



What are Bahá'í Studies?

A good starting point to begin to understand what are Bahá'í Studies is provided in the following statement written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi in 1943:

The Cause needs more Bahá'í scholars, people who not only are devoted to it and believe in it and are anxious to tell others about it, but also who have a deep grasp of the Teachings and their significance, and who can correlate its beliefs with the current thoughts and problems of the people of the world.
(*Compilation* 3:231)

This statement describes five prerequisites for a Bahá'í scholar:

1. to believe in the Cause;
2. to be devoted to the Cause;
3. to be anxious to tell others about the Cause;
4. to have a deep grasp of the Teachings and their significance;
5. to be able to correlate the beliefs of the Cause with the current thoughts and problems of the people of the world.

To believe in the Cause

This first prerequisite sounds amazing for a Western-minded person. Shoghi Effendi tells me that if I want to become a Bahá'í scholar, I need first to believe in the Bahá'í Faith. This statement is precisely the opposite of what Western scholars use to say about religious studies. They use to “support the viewpoint of methodological agnosticism.”¹ They also use to say “that it is unscientific to believe in God.”² The Universal House of Justice explained: “Undoubtedly the fact that Bahá'í scholars...

Notes of a talk delivered during a meeting of the Association francophone européenne d'études bahá'íes, in Paris, on 7 December 2003.

¹ Letter on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, 3 January 1979, *Messages* 389.

² Letter on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, 6 December 1975, *Compilation* 3:247.

believe in the Faith that they are studying will be a grave flaw in the eyes of many non-Bahá'í academics, whose own dogmatic materialism passes without comment because it is fashionable; but this difficulty is one that Bahá'í scholars share with their fellow believers in many fields of human endeavour.”³ And this is the point. Borrowing the words of a versatile Bahá'í scholar, Moojan Momen: “thought can never occur in an ideational vacuum. All human thought and activity is grounded in values. One cannot begin to think about a question without having a starting point for one’s thought and a certain direction or pathway to follow in the process of thinking” (“General Conclusions” 15). Thus, as an aspirant scholar, I should make a decision: do I want to study the Bahá'í Faith on the ground of the materialistic conception of the nature of reality which is rampant in the Western world, or do I want to do it on the ground of the spiritual conception of the nature of reality taught by the Bahá'í Faith? Shoghi Effendi tells me that I will be a Bahá'í scholar only if I have accepted the spiritual conception of the nature of reality taught by the Bahá'í Faith. Otherwise, I will be a Western scholar.

There are many possible reasons why Shoghi Effendi listed the prerequisite of believing in the Cause as the first for a Bahá'í scholar. In my opinion, the most important is intellectual honesty. If I am a Bahá'í, how can I honestly decide to write about my Faith as if I looked upon it “from the norm of humanism or materialism,”⁴ which I do not accept, which I hope may become soon obsolete because I witness with my own eyes, within myself and in the world around me, its painful results? How can I honestly think, for example, that “academic objectivity” requires “taking no account of the spiritual forces which” as a Bahá'í, I see at the “foundation”⁵ of any religion? How can I honestly think that religion is “the product solely of human striving after truth” and not “the fruit of the creative Word of God which, with divine power, transforms human thought and action”?⁶ As the Universal House of Justice explained: “In scientific investigation when searching after the facts of any matter, a Bahá'í must, of course, be entirely open-minded, but in his interpretation of the facts and his evaluation of evidence we do not see by what logic he can ignore the

³ Letter on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, 3 January 1979, *Messages* 390.

⁴ Letter on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, 4 October 1994, *Compilation* 3:261.

⁵ Letter on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, 4 October 1994, *Compilation* 3:261.

