

Baha'i Context

Denis MacEoin

On first being shown Moojan Pomen's response to my article on Baha'i scholarship, I was delighted that he had taken the trouble to write it -- I had, after all, presented my original remarks solely with the object of initiating a wider discussion. Having already written at some length and, to some extent, had my say on several important issues, I was happy to let Moojan's rejoinder speak for itself and, perhaps, in due course, evoke further responses. But after finishing and reflecting on his comments, I found myself strangely disturbed, and in the time that has elapsed since then, I have not been able to shake off that initial sense of disturbance, until, in the end, I have felt compelled to put pen to paper again. It has saddened me very much that an old friend like Moojan has been so unfair in his evaluation and presentation of what I have written and that he has felt it necessary or desirable to use so many ad hominem arguments in the course of his response.

That, of course, is still pretty much on the personal level, and, had that been all, I think it would have been wisest to have let the matter rest there. After all, he does have the right to a few sharp words addressed in my direction after my fairly critical review of his recent book. But there is more to Moojan's response than personal attack on me and my motives. By rearranging and reworking the arguments in the way he has, and by misquoting and misrepresenting me on occasion, he has succeeded in turning what was a basically academic debate (controversial in tone though it may have been) into a matter of apologetics, much as earlier Baha'i writers such as Gulpaygani (in the Kashf al-Ghita') used all manner of tendentious ploys to repudiate Browne's views about the distortion of Babi history and doctrine by the Baha'is. Reading Moojan's response confirms a feeling I have had for some time, that he is not really concerned with academic scholarship, but with the promotion and defence of a fairly orthodox view of Baha'ism. Now, there is absolutely nothing wrong with that, so long as we are all aware that that is what is going on. There must be such writers in any religious tradition, and I have very high regard for Moojan's abilities as an orthodox scholar; he is, to my mind, a great deal more honest and accurate than many earlier writers in the same tradition, such as Israq Khavari, and is a very worthy successor in this country to Hasan Balyuzi, whom I also held in very high esteem.

Problems arise, however, when basically pietist scholars like Moojan, or those associated with the Canadian Association for Studies on the Baha'i Faith or World Order magazine, insist that they are involved in the same sort of scholarly activity as researchers in the wider world. Sometimes, of course, that is true, but very often it is not, and the results can frequently be misleading. It is because of this and because of the risk that it may add further to the confusion that exists in this area, that I feel compelled to reply to Moojan's response, at the risk of turning a simple discussion into a protracted controversy. I will readily admit, however, that at least one other factor impelling me to reply in this way is my realization that Moojan himself would prefer the whole issue to be dropped in case it disturbs too many people, whom he appears to feel it is his duty to protect. I do not, on the whole, respond well to hints of that kind.

I suppose my strongest reaction to Moojan's response (apart from the inevitable sense of personal injury from several of his remarks) was a feeling that, in a way, the whole thing confirmed just about everything I had written about the difficulties of generating valid scholarship within a Baha'i context. A number of passages indicate the level on which Moojan carries on his argument:

'... it matters not a whit for Baha'is in what way MacEoin or anyone else thinks Baha'u'llah's writings are different from what Western Baha'is believe as long as these Baha'is are satisfied that what is taught in the West accords with Shoghi Effendi's interpretations' (p.61).

'I fail to see any reason why Baha'i literature... should have any scholarly

value. The primary purpose of these publications is to be spiritually edifying....' (p.64).

'... I felt that his (MacEoin's) latest outpouring may have caused a good deal of dismay and distress to some Baha'is who may have read it and therefore felt that a firm rebuttal of many of the points in the article that were clearly distortions of the Baha'i Faith and its teachings was necessary' (p.65).

Now, I fully appreciate Moojan's concern as expressed in these and other passages and I am happy to accept that, within its proper context, such concern is proper and unavoidable. All I would venture to suggest is that the context of these statements is that of faith, not scholarship, but that what I was seeking to discuss was scholarship, not faith. Of course my views matter not at all to anyone committed to blindly accepting Shoghi Effendi's interpretations; of course Baha'i literature ought not primarily to be scholarly, any more than, as Moojan says (p.65), the Baha'i faith should be a club for scholars; and of course some of my views may cause distress in certain quarters and necessitate Moojan's timely intervention to keep the faithful on the straight and narrow. But what has any of this to do with the question of how scholarship can be carried on about Baha'ism and related topics (a) by non-adherents, (b) by adherents, or (c) by both groups together?

It is axiomatic that most religious literature should be 'spiritually edifying' (though what is axiomatic does not necessarily follow naturally, as the Baha'i example shows); but it is also, I would have thought, axiomatic that scholarly writing on the same subject be academically sound, that historical writing be empirically accurate, that theological discussion be philologically, textually, hermeneutically, and methodologically rigorous. It is obvious that my views may be wholly irrelevant to the true believer, but that does not mean they are irrelevant absolutely. There is a bigger world out here, in which most people do not subscribe to Shoghi Effendi's interpretation of anything, and the inhabitants of that world have every right to suggest alternative views of Baha'i scripture, history, or doctrine. Moojan is perfectly correct from the point of view of undeviating faith and 'protection'; but the debate is about scholarship.

This problem is evident in the very first paragraph of Moojan's reply, where he maintains that Steve Lambden's response 'covered much of the ground where Baha'is can, to some extent, agree with MacEoin' and goes on to say that he will now point out some issues 'over which... a Baha'i would disagree' (p.57). I am disturbed here by the phrases 'Baha'is can... agree' and 'a Baha'i would disagree'. What does this amount to but an assertion that there is a sort of party line on agreement and disagreement, that individuals, once committed to the true faith, cease to exercise any kind of independent thinking, that they must instead subscribe wholly and unreservedly to certain propositions established by Moojan and others? There is, I fear, reflected in this much of the orthodox Baha'i view that there ought to be a high level of agreement between believers on all issues: disagreement implies disunity, and disunity is the greatest of all sins. That, again, is a perfectly fair attitude from the point of view of faith (although the idea of unity at any price is, perhaps, ethically questionable), but, for the purposes of scholarship and even of meaningful dialogue, it is deleterious in the extreme. Even on the level of faith, however, I doubt whether it is an altogether healthy attitude, and I would think there are many Baha'i readers who would take issue with Moojan on this point. I shall return to a different facet of this problem later, in discussing the question of 'authenticity'.

I am, in general, not a little disturbed by Moojan's ill-disguised contempt for contemporary western scholarship, despite his numerous attempts to pretend that he is concerned with academic values. This underlying hostility is inadvertently but, I think, sharply revealed in a passage on page 59 in which he quotes from my original article:

'In criticising Kirza Abu'l-Padl Gulpaygani's work for not having "that pretence of rigour... and lack of obvious bias that is so essential in (modern Western) scholarship (p.58)", MacEoin does not seem to be aware that he is admitting that many modern Western scholars put a great deal of effort into creating an appearance of impartiality and scholarship which is in fact a veneer for deep biases within their work.'

