

Reviewing: Practice and Functions of Literature Review

by Shoghi Effendi and Universal House of Justice

Compiled by Universal House of Justice Research Department.

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From a Letter Written by Shoghi Effendi

From Letters Written on Behalf of Shoghi Effendi

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1. So great is the importance and so supreme is the authority of these assemblies that once 'Abdu'l-Bahá after having himself and in his own handwriting corrected the translation made into Arabic of the *Ishráqát* (the Effulgences) by Sheikh Faraj, a Kurdish friend from Cairo, directed him in a Tablet to submit the above-named translation to the Spiritual Assembly of Cairo, that he may seek from them before publication their approval and consent....

This is indeed a clear indication of the Master's express desire that nothing whatever should be given to the public by any individual among the friends, unless fully considered and approved by the Spiritual Assembly in his locality; and if this (as is undoubtedly the case) is a matter that pertains to the general interest of the Cause in that land, then it is incumbent upon the Spiritual Assembly to submit it to the consideration and approval of the national body representing all the various local assemblies. Not only with regard to publication, but all matters without any exception whatsoever, regarding the interests of the Cause in that locality, individually or collectively, should be referred exclusively to the Spiritual Assembly in that locality, which shall decide upon it, unless it be a matter of national interest, in which case it shall be referred to the national body. With this national body also will rest the decision whether a given question is of local or national interest....

(5 March 1922, published in 'Bahá'í Administration: Selected Messages 1922-1932' [rev. ed.], (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980), p. 23.

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2. In case you are thinking to publish this explanation of yours, Shoghi Effendi would like you to present it to the National Spiritual Assembly and ask their approval before you do so. The Cause is still in its stage of infancy, it has to be reared with motherly care. Such precautionary measures, therefore, are to hasten its development and safeguard the consistency of its publications.

(11 March 1923 to an individual believer)

3. To keep the unity of action in the Cause it is absolutely essential that all activities be with the approval and sanction of the National Assembly of that locality. Shoghi Effendi, therefore, would like you to obtain the sanction of the National Assembly before you undertake the publication of any matter.

(24 November 1926 to an individual believer)

4. (1) When Shoghi Effendi orders someone to translate some book it does not mean that the work could be published without the sanction of the National Spiritual Assembly even though that sanction may be a function of formality, for Shoghi Effendi has submitted for the sanction of the National Spiritual Assembly things that he has himself translated.
(2) The National Assembly should be interested in such translations and help as much as possible for it is, after all, a service to the Cause. That body should therefore be responsible for copyrights and other matters. Their attitude should be that of assistance rather than obstruction.
(3) The National Spiritual Assembly should feel interested and help in such translations.
(4) The National Spiritual Assembly is free to help in its publication or not, according to whether they deem the work worthwhile. Their objective should be the highest good of the Cause and not obstruction of individual initiative.
(27 December 1932 to an individual believer)
5. Shoghi Effendi would, however, like to draw your attention to the fact that every book that a Bahá'í desires to publish, on any phase of the Movement, should obtain the sanction of the National Assembly under whose jurisdiction he lives, or of the country in which he desires to publish the book. In this case it is a mere formality for the Guardian is sure that the National Assembly of the British Isles have known of this book and have been anxiously awaiting its publication. Shoghi Effendi submits even the books he himself writes to such a procedure. It is really to safeguard the teachings from being misinterpreted by friends who have not deepened their knowledge of the teachings.
(6 May 1933 to an individual believer)
6. ...you can submit your article to the Reviewing Committee, whose function is to decide whether the matter used in Bahá'í articles or books conforms with the Teachings.
(18 February 1945 to an individual believer)
7. Regarding your question concerning Bahá'ís printing and circulating matter on the Faith: whether the person writes it openly, as a Bahá'í, or gives the impression he is not a Bahá'í (in order to make his statements seem those of a dispassionate observer and thus carry more weight with some minds), if he is a voting member of our Faith he should submit the material to the National Spiritual Assembly, or its appointed Committee, to be passed upon as to its accuracy and acceptability. Naturally non-Bahá'í material the individual is free to do as he likes about. The National Assembly should deal efficiently with such matters and thus encourage the friends to follow the correct procedure. The whole object in Bahá'í Administration is not only to manage the affairs of the Cause, but to stimulate the believers to work for it and to teach it to the masses. When the National Spiritual Assembly provides competent and quick service, in its own work and that of its Committees, it will see a far greater manifestation of enthusiasm and enterprise on the part of the believers.
(28 March 1945 to a National Spiritual Assembly)
8. So often persons can be carried away by their enthusiasm and express something detrimental to the Faith. Therefore they must either refer their articles to their Local Spiritual Assembly or the National Reviewing Committee.
(13 April 1946 to a National Spiritual Assembly)
9. He was very pleased to hear you have translated ...'s book into German. If you plan to have this published in Germany the German Reviewing Committee should see it first. This is no reflection on your abilities, but merely to uphold the administrative laws in this respect, as of course some utterly unqualified believer could publish misleading and inferior stuff, damaging to the Cause's prestige, if no such protective Committee existed.
(12 November 1947 to an individual believer)
10. Regarding Mrs. ...'s booklet, generally speaking, Local Spiritual Assemblies are not empowered to review material which is for national circulation. The Guardian thinks that your Assembly, or the Committee that you delegate such authority to, should review the pamphlet in question, and if it is