⁶ Letter on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, 3 January 1979, *Messages* 389.

truth of the Bahá'í Revelation which he has already accepted; to do so would, we feel, be both hypocritical and unscholarly.”⁷

Another possible reason why Shoghi Effendi listed the prerequisite of believing in the Cause as the first for a Bahá'í scholar is that if I have accepted Bahá'u'lláh as the Manifestation of God for this age, I believe in the power of His words “to effect a transformation in the whole character of mankind, a transformation that shall manifest itself both outwardly and inwardly, that shall affect both its inner life and external conditions” (Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-Íqán* 40-1). Thus, if I want my scholarship to be an instrument to promote this transformation, I will also want to postpone my “feeble brain” to His “divine, universal mind” because I well remember the words by the Persian poet Ḥakím Saná'í (d. 1141) quoted by Bahá'u'lláh in the *Four Valleys*:

How can feeble reason encompass the Qur'án,
Or the spider snare a phoenix in his web?
Wouldst thou that the mind should not entrap thee?
Teach it the science of the love of God! (*Seven Valleys* 52)

To be devoted to the Cause

Thus, we come to the second prerequisite for a Bahá'í scholar listed by Shoghi Effendi: to be devoted to the Cause. If I want to be a Bahá'í scholar, it is not sufficient to believe in the Cause. I also need to be devoted to it. Only if I am devoted to the Cause will I be ready to go through those “intellectual tests” which, as Shoghi Effendi wrote in his first letter to the Western believers after the passing of the Master, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá Himself will “send” me “to purify” me “and make” me “brighter than before” (*Bahá'í Administration* 16-7). Moreover, the Universal House of Justice warned the Bahá'í scholars against these tests, defining them in their specific case as “the temptations of intellectual pride,” which in the past has made ancient scholars “over-anxious to encompass the Divine Message within the framework of their limited understanding, to define doctrines where definition was beyond their power, to explain mysteries which only the wisdom and experience of a later age would make comprehensible, to argue that something was true because it appeared desirable and

⁷ Letter on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, 3 January 1979, *Messages* 390.

necessary.”⁸ I will be ready to accept the pain of having these veils “be burned away at the fire of love” only if having found “a trace of the traceless friend” and inhaled “the fragrance of the long-lost Joseph from the heavenly messenger” I have stepped into the Valley of Love (Bahá’u’lláh, *Seven Valleys* 11, 9-10).

Once more, this prerequisite goes against the Western idea of scholarship: “emotion and intuition are not constituent of proof – that is... proof must carefully exclude appeals to intuition, to faith, to feeling; it must rest solely on objective fact” (“Interchange” 16). Of course, this is a challenge for Bahá’í scholars. The Universal House of Justice warns them in this regard:

The sundering of science and religion is but one example of the tendency of the human mind (which is necessarily limited in its capacity) to concentrate on one virtue, one aspect of truth, one goal, to the exclusion of others. This leads, in extreme cases, to fanaticism and the utter distortion of truth, and in all cases to some degree of imbalance and inaccuracy. A scholar who is imbued with an understanding of the broad teachings of the Faith will always remember that being a scholar does not exempt him from the primal duties and purposes for which all human beings are created. All men, not scholars alone, are exhorted to seek out and uphold the truth, no matter how uncomfortable it may be. But they are also exhorted to be wise in their utterance, to be tolerant of the views of others, to be courteous in their behaviour and speech, not to sow the seeds of doubt in faithful hearts, to look at the good rather than at the bad, to avoid conflict and contention, to be reverent, to be faithful to the Covenant of God, to promote His Faith and safeguard its honour, and to educate their fellowmen, giving milk to babes and meat to those who are stronger.⁹

If I am really devoted to the Cause, I will find my own balance and manage to avoid the two pitfalls described by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, when He said: “Should a man try to fly with the wing of religion alone he would quickly fall into the quagmire of superstition, whilst on the other hand, with the wing of science alone he would also make

⁸ Letter on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, 23 March 1983, *Compilation* 3:255, 254.

⁹ Letter on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, 3 January 1979, *Messages* 390-1.

no progress, but fall into the despairing slough of materialism” (*Paris Talks* 143). In other words I will learn not to “fall into the despairing slough of materialism,” avoiding to blindly follow the footsteps of the modern humanistic scholars. At the same time, I will make good use of my capacity for understanding and will do my utmost effort not to become superstitious and fanatic in my faith.