It is instructive to refer back to my article to see what I actually wrote there: '... because they (the works of Baha'i scholars from Gulpaygani onwards)

lack even the pretence of rigour, of critical analysis, of open-mindedness, of balance and lack of obvious bias that is so essential in works of scholarship.' I do not wish to suggest that Moojan has deliberately misquoted me, but I do find it significant that he has done so in the way he has and that he has drawn from his misquotation the conclusions he presents. It is curious that he has not seen the significance of the word 'even', that he has left out those phrases ('critical analysis', 'open-mindedness', 'balance') that do not fit very well with the idea of 'pretence', and that he has sought to qualify 'scholarship' with 'modern Western', which I did not do. Moojan's own deep-seated fantasy that modern western scholars are all really engaged in maintaining a pretence of impartiality and open-mindedness has so taken hold of him that he does not even find it curious that I should 'admit' to such a thing.

In his first paragraph, Moojan also argues that, despite my assertions to the contrary, my paper 'appeared to be much more an emotional vindication of (my) decision to leave the Baha'i community than a useful contribution to the discussion of scholarship in a Baha'i context' (p.57). To be fair, I did not claim that my article was wholly free of any element of vindication, but expressed the belief that it did not represent 'in the main' an attempt to rationalize and justify my own loss of faith. I did, in fact, try to address this problem on page 65. I am willing to accept that there is more than an element of vindication in my article -- it would scarcely be human to expect otherwise. But I did attempt to avoid justificatory issues as far as possible, and I am disturbed that Moojan has failed to see that. My reasons for joining the Baha'i movement in the first place, for remaining in it for nearly fifteen years, and for leaving it in the end, are very complex and have much to do with my development on several levels as a person. Moojan himself argues, quite rightly, that 'most people become Baha'is and remain Baha'is not because of any intellectual analysis of the Baha'i teachings but because of what they experience as the reality of the religion' (p.61). In addition -- but this is bound to be more uncomfortable for Moojan to accept -- many people leave Baha'ism behind in the end also 'because of what they experience as the reality of the religion'. If joining and belonging can be justified in such terms, so, I fear, can leaving. I would even go so far as to say that, for some people, abandoning a religion such as Baha'ism can be an important and necessary step in their spiritual development.

Of course, I had intellectual problems as a Baha'i, but, as in the case of other ex-Baha'is of my acquaintance, these were not ultimately responsible for my decision to leave. When I wrote that I did not want to pen a vindication of that decision, I was being entirely honest, with my readers as much as with myself. To write such a vindication would require a wholly different approach and would involve much discussion of my own personal development from a teenager open to the appeal of Baha'i ideas and society through to an adult whose experience of life and of the Baha'i community compelled him in other directions. It seems significant to me that Moojan has failed to appreciate this very basic fact, particularly since he has known me personally for a very long time. It is possible -- and I stress this point -- to write objective explanations of Baha'ism which have nothing to do with purely personal responses to it as a religion. If such explanations should be critical, this may have nothing at all to do with personal feelings. In my article, I took great care to point out that the majority of my criticisms were ones I had already entertained as an active, believing Baha'i (albeit one with those doubts that are such an essential adjunct of faith). To seek to invalidate those same criticisms by asserting that they represent some sort of private vindication is somewhat shabby, and I hope no-one will be seriously misled by it.

It is certainly not helpful in a discussion of this sort to refer to me, even if only indirectly, as an 'apostate' (p.59). That Moojan thinks in such terms at all is somewhat disturbing and not a little revealing. The use of intemperate language of this kind is, of course, fairly common in Baha'i literature, particularly in the works of Shoghi Effendi, who hurls invective and abuse at all whom he regards as 'enemies of the cause', and Moojan is well within the conventions of this tradition when he employs such terms. Whatever else it may be, this is not the language of scholarship or informed debate.

I will admit that many of the points I make involve issues about which I feel strongly, and that they are often expressed in emotive language. Emotive, but not, I think, unconsidered. My adoption of a critical and forceful style is in part a natural and honest reflection of the strength of my feelings about certain issues, in part a deliberate attempt to stimulate controversy. Moojan, like the Haifa Research Department and so many other defenders of Baha'i orthodoxy, fights shy of anything that may 'cause alarm in the breasts of... believers'. He would rather I did not write on the subject at all; my ideas may cause distress in some quarters, which will necessitate a 'firm rebuttal' in order to calm those disquieted by unconventional views. God forbid that someone might be agitated enough to engage in some sort of independent search after truth. I can understand Moojan's concern and, to some extent, sympathize with it. But, to be frank, it worries me more than anything. None of us enjoys watching news reports about famine in Ethiopia or massacres in Assam, but it is extremely important that we do so. Some governments do not like public debate about sensitive issues, but politics would stagnate without it. And sometimes the issues are just too important to allow the sensitivities of a handful of civil servants or government ministers to prevent open and critical debate -- as is the case, for example, with the nuclear weapons and civil defence issues in this country. Moojan reminds me a little of Margaret Thatcher and Michael Heseltine, smoothly trying to reassure the public that they and their generals have everything under control and that, if war does break out, we should white-wash our windows and hide under the table. People need to be shaken, shocked out of complacency, disturbed by the realities of life. Can Moojan really deny that almost all Baha'i writing, speeches, and discussions are bland and uncontroversial to the point of sterility? Or has he lived so long in the cocoon of Baha'i values and standards that he has completely lost sight of what goes on outside. If a controversial style helps puncture complacency or disturb blandness, it can be no bad thing.

I cannot help feel that there is a large element of elitism in Moojan's attitude. He, of course, is privy to these difficult matters and can handle them. The mass of simple believers, on the other hand, must be protected from them, must be kept in blissful ignorance. Moojan does not, at the same time, seem to think it at all harmful for the same people to be exposed to the inanities, gross oversimplifications, and pious meanderings of any number of popular and influential Baha'i writers. These, no doubt, he sees as spiritually uplifting. But for whom? Not, surely, for himself -- I cannot imagine that he finds anything in them. For the simple masses, of course.

This underlying dread of controversy is clearly responsible for many of the attitudes expressed in Moojan's response and is, indeed, one of the most notable features of his literary work in general. It is particularly evident in his support of the view that 'the response that one elicits from such individuals as Counsellors depends a great deal on the occasion and manner in which controversial points are put to them rather than the points themselves' (p.64) and his insistence that 'if the unwise actions of the scholar threaten to disrupt the community and cause dismay, the Counsellors may well act in a manner that will seem to the scholar to represent a cutting off of a free exchange of thoughts and ideas' (ibid). It is interesting that these passages occur in the course of an attempt to defend Counsellors from the charge of authoritarianism, whereas the attitude of extreme deference expressed in them seems to me to provide a certain confirmation of that charge. It is significant that Moojan is ready to depict the words or actions of the scholar as potentially 'unwise', 'threatening', 'disrupting', and 'dismaying', whereas those of Counsellors are 'nurturing' or 'developing'. But what if -- as I have often known to be the case -- Counsellors or other members of the Baha'i hierarchy behave unwisely, what if they threaten deeper values, what if they dismay intelligent and sensitive individuals? It seems that, once the hierarchical perspective has been adopted, words and actions may be judged, not on their own merits, but in terms of the authority-source from which they originate. Scholars are, indeed, often unwise and do frequently cause dismay; but so, for that matter, do Hands, Counsellors, Board Members, NSA members, and so on. Merely to submit to the opinions or feelings of individuals because of the

formal positions they hold bolsters up precisely that kind of authoritarianism about which I have previously expressed misgivings.

