientific revolution was already well advanced. The Bahá'í Faith affirms the basic unity of
religion and science, and insists that its belief system, though capable of stirring powerful emotions within the
human soul, is nonetheless scientifically and rationally based. Moreover, the Bahá'í Faith has no priesthood or
clergy and affirms that scholarship is an activity which can and should be undertaken, to some degree, by every
normally endowed human being. So, within the Bahá'í community there is a much greater continuity between
general activities and scholarship than appears to have been the case for many traditional religious communities.
Undoubtedly, certain forms of scholarship may well require special social and material conditions to be pursued
successfully, and the Bahá'í teachings explicitly accord a certain respect to scholars. But respect is also paid to a
host of other vital social functions (e.g., agriculture, teaching, or medicine). Consequently, the social distance
between scholarship and other roles within the community is, according to the

Bahá'í conception, very small indeed.
In other words, if the Bahá'í viewpoint on scholarship is valid, and if Bahá'í norms and values are properly implemented on the social level, we can reasonably expect the Bahá'í Faith to make a significant contribution towards healing some of the unhealthy aspects of the traditional relationship between scholars and society.

Scholarship Defined

The following definition of scholarship is basic to all of our subsequent discussion of this notion: Scholarship is disciplined intellectual activity undertaken to help determine the truth of some matter or else to apply in a practical way some previously determined truth.1 Let us comment briefly on certain aspects of this definition.

In the first place, intellectual activity, even intellectual activity undertaken in the pursuit of truth, does not necessarily count as scholarship. We may sincerely seek the truth of some matter, and even pour great energy into this pursuit, but if our effort lacks discipline, if it is frantic, unsystematic, purely spontaneous, or haphazard, it is not scholarship. Of course, there are times when a disciplined approach to truth-seeking is not appropriate—when we are under extreme pressures of time and circumstance, for example. Thus, a scholarly approach to truth is not always the best approach.

In the second place, there are many forms of disciplined intellectual activity that do not count as scholarship because they are not directed towards the goal of seeking or applying truth. Game-playing and other such recreational uses of the intellect are thus not scholarship (though a systematic study of the theory of a particular game could be scholarship). Uses of the intellect to pursue social goals not related to truth-seeking are also examples of non-scholarly disciplines. We may engage in certain intellectual disciplines in order to intimidate or control others, to sell them products or ideas, or to elicit from them or from ourselves any number of desired forms of behavior. In some instances, such activities may be based on or related to scholarship, but they can nonetheless be carried on in the absence of scholarship, and they do not themselves constitute scholarship.

In a general way, the social value of scholarship derives primarily from the degree of systematization it involves. Experience has shown that determining the truth of some questions takes long periods of time, possibly extending over several human lifetimes. If a scholarly community is formed with

a view to a systematic exploration
of such a question, then generations of individuals who have acquired a common discipline and who build on the
results of previous scholarship may succeed where a less systematic approach has failed.
In most cases, scholarship of this type can only take place under special social conditions, for it requires of the
scholar a temporary disengagement from the immediate practical concerns of everyday life. Thus, no matter how
great the passion for scholarship, the potential scholar who receives no cooperation or understanding from society is
not very likely to succeed. At the same time, society rightfully expects scholars to recognize that the special
conditions they enjoy entail economic sacrifice on the part of others and, as a consequence of this recognition, to
refrain from abusing their privileges.2

Scholarship in the Bahá'í Context

Broadly speaking, we can distinguish at least three basic types of scholarship that may be properly labeled
'Bahá'í'. The first two types derive from the Bahá'í conviction
that the writings of the founder of the Bahá'í Faith,
Bahá'u'lláh (1817–1892), are divinely inspired and contain significant truths and insights about the nature and
structure of the human personality and of the social and physical environment in which we humans live, move, and
have our being. The first category of Bahá'í scholarship, then, is the concentrated and systematic study of these
writings in an effort to uncover the truths they contain. The second, related category is the study of some natural or
social phenomenon from the Bahá'í viewpoint, i.e., in the light of the truths gleaned from previous or parallel study
of the Bahá'í writings. Representative of this kind of scholarship would be attempts to apply Bahá'í moral, spiritual,
or psychological principles in the context of one's profession as, say, a psychologist, doctor, or teacher. The third
category of Bahá'í scholarship is study of the Bahá'í Faith itself as a social and historical phenomenon.
The successful pursuit of the first two types of Bahá'í scholarship would seem to presuppose acceptance of the
basic Bahá'í belief in the divine inspiration of the Bahá'í writings. Though it is quite possible to imagine situations
when this would not be so, our discussion of the first two categories of scholarship will not consider the problems
that might arise for non-Bahá'ís who attempt to understand and apply Bahá'í concepts and principles outside the
context of Bahá'í conviction.