To be anxious to tell others about the Cause

This prerequisite is essential because it gives me the best motivation for my Bahá’í aspirant scholarship: to spread the Bahá’í message. This is a wholly unselfish motivation. It is a motivation grounded on one’s love of God, His Manifestation, and humankind. Bahá’u’lláh explained very clearly that

Knowledge is of two kinds: Divine and Satanic. The one welleteth out from the fountain of divine inspiration; the other is but a reflection of vain and obscure thoughts. The source of the former is God Himself; the motive-force of the latter the whisperings of selfish desire. The one is guided by the principle: “Fear ye God; God will teach you;”[Koran 2:282] the other is but a confirmation of the truth: “Knowledge is the most grievous veil between man and his Creator.” The former bringeth forth the fruit of patience, of longing desire, of true understanding, and love; whilst the latter can yield naught but arrogance, vainglory and conceit. (*Kitáb-i-Íqán* 69-70)

This is an excellent protection both for Bahá’í scholars as well as for the Cause. We cannot forget the harmful results of the studies of ancient religious scholars. The pure river of the Religion of God was polluted by their misunderstandings of the meanings of the divine Words. Thus, the light of faith was changed into the darkness of superstition. The “whisperings of selfish desire” moved ancient scholars to promote their interests rather than the interests of their fellow human beings. This kind of scholarship has no place in the Bahá’í Faith. We are lucky. Bahá’u’lláh has protected us from these flaws.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá writes that humankind “‘has entered its long-predicted phase of maturity, the evidences of which are everywhere apparent...” (in Shoghi Effendi, *World Order* 165). And Shoghi Effendi explains: “The Revelation entrusted by the Almighty Ordainer to Bahá’u’lláh... has been endowed with such potentialities as

are commensurate with the maturity of the human race—the crowning and most momentous stage in its evolution from infancy to manhood” (*World Order* 166). The first result of the maturity of humankind is: “Unification of the whole of mankind... the hall-mark of the stage which human society is now approaching” (Shoghi Effendi, *World Order* 202). However, there are also other important results. First, humankind has a really authentic Scripture for the first time in history. The authenticity of Bahá’í Scripture is scientific. We are sure that the Manifestation of God has revealed those words. Moreover, we do not accept as Bahá’í Scripture any writing on whose scientific authenticity we have doubts. Second, for the first time in history, a Manifestation of God has incontrovertibly appointed a successor, a person whom He has appointed as the Centre of His Covenant with His followers, “the perfect Exemplar of His teachings, the unerring Interpreter of His Word” (Shoghi Effendi, *World Order* 134). Moreover, in His turn, this Successor has incontrovertibly appointed His Own successor, “the Guardian of the Cause of God.” He wrote that the Guardian was “the Interpreter of the Word of God” and that he was “under the care and protection of the Abhá Beauty, under the shelter and unerring guidance of the Exalted One” (*Will* 11). Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi have assured the Bahá’ís that the Universal House of Justice will “infallibly” guide the Bahá’í community towards the fulfilment of its high destinies. Last, Bahá’u’lláh has clearly stated that no personal interpretation of His writings has any authority. “Whoso interpreteth what hath been sent down from the heaven of Revelation, and altereth its evident meaning, he, verily, is of them that have perverted the Sublime Word of God, and is of the lost ones in the Lucid Book” (*Kitáb-i-Aqdas* ¶105). Thus, this age has been defined by Bahá’u’lláh as “the Day which shall not be followed by night” (in Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 245). On this solid ground the Bahá’ís may feel free to proceed in their “independent investigation of truth,” which is the first principle of the Bahá’í Faith, “for blind imitation of the past will stunt the mind” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections* 248). This is the starting point of all Bahá’í Studies, which, in my opinion, are an indispensable element of any Bahá’í life. Bahá’u’lláh writes: “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” (*Kitáb-i-Aqdas* ¶ 182). This is the beginning of Bahá’í Studies.

However, as important and acceptable as this prerequisite may be, I cannot forget that this prerequisite also seems to go against the Western idea of scholarship.

A Bahá'í scholar devoted to the promotion of the Bahá'í message could be seen in the Western world as an ideological activist. But a perusal of the Bahá'í Scriptures on the teaching issue will help me clarify this point. Bahá'í Scriptures suggest that teaching a religion is not the same as the indoctrination promoted by an ideology aiming at conquering the world. It is instead a commitment to promoting spirituality, that is, to “aiding the world of humanity to acquire spiritual joy and fragrance,” to leading human beings “to divine instruction, to heavenly advice and teachings” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Tablets* 2:391), without seeing in oneself “any superiority” whatsoever (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections* 30). This mutual encouragement to spirituality—intended as the capacity to manifest the divine virtues through one’s feelings, words and actions—should be the foundation of all human relations. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is reported to have said to a small group of Bahá'ís: “Man must always associate with those from whom he can get light, or be with those to whom he can give light. He must either receive or give instructions. Otherwise, being with people without these two intentions, he is spending his time for nothing, and, by so doing, he is neither gaining nor causing others to gain” (Thompson 50). Therefore, teaching one’s faith does not mean indoctrinating one’s fellow people but a mutual encouragement to spirituality, primarily through a behaviour worthy of the high spiritual teachings of one’s religion. To devote one’s studies to this high purpose cannot undoubtedly be of any prejudice to their scientific soundness.