Perhaps the matter would not be quite as serious if things were as black and white as Koojan suggests: hot-headed, inflammatory scholars (typified by apostates like myself) on the one hand, and wise, sensitive Hands or Counsellors or whatever on the other. But in my own experience and that of others with whom I have spoken over the years, the most worrying feature of such clashes as have occurred lies precisely in the fact that innocuous or even strictly orthodox remarks based on scripture can often evoke near-hysterical responses. I may have a personal penchant for controversy, but I am not so wholly lacking in tact or wisdom as Koojan appears to think (though I am lacking in subservience). In my later years as a Baha'i, I did, in fact, make genuine and considered efforts to tone down my writing and lecturing, and I know that a great many perfectly ordinary Baha'is responded positively to my views. It was all the more horrifying to me, then, that I was again and again attacked, not for having expressed obviously controversial or heretical views, but opinions backed up by scriptural authority or solid historical evidence which just happened to run counter to the views of certain privileged groups or individuals. I was never surprised when my consciously controversial opinions were refuted, but I was surprised and hurt when cautiously-expressed, thoughtful views were attacked with a breath-taking viciousness that left me stunned. Koojan sets much store by the fact that Counsellors 'possess no executive powers at all' (p.64), stressing the fact that 'their role is solely to advisory and exhortatory' (ibid). Counsellors and all the rest do not need executive powers to exercise authority. Does Koojan honestly imagine that real power rests solely with executive bodies, that human society is that simple? The ulama in Islam possess no executive powers, but I would not like to conclude from that that they possess no authority. Indeed, Islam, like Baha'ism, claims to be a religion without a priesthood; but it cannot be denied that it has a powerful spiritual hierarchy.

All of this is taking us a little away from the main topic, so let me return to Koojan's response. On page 57, Koojan first raises an argument which is to feature regularly in his discussion -- the view that I have 'a curious attachment to a rather outdated idea of objectivity in scholarship'. He considers this point in detail on pages 58-59 where he attempts to criticize my 'naive faith in an outdated idea that scientific objectivity is attainable in a field such as the study of religion' (p. 58). I fear that here, as elsewhere, Koojan's preferred technique is to set up Aunt Sallys, which he van then proceed to knock down; but I cannot let him get away with this. I do not wish to undertake a further, prolonged discussion of scientific method and so on -- it would be preferable if readers returned to my original article to find out what I actually did say, rather than relying on what Koojan thinks I said. But it is important to point out that I have nowhere expressed a belief in the attainment of total objectivity, and that I do not, in fact, hold to such a belief. Perhaps Koojan should read again my remarks on page 55 of my article. I state there that 'there is such a thing as objective or absolute truth' (which, I notice, Koojan also states on page 61), but I then go on to describe the positivist outlook (which holds that such truth can be attained by men) as 'meaningless'. Some sentences later, I describe how 'our advancing theories are steps on an unending path towards an ultimately unattainable goal, approximations rather than final statements about the truth' (p.55). Following this, I quote Popper to the effect that 'science has nothing to do with the quest for certainty or probability or reliability. We are not interested in establishing scientific theories as secure, or certain, or probable' (ibid). I later quote him again as saying that objective truth is 'the standard which we may fall short of' (ibid). My own attitude is, I think, well summed up some pages earlier in the statement that 'the scientist (or sociologist or linguist or historian) must proceed by methods that are rational, critical, open to criticism, universal, and as free from subjective bias as it is possible to render them' (p.53). It is perverse of Koojan to conclude from such a discussion that I cling to an 'outdated' belief that 'scientific objectivity is attainable', when I have just stated exactly the opposite. I have, indeed, to ask whether he has actually read or read carefully the relevant sections of my article. And I wonder if he has ever read any Popper.

I suspect, however, that it matters very little to Koojan what I really think and what I actually say. It is evident from several passages in the present

refutation that he is determined to demonstrate that I am somehow uninformed of modern developments, even in my own field: 'in his approach to the study of the Baha'i Faith, I feel Mackoin is out of touch with much of modern scholarship' (p.60). Apart from the rather insulting quality of such remarks directed by an amateur to someone working full-time in the area, I feel that they are very wide of the mark and, in fact, indicate further Koojan's own inability to grasp the nature of contemporary debate in this field.

The basic problem in Koojan's arguments on page 60f and his use of Cantwell Smith to bolster his position lies, I think, in a failure to distinguish between the areas of empirical investigation and the discussion of faith-related matters. Perhaps Koojan has not yet read Smith's classic study, The Meaning and End of Religion, a work which I would recommend to him most highly. There, Smith distinguishes what he calls the 'cumulative tradition' from 'faith' and argues as follows: 'Men may differ as to the content of faith or as to its validity, but there is in principle little room for differing as to its overt manifestations across the centuries in their resplendent or grotesque variety. The unobservable part of man's history, especially his religious history, may and indeed must be acknowledged an open question so far as scholarship is concerned. Meanwhile the observable part, including that of his religious history, is because of that very scholarship accessible to open scrutiny' (p.155).

No scholar, however eirenicly inclined, will ever condone lack of rigour, bias, or obfuscation in the investigation of empirical facts about religion: what really happened in history, what texts actually state, what social factors are at work. Disagreement there will be, of course, but there will be mutual respect between disputants so long as all are willing to abide by what one might describe as the 'rules' of academic research. And it is this that I was primarily concerned with in my article, in that I sought to identify what I consider to be obstacles in the way of such research within the Baha'i community. I do not suggest that there can ever be absolute agreement as to 'facts', and I certainly would not wish to imply that there could (or should) ever be agreement as to the interpretation even of mutually-agreed empirical data.

