

APPENDIX TWO

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12 October 1979

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Universal House of Justice
P.O. Box 155
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Dear Baha'i Friends,

The participants at the second Cambridge Bahá'í Studies Seminar on Methodology and Ethics, held on 15-15 September 1979 have asked me to write to you expressing their gratitude for your response to the report of last year's seminar and also raising with you a number of problems that arose out of the discussion of this year:

- 1) In the letter from the Department of the Secretariat dated 3 January 1979, which accompanied the Research Department's comments on last year's seminar report, there is a statement to the effect that the policy has been established not to require review for doctoral theses unless 'there is a proposal to publish them in larger quantities than is required by the examining body.' It was pointed out that through such institutions as University Microfilms and the Inter-Library Loan System, it was common for Ph.D. candidates to sign a statement allowing copies of their theses to be reproduced for the use of other scholars working in similar fields. Although it is theoretically possible to restrict circulation of one's thesis, this is usually only done for exceptional reasons, and in the case of the University of London, for example, the candidate can only apply to have this done for a period which does not normally exceed five years, after which the thesis becomes freely available. All of this, of course, represents publication of the thesis in 'larger quantities than is required by the examining body', although the method used is just photographic reproduction and does not involve printing the thesis. If this sort of 'publication' would then require the work to be reviewed, this might create some difficulties for Ph.D. candidates in the presenting of their theses to their universities.
- 2) In the past, we have circulated photocopies of seminar papers, reports and other materials and even sent copies of these to the Universal House of Justice. However, the question was raised whether all material, whatever its format, should not be subject to review before being circulated among Bahá'ís. Such a necessity would, of course, be both awkward and time consuming.

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- 3) The question was once again raised concerning the review of scholarly works and how it can be possible for a work that is the result of several years' research including the reading of many texts that are not generally available to be reviewed by persons who have not done the work that the author has done on the book. It was proposed that a possible solution to this difficulty would be to divide Bahá'í books into two categories: firstly, those books which are to be regarded as official expressions of Bahá'í doctrine and views, and secondly, those works which are to be considered the personal opinion of the author. The first category would be reviewed with regard to both the correctness of the presentation of the Faith in the book and the protection of the Faith from attacks due to statements made in the book. The second category would be reviewed only with regard to the protection of the Faith (including, of course, where accurate presentation comes into protection). In this way, reviewers would be relieved of the well-nigh impossible task of judging the correctness of the opinions of a scholar who may have done years of work to reach these conclusions.
- 4) It was decided to ask concerning the level of authority of the comment of the Research Department especially in view of the fact that substantially the same comments were later reprinted in Bahá'í News under the heading 'A Message from the Universal House of Justice'. It was further felt that some clarification was needed regarding other material emanating from the World Centre under various departmental headings and whether Bahá'ís should regard these in the same way as they would regard material coming from the Universal House of Justice itself and under its own signature.
- 5) We would invite your comments on the controversy between Bahá'u'lláh and Azal (pp. 10-11 of the enclosed report) which is a specific example of one of the more difficult problems facing Bahá'í scholars.
- 6) It was felt by several participants that it would be very useful if the Universal House of Justice were to share with us a selection of quotations from the Bahá'í Writings on the subject of scholarship.

Yours in His Service,

Moojan Momen