To have a profound grasp of the Teachings and their significance

How shall I obtain a profound grasp of the Teachings and their significance? Of course, I must study the Bahá'í Scriptures. First of all, I must reflect on the meaning of those Scriptures. They are the written transcription of the words of the “Day-Star of Knowledge” (Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets* 205), the “Well-Beloved of all worlds” (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 31). They are the most precious thing I have in my life. They are the source of my well-being. They are “the living waters of the utterance of the All-Merciful” (Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle* 65), through which my heart may be purified and cleansed by any acquired learning which does not conform to those words. I must study them “in the spirit of search, not in blind imitation” (Bahá'u'lláh, *Seven Valleys* 24). However, this does not mean that I should defy their authority, but only that I should defy human authorities. In my specific case, born and grown up as I am in the materialistic milieu of the Western world, it means that I should “Weigh not

the Book of God with such standards and sciences as are current... [in the world], for the Book itself is the unerring Balance established amongst men” (Bahá’u’lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* ¶ 99). If I want to be a Bahá’í scholar, I must accept that “the whole theory of Divine Revelation rests on the infallibility of the Prophet, be He Christ, Muḥammad, Bahá’u’lláh, or one of the others. If they are not infallible, They are not Divine, and thus lose that essential link with God, which, we believe, is the bond that educates men and causes all human progress.”¹⁰ Otherwise, I will be a Western scholar, not a Bahá’í scholar.

If I accept to be wholly exposed to His Words, I will witness wonderful results in my own self, because, as the Báb wrote, “There is no paradise more wondrous for any soul than to be exposed to God’s Manifestation in His Day, to hear His verses and believe in them, to attain His presence, which is naught but the presence of God, to sail upon the sea of the heavenly kingdom of His good-pleasure, and to partake of the choice fruits of the paradise of His divine Oneness” (77). In this case, I will gradually obtain a special knowledge. It is an experiential knowledge of the spiritual reality of things, and thus, it could be defined as spiritual or inner knowledge or gnosis (*‘irfán*). Bahá’u’lláh describes it in His so-called “Tablet of the True Seeker,” in the Valleys of Knowledge and of Unity of the *Seven Valleys*, in the second and the fourth of the *Four Valleys*, and several passages of *Javáhiru’l-Asrár*.

This spiritual or inner knowledge implies four fundamental achievements. First, it means a deeper and deeper awareness of the fact that “all things are involved in all things” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation* 349) and that “the phenomena of the universe find realisation through the one power animating and dominating all things, and all things are but manifestations of its energy and bounty” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation* 286). A growing awareness of this “intrinsic oneness of all phenomena” is essential to each individual’s spiritual journey since Bahá’u’lláh Himself describes it as a fundamental element of the spiritual journey He describes in the *Seven Valleys*. It is a goal to be pursued in the inner level (search, studies, prayer, meditation) and the outer level (work, community life, administrative service). Second, experiential knowledge creates a deeper awareness of the ephemerality of the self in front of God, a condition which Bahá’u’lláh describes in the Valley of True Poverty and Absolute Nothingness. Third, this knowledge also implies the awareness that “all the Prophets

¹⁰ Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 11 January 1942, *Lights of Guidance* 477.

and the Messengers of God . . . [are] as one soul and one body, as one light and one spirit” (Bahá’u’lláh, *Gems of Divine Mysteries* ¶ 44). The awareness of this concept is essential because it is the prerequisite for the abolition of the existing conflict among religions, which is why most Western people do not rely on religions as remedies for the present problems of humankind. Fourth, this knowledge finally implies an inner urge to act according to the principles of “divine philosophy,” which are the kernel of morality.