I am aware that one of Koojan's major concerns is to defend his faith from what he sees as 'hostile and unsympathetic' (p.59) analysis phrased in 'emotional and subjective' (p.65) language. Certainly, Baha'ism has in the past suffered greatly from largely unwarranted attacks from its Muslim and Christian opponents, and it is understandable that sensitivity has developed in this area. Koojan, I think, in common with quite a few other more orthodox Baha'is, sees my writing as falling within this category and seeks to erect defences against it, using methods similar to those employed in the refutation of polemical attacks. He is, of course, entitled to think and react in that way, but I would, at least, like to make one or two distinctions clear. Unlike Muslim, Christian or other polemicists, I did not start out unsympathetic to Baha'ism for ideological or other reasons. On the contrary, I was for a great many years an active and enthusiastic supporter of the movement, if anything more dedicated to its propagation and defence than even Koojan himself. In the end, however, academic research and increased experience took their toll and caused me to become disillusioned and -- yes -- 'hostile and unsympathetic'. But this does not place my work in the same category as that of anti-Baha'i polemicists, since it is based, not on a priori assumptions about the movement formulated from existing beliefs, but on close study and observation followed by careful analysis. Had I overcome initial biases of hostility to reach favourable conclusions about Baha'ism, no doubt Koojan would hold me up as a model of academic method. It is, I fear, merely because the biases I had to overcome were those of allegiance and the results I reached were, in many cases, unfavourable, that he finds cause for complaint.

In this, I feel that Koojan displays much of the selectivity to which I refer more than once in my article. Were I writing critically about, let us say, the Moonies or Scientologists or Jehovah's Witnesses, I doubt very much if he would find fault with either my style or my method. Why does Koojan not apply his eirenic principles to 'Abd al-Baha' when he calls the Protestants 'the most fanatical of all sects' (Makatiib vol.2 p.119) or makes vehement accusations against the Papacy (Some Answered Questions, ch.34); why does he not describe Baha' Allah as 'hostile and unsympathetic' when he refers to the Shi'is as 'the most wretched of sects' (Ma'ida-yi asmani vol.7 p.182) and their leaders as

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'false, cruel and cowardly' (quoted Promised Day is Come p.88); why does he not speak of the 'basic hostility to Islam' of Shoghi Effendi, who writes in the most extreme and abusive of language about the fate of that religion in the modern world (see, for example, ibid pp.93-98)?

To be frank, I see no reason why Baha'is or Baha'ism should be given preferential treatment in this respect. Simply because a movement claims to be a 'world religion' or whatever does not automatically entitle it to nothing but favourable comment. Baha'is do seem to want things very much their own way. They demand the right to preach their religion freely and widely, and to seek converts on as large a scale as possible. In the end, they aim to bring the whole world under their system. But should anyone attempt to present alternative versions of the movement or its aims to the public, in speech or writing, they often become hysterical and accuse their critics of 'bias', 'hostility', and so forth, being particular happy to appeal to western liberal notions of religious tolerance that are sometimes conspicuously absent in the Baha'i scriptures themselves. They may often be right. But the very act of making claims for a religion (especially claims based on the assumption that the existing order of society is defunct and must be replaced by a new system) must necessarily expose it and its adherents to criticism. The public has a right to hear all sides. It would be naive to imagine that all religions and all doctrines are somehow 'good' or 'beneficial', and it is disingenuous to argue that a hostile or cynical approach to a particular movement is a sign of hostility or cynicism towards religion itself. There is a difference that Moojan has yet to learn between deliberate and uncalled-for abuse and forceful language based on careful consideration of the facts. Critical accounts may be embarrassing, even damaging, to a given movement, but they may be of considerable benefit to society at large, whose well-being must be the scholar's primary concern. This principle is, I think, being more widely recognized since the advent of new religious movements like the Fonies and Scientists, whose activities are readily recognizable as harmful to society as a whole.

When he suggests that I should divert my intellectual talents into 'another field' (p.59), what Moojan is really saying is that I should either write pleasant things about Baha'ism (i.e. things with which he agrees or with which he is told to agree by those above him) or avoid making waves. This would, of course, be convenient and tidy from the orthodox point of view, but as a suggestion it has no place in a debate on the question of academic scholarship within the Baha'i context. What does Moojan really want to happen? That every time a scholar writes critical or demythologizing or otherwise awkward comment about Baha'ism, he should be persuaded to abandon the subject? Or perhaps anyone, not just a Baha'i, wanting to write about the religion, should be required to submit his work to a Baha'i reviewing committee. It seems to me that Moojan would like to restrict scholarship in this field to those who are willing to play by rules established by him. Even some seminars recently organized by him have been notable for the restrictions placed on those invited to attend. Such developments are decidedly a backward step for scholarship in this field. It was always the pious but genuine hope of earlier seminars in this country that we might encourage 'non-Baha'i' academics, whatever their opinions, to attend and to contribute, thereby expanding the range and quality of viewpoints expressed and exposing internally-acceptable views, which might not go observed, to useful criticism. Now, it seems, seminars are to remain closed to all but the faithful, or to be open, perhaps, to carefully-selected outsiders who can be relied on not to present opinions that could prove disturbing. These are excellent defensive tactics, but they are unlikely to reassure the academic world about the real intentions of Baha'i scholars.

To return to the question of my supposed ignorance of contemporary developments in scholarship, I would suggest that it is, in fact, Moojan himself who displays a curious lack of knowledge in his discussion of the development of Islamic studies (pp.59-60), where he draws a contrast between 'many 19th Century (sic) orientalist's towards Islam' (p.59) and modern scholars, whose 'references to Muhammad are courteous and respectful' (p.59). I fear Moojan is sadly ill-informed about what has happened in the modern period in this field. Modern scholarship has certainly become increasingly scientific and open-minded, and no

competent Islamicist today would dream of proceeding from the a priori assumptions of many of his nineteenth-century predecessors. But if Moojan imagines for a moment that this has made modern western writing on Islam acceptable to Muslims, he is seriously out of touch with the subject. He need only read Edward Said's Orientalism to see that many Muslims are, if anything, even more violently opposed to the work of contemporary 'orientalists' than that of earlier writers. These latter could often be dismissed as polemicists writing with a missionary or related intention, but modern writers employing the methods of contemporary scholarship are seen to be infinitely more dangerous to orthodoxy precisely because they have broken away from overt religious or cultural biases. Moojan may be correct in suggesting that the object of modern Islamicists 'is not to cast doubt on Muhammad's integrity or indeed upon his claims' (p.59), but the result of their work may, from the orthodox Muslim point of view, do just that. Here again, Moojan reveals that his true criteria are not integrity, accuracy, consistency, or whatever, but 'courtesy' and 'respect'. That is fine, but just how far does it take us? I would never deliberately set out to 'prove' to my students that Muhammad was a false prophet; but I would not, at the same time, conceal from them any doubts I might personally entertain about the nature of his claims. There has to be respect for honesty as well.

There are, indeed, obvious limits to how far a scholar can or ought to go in seeking to mollify the feelings of orthodox believers. I think Maxime Rodinson expresses this well in a passage that follows a somewhat critical description of the Qur'an in his life of Muhammad:

'May any Muslims who happen to read these lines forgive my plain speaking. For them the Koran is the book of Allah and I respect their faith. But I do not share it and I do not wish to fall back, as many orientalists have done, on equivocal phrases to disguise my real meaning. This may perhaps be of assistance in remaining on good terms with individuals and governments professing Islam; but I have no wish to deceive anyone. Muslims have every right not to read the book or to acquaint themselves with the ideas of a non-Muslim, but if they do do so, they must expect to find things put forward there which are blasphemous to them. It is evident that I do not believe that the Koran is the book of Allah. If I did I should be a Muslim. But the Koran is there, and since I, like many other non-Muslims, have interested myself in the study of it, I am naturally bound to express my views' (pp.217-18).