However, the third category of Bahá'í scholarship can just as easily be pursued by non-Bahá'ís as Bahá'ís.
Indeed, some would maintain that non-Bahá'ís are better suited to undertake such a study, being presumed free of any pro–Bahá'í bias. However, non-Bahá'ís may well have anti-Bahá'í biases, and no historical or critical study is ever totally value free. We will thus suppose that studies in the third category can be undertaken with equal integrity by both Bahá'ís and non-Bahá'ís.
Our discussion in the remainder of the present paper will focus almost exclusively on the first type of Bahá'í scholarship identified above.

Studying the Bahá'í Writings

Each of the great religions of the world has been based on the belief that its founder was divinely inspired, a sanctified human instrument chosen by God as his mouthpiece and spokesman. The sayings and writings of these founders have therefore been regarded as the Word of God Himself, as truths revealed by God to humankind.
Thus, the writings and/or the recorded sayings of these great religious founders have been accorded the status of holy books or sacred scriptures.
Whatever validity one wishes to accord this view, it has been traditionally plagued by problems of higher criticism (textual authenticity), at least where the older religions are concerned, and of lower criticism (textual interpretation). Concerning the former, the realization that generations of oral tradition have intervened between, say, the historical Jesus and the first written records of his sayings, has certainly undermined many scholars' confidence in ancient documents purporting to be the authentic sayings of historically remote religious founders.
For the historically more recent religions, such as Islam, there is relatively little, if any, serious doubt as to the authenticity of the holy book (the Qur'án), but continued dispute about oral tradition (hadíth). Indeed, Islam has held that the Qur'án is the first and highest proof of the divine origin of Muhammad's teachings, and Muslims regard the Qur'án as the literal Word of God.
But even in cases where authentic texts are available, the problem of lower criticism may still remain. If divers elements within a religious community each claim the right of authoritative interpretation of a holy book, and if these interpretations are sometimes contradictory, then the existence of authentic texts will not be sufficient to generate unity of doctrine—a consensus of understanding of the truths the

holy book is considered to contain.
The Bahá'í Faith deals forthrightly with the problems of both higher and lower criticism. All published writings of Bahá'u'lláh are based on authentic original texts either written by Him or else dictated, signed, and sealed by Him. Because these original manuscripts are preserved, any possible errors resulting from mistranslation into another language or editorial errors in publication of the original can be corrected. All sayings attributed to Bahá'u'lláh are based only on such authentic texts. Though a parallel oral tradition of anecdotal sayings of Bahá'u'lláh exists, Bahá'ís are specifically forbidden by Bahá'u'lláh's own written instructions from regarding any such sayings as authentic.
Thus, with regard to higher criticism, Bahá'u'lláh continues the Islamic tradition of considering the authentic texts of the founder as the most important single product and proof of divine revelation:

> Say: the first and foremost testimony establishing His truth is His own Self. Next to this testimony is His Revelation. For whoso faileth to recognize either the one or the other He hath established the words He hath revealed as proof of His reality and truth.... He hath endowed every soul with the capacity to recognize the signs of God. (Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings 105–6)