As this spiritual knowledge begins to enlighten my heart, I will also obtain a growing capacity to manifest spiritual love towards all creation, as well as an increasing capacity to create fruits of harmony, love, unity, and peace—a capacity so important that spirituality also is defined as “love in action” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in “Join the Army of Peace” 112). It is “spiritual progress,” of which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says: “Spiritual progress is through the breaths of the Holy Spirit and is the awakening of the conscious soul of man to perceive the reality of Divinity” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation* 142).

Therefore, I think that when Shoghi Effendi says that if I want to be a Bahá’í scholar, I must achieve “a deep grasp of the Teachings and their significance,” he does not want to say that I must have a deep intellectual knowledge of the Teachings, but also that I should strive towards this kind of inner knowledge, which is so important in its practical aspects.

To be able to correlate the beliefs of the Cause with the current thoughts and problems of the people of the world

Achieving a good understanding of Bahá’í Scripture is a significant step. However, still, it is not enough. Scriptures are revealed “to effect a transformation in the whole character of mankind, a transformation that shall manifest itself both outwardly and inwardly, that shall affect both its inner life and external conditions” (Bahá’u’lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán* 40-1). Thus, we come to a critical point of Bahá’í Studies: discovering how the Bahá’í Teachings are relevant to the current problems of the people of the world. This effort requires that I must broaden the scope of my studies. I must not read and study only the Bahá’í Scriptures or the writings of Bahá’í scholars. I must also obtain “a firm foundation of scientific and literary training,”¹¹ “make detailed

¹¹ Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 28 November 1926, *Compilation* 3:240.

inquiry into the various branches of contemporary learning—arts and sciences alike—and... concentrate... [my] attention on serving the general interests of the people,”¹² “move towards the front ranks of the professions, trades, arts and crafts which are necessary to the further progress of humankind,” so that I may “ensure that the spirit of the Cause will cast its illumination on all these important areas of human endeavour... [and] guarantee the transmittal to the future of those skills which will preserve the marvellous, indispensable achievements of the past” (Universal House of Justice, *Lights of Guidance* 638). And thus the whole scope of human learning opens up in front of me because what Shoghi Effendi wants me “to do is to study more, not to study less. The more general knowledge, scientific and otherwise... [I] possess, the better.”¹³ Alessandro Bausani (1921-1988), who was one of the earliest Western Bahá’í scholars, wrote in the 1950s:

It is important... for a Bahá’í... besides studying the writings of the Faith in the first place, to deepen in parallel in some other human discipline of his choice... Studying only human disciplines without taking care of the holy writings yields no fruit, but also concentrating only on the holy writings while ignoring their resonance with the modern world leads to stagnation. In truth, the first Bahá’í principle, that of search after Truth, which seems fulfilled through the discovery of the Faith, providentially continues in searching how religious Truth... may be adapted to the scientific, cultural, political, and social conditions of the present world. This “search” is always open. (1)

No field of human endeavour is out of the interests of an aspirant Bahá’í scholar. In this regard, Momen wrote: “Whenever I have researched an area and read the non-Bahá’í literature and then come back to the Bahá’í literature, it has provided me with many insights into the Bahá’í material which I would not have gained by just studying purely the Bahá’í texts themselves” (“Bahá’í Scholarship” 53). In 1994, a whole issue of *The Bahá’í Studies Review*, a publication of the Association for Bahá’í Studies of English-Speaking Europe, was devoted to Bahá’í scholarship, and you may find there a good list of issues of scholarly interest for the Bahá’ís. For example, the

¹² Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 30 January 1926, *Compilation* 3:235.

¹³ Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 5 July 1947, *Compilation* 3:249-50.

Bahá'í scholar Stephen Lambden suggests religious studies, Islamic studies, Bahá'í dimensions of spirituality, the humanities and non-religious ideologies, as well as Bahá'í philosophy of law, Bahá'í ethical philosophy, etc. (66-27).

Functions of Bahá'í Studies

The Universal House of Justice has identified four essential functions of Bahá'í Studies. It has listed them in a compilation on “Scholarship” that it sent to selected National Spiritual Assemblies in 1995. These functions are:

1. Promotion of human welfare;
2. Defense of the Faith;
3. Expansion and consolidation of the Bahá'í Community;
4. Contribution to scholarly development.