in accordance with the Teachings, there is certainly no reason why it should not be circulated, but in the future, the Spiritual Assemblies should be more careful about publishing literature which is for more than local use.

(10 March 1951 to a National Spiritual Assembly)

11. Any Bahá'í book presenting the Faith should be reviewed by a competent body. This only means that they should ascertain whether there is any misrepresentation of the Teachings in it. Sometimes the friends think they have to go into literary reviews and interfere with the author's style etc., which of course is wholly unnecessary....

(15 November 1956 to an individual believer)

From Letters Written by the Universal House of Justice

12. The function of reviewing is, essentially, to check the Author's exposition of the Bahá'í Faith and its teachings, which may include verification of any quotation from Bahá'í writings. This function should not be confused with evaluation of the literary merit of a work or of its value as a publication, which are normally the prerogative of the publisher. However, in the case of works to be published by its Bahá'í Publishing Trust, the National Spiritual Assembly may, if it so wishes, assign all these responsibilities to one committee.

(23 July 1964 to a National Spiritual Assembly)

13. A publishing trust has the right to refuse publication of any particular title, and a National Assembly has the right to review any proposed Bahá'í publication for accuracy and propriety. But no publisher has the right to alter or change an author's manuscript without his knowledge and consent.

(28 July 1966 to a National Spiritual Assembly)

14. Review of material to ensure accuracy and dignity of its presentation should not be confused with sponsorship of its publication. In principle, whether or not you wish to sponsor a project is for you to decide.

(22 November 1971 to a National Spiritual Assembly)

15. Some of the friends have suggested that the emergence of the Faith from obscurity indicates the timeliness of ceasing observance in the Bahá'í community of certain restraints; particularly are they concerned about the temporary necessity of review before publishing.

That the Faith has emerged from obscurity on a global scale is certain. This definitely marks a triumphant stage in the efforts of the community to register its existence on the minds of those who influence world events. Consider how, because of the sufferings and sacrifices of the friends in Iran, the concerns of the community in these respects have become a matter of discussion in the most influential parliaments and the most important international forums on earth. That this emergence frees the Cause to pursue objectives hitherto unreachable is also undeniable; but that it marks the attainment of the community's anticipated maturity is entirely doubtful.

How could it have attained maturity, when we know from the clear guidance of the beloved Guardian that obscurity is but one of the many stages in the long evolution towards the Faith's golden destiny? Has he not advised us all that the subsequent stage of oppression must precede the stages of its emancipation and its recognition as a world religion? Can the friends forget the oft-quoted warning of 'Abdu'l-Bahá concerning the bitter opposition that will confront the Cause in various lands on all continents? In the case of the American believers, has Shoghi Effendi not alluded to this coming fury in his description of them as "the invincible Army of Bahá'u'lláh, who in the West, and at one of its potential storm centres is to fight, in His name and for His sake, one of its fiercest and most glorious battles"?