From this point of view, the passage quoted by Moojan from Cantwell Smith to the effect that 'anything I say about Islam as a living faith is valid only in so far as Muslims can say "Amen" to it' (quoted p.60) needs serious qualification. First of all, what is meant here by 'Muslims'? Are they orthodox Sunnis, liberal Sunnis, members of the Muslim Brotherhood, Ahmadis, orthodox Shi'is, Ismailis, Sufis, English converts, Black Muslims, Indonesians, Africans? Can we simultaneously obtain the approval of the western-educated Muslim scholar and the illiterate believer in a traditional society? And can we really put our own views so wholly at the mercy of the opinions of others?

Something of this difficulty has been expressed by Joachim Wach in another way: Is it not necessary to be a member of a religious community to understand its religious notions and customs? But what does it mean to be a "member"? Could it be seriously maintained that a great scholar belonging to Group A would be less capable of understanding the religion of Group B than any ignorant and humble person belonging to the latter?' (The Comparative Study of Religions p.10).

The same writer, indeed, condemns the kind of extreme indifference implied in the quotation from Smith: 'To me,' he says, 'there is something pathetic about the modern historian of religion who uses strong words only when he wants to convince us that he has no convictions.... Ernst Troeltsch has characterized an "unlimited relativism" by stating that a weakly constituted natural history has become identified with empathy (Nachfuehlung) for all other characters together with a relinquishing of empathy for oneself, with skepticism and playful intellectuality, or with oversophistication (Blasphemie) and a lack of faith. It could be asked if an open hostility is not more appropriate to the subject of religion than this noncommittal attitude' (ibid p.8). Significantly, in view of Moojan's earlier remarks, Wach continues thus: 'All this is not to say that the ideal of objectivity should be abandoned by those engaged in comparative studies' (ibid).

There is, however, a further dimension to this discussion, to which I wish to draw particular attention. This is that Moojan's attempt to portray me as a positivist is, in a sense, little more than a projection of his own positivism. I have already drawn attention, in my recent review in Religion of Moojan's Babi and Baha'i Religions, to his insistence on the 'inaccuracies' of early writers and their eventual replacement by 'accurate accounts' published by Baha'i communities in the West. This same attitude informs much of his refutation, where my views are described as 'distortions of the Baha'i Faith and its teachings' (p.65) or in his assumption, previously referred to, that there are definite matters about which Baha'is will agree or disagree. Far from my attempting to 'impose upon the Baha'i Faith' a perspective of my own, 'whether the facts fit or not' (p.57), it is Moojan himself who seeks to maintain an ideal image of Baha'ism, which he feels it to be his sacred duty to protect from misrepresentation. The actual circumstances of the Baha'i community are, for him, merely 'distortions and deviances from Baha'i teachings' (p.64), which will, in the end, be eliminated and replaced by the 'true' practice, based on scriptural ideals. It is, to put it simply, the Wahhabi ideal in Baha'i garb.

The results of this insistence on the priority of the ideal over the actual can be clearly seen in Moojan's method of selecting the material used in The Babi and Baha'i Religions. Although he dismisses much early writing as replete with errors, he is quite happy to use any quotation that happens to support his idealized view. Thus, for example, he quotes from an article entitled 'Bab and Babism' (1869) by Edward Evans. The first passage cited indicates just how little Evans actually knew about the subject: 'It is a singular fact, that during the last quarter of century there should have sprung up in Central Asia a new religion which already numbers its adherents by millions' (p.24). And yet Moojan goes on to quote as 'significant' Evans's statement that 'Babism, in fact, has passed through all the phases of the other great historic religions, and is entitled henceforth to a place by the side of them' (p.25). Why should this particular piece of historical balderdash (note the date) be deemed 'significant' when other, equally inaccurate statements are dismissed by Moojan out of hand? The answer is, I think, obvious.

Something of the ambiguity in Moojan's position can be seen in his discussion of religion and science on page 62. There, he argues that human interpretation of revealed truth is necessarily imperfect and that, therefore, there can be no access to absolute truth by this means. While this is perfectly correct as an expression of the Baha'i position as regards personal interpretation, it leaves aside two features of Baha'i doctrine which are crucial to the arguments I originally advanced. The first of these is the emphasis which Baha'i scripture gives to the notion that, whereas the word of God had previously been revealed in opaque or ambiguous language, in the present day it has been made known without veils or ambiguity. Having referred to the corruption of Christianity and Islam because of a lack of clarity in their scriptures, Shoghi Effendi writes: 'Not so with the Revelation of Baha'u'llah. Unlike the Dispensation of Christ, unlike the Dispensation of Muhammad, unlike all the Dispensations of the past, the apostles of Baha'u'llah in every land... have before them in clear, in unequivocal and emphatic language, all the laws, the regulations, the principles, the institutions, the guidance, they require for the prosecution and consummation of their task' (The World Order of Baha'u'llah p.21). The matter is not, of course, as simple as I make it seem, but the general tendency is to regard the writings of Baha' Allah as unusually clear and to accept the revealed text at its face value, wherever possible. From the rational point of view, this has serious implications, since Baha' Allah stresses the supreme authority of the word of God and demands wholesale acceptance of it:

'On a number of occasions, the people of the Bayan have asked the following question: David, the author of the Psalms, lived after Moses... but the Primal Point (the Bab)... refers to him as having lived before him. This is in contradiction to the books and what the prophets have taught. We have replied: fear God and do not oppose him that God has adorned with the most great infallibility.... The servants must confirm the dawning-place of the divine command in whatever is manifested by him' (untitled letter, in Israrat, p.18).

Not only must men agree to what has been stated by the prophet, they must also conform their own statements to his: 'Words too must be in conformity with what has issued from the mouth of the will of God in the tablets, in the most

outward sense' (untitled letter, in ibid, p.103). There is not much room in any of this for the exercise of independent reasoning.

The second relevant feature is the notion of infallible powers of interpretation vested in 'Abd al-Baha' and Shoghi Effendi. The effect of this doctrine is to restrict even further the latitude for discussion and the expression of personal opinion so as to prevent the development of any rational theory. The following quotations from 'Abd al-Baha' illustrate this point quite clearly, I think:

'If a soul shall utter a word without the sanction of the Covenant, he is not firm.... No one shall speak a word of himself' (Promulgation of Universal Peace, p.317).

'Abdu'l-Baha is the interpreter of the aims, intents, and purposes of the words of the Blessed Perfection, and is the interpreter of his own written words; and none can say that this or that is the intention conveyed therein, save 'Abdu'l-Baha' (Star of the West vol.6, p.44).

