

Learned

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'Learned'.

Many prominent early Baha'is belonged to the Islamic learned class, the *'ulama*, and Baha'u'llah specifically blessed them, 'the learned amongst among the people of Baha'. They were his 'trustees', 'the manifestations' of his commandments, the embodiments of steadfastness, 'the daysprings of Divine Utterance', 'the billows of the Most Mighty Ocean', 'the stars of the firmament of Glory', and 'the standards of triumph' of his cause (KA 82 k173; TB 221). More generally, he praised those servants who dedicated themselves 'to the education of the world' and 'the edification of its peoples'. These brought 'the life-giving water of knowledge' to the peoples of the world, directing them to 'the straight path' and acquainting them with what was conducive 'to human upliftment and exaltation' (TB 35). That there would continue to be Baha'i learned was indicated by Baha'u'llah's appointment of certain followers of HANDS OF THE CAUSE, a position later given institutional status as part of the Baha'i 'Administrative Order', and the establishment of such other 'institutions of the learned' as the AUXILIARY BOARDS and the CONTINENTAL BOARDS OF COUNSELLORS. These individuals are recorded high rank, but unlike the Shi'i counterparts are denied executive power (given instead to the elected ASSEMBLIES) or the right to make authoritative interpretations binding on their fellow believers (MUHJ 214-16 no. 111). Nor -- apart from the Hands -- are their appointments for life. Other eminent Baha'i teachers may also be considered 'learned', but they have no administrative rank. See also ADMINISTRATION'; 'ULAMA.

Scholarship.

Advanced study of a subject; the qualities and attainments of a scholar.

The need.

For Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice the development of Baha'i scholarship was of great importance. Shoghi Effendi noted in the 1940s that the thinking world had already 'caught up' with the universal 'BAHA'I PRINCIPLES' enunciated by Baha'u'llah, and that these no longer seemed new. Yet he reiterated that the Faith had the answer to the

world's problems. What was needed was individuals able to present the Baha'i teachings to intelligent people. There was a need for more Baha'i scholars, and for 'a more profound and coordinated by scholarship'. The Baha'is needed both to know the Baha'i teachings in depth, and to be well educated in general, having a sound knowledge of history, religious history, economics, sociology, science and the like. Thus they should be able to correlate the thinking of modern thinkers and progressive movements with the Baha'i teachings. Again, the House of Justice has referred to the potential importance of Baha'i scholarship in the CONSOLIDATION of the Baha'i community as it becomes better known in the wider world; to the need for intelligence analysis of current issues of social concern from a Baha'i perspective; and the vital role of scholars in defending the Faith from its detractors. CC1: 227-31 nos. 501, 506, 510-11, 5i5; *Baha'i scholarship* 3-8, 11, 15, 42, 44; MUHJ 387 no. 217.1, 720 no. 453.13.

General principles.

For the House of Justice: [1] There is no conflict between 'true' science and 'true' religion: both are sources of knowledge about reality. Baha'i scholars should combine 'profound faith' with 'freedom of thought'. They should be both loyal to Baha'u'llah and his teachings, and study their religion searchingly and intelligently following the principle of 'an unfettered search after truth'.

[2] All human knowledge is limited (see KNOWLEDGE), including Baha'is' understanding of their own scriptures and the scientific theories of a particular period in human history. Thus there is no one 'correct' view of the history and teachings of the Faith.

[3] Baha'is should not accept uncritically the materialistic theories of much modern thinking just because these are fashionable.

[4] The harmony of the Baha'i community is important. Baha'is should avoid the antagonisms that have divided other religious groups into those who blindly hold to the letter of their scriptures and those who question everything (i.e. the 'fundamentalist'/'liberal' divide). Both extremes are destructive. Baha'i scholars should therefore phrase their findings with tact, moderation, humility and wisdom, whilst the general community, in particular those who hold positions of responsibility in the Baha'i administration, should be tolerant of the views of others, accept a diversity of opinions, and avoid the censoriousness that could stifle the development of scholarship.

[5] REVIEW remains an important means of protecting the Faith at what is still an early stage in its development, where it is both severely persecuted in IRAN and not widely understood. *Baha'i Scholarship* 9-28; UHRD, *Scholarship*. See also BABI AND BAHAI STUDIES.

Review.

'Abdu'l-Baha initiated a policy of pre-publication approval of Baha'i TRANSLATIONS by ASSEMBLIES, and this was formalized by Shoghi Effendi, who directed that, whilst the Faith was still 'in its infancy', all Baha'i publications -- including magazine articles -- should be supervised by the relevant local or national assembly, to provide for 'a dignified and accurate' presentation of the Faith (BA 23, 38; LG 101 no. 349). Literature review was temporary and would be abolished in the future (WOB 9). The Universal House of Justice has continued this policy, extending it to all forms of media presentation (books, poems, radio scripts, films) and directing that national assemblies appoint reviewing committees for this purpose (MUHJ 185-9 no. 94). This concern is to guard against 'misrepresentations' of the Faith by Baha'is when it is still relatively unknown (LG 102 no. 353).

Babi and Baha'i Studies.

Academic study of the Babi and Baha'i religions. The term 'Baha'i Studies' has also come to have a wider usage (see below. See also SCHOLARSHIP).

Traditional Baha'i scholarship.