Those who are anxious to relax all restraint, who invoke freedom of speech as the rationale for publishing every and any thing concerning the Bahá'í community, who call for the immediate termination of the practice of review now that the Faith has emerged from obscurity—are they not aware of these sobering prospects? Widespread as has been the public revulsion to the current

persecutions in Iran, let there be no mistake about the certainty of the opposition which must yet be confronted in many countries, including that which is the Cradle of the Administrative Order itself.

The Faith is as yet in its infancy. Despite its emergence from obscurity, even now the vast majority of the human race remains ignorant of its existence; moreover, the vast majority of its adherents are relatively new Bahá'ís. The change implied by this new stage in its evolution is that whereas heretofore this tender plant was protected in its obscurity from the attention of external elements, it has now become exposed. This exposure invites close observation, and that observation will eventually lead to opposition in various quarters. So, far from adopting a carefree attitude, the community must be conscious of the necessity to present a correct view of itself and an accurate understanding of its purpose to a largely sceptical public. A greater effort, a greater care must now be exercised to ensure its protection against the malice of the ignorant and the unwisdom of its friends.

Let us all remember that the struggle of the infant Faith of God to thrive is beset with the turmoil of the present age. Like a tender shoot just barely discernible above ground, it must be nurtured to strength and maturity and buttressed as necessary against the blight of strong winds and deadly entanglements with weeds and thistles. If we to whose care this plant has been entrusted are insensitive to its tenderness, the great tree which is its certain potential will be hindered in its growth towards the spreading of its sheltering branches over all humankind. From this perspective we must all consider the latent danger to the Cause of ill-advised actions and exaggerated expectations; and particularly must we all be concerned about the effects of words, especially those put in print. It is here that Bahá'í authors and publishers need to be attentive and exert rigorous discipline upon themselves, as well as abide by the requirements of review at this early stage in the development of the Faith.

(29 December 1988 to the Followers of Bahá'u'lláh in the United States of America)

From Letters Written on Behalf of the Universal House of Justice

16. The House of Justice wishes you to concentrate on the general purpose of review as set out on page 1 of the Memorandum [Memorandum on Bahá'í Publishing - Ridván 1971] under the subheading 'Purpose of Review'. With this in mind, item (b) under the subheading 'Reviewing Committees' on page 2 of the Memorandum refers to the accuracy of the presentation of the Faith and in no way contradicts the checking of accuracy of quotations mentioned under the subheading 'Editing'. Of course, as a part of its general duty the Reviewing Committee must insist on the correction of any quotation that it finds to be either mis-quoted or quoted in a misleading context, as this would affect the aspects with which it is concerned, and any author or publisher would normally be grateful to have such inaccuracies pointed out, but the Reviewing Committee does not have the duty of minutely checking every quotation including those it sees no reason to question, as the publisher does. The Bahá'í review is concerned with an acceptable presentation of the Faith and its Teachings.
(3 August 1975 to a National Spiritual Assembly)

17. In reply to your letter of 31 October 1977 in which you ask 'whether works by Bahá'ís which are not about the Faith but which refer to the Faith in any way or which use quotations from the Writings require review', and if so, how shall the reviewers apply the standards of Bahá'í review, the House of Justice instructs us to send you the following reply.

To deal with the question of use of quotations first, the Universal House of Justice has decided that Bahá'í authors are free to quote from the Sacred Text and its authentic translations as well as from the general letters of the Guardian without restriction, although the context in which the quotations are made may be subject to review.

As to Bahá'í authors who refer to the Faith in works which are not specifically about it, the House of Justice instructs us to say there is no need for review although Bahá'í authors may, if they wish, submit the relevant passages for review. For instance, some such casual reference as possibly 'the Bahá'í Faith which maintains a House of Worship in Wilmette' obviously need not be reviewed.

However, where an actual presentation of the Faith or any particular aspect of its teachings is made, in a work not specifically about the Faith, the relevant passage and its context should, at present, be sent for review.

(28 November 1977 to a National Spiritual Assembly)

18. The House of Justice can see no reason why permission for the publication of this book should be refused. There are undoubtedly a number of matters which a Reviewing Committee would wish to take up with Mr. ... in addition to those mentioned by the Ad Hoc Committee appointed by the House of Justice, but these should be drawn to his attention so that he can correct the typescript accordingly and render it acceptable to the Reviewing Committee.