Promotion of human welfare

This function of Bahá'í Studies is the direct consequence of a critical Bahá'í belief, that is, that “even the minutest details of civilised life derive from the grace of the Prophets of God” and that nothing “of value to mankind has ever come into being which was not first set forth either directly or by implication in the Holy Scriptures.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Secret* 96) Thus, since I believe that Bahá’u’lláh is the Manifestation of God of this age, I also believe that His revelation is humankind’s most important source of knowledge. If I study His teachings and contribute to a deeper understanding of their implications, I will surely put at the disposal of my fellow beings an important source of knowledge for the good of all humankind.

Defense of the Faith

Any new idea must struggle to find its way in the world. So much so, the new ideas brought by the new Manifestation of God, which are “iconoclastic... uprooting error, destroying false religious beliefs” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation* 154). Although the Universal House of Justice has informed the Bahá'í World in Ridván 1992 that “[i]n learned circles, in reference works and in the media, the Faith is increasingly being referred to as a ‘principal’ or ‘major’ world religion” (*Compilation* 3:238), yet, if we

want “the divine remedy given by Bahá’u’lláh”¹⁴ may be applied to solve the manifold problems of the world, we must bend every effort so that the “veil of misconceptions that is [still] prejudicing the mind of... [several] scholars in the western world”¹⁵ may be increasingly removed and “the image of the Faith... [may] become, gradually but constantly, nearer to its true character.”¹⁶

Expansion and consolidation of the Bahá’í Community

Bahá’í Studies are very important for the expansion of the Bahá’í Community in Europe, whose “people are so sceptical about religion and look with so much contempt towards religious organisations and movements.”¹⁷ They are also crucial for consolidating the Bahá’í communities, some of which are “not yet broadly diverse or accustomed to dealing with all ranks of society.”¹⁸

Contribution to scholarly development

The Universal House of Justice explains in this regard:

As the Bahá’í community grows it will acquire experts in numerous fields—both by Bahá’ís becoming experts and by experts becoming Bahá’ís. As these experts bring their knowledge and skill to the service of the community and, even more, as they transform their various disciplines by bringing to bear upon them the light of the Divine Teachings, problem after problem now disrupting society will be answered.¹⁹

The Universal House of Justice, for example, wrote to a psychologist: “Psychology is still a very young and inexact science, and as the years go by Bahá’í psychologists, who know from the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh the true pattern of human life, will be able to make great strides in the development of this science, and will help profoundly in the alleviation of human suffering” (*Messages* 111-2). This is only

¹⁴ On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 9 December 1931, *Compilation* 2:191.

¹⁵ On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 11 March 1929, *Compilation* 3:239.

¹⁶ The Universal House of Justice, Ridván 1984, *Compilation* 2:263.

¹⁷ On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 5 May 1934, *Compilation* 3:240.

¹⁸ On behalf of the Universal House of Justice, 18 April 1989, *Compilation* 3:244.

¹⁹ On behalf of the Universal House of Justice, 21 August 1977, *Compilation* 3:243.

an example. Bahá'í Studies have a lot to contribute to the development of human learning, especially in this old European continent, which is today sunk in materialism, whose dogmas are as unquestioningly accepted as once religious dogmas were upheld.

A conclusion

In 1993, these encouraging words were written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice:

The House of Justice wishes to avoid use of the terms “Bahá'í scholarship” and “Bahá'í scholars” in an exclusive sense, which would effectively establish a demarcation between those admitted into this category and those denied entrance to it. It is clear that such terms are relative, and that what is a worthy scholarly endeavour by a Bahá'í, when compared to the activities of those with whom he is in contact, may well be regarded as of vastly lesser significance when measured against the accomplishments of the outstanding scholars which the Faith has produced. The House of Justice seeks the creation of a Bahá'í community in which the members encourage each other, where there is respect for accomplishment, and a common realisation that every one is, in his or her own way, seeking to acquire a deeper understanding of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh and to contribute to the advancement of the Faith. (*Compilation* 3:233)

These words mean that Bahá'í Studies are open to each of us. As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said: “Knowledge is love. Study, listen to exhortations, think, try to understand the wisdom and greatness of God. The soil must be fertilised before the seed can be sown” (qtd in Kirkpatrick 314).

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