'Firmness in the Covenant means obedience, so that no one may say this is my opinion. Nay rather, he must obey that which proceeds from the pen and tongue of the Covenant' (SW vol.10, p.251).

'Not one soul has the right to say one word in his own account, or to explain anything or to elucidate the text of the Book whether in public or in private' (SW vol.8 p.223).

'Should there appear the least trace of controversy, they must remain silent, and both parties must continue their discussions no longer, but ask the reality of the question from the Interpreter' (Baha'i Scriptures p.544).

'In this day, the gates of contention must be closed and the causes of strife prevented. This cannot be done unless all follow an interpreter and obey the appointed centre of the covenant. That is, they must cling to his clear explanations and hold firm to his lucid interpretations, in such wise that their tongues will speak on behalf of his tongue and their pens transmit whatever he utters. They must neither add nor subtract a letter, nor provide a word of interpretation or implication or explanation' (Letter in Makatib vol.2 p.249).

I do not wish to seem to be deliberately obtuse in this matter. I am well aware that permission to offer private interpretations exists and that, to some extent, there is encouragement to do so. Nevertheless, it is evident that freedom of interpretation is seriously restricted by passages such as those just quoted and that, in practice, Baha'is prefer to follow the system of 'imitation' (taqlid) by referring contentious (or even minor) matters to Haifa or to Hands or Counsellors. In my own experience, the existence of scriptural passages such as the foregoing stressing strict obedience to authoritative interpretations provides a powerful weapon for those who wish to suppress uncomfortable ideas. By defending one's own views as 'the Baha'i teachings' it is possible in practice to put one's opponents on the defensive and to render nugatory any support they may have.

It should, I think, be added in passing that Moojan's diagram (p.61) offers a reasonable paradigm for the development of internal, largely theological scholarship, but is of little value once non-believers are brought into the situation. A Muslim or Christian might have very different ideas about the 'revealed' side of the system, an atheist misgivings about the provision of 'natural laws' by the same 'Absolute Truth' responsible for 'revealed religion'. To insist on such a representation of the relations between faith and reason in such a context can only lead, I think, to further confusion.

To return to the text of Moojan's response, I am not sure that I have understood his reference to the 'contradiction' which, he claims, 'spans almost the entire length of (my) paper' (p.57). He seems to be saying that there is a contradiction between my view, on the one hand, that Baha'i anti-intellectualism and dogmatism are due to the sectarian character of Baha'ism, and my pessimism, on the other hand, with respect to future Baha'i dogmatism and authoritarianism. I take it that Moojan sees a contradiction here because, as he maintains on page 58, Baha'ism is 'very clearly in the process of evolving towards being a church' and because, as he argues, such an evolution involves a 'corresponding liberalization of many aspects of authoritative control and a decrease in anti-intellectualism' (p.58).

Now, Moojan may be right either in saying that I am wrong in defining Baha'ism as a 'sect' or in arguing that my pessimism about future developments is misplaced, or, indeed, he may be right in both cases; but this is not logically the same thing as demonstrating the existence of a contradiction between my two assertions. There are several reasons for this. First of all, I may be correct in thinking that Baha'ism may very well continue in most places to remain closer to a sect-type than a church-type organization, although I am very aware of changes in structure and so forth that are bringing it closer to the latter end of the spectrum. I shall return to this question in a moment. Secondly, I have nowhere suggested that Baha'ism will remain dogmatic, authoritarian, and so on because it will retain sect-type characteristics. It may be true that the larger a religious movement grows, the more liberal it becomes, but that is not axiomatic (any more than the notion that a small-scale group must be dogmatic etc.). The Roman Catholic church remains heavily dogmatic and authoritarian, all the more so because of the size and complexity of its organizational structure. Islam is, in all respects, a universal religion, yet it has been and is essentially doctrinaire, authoritarian, and, in contemporary terms, anti-intellectual.

When Moojan talks about 'liberalization', what he is really referring to are precisely those features of some churches which Baha'is most strongly condemn: toleration of secular ideas and practices, a readiness to compromise on points of doctrine, laxity in many areas of religious life, and so on. Baha'ism is founded on a belief in a canon of authoritative scripture infallibly interpreted, in legislation handed down by God through His prophet or the Universal House of Justice, in a divinely-ordained administrative order, in a covenant designed to preserve total unity and to exclude all deviant beliefs or practices, in a system destined to replace all existing secular and religious systems, and so forth. I really cannot see in any of this very much room for the kind of liberalization normally associated with church-type religion. Moojan, I fear, would be the first to protest if the doctrinal purity he is so eager to preserve from 'distortions' were to seem in danger from liberalizing, compromising tendencies, especially if this seemed to threaten the covenant he feels compelled to defend so strenuously.

Moojan's thinking about such concepts as 'sect' and 'church' (on which I do not personally insist, aware as I am of their empirical limitations) seems to be both confused and dictated less by observation of real developments than by his ideal image of Baha'ism. Thus, for example, he describes certain developments that 'demonstrate a move of the community away from a sect-like attitude and towards exhibiting the attitudes of a church' (p.57) and then goes on to say that 'even some of the recent decisions of the British National Spiritual Assembly have some elements of this move in them' (ibid). There may be a certain truth in this, but there are evident dangers in arguing about empirical developments on the basis of abstract decisions. This tendency to argue from the ideal towards is even more evident in Moojan's quite extraordinary statement that Baha'ism is 'very clearly in the process of evolving towards being a church even in areas where there are not many Baha'is' (p.58; my emphases). This reminds me of a quite remarkable statement issued in 1981 by the British Baha'i Public Information Committee: 'Don't play the "numbers game" with Assemblies in this country. Try and avoid stating actual numbers in communities unless asked outright. Non-Baha'is would probably not believe the fewness of our numbers in view of the status the Faith has obtained as one of the eight major (non-Christian) religions in the U.K.' (Baha'i Monthly News Service 2:7, February, 1981). The committee has got it wrong, of course: non-Baha'is would not believe the status of the Baha'i faith as one of the eight major religions in the U.K. if they knew of the fewness of its numbers. So long as potty thinking like this dominates the Baha'i self-image, it will be useless to attempt to generate meaningful discussion about sociological developments in the movement.

The tension between 'authenticity' and 'actuality' in Moojan's presentation is particularly marked in his discussion on page 60 of my own views on this topic. After quoting -- in the first instance inaccurately -- two of my statements concerning the gulf between what the Babi and Baha'i scriptures actually teach and what Baha'is think they do or are told they do, Moojan dismisses these as 'assertions... which have little substance to them'. He then

proceeds to argue that a knowledge of Shoghi Effendi's writings enables western Baha'is to judge their faith for themselves, 'with no fear of any major hidden surprises'.