The subject of the interpretation of the Apocalypse is not one on which there is a great need for literature in the Bahá'í world. Moreover, the House of Justice does not think it would be wise for a Bahá'í Publishing Trust to publish this book. But the liberty of the friends to write and publish books about the Faith and its teachings should not be restricted more than is absolutely necessary. Provided Mr. ...'s book can pass review, the House of Justice wishes him to be free to seek a publisher and make his work available to the friends and the general public if he is able to do so.

(30 November 1977 to a National Spiritual Assembly)

19. In answer to the ... points raised in your letter, the Universal House of Justice has instructed us to convey to you the following comments.

- 1) When we conveyed the decision of the House of Justice that no review was required for a doctoral thesis unless there was a proposal to publish it in larger quantities than required by the examining body, the reference was to publication by printing. Photographic reproduction of individual copies, which is an accepted practice among scholars and in universities, would not be considered to be publishing in this context.
- 2) The circulation of seminar reports, papers and other materials among those concerned is permissible at this stage without the need for review, unless, in the view of the National Spiritual Assembly under whose jurisdiction the circulation takes place, such papers are likely to contain material prejudicial to the interests of the Faith.
- 3) You raise the question of the problem presented by the need to review scholarly works which may be the result of several years' research and detailed study of materials which may not be known to, or even available to those who must do the reviewing. The House of Justice states that when the author of such a work presents his book for review, he is at liberty to express such thoughts to the National Spiritual Assembly concerned. Should a difference of opinion arise between the author and the reviewing committee, and should the National Spiritual Assembly be unable to resolve it, the matter may be referred to the Universal House of Justice.

(23 December 1979 to an individual believer)

20. ...the Universal House of Justice has, in the past, sent to you and to your Publishing Trust general guidelines for reviewing literature submitted for publication. This guidance is obviously binding on any manuscript presented to your Assembly. Due to the present situation in Iran, however, the timeliness of publishing literature in the Persian language is an important factor to take into account, and therefore the House of Justice requests you to appoint a Persian Reviewing Committee, the members of which need not be resident in the United States. They should obviously be Bahá'ís competent to advise on the suitable time and wisdom of publishing original Persian texts submitted to them, as well as commenting on the usual reviewing functions.

The publication of the memoirs of the friends requires a great deal of careful attention. Personal recollections sometimes include statements which are not in conformity with available historical Bahá'í literature, and events occasionally referred to in such essays deal with subjects which could be used by the enemies of the Faith in Iran and elsewhere. It is obvious that at this time such publications cannot be considered as priority items required by the Persian believers living outside Iran. You are welcome to inform your Persian Reviewing Committee of this guidance.

(19 August 1980 to a National Spiritual Assembly)

21. Concerning the matter of review, the House of Justice feels that the present state of Bahá'í scholarship would make it most unwise to lift the requirement for review for works of Bahá'í scholars aimed at a largely non-Bahá'í audience. There are, the House of Justice is very pleased to see, a growing number of Bahá'í scholars who approach their work with the enquiring mind of a true scholar, eager to seek out the truth, but also keenly aware of their own limitations and expressing their conclusions with scientific caution....

... It must be remembered that the purpose of review is to protect the Faith against misrepresentation by its own followers at this early stage of its existence when comparatively few people have any knowledge of it. An erroneous presentation of the Teachings by a Bahá'í who is accounted a scholar, in a scholarly journal, would, by that very fact, do far more harm than an erroneous presentation made by an obscure Bahá'í author with no pretensions to scholarship.

The House of Justice feels that for it to designate certain believers as 'approved scholars', so to say, who would not need to have their scholarly publications reviewed, while maintaining the requirement for all other believers, would be invidious and raise far more problems than the present ruling requiring review of all publications about the Faith by Bahá'ís.

(8 October 1980 to an individual believer)

22. We have been asked to remind you that any passage in a book written by a Bahá'í which deals with the Cause must be reviewed together with its context by the National Spiritual Assembly of the country in which it is first published and distributed. This should be done before it is sent to the publisher.