Many of the prominent early Iranian Baha'is were former Shi'i 'ULAMA. As part of their service to the Baha'i Faith, several of these men wrote apologies for their religion and made compilations of Baha'i writings and historical documents which were widely circulated amongst the Baha'is. Although school and enormously erudite, their work differs from the modern Western field of religious studies in its unambiguous faith commitment: the underlying purpose of their scholarship was to help advance the Baha'i religion. The only early Baha'i scholar whose work has been translated into English is MIRZA ABU'L-FADL GULPAYGANI. Others whose work is highly regarded include FADIL MAZANDARANI and 'Abdu'l-Hamid ISHRAQ-KHAVARI. The more recent work of Muhammad 'Ali Faizi, 'Azizu'llah Sulaymani, and (in English) of Hassan BALYUZI continue this tradition.

Early academic studies.

Critical academic studies of Babi and Baha'i texts, doctrines and history began with the work of European orientalist in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The most important of

these scholars was E.G. BROWNE. Others of note were A.L.M. NICOLAS, Victor ROSEN, Alexander TUMANSKI and Hermann Roemer. The work of the Comte de GOBINEAU must also be mentioned, not for its scholarship, but because of its early date (1865) and its inspiration of subsequent studies. The major works of Browne on the subject date from 1889 to 1910. MBBR 17-52.

The modern period.

A new phase in Babi and Baha'i studies began in the 1970s. Although overlapping, two distinct trends may be identified.

Institutional.

There have been a number of developments sponsored by the Baha'i community. '[A]nimated by the spirit of inquiry into the limitless meaning of the Divine Teachings', these have sought both to present the Baha'i Faith and its ideals to a wider intellectual audience and explore the implications of the Baha'i teachings in all aspects of human life. This approach to 'Baha'i Studies' was effectively begun with the establishment of the Canadian Association for Studies on the Baha'i Faith in 1975 in response to a call by the Universal House of Justice. This body aimed to promote lectures and conferences relating to the Baha'i Faith at Canadian universities. Reflecting international interest, the organization was renamed the Association for Baha'i Studies (ABS) in 1981. It also published a series of *Baha'i Studies* volumes (mostly monographs) and *The Journal of Baha'i Studies* from 1988 (BW17: 197-201; 18:194-200; Danesh). Regarding all Baha'is as potential scholars it has promoted a wide range of activities within the Baha'i community, including in the arts and health (A Baha'i International Health Agency was formed under its sponsorship in 1982). A large number of national or regional affiliate associations have now been established (22 by 1995, including eight in the Americas, six in Europe, three each in Africa and Asia, and two in Australasia). Activities of these associations range from academic study of aspects of history and belief to studies of the possible application of the Baha'i teachings to varied aspects of human life (including moral education and the search for a global ethic) and Baha'i DEEPENING. Various publications of seminars and the like have been produced, of very variable quality. In some places the traditional Baha'i SUMMER SCHOOLS have become more rigorous, as in Australia, where a three-year certificate program in Baha'i Studies was introduced in 1995 Other institutional developments have included the establishment of the first Baha'i University (Universidad Nur) in Santa Cruz, Bolivia in 1984 and of Baha'i-sponsored Chairs at the Universities of Maryland in the United States and Indore in India in 1990. The UK-based ABS affiliate for English Speaking Europe produces the *Baha'i Studies Review* (from 1990). BWNS 1994-5: 89-95, 321-4.

Independent.

At the same time there has been a renewed interest in the more focused academic study of the Babi and Baha'i religions. Although most of those involved in this movement have been Baha'is or former Baha'is they have sought to employ the tools of modern critical scholarship to advance understanding for its own sake rather than to promote particular faith positions. This approach has sometimes engendered tensions with more traditional Baha'is. Instances of this approach include several series of academic seminars on Baha'i Studies in Britain and the United States, including at the University of Lancaster in England (1977-1980) and at the American Academy of Religion (from 1984) and Middle East Studies Association (from c. 1992); Moojan Momen's collection of source materials, *The Babi and Baha'i Religions* (MBBR, 1981); new translations of works by Mirza Abu'l-Fadl (1981, 1985); the Kalimat Press series *Studies in Babi and Baha'i History* (from 1982); the scholarly journal *Baha'i Studies Bulletin* (from 1982); the George Ronald series *Baha'i Studies* (from 1996); the internet discussion forum H-Bahai (from 1997; one of the H-Net humanities list sites); and a flurry of doctoral and other dissertations on Baha'i-related topics from the mid-1970s onwards (Collins, *Bibliography*, 303-10), some of which have since found their way into print (Amanat [ARR], MacEoin [McS], Smith [SBBR]). For a review of English-language sources up to 1985 see SBBR 225-38.

From 'Ulama.

'Abdu'l-Baha's ideal.

In his anonymously published *Secret of Divine Civilization* (1875) 'Abdu'l-Baha held that the truly spiritually learned were 'lamps of guidance among the nations' and a sanctuary for the distressed. Such individuals would be recognized by their SPIRITUAL QUALITIES, intellectual power and enlightened knowledge. They should seek to acquire the perfections of spiritual and material perfection; defend Islam; oppose their own passions; and obey the divine commandments. Only then would they be worthy of emulation (*taqlid*). Their learning should encompass not only the fundamentals of religion and holy law but also the scriptures of other religions, political science, history and the natural sciences. As to the attributes of perfection, these included 'learning and the cultural attainments of the mind'; justice and selfless impartiality; and dedication to community education. Clerical status of itself was number proof of knowledge and moral continence (SDC 34-40, 59). See also 'LEARNED'.