In a sense, this is perfectly true, since Baha'is, like the members of other religions, 'make' their own living tradition and engage in hermeneutical activity. But this is, nevertheless, a disingenuous response to my criticism, ignoring as it does the role and significance of scriptural texts in Baha'i consciousness and praxis. Baha'ism is first and foremost a 'religion of the book', and it is such in special ways. Whereas the hadith canon in Islam emerged out of the discussions and theories of the first two centuries, creating a large body of unauthentic material alongside the Qur'an, Baha'ism has always stressed the priority of the word of God in absolutely authentic texts mediated and interpreted only by the writings of 'Abd al-Baha' and Shoghi Effendi.

It is axiomatic that, within such a system, scriptural texts will play a disproportionately important part in shaping and directing the development of the community. This is already obvious in the use of quotations in the writings of Shoghi Effendi and, more particularly, in replies to questions from the Universal House of Justice, or in the compilations of scripture produced under the aegis of the latter body. As in Islam, the sacred text is used as a source of authority for the establishment of the norm, of what is sunna and what is not. It is a widely-recognized fact within the Baha'i community that there are many laws and teachings presently unknown which will, in due course, be made available and implemented in the West, and there is every reason to believe that, as time passes, Baha'i communities will be required to conform more and more to the requirements of scripture. Historically, this has already taken place to a large extent. There is a significant difference between the early development of Sunni Islam, with its notions of ijtihād and ijma', and that of Baha'ism, with its wholly prescriptive approach to law and doctrine. It is arguable that many early western Baha'is would be distressed by a great many contemporary views and practices, and there is every reason to believe that many Baha'is alive today would find future developments disturbing. This is, in fact, not mere speculation or assertion on my part: I have seen it proved in practice many times, when western Baha'is have reacted with considerable agitation when introduced to a law or doctrine or historical fact previously unknown to them, particular when the item of information in question contradicts what they have always been led to believe to be the truth. Moojan may regard it as something of a dirty trick to reveal such things to the innocent masses; I am inclined to think that the dirty trick lies in concealing them from in the first place, in winning converts under false pretences.

Obviously, there is no space here for me to provide in detail the kind of examples necessary to prove just how much substance there is to my 'assertions'. But I would have thought the point was obvious to anyone who, like Moojan, is well-versed in both original Babi and Baha'is texts and in the published materials available in English. Of course western Baha'is can read the writings of Shoghi Effendi in English 'without any need for translation and hence any supposed bowdlerization and expurgation'. But the same does not hold true of the writings of the Bab, Baha' Allah, and 'Abd al-Baha', nor does it apply to the fairly extensive Persian correspondence of Shoghi Effendi. The vast majority of western Baha'is have to rely on translations, and these are frequently bowdlerized and expurgated.

Surely it is no coincidence that the laws and teachings of the Bab and Baha' Allah that have never been made available in translation are precisely those which a reasonable person might suppose likely to disturb the majority of western converts. Why have some of the laws of the Anda been made available and not others; why does the Synopsis and Codification skirt very carefully and precisely round those laws most likely to cause upset or offense; why has the text of the 'Most Holy Book' not been made available to believers in its entirety, even in Iran (for some time)? Surely Moojan himself cannot be unaware of how very carefully the texts in Selections from the Writings of the Bab were chosen, nor would it take a great intellect to guess just why certain passages of certain works were omitted. To anyone who knows the writings of the Bab in the original, the book is seriously unrepresentative in terms of style and content, both of which have been chosen to make the material acceptable in a Baha'i context.

I do not wish to exaggerate this point. To a large extent, the way in which 'Abd al-Baha', Shoghi Effendi, and the contemporary Baha'i leadership have presented their faith has been dictated by a need to concentrate on its most attractive features, to find an image consonant with the mood and needs of the public. We are, after all, in a religious 'market situation', as Berger and others have pointed out. I have no desire to impute base motives to any of these people, merely to suggest that, in their eagerness to win converts, they have allowed themselves to compromise a little with the truth. Nevertheless, I do find it disturbing, for example, that both Baha' Allah and 'Abd al-Baha' took pains to stress the radical differences between Babism and Baha'ism, but that Shoghi Effendi not only played this down, but even suggested the opposite in his writings; and I certainly feel concerned when Moojan, in the introduction to his Fahi and Baha'i Religions, deliberately and knowingly attributes to the Bab teachings he never expounded in an attempt to conflate the two movements for obviously apologetic purposes. I also find it worrying that sweeping statements are made in Baha'i literature about, let us say, the principle of equal rights for men and women, when Baha'i law does not, in fact, offer such equality at all.

There are 'major hidden surprises' for uninformed converts, and there is no reason to suppose that, as time goes on, they will not be sprung in various ways. I may be overstepping the mark when I suggest that such revelations will lead to mass withdrawal -- that has not happened with Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Moonies, or whatever -- but I think it would be reasonable to suggest that it will cause problems for the Baha'i movement. Baha'is may, in the end, be able to overcome these problems, but I cannot believe they will do so by an ostrich-like refusal to recognize their existence or by specious attempts to side-step them by trotting out unimaginative phrases of loyalty and obedience. Such methods have never worked in previous religious communities, and I see no reason why they should work in Baha'ism. As the saying goes, you can fool some of the people some of the time....

Let us turn from this to the question of review, raised by Moojan on his second page, where he argues that the appearance of my article in this Bulletin is an effective negation of my criticism of the reviewing process. I wonder if Moojan is really as naive as he seems. Although the Bulletin has been approved by the British National Assembly and has been tolerated for three issues, there can never be a guarantee that this approval will continue no matter what appears in these pages. Something like this happened to the now-defunct Los Angeles Newsletter, tolerated then suppressed by the US National Assembly. If pressure should be applied from other quarters, the life of this Bulletin could be very short indeed. Would the Baha'i authorities be quite so tolerant if it had a circulation in hundreds or thousands, instead of a couple of dozen? It is quite intolerable to me that a scholarly effort of this kind, whatever its initial shortcomings, should be subject to this sort of threat at all. What was most disturbing about the Los Angeles fiasco was the signal failure of the would-have-been radical elite of the U.S. Baha'i community to resist in any very serious way the edict of the National Assembly -- a potent indication of just how powerful a deterrent the reviewing process can be to independent discussion. Of course, I sympathize with those who were involved: it would have taken considerable moral courage to resist the pressures brought to bear on them. After all, a persistent refusal to toe the line could easily have resulted in their excommunication, something which would have run counter to their aims. And that is the crux of the matter: the Baha'i authorities can seem very tolerant when they wish to do so, but they do hold the major sanction of excommunication or even simple removal of the right to vote or hold office.