(30 November 1980 to an individual believer)

23. As regards the reviewing panel's duty to check the accuracy of quotations from Scripture, ... we are instructed to refer you to the letter sent to you dated August 3, 1975, in reply to your letter of July 18, 1975, raising a number of questions about the House of Justice's Memorandum on Bahá'í Publishing of Ridván 1971. For your convenience we attach a copy of the letter of August 3, 1975. [See extract 16] From it it becomes apparent that were a reviewing committee, in the course of reading a typescript, to notice a quotation from Scripture which was inapt or in a misleading context or inaccurately quoted, it would certainly call this to attention, but "the reviewing committee does not have the duty of minutely checking every quotation including those it sees no reason to question...."

(21 December 1981 to a National Spiritual Assembly)

24. With reference to review of art shows and dramatic presentations by Bahá'í artists your Assembly will wish to exercise such review responsibility as it may see fit in order to assure a befitting quality of the work, particularly where Bahá'í sponsorship has been undertaken or is implicit in the conduct of the event.

(15 April 1982 to a National Spiritual Assembly)

25. ...it [the Universal House of Justice] 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 Bahá'í 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 continually being made to this end.

Three different categories of publications are subject to different procedures. Manuscripts written by Bahá'ís about the Faith or its teachings are subject to review. Translations of Bahá'í 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 Salmání 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-Bahá'í agency and its publication by Bahá'ís. Bahá'ís owe it, in loyalty to Bahá'u'lláh, to present the material in a manner that will neither distort the true character of His Faith nor the truth of the historical record....

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 Kitáb-i-Aqdas", Bahá'u'lláh 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 Huqúqu'lláh. 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 Bahá'ís, for did not Bahá'u'lláh quote with approval the statement that "Not everything 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."

(23 March 1983 to an individual believer)

26. There is no specified time limit within which a National Spiritual Assembly has to complete its review of a manuscript; however, it must urge its reviewing committee to expedite any review it undertakes. Differing circumstances make it impossible for every manuscript to be reviewed within the same time span: volume, complexity of the material, availability of reviewers, the pressure of work are some of the factors to be considered. However, if you find that the review of your manuscript has been unduly delayed, you should not hesitate to send an inquiry to the National Spiritual Assembly.

(11 July 1984 to an individual believer)

27. With regard to the temporary requirement that the writings of Bahá'ís on the Faith must be reviewed before publication, the House of Justice confirms that this will definitely be removed in due course, and may well be modified in the meantime as conditions change. At present, for example, it is not applicable to such writings as doctoral theses, unless these are to be published in larger numbers than required for the degree.

(1 September 1986 to an individual believer)

28. In a book that a Bahá'í writes about the Faith there is a certain leeway possible for him in the expression of the teachings in his own terms, and the purpose of review in such a case is to ensure that this leeway does not exceed the proper bounds and result in the book's being a distortion of the Faith. In such a book as yours, however, which is a detailed historical account of the early years of the Cause, dealing intimately with the Central Figures themselves, reviewers should pay a much closer attention to ensure that events that are related and words that are quoted have a sound historical basis.

The life of a Manifestation of God is indescribably precious. Inevitably there are many stories of the early days of a Faith that circulate by word of mouth, some true, some partially true, some false; and it is the hope that gradually these can be sorted out by scholars so that their varying reliability can be ascertained for the guidance of future generations.

The problem with your book is that you avowedly invent words and put them into the mouths of historical characters, describe in detail events of which only a sketchy knowledge exists, and incorporate information which you may have obtained from guides during your visit to Iran, but which is in no way qualified as to its source. In your own words, the accounts are 'fleshed out'.

It is, we understand, a highly readable book, one that will grip the reader's attention. Inevitably, therefore, the reader's mind will be filled with all sorts of unreliable and even invented information which he, half remembering, will in turn recount. In other words, the book would act as a massive muddying of the waters of Bahá'í history, disseminating into the world stories which it might never be possible to effectively retract in future, even if proved to be false. ...

... normally a Reviewing Committee is responsible for checking that a book written by a Bahá'í author about the Faith does not convey a false impression about either the Faith or its teachings. If the book is a history, the Reviewing Committee should assure itself that the account is soundly based, although it may not check in detail all the reported facts.