With respect to interpretation, Bahá'u'lláh specifically designated his eldest son, 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1844–1921), as the only legitimate interpreter of his writings, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá subsequently conferred the same authority on Shoghi Effendi (1896–1857).3 The body of interpretive writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, together with the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, form an extraordinary corpus.4 Every literate Bahá'í has direct and equal access to these writings and is free to search out their meaning for himself. No person's opinion is considered as having authority or as having greater validity than another's.5
Since the Bahá'í Faith has no priesthood or clergy, there are no intermediaries between the individual believer and the holy texts. Moreover, Bahá'u'lláh has explicitly stated that some portions of his writings can be understood on different levels of meaning and that no one, literal interpretation of such passages can possibly be valid.
Indeed, Bahá'u'lláh does not only invite the individual believer to study his writings, he makes it a moral duty to do so:

> Immerse yourselves in the ocean of My words, that ye may unravel its secrets,

and discover all the pearls of
wisdom that lie hid in its depths. (Gleanings 136)

Recite ye the verses of God every morning and evening. Whoso reciteth them not hath truly failed to fulfill his
pledge to the Covenant of God....Take heed lest excessive reading… make you vainglorious. Should a person
recite but a single verse from the Holy Writings in a spirit of joy and radiance, this would be better… than
reciting wearily all the Scriptures of God…. (Divine Art 58–59)

Thus, the Bahá'í who would be a scholar of the Bahá'í writings has many favorable initial conditions. He or
she has direct access to a considerable volume of the texts of Bahá'u'lláh, together with authoritative commentaries
and interpretations by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi. Except for an occasional mistranslation, one is faced with
no higher critical problems. Nor does one have to contend with a priesthood or clergy attempting to impose some
particular reading of the texts.
Finally and significantly, the Bahá'í writings contain a number of passages that bear directly on the study of
these same writings and that indicate the nature and importance of the task awaiting the potential scholar. They also
suggest those attitudes and approaches most conducive to success. Let us examine briefly a few of these counsels
and promises.
Shoghi Effendi has affirmed:

If you read the utterances of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá with selflessness and care and concentrate upon
them, you will discover truths unknown to you before and will obtain an insight into the problems that have
baffled great thinkers of the world.6

We see here the stress on the intellectual discipline of careful concentration and on the spiritual discipline of
selflessness. At the same time, there is the promise of attaining an extraordinarily high level of insight and
understanding.
In a similar vein, Shoghi Effendi has written: "There is no limit to the study of the Cause. The more we read
the writings, the more truths we can find in them and the more we will see that our previous notions were
erroneous."7 Regarding the moral duty of the individual believer to undertake such a study, Shoghi Effendi has
written: "To strive to obtain a more adequate understanding of the significance of Bahá'u'lláh's stupendous
Revelation must, it is my unalterable conviction, remain the first obligation

and the object of the constant endeavour
of each one of its loyal adherents" (The World Order 100).
The nature, extent, and importance of the knowledge to be gained from a study of the Bahá'í writings has been
set forth by Bahá'u'lláh in a remarkable passage:

Consider...the revelation of the light of the Name of God, the Educator. Behold, how in all things the evidences
of such a revelation are manifest, how the betterment of all beings dependeth upon it. This education is of two
kinds. The one is universal. Its influence pervadeth all things and sustaineth them....The other is confined to
them that have come under the shadow of this Name, and sought the shelter of this most mighty Revelation.
They, however, that have failed to seek this shelter, have deprived themselves of this privilege, and are
powerless to benefit from the spiritual sustenance that hath been sent down through the heavenly grace of this
Most Great Name. How great the gulf fixed between the one and the other! (Gleanings 189–90)

Let us consider for a moment some of the possible implications of this pregnant statement by Bahá'u'lláh. First
comes the affirmation that the ultimate source and ground of human knowledge is God and, in particular, God's
specific intention that humanity be educated (expressed by God's act of revealing "the light of the Name of God, the
Educator"). Because God is Creator, because He is that ultimate Force or Entity responsible for all other forces and
entities in existence, his intention that humans attain knowledge is reflected to some degree "in all things," i.e.,
within every aspect of reality, including, of course, human beings themselves. Undoubtedly, the human capacities for abstract reason and creative imagination are the "manifest evidences"
within ourselves of God's desire that we be capable of attaining knowledge. Indeed, Bahá'u'lláh has elsewhere
confirmed that the human intellect is the most important faculty God has bestowed upon humanity: "First and
foremost among these favours, which the Almighty hath conferred upon man, is the gift of understanding"
(Gleanings 194).
The expression of God's educative intention in other, non-human aspects of creation can be seen in their
lawfulness, orderliness, and coherence—in the universal law of cause and effect that alone allows man's intellect to
comprehend the phenomena of reality. "...all things, in their inmost reality, testify to the revelation of the names and
attributes of God within them. Each according to its capacity, indicateth, and