Moojan also mentions in this context Avara's history. Perhaps my phrase 'dropped like a hot brick' was too forceful ('put down like a very warm brick' might, perhaps, have been better); nevertheless, my basic argument remains. Shoghi Effendi had originally described the book as 'beyond any doubt the most graphic, the most reliable and comprehensive of its kind in Baha'i literature'. If this was correct (and I presume that Moojan feels compelled to concur), I have to ask why the book has for a very long time been almost unobtainable (the fact that Moojan mentions it in his bibliography is hardly earth-shaking). What

I am trying to say is that even indirect suppression of this kind does have a harmful effect on the normal development of scholarship. Thus, to use another example, modern accounts of the development of Baha'ism under Shoghi Effendi (e.g. The Priceless Pearl) make virtually no references to Mason Remey, in spite of the highly important role he played during that period. The technique is one well known in Soviet Russia. How can serious historiography proceed when extreme biases of this kind are introduced into published material.

As regards the question of Mohrab's book and Shoghi Effendi's permission for it to be advertised, I have to ask why, in spite of this, the book did not continue to be published. It was obviously 'safe' reading (though admittedly quite boring -- not that that would have deterred Baha'is), since it had 'already been reviewed and corrected'. What is slightly more disturbing, however, in the final sentence in the letter to which Moojan refers: 'In view of the above quotation the Universal House of Justice states that it would be permissible for you to quote from "Abdul-Baha in Egypt" (p.83). That anyone should require permission before quoting from anything, and that that permission should be conditional on the availability of quotations from Shoghi Effendi, is wholly outrageous. Does Moojan really imagine that genuine and honest scholarship is furthered by authoritarianism of this kind? Far from this letter 'refuting' my 'assertions', it seems to me to back them up more than a little.

The essentially authoritarian nature of Moojan's thinking and his extreme readiness to accept the authoritarianism of the Baha'i system is, I think, reflected in yet another significant misrepresentation of my position on page 63. He writes, 'from his (i.e. my) statement that he would like to live in a system where he is free to abandon any rules with which he does not agree (p.65), one wonders whether he is advocating anarchy'. Here, as before, I am interested in the way Moojan has chosen to read my text, in how he proceeds to comment on his own presentation of it. What I actually wrote was: '(these questions) can only hope to be solved where men are free to change and direct their lives as they themselves see fit, to make their own laws and rule themselves through their own institutions, to question and, if need be, abandon any rules and dogmas and systems under which they do not wish to live'. I fail to see how Moojan interpreted this as he did, to mean that I mean the abandonment of rules by individuals on the basis of personal disagreement. It is wilful of Moojan to fail to mention my references to 'men' as a collectivity, to the making of 'laws' and rule through 'institutions', and to 'dogmas' and 'systems', all of which make it abundantly clear that what I am talking about is not personal authoritarianism but collective social change and organization through consensus -- something not far removed from the traditional British parliamentary system. That Moojan seems incapable of seeing anything between order on the one hand and anarchy on the other, and that he can equate the democratic process with the latter is both significant and disturbing. To the extent that Moojan is representative of widely-held Baha'i attitudes, his views on this matter are far from reassuring in the present context.

May I finally refer to one or two small points that do not fit into a more organized framework? I realize that the term 'Baha'ism' may seem offensive to some people, but I really see no reason why Moojan should feel it necessary to use the abbreviation 'sic' when quoting my use of it. Baha'i literature consistently uses the terms 'Judaism', 'Hinduism', 'Buddhism', and 'Zoroastrianism' without any derogatory intention. In the world at large, '-ism' is a perfectly neutral suffix which allows the formation of single-word terms for doctrines and movements, and I cannot see any useful objection to its use for both the Babi and Baha'i religions. This is not quite so minor a point as it may appear, since I feel that, here again, the special pleading indulged in by so many Baha'is is in evidence.

In his footnote to page 65, Moojan argues that my objections to the term 'non-Baha'i' are based on 'an unwillingness to accord the Baha'i Faith recognition on an equal basis with the other world religions'. To a large extent, Moojan is correct in this. The easy assumption implied in the phrase 'the other world religions' is not really very evident to anyone but Baha'is or others who have been given and have accepted a false impression of the size or influence of Baha'ism. I know of no reputable scholar in the field of religious studies who,

knowing the true situation, would accord Baha'ism the status of a 'world religion', in the sense the term is applied to, let us say, Christianity or Islam. Baha'ism has no historical tradition to speak of, it is not and has never been the religion of any sizeable community, people or nation, there has never been a Baha'i civilization, and there are fewer Baha'is in the world than, say, Mormons or Jehovah's Witnesses. The process of making Baha'ism into a 'world faith' by spreading it through consciously-planned campaigns is almost wholly artificial and is unlikely of itself to impress the better-informed. I do not wish to suggest that one should deride Baha'ism for its lack of influence or size, simply to say that one should recognize the reality of the situation and not go on talking nonsense about it being 'one of the eight major religions in the U.K.' or whatever. It is one thing to accept Baha'ism as a 'world faith' in the minds and hopes of Baha'is -- that seems to me to be significant, since it influences how they think and act about their religion -- but it is quite another to transfer this metaphysical 'truth' onto the realm of empirical reality. From the point of view of how things really stand, I will admit that it does seem absurd to me that an insignificant minority such as the Baha'is should create major divisions like 'Baha'i' and 'non-Baha'i'.

More to the point, however, is the following comment by Cantwell Smith in the essay to which Koojan seeks to refer me, in a footnote he may have overlooked: 'This term ("non-Christian") is used advisably here, to designate the nineteenth-century attitude. As a matter of fact, I would suggest that there is hardly a more fruitful way towards misunderstanding a Muslim, a Hindu, or a Buddhist than that of thinking of him as a "non-Christian". By the use of such negative concepts it is possible to miss altogether the positive quality of another's faith' (Eliade and Kitagawa ed. The History of Religions p.33 f.n.5).

I am sorry that Koojan does not think highly of my recent work on Babism and Baha'ism. Here, perhaps more than at any other point in his response, I fear he reveals the true standards by which he wishes to judge scholarship in this field. Leaving aside all questions of whether they are any good at all, I would have thought it was obvious that my later writing is academically an improvement on earlier work. Objectively considered, the response of publishers, editors, fellow academics and so on would indicate that this is true. Would Koojan seriously wish to suggest that my World Order articles on 'Oriental Scholarship and the Baha'i Faith' or 'The Concept of the Nation in Islam' are in any sense superior to my present writing? From my own point of view, they are embarrassments, seriously marred by the extreme biases of religious commitment and academically quite worthless. It is clear that, for Koojan, the criterion of quality is how favourable or unfavourable a writer shows himself to be towards Baha'ism and that, in the end, all other considerations of accuracy, penetration, lucidity, lack of bias, or whatever take second place -- or, perhaps, none -- for him. I hope that he is happy and fulfilled in this, if it is what he really wants. But I am personally saddened and disappointed. There was another Koojan Momen once, who had ideals and talked of academic values; I had hopes of him, just as he, perhaps, had hopes of me. It is sad that we have disappointed one another so much. Sad, but, in the way of all things human and mutable, perhaps inevitable.

Denis MacEoin  
Department of Religious Studies  
University of Newcastle Upon Tyne  
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