A Bahá'í publisher, however, would have the duty of going beyond this to check the accuracy of all quotations and to satisfy himself that there is a sound basis for the historical statements made.

In the process of review as well as of publishing, the reviewer and the publisher might well feel it advisable to draw to the author's attention questions of style or expressions of opinion, and it is here that the author, rather than the reviewer or editor, has the last word unless it can be shown that an opinion is clearly in contradiction to the teachings.

There is also the question of wisdom and propriety. A Reviewing Committee might, conceivably, approve a book but recommend that permission to publish it be withheld because its publication could give rise to serious problems for the Cause. Such a decision may also be taken by the National Spiritual Assembly itself.

At any point, of course, an author can refuse to make a change—but likewise, the Reviewing Committee can refuse to approve the manuscript, or a publisher can refuse to publish it. The matter, therefore, is one that should be worked out in an atmosphere of consultation and mutual respect.

(29 September 1986 to an individual believer)

29. In relation to the publication of material on Judaism and the Bahá'í Faith, careful consideration must be given to the wisdom and timeliness of the subject, due to the delicate nature of the relationship between the Bahá'í World Centre and the State of Israel and to persistent Middle East tensions. Therefore, the House of Justice asks that, if you decide to proceed with your intention to write the proposed book at this time, your manuscript should be submitted to the World Centre for an initial study.

(22 December 1986 to an individual believer)

30. We are to say that there is no provision at the World Centre for the review of books by believers. If your own National Spiritual Assembly does not feel able to publish your work, you are entirely free to submit the book to any other publisher, Bahá'í or non-Bahá'í, and to accept any offer of publication which you might receive. You should know, however, that at present all books about the Faith published by the believers must be approved for publication by the National Spiritual Assembly of the country where publication takes place.

(6 July 1987 to an individual believer)

31. You express concern about censorship in Bahá'í publications, which, you feel, does prevent believers from expressing opinions or grievances about problems in the Bahá'í community.

As you know, at this stage all works by Bahá'ís which refer to the Faith, such as books, pamphlets, articles and translations, must be approved by the Spiritual Assembly before publication. The Guardian has stated that the purpose of review is to: 'provide in general for a dignified and accurate presentation of all Bahá'í literature and its distribution to the public'. He described this practice as being necessary 'in these days when the Cause is still in its infancy' and foreshadowed a future time when 'the present restrictions imposed on the publication of Bahá'í literature will be definitely abolished'. These restrictions are subject to abolition by the Universal House of Justice when it deems the time to be propitious.

There are many avenues available to believers to express their opinions and concerns about issues affecting the Bahá'í community, e.g. during the consultative portion of the Nineteen Day Feast, at Conventions and conferences, through correspondence addressed to the Assemblies, or in consultation with Counsellors or Auxiliary Board members. With the growth of Bahá'í newsletters and magazines, and with the development of associations promoting Bahá'í scholarship, further avenues exist for the publication of articles which describe or analyze pertinent issues in the relationship between the Bahá'í community and the larger society.

In exercising their privilege to contribute to the consultation in these gatherings or publications, Bahá'ís are enjoined to be courteous and considerate of others, to be moderate in tone and to not

insist on the correctness of their views; however, such conditions should not preclude the frank expression of differing views. Bahá'u'lláh has forbidden 'conflict' and 'contention'; open disputation in the public arena over matters in the Bahá'í teachings is an inappropriate means of clarifying difficult issues. It can be extremely harmful to the interests of the Faith if Bahá'ís who hold strong opinions but are not well-versed in the teachings publish documents which attack basic tenets of the Faith or undermine the authority of Bahá'u'lláh Himself. There is ample scope within the channels of the Administrative Order for questions to be raised and discussed in a manner which avoids dispute.

(11 January 1988 to an individual believer)

32. The Universal House of Justice has received your letter of 6 January 1988 and has considered with much interest the points you raise. It recognizes that the time has come when special reviewing procedures will have to be initiated to avoid the kinds of problem that you outline. It has asked us to send you the following reply.

