

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

BAHÁ'Í WORLD CENTRE

Department of the Secretariat

July 18, 1979

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Dear Bahá'í Friend,

The Universal House of Justice has instructed us to acknowledge your very interesting letter of 20 April 1979 and to convey the following reply.

In its comments on the report of the Cambridge Bahá'í Studies Seminar the Research Department concentrated on what was felt to be the central problem affecting the whole range of Bahá'í studies, rather than commenting on specific points that had been raised, many of which seemed to be illusory or based on grossly inadequate data. The assertion, for example, that the Bahá'í world is experiencing "a crisis in terms of consolidation and teaching" and "a general air of stagnation", was an unwarranted generalization of particular localized conditions and widely at variance with the facts. The House of Justice feels that scholars should be aware that the Faith is still in its infancy, and that every stage in its growth can be considered critical. If they see faults in the administration of the community or in the development of its way of life they should, like any other believers, candidly present their views to the institutions concerned through the channels that our divinely created Order has provided.

The concern was expressed that many of the friends, holding that there is only one "correct" view of the history and teachings of the Faith, react critically to unfamiliar views. This has already been covered in statements made by the Universal House of Justice itself, for example that on pages 88-89 of "Wellspring of Guidance". As you point out in your letter, divine Revelation is infallible and proceeds from an all-encompassing knowledge of the Truth, but when individual Bahá'ís attempt to apply Sacred Texts to any specific problem or situation they do so using their own minds which are of limited understanding. Thus, just as people can differ from one another in their use of reason in making deductions from available evidence, so they can also differ in their understanding and application of a passage of divine Revelation. The Bahá'í principle of the harmony between science and religion requires, as you say, that a Bahá'í scholar must use **his intelligence** to arrive at a solution of a specific problem if there is an apparent conflict between a Sacred Text and other evidence; and also he must accept the fact that some problems may defy his comprehension.

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The House of Justice is certain that many problems will be much more easily resolved as Bahá'ís grow in their understanding of the nature and method of divine Revelation, freed from the preconceptions of the past. In relation to certain Tablets, for example, the Guardian has explained that Bahá'u'lláh was expressing Himself in the terminology, and according to the understanding, of the person to whom He was writing, or was using figures of speech or examples to convey a general principle. A study of the way in which the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá have commented on the Scriptures of previous dispensations can also be most illuminating.

By conveying the comments of the Research Department on the Cambridge Seminar the House of Justice did not intend to imply that there was only one valid methodology for Bahá'í historians to follow. It merely wished to alert Bahá'í scholars to the dangers that are inherent in the paths that some of them are following at the present time. Historical research is largely a matter of evaluating evidence and deducing probabilities. Historical evidence, moreover, is always fragmentary, and may also be accidentally erroneous or even intentionally fabricated. The House of Justice realizes that you are fully aware of this, but it stresses the point because it does not see how a Bahá'í historian can in all honesty claim to be a faithful believer on the one hand and, on the other, challenge in his writings the veracity and honour of the Central Figures of the Faith or of its Guardian.

The fact that the Faith, as the Guardian states, "enjoins upon its followers the primary duty of an unfettered search after truth", should reassure any aspiring Bahá'í historian that there can be no question of any requirement to distort history in the so-called "interests" of the Faith. On the contrary, the combination of profound faith and freedom of thought is one of the great strengths of the Bahá'í religion. It does, however, place a great responsibility upon Bahá'í historians to put forward their views and conclusions with moderation and due humility. In this connection one of the Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh states:

"Thou hast written that one of the friends hath composed a treatise. This was mentioned in the Holy Presence, and this is what was revealed in response: Great care should be exercised that whatever is written in these days doth not cause dissension, and invite the objection of the people. Whatever the friends of the One true God say in these days is listened to by the people of the world. It hath been revealed in the Lawḥ-i-Ḥikmat: 'The unbelievers have inclined their ears towards us in order to hear that which might enable them to cavil against God, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting.' Whatever is written should not transgress the bounds of tact and wisdom, and in the words used there should lie hid the property of milk, so that the children of the world may be nurtured therewith, and attain maturity. We have said in the past that one word hath the influence of spring and causeth hearts to become fresh and verdant, while another is like unto blight which causeth the blossoms and flowers to wither. God grant that authors among the friends will write in such a way as would be acceptable to fairminded souls, and not lead to cavilling by the people."

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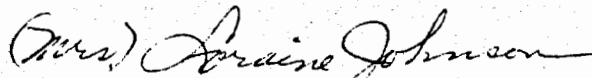
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The House of Justice agrees that it is most important for the believers, and especially those who hold positions of responsibility in the Administrative Order, to react calmly and with tolerant and enquiring minds to views which differ from their own, remembering that all Bahá'ís are but students of the Faith, ever striving to understand the Teachings more clearly and to apply them more faithfully, and none can claim to have a perfect understanding of this Revelation. At the same time all believers, and scholars in particular, should remember the many warnings in the Writings against the fomenting of discord among the friends. It is the duty of the institutions of the Faith to guard the community against such dangers. It was with this in mind that the Research Department urged upon Bahá'í scholars the need for moderation and kindness in their words, for it cannot be denied that some of the statements that have been made recently in the name of Bahá'í scholarship by certain individuals have betrayed an intemperance, and a lack of appreciation of many of the fundamental teachings of the Faith, that would understandably arouse alarm in the breasts of the most tolerant of believers.

The House of Justice asks us to convey to you its loving appreciation of your services to the Faith and to assure you of its prayers in the Holy Shrines on your behalf.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,



For Department of the Secretariat

cc: The International Teaching Centre