

## 5 October 1993

With regard to the current policy of advance review, all Bahá'ís, whatever their professions, are challenged to reflect on the implications of our common struggle to achieve Bahá'u'lláh's purpose for the human race, including the use of our intellectual resources to gain deeper understanding of that Revelation and to apply its principles. In pursuing this course that has been set for it so explicitly and emphatically by its Founder, the Bahá'í community acts through the institutions that He has provided.

Scholarly endeavors are not an activity apart from this organic process, answering to standards and operating on authority outside it. The House of Justice believes that part of the difficulty that some Bahá'í academics are having with the question of prepublication review may arise from the fact that, in their scholarly work, such believers do not see themselves as full participants in this process, free to act with the spiritual autonomy they exercise in other aspects of their lives. What the Bahá'í community is engaged in bringing into visible expression is a new creation. In this, the Cause has urgent need of the unfettered and wholehearted assistance of its scholars. The House of Justice has sought to point out that, as in every other field of Bahá'í endeavor, there are certain conditions under which this assistance may be rendered, conditions implicit in the nature of the process and made explicit in the Divine Text.

These requirements are of course not reflected in the standards currently prevailing in Western academic institutions. Rather, both Bahá'í institutions and Bahá'í scholars are called on to exert a very great effort, of heart, mind, and will, in order to forge the new models of scholarly activity and guidance that Bahá'u'lláh's work requires. The House of Justice believes that you will serve the interests of the Faith best if you will direct your thoughts to this end. Merely to reiterate the conventions and requirements of systems which, whether academic, political, social, or economic, have been shown not to have adequate answers to the anarchy now engulfing human society, or any willingness to come to grips with the implications of their impotence, is of little practical help. We do a grave disservice to both ourselves and the Faith when we simply submit to the authority of academic practices that appeal for their claim of objectivity to theories which themselves are being increasingly called into question by major thinkers. While non-Bahá'í academics may slip carelessly into regarding the institutions founded by Bahá'u'lláh as simply another form of "religious establishment" and avoid serious examination of the truths of His Revelation in this fashion, it is clearly impossible for anyone who is a Bahá'í to follow them down this empty track.

The House of Justice is aware that the continuation of the policy of review can cast a shadow on the good name of the Faith in the eyes of certain non-Bahá'í academics. In an environment where publication is vital to advancement and recognition, any requirement that delays or inhibits this activity must be a matter of grave consideration, not only by the individual scholar but by the governing

institutions of the community that eagerly watch his rise and count anxiously on his effective assistance. But is that not precisely the kind of spiritual dilemma being faced by many Bahá'ís in their efforts to serve Bahá'u'lláh's purpose? On many occasions, in developing lands particularly, believers of capacity have had to forgo opportunities for promising political careers, careers whose value they could easily have justified on the basis of public service, because such a choice was not in conformity with Bahá'u'lláh's teaching and purpose. There are, likewise, many examples of believers who have had to set aside both a professional life and legitimate family concerns in order to pioneer in inhospitable regions of the globe.

It is apparent that the crisis of contemporary civilization is impelling thinkers in many lands to explore new scholarly methodologies capable of coming to grips with spiritual, moral, cultural, and social phenomena not hitherto encountered. No segment of humanity is so well equipped as the Bahá'í community to take a leading role in this effort. As a body of people who are being steadily freed by the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh from the "gravitational pull", so to speak, of the cultures in which their habits of mind have been formed, the community already has a unique approach to the exploration of reality. This approach needs to be sharply honed as an ever more effective instrument of social transformation. The devising of the new scholarly paradigm called for by this circumstance offers a priceless opportunity of service and achievement to those Bahá'ís who enjoy the dual gifts of spiritual faith and intellectual faculties trained in the best that contemporary society has to offer.

The Universal House of Justice can only invite Bahá'í scholars, as it invites all other believers, to respond to this historic challenge, in whatever way and to whatever extent each person considers possible. It is confident that, in Bahá'í scholarship as in all other areas of Bahá'í service, the essential resources will gradually be forthcoming and the required models of research and study will be refined through the process of consultation. It is this achievement, the House of Justice believes, that in the long run will best protect the reputation of the Cause from whatever immediate misunderstandings and criticisms it may encounter. Indeed it is greatly encouraged by the response that Bahá'í scholars in many fields are already making.

Written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, 5 October 1993, Issues Related to the Study of the Baha'i Faith