is expressive of, the knowledge of
God. So potent and universal is this revelation, that it hath encompassed all
things visible and invisible”
(Bahá’u’lláh, Gleanings 178). Indeed, we might reflect that, no matter
how great our intellectual and experiential
capacities, if we were confronted with a fundamentally chaotic and incoherent
world, then the exercise of those
capacities would be utterly in vain. We could not make sense out of a senseless
world.
In summary: according to Bahá’u’lláh, God (the Creator) is a conscious
being Who has definite purposes for
humankind, and in particular the intention that humans attain knowledge of
reality. God has expressed this intention
in two basic ways, one general and universal and the other specific and
restricted. In a general way, He has
embedded a coherent structure within all aspects of reality and endowed humans
with the mental capacities that
allow them to perceive and comprehend this structure. The process of the
interaction between the innate human
intellectual capacities on the one hand and the inherent structure of reality
on the other constitute the first kind of
education. This process is continual and takes place, in various degrees, under
all conditions.8
The second kind of education “is confined to them that have come under the
shadow of this Name, and sought
the shelter of this most mighty Revelation.”9 In other words, it results from
the spiritual processes that God has made
available to us only through a particular aspect of reality, namely the
Manifestation (Prophethood) of Bahá’u’lláh.
Bahá’u’lláh has elsewhere explained that the great religious founders of
history are all chosen vehicles
(Manifestations) of specific revelations of God to humankind. “As a token of
His [God’s] mercy...and as a proof of
His loving–kindness, He hath manifested unto men the Day Stars of His divine
guidance, the Symbols of His divine
unity [the Manifestations], and hath ordained the knowledge of these sanctified
Beings to be identical with the
knowledge of His own Self. Whoso recognizeth them hath recognized God”
(Gleanings 49–50). These
Manifestations are all specially endowed human beings, and no Manifestation is
superior in rank to any other. But
their revelation of truth is progressive, adapted to the needs of a constantly
evolving human society. Speaking of this
progression of the Manifestations, Bahá’u’lláh has said that

> any apparent variation in the intensity of their light is not inherent in the
> light itself, but should rather be

attributed to the varying receptivity of an ever-changing world. Every Prophet Whom the Almighty and
Peerless Creator hath purposed to send to the peoples of the earth hath been entrusted with a Message, and
charged to act in a manner that would best meet the requirements of the age in which He appeared. (Gleanings
79)

According to Bahá'u'lláh's teachings, his own revelation is the most recent in this progression; it is the
appropriate revelation for the needs of the present age, and that is the only reason why such strong claims of potency
are applicable to it. Otherwise, the claims Bahá'u'lláh makes for his own revelation apply equally well to all
previous or future Manifestations, within the context of the place and time of their appearance.
This point having been made, it remains nonetheless to understand more precisely the nature of the special
knowledge afforded those who have "sought the shelter of this most mighty Revelation." First, and most obvious, is
knowledge related to ethical norms—propositions that assert how man should act in various circumstances. Such
normative propositions can be viewed as divinely–inspired moral injunctions. Some theologians and philosophers of religion have contended that this is the only kind of knowledge religion
brings to humanity. In particular, they have claimed that religion does not and cannot bring propositional truth of
the sort found in science, i.e., empirically grounded propositions about objective reality. Since virtually everyone
agrees with Hume's insightful dictum that normative and non-normative propositions cannot be logically deduced
from each other, such a view of religious truth implies an absolute separation of faith and reason, religion and
science, values and facts. It is therefore significant that the Bahá'í writings explicitly affirm the unity and harmony
of religion and science, and also contain a number of assertions about the structure of objective reality. Thus, from
the Bahá'í point of view, the particular knowledge vouchsafed to humanity through the Manifestations is in no way
restricted to normative propositions.
Let us cite a few examples of propositional truths whose assertions are to be found in the Bahá'í writings. With
regard to individual human nature, Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá affirm that the humans are not just the product of
some combination of hereditary and environmental influences. Rather, there is a third aspect to individual character
which derives from an objectively-existing, nonmaterial entity called the soul