The problem can be divided into two aspects: the availability of Bahá'ís who are sufficiently knowledgeable to be able to review the works of Bahá'í academics intelligently; and the establishment of procedures which can provide reviews at high speed and with validity for a number of countries.

To the first point we are asked to say that the Universal House of Justice does not feel that it is necessary for the reviewer to be qualified in the same discipline as the writer of a document. For example, in the case of an article by a professional historian, it is not the function of the reviewer to ascertain the correctness of the article from a historian's point of view; it is his task to ensure that the writer has not, in the course of his discussion, misrepresented Bahá'í teachings or put forward theses which are incompatible with being a Bahá'í.

There are Bahá'ís who are scholars in their own specialized fields of research and also scholars of the Faith and its teachings; but unfortunately this is not always the case. Reviewers should combine a profound knowledge of the Faith and understanding of its principles with the wisdom and good judgement to understand their limitations in the area of the author's specific area of expertise.

Believers with such qualifications able to review scholarly papers are few and scattered. The House of Justice therefore will give consideration to the feasibility of appointing what would amount to a panel of such reviewers throughout the world, together with a coordinator for the work. A similar arrangement has already been established for publications in Persian and seems to operate quite smoothly....

(7 February 1988 to an individual believer)

33. The Universal House of Justice has received your letter of 7 June 1989, concerning a writing project which you had been contemplating in collaboration with a professional filmmaker and writer who is not a Bahá'í, and we have been asked to send you the following reply with an expression of regret for the delay due to pressure of work.

Given the long history and overwhelming current examples of repression in the world, it is not surprising that in a country like the United States, which upholds freedom of speech as a cardinal principle, the non-Bahá'í collaborator in a filmmaking project, such as you have described, would be concerned about any perceived, or misperceived, notion of censorship. As you know, review of manuscripts before publication is a discipline which the Bahá'í community applies to its own members as a temporary necessity, for it is anticipated that in due time this practice will cease. The reason is simple: At this early stage in the development of the Bahá'í Faith, which is striving against great odds to establish itself in a world that is highly critical, often antagonistic towards new ideas, and whose communications media tend to emphasize negative information, it is important that Bahá'í authors, scriptwriters and filmmakers endeavour to present the Faith with accuracy and dignity. It is one thing for a non-Bahá'í to make erroneous statements about the Faith; this can be excused on the basis of ignorance. But for a Bahá'í to make such errors is quite a different thing, because he is considered to be knowledgeable about that which he espouses.

Therefore, a Bahá'í author is expected to ensure to the extent possible a correct representation of the Faith in his work; as an aid he draws upon the reviewing facilities provided by Bahá'í institutions. A great many authors spontaneously and informally submit their manuscripts to a type of review, although they would not necessarily call it that, when they request the comments and criticisms of persons whose expertise and judgement they respect. Submission to Bahá'í review is no greater a requirement, and may well be less demanding in most cases, than the rigorous review of scientific papers before their publication. In the same way that scientists have acceded to the discipline of review in the interest of ensuring the precision and integrity of their dissertations, Bahá'í authors respect the function of review in the Bahá'í community.

The Bahá'í Faith makes very serious claims and has a rich and complex history, but it is as yet a young religion whose precepts are not widely understood. It has been undergoing severe persecution in the land of its birth and is experiencing serious opposition in other places where its detractors have no compunction in misrepresenting its purposes. Until its history, teachings and practices are well known throughout the world, it will be necessary for the Bahá'í community to make efforts within itself to present correct information about the Faith in books, films or other media. This can and must be done without violating the principle of freedom of expression, which, according to the teachings of the Faith, is a vital right of all persons.

It is not necessary for Bahá'í authors to make an issue of the function of review with others with whom they wish to collaborate, because it is not required of non-Bahá'ís, though they can, if they wish, call upon Bahá'í reviewing facilities when dealing with Bahá'í topics. Although the function of review in the Bahá'í community is concerned with checking an author's exposition of the Faith and its teachings, this function is not to be confused with evaluation of the literary merit of a work or of its value as a publication, which are normally the prerogative of the publisher. With or without review, the work presented by a Bahá'í to a non-Bahá'í collaborator will, it is presumed, be judged by that collaborator on its merits.

(25 September 1989 to an individual believer)