or spirit. The soul is the locus or seat of the individual's personality and self, and is endowed with certain intrinsic or inherent capacities, which constitute one's spiritual capacities. The capacities for understanding, for action (will), and for love are among those explicitly mentioned in the Bahá'í writings as spiritual capacities. It is further explained that the soul and its capacities do not depend upon the body and are, in fact, immortal. The proper development of spiritual capacities is thus seen as the fundamental goal of human existence, and many of the ethical norms of the Bahá'í Faith are clearly directed to this end.

Concerning the genesis and biological development of humanity, the Bahá'í writings affirm that the human race has indeed gradually evolved from lower forms over a long period of time. However, 'Abdu'l-Bahá asserts that, from the beginning of this evolutionary process, humankind has constituted a distinct species.10 Moreover, these teachings are not restricted to one or two vaguely-worded statements but are rather part of a considerable body of doctrine regarding the laws governing the evolution of more general kinds of systems, including the various social systems of human history. The depth and cogency of these teachings have already attracted the interest of both Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í scientists.11

However, in the light of Bahá'u'lláh's strong statement that those who have not accepted his revelation "have deprived themselves of this [special knowledge], and are powerless to benefit from [its] spiritual sustenance," it would seem clear that the knowledge accessible only through his revelation is not primarily knowledge which can be independently discovered by science, for the latter is the kind of knowledge that is qualified as "universal." Indeed, if religion only articulated truths that could be discovered without it, then religion would be redundant and irrelevant. Thus, we can begin to understand that the special knowledge vouchsafed to those who accept Bahá'u'lláh's revelation is a subtle and intricate knowledge of certain deep spiritual laws and principles which, although objective in their operation and thereby potentially discoverable empirically, are nonetheless extraordinarily difficult to understand without the aid of a divinely inspired spiritual guide.12

Conclusions

It is clear, even from the brief discussion above, that the Bahá'í writings contain a wealth of profound and

philosophically cogent concepts concerning fundamental issues of human existence. A systematic study of these concepts might well be compared to so-called fundamental research in science, while attempts to apply Bahá'í principles to the solution of practical problems would correspond to applied research. Finally, study of the history and development of the Bahá'í community would be analogous to the scholarship of historians and philosophers of science and scientific practice. The development of the most fruitful methodologies for each of these kinds of Bahá'í scholarship will undoubtedly take generations of work and experience on the part of many scholars from a broad and diverse range of backgrounds.

At this early stage in the evolution of the Bahá'í Faith, which has not even totally emerged from its primitive period as a persecuted and deprecated minority in the land of its birth,13 it seems fair to say that all three forms of Bahá'í scholarship are, as yet, relatively undeveloped. However, it also seems fair to say that, given the extremely difficult circumstances with which the Bahá'í community has had to contend from the beginning of its existence, Bahá'í scholarship is in some ways remarkably advanced. Indeed, there currently exist a number of thoughtful studies of the Bahá'í writings as well as important histories, local and global, by both Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í authors. Also, several recent works have attempted to apply Bahá'í principles to the solution of social and other practical problems.14

Perhaps it is in this latter direction that the most novel Bahá'í contributions to scholarship will ultimately appear. For example, a recent commentary on Bahá'í scholarship by the International Teaching Centre in Haifa points out that "All believers can... strive to relate the Bahá'í teachings to the thinking and concerns of the non–Bahá'í population around them," and thus that "Bahá'í scholarship is [not] an activity open only to those who are highly educated or who are pursuing an academic career."15

In any case, on the basis of the short but rich history of the Bahá'í community around the world and in the light of the many statements in the Bahá'í writings which give such importance to all aspects of scholarship, it is reasonable to anticipate that Bahá'í intellectual life will preserve and enrich, in both spirit and form, the best of traditional scholarly disciplines and will develop imaginative new approaches as well.

Notes

1. By “truth” I mean correspondence with reality. The point is that a proposition or body of propositions (a theory) can be true without our knowing it to be so, and my definition of scholarship here clearly embodies the (normative) notion that intellectual investigation must have the pursuit of truth (i.e., the pursuit of the positive knowledge that a given theory does in fact correspond to reality) as its goal in order to count as scholarship. Of course, it is clearly possible that we may be entirely unsuccessful in discovering the truth of some matter, even though we approach the question in a sincerely motivated and disciplined manner. Nevertheless, the difference between this approach to knowledge-seeking and the approach that is either insincere (e.g., because it seeks rather to promote or establish some preconceived view) or undisciplined is important, for the latter is much less able to discover the truth than the former. Moreover, the scholar dedicated to truth-seeking is more likely to modify his viewpoint in the light of new evidence than one who seeks primarily to defend his own views at all costs.

2. Intellectual professions such as scholarship are economically privileged precisely because those who pursue these professions consume but do not produce tangibles. Moreover, the ultimate social benefits of scholarly work may appear only after several generations, whereas the benefit to society of other intellectual professions (e.g., teachers or administrators) is more immediate, and also more easily assessed. (Indeed, it frequently happens that, in the short term, the value of a scholar’s work can only be judged by other scholars.) Thus, the implicit social contract between the scholarly community and the greater community requires a more ample measure of trust than is the case for most other professional communities. It is this trust that scholars must not abuse if they are to maintain their integrity in the eyes of nonscholars.

3. The passing of Shoghi Effendi in 1957 marked the end of the line of authoritative interpreters of the Bahá’í writings. Since 1963, the administrative leadership of the Faith is effected via an elected nine-member body called the Universal House of Justice. The administrative plan of the Bahá’í Faith, including the function, role, and manner of election of the Universal House of Justice, was clearly set forth in the written texts of Bahá’u’lláh Himself, and Bahá’u’lláh left to his appointed successor, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the task of laying the groundwork for the implementation of this plan. For a more detailed discussion of the history and development of the administrative

order of the Bahá'í Faith, see W.S. Hatcher and J.D. Martin, The Bahá'í Faith (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985).

4. From now on, the term "Bahá'í writings" will refer to this corpus, comprising the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi.

5. This principle has also been explicitly stated by Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

6. Shoghi Effendi, in a letter to an individual believer dated 30 January 1925.

7. Shoghi Effendi, in a letter to an individual believer dated 25 August 1926.

8. In one passage, 'Abdu'l-Bahá gives the name "philosophy" to the knowledge that results from this process:
"Philosophy consists in comprehending the reality of things as they exist, according to the capacity and the power of man." ('Abdu'l-Bahá Some Answered Questions [Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1984], 221).

9. See the passage from Gleanings 189–90 quoted above. Henceforth, subsequent citations of portions of this passage will not be referenced.

10. It is perhaps interesting to note that before the advent of modern molecular biology it would have been extremely difficult to understand how distinctness of species could be maintained throughout the many morphological changes occurring in the course of biological evolution. We now know that specific distinctness exists on the cellular level, encoded in the characteristic biochemical structure of the genetic material of each given species. Biochemical incompatibility between these characteristic genetic configurations assures specific integrity.

11. See, for example, Ervin Laszlo, Foreword, "To the Peoples of the World," Bahá'í Studies 14 (1986): xiii–xiv.

12. Further elaboration of some of these ideas can be found in two of the author's previous monographs in the Bahá'í Studies series: "The Science of Religion," rev. ed., 1980 and the "Concept of Spirituality," 1982.

13. Indeed, as of the present writing, members of the Bahá'í community in Iran continue to be subject to arbitrary arrest, torture, and execution for their religious beliefs.

14. See, for example, H. Danesh's "A Violence–Free Society: A Gift for Our Children," Bahá'í Studies 6 (1979).

15. Contained in a statement on scholarship by the International Teaching Centre of the Bahá'í Faith, dated 9 August 1984, p.3.

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