

*The 21st Hasan M. Balyuzi Memorial Lecture*

The Opening of the Academic  
Mind: The Challenges Facing a  
Culture in Crisis

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*Abstract*

This essay offers a perspective on the state of the academy. It attempts to address reforms essential to the progress and development of society: retrieving the central place of teaching in the curriculum, inculcating humility in place of intellectual arrogance, protecting the academy against the intrusion of corporate and political agendas, abrogating the law of “publish or perish,” and finally, widening the intellectual and spiritual horizon of students by introducing them to the noble monuments of classical culture and to that “universal and unanimous tradition” represented in the spiritual heritage of the human race.

Ah love! Could thou and I with fate conspire,  
to grasp this sorry scheme of things entire,  
would not we shatter it to bits and then,  
remould it nearer to the heart's desire.

—Omar Khayyam

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It is an honor to have been invited to give this year's Hasan Balyuzi Memorial Lecture at this distinguished gathering. I have chosen as my

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theme the state of the academy or, in more general terms, the university as an institution of higher learning in today's world. I recognize that we represent here not only academicians but also many others from a variety of different professions and backgrounds. The question might be asked: "Why have I not chosen something more inclusive?" The answer is that the university has been my life.

I have been a university professor for almost fifty years, during which time I have served as associate dean and department head and held professorships in the fields of Anglo-Irish Studies, English Literature, Translation, Cultural Studies, Comparative Literary Studies, and Conflict Resolution and World Peace. I have had the privilege of teaching at leading universities in North America, Europe, Africa, and the Middle East. In December 2004 I shall step down as the professor holding the Bahá'í Chair for World Peace to move into another field that has engaged my attention for the last forty years; I shall become the Kahlil Gibran Professor of Values and Peace at the University of Maryland.

More importantly, perhaps, the choice of my subject is on account of the fact that much can be done to improve the state of the academy. Even today the academy struggles with the same questions raised by Aristotle twenty-three hundred years ago when he wrote:

... mankind is by no means agreed about the best things to be taught, whether we look to virtue or the best life. Neither is it clear whether education is more concerned with intellectual or moral virtue. The existing practice is perplexing; no one knows on what principle we should proceed—should the useful life, or should virtue, or should the higher knowledge, be the main aim of our training? (*Politics* 8:2:1337a35)

It is imperative that the questions posed by Aristotle be answered and that we should meet the challenges of reforming an institution which in its origins was destined to serve the most noble of all goals: to instruct and provide the young with an education concerned with character formation and not the mere acquisition of qualifications. For without character

no learning or academic achievement truly fulfils its promise. Arthur J. Schwartz, a leading authority on character education, has observed, “The challenge for higher education is to establish character development as a high institutional priority. Sustained leadership is needed to articulate the expectations of personal and civic responsibility in all dimensions of learning and living on a college campus” (A 68).

Allow me at the outset to make one thing very clear: my aim in this paper is not to denigrate the university as an institution, nor is it to undermine the importance of scientific research and rational inquiry. The attempt here is to emphasize the importance and the necessity of restoring a balance, in all scholarly endeavors, between mind and spirit, natural and divine philosophy. The restoration of this balance must also inculcate a pure motive, described by Albert Einstein as that “cosmic religious feeling” (39) which was the impetus of all his scientific work. Through the restoration of such a balance, an education which is virtue centered can again become possible.

Unfortunately, today’s universities are becoming more and more divorced from spirituality and dependent on quantitative analysis and empirical data. This imbalance has caused the corruption and distortion of both science and religion, which Bahá’ís believe to be pillars established to support the Faith of God. There can be no greater concern in education today than the division between the scientific approach, also called “natural philosophy,” and divine philosophy. The division of these two noble virtues, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá calls them, has distorted humanity’s vision and prevented it from recognizing the fact that “civilization is itself a spiritual process, one in which the human mind and heart have created progressively more complex and efficient means to express their inherent moral and intellectual capacities” (qtd. in Bahá’í International Community 5). But there was a time when such a division had not yet occurred. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has referred to such a time in Ancient Greece when philosophers

were devoted to the investigation of both natural and spiritual phenomena. In their schools of teaching they discoursed upon the world of nature as well as the supernatural world. . . . Man should continue

both these lines of research and investigation so that all the human virtues, outer and inner, may become possible. The attainment of these virtues, both material and ideal, is conditioned upon intelligent investigation of reality, by which investigation the sublimity of man and his intellectual progress is accomplished. (*Promulgation 327*)

Originally the educator acted as a physician of the soul. His concern was to make the soul well by involving the student in a spiritually fulfilling way of life and participating with the student in contemplation and right action. Accordingly, at the opening of his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle states: “. . . we are inquiring not in order to know what virtue is, but in order to *become* good, since otherwise our inquiry would have been of no use.” It is for this reason that education cannot simply consist of the acquisition of knowledge, for, as Aristotle explains, “it is by doing just acts that the just person is produced, and by doing temperate acts the temperate person; without doing these no one would have even a prospect of becoming good. But,” he continues,

most people do not do these, but take refuge in theory and *think* they are being philosophers and will become good in this way, behaving somewhat like patients who listen attentively to their doctors, but do none of the things they are ordered to do. As the latter will not be made well in body by such a course of treatment, the former will not be made well in soul by such a course of philosophy. (1103b27; emphasis added)

Therefore, if education fails to empower students with virtues of character, then, to borrow a phrase from Plato, they are left to wander around like cattle on the chance of picking up virtue by luck,<sup>1</sup> and, as Aristotle points out, “[t]o entrust to chance what is greatest and most noble would be a very defective arrangement” (*Nicomachean Ethics 1099b24*).

I believe in the university and in its noble mission. I believe, also, that it is the duty of all of us who are members of the academy to uphold its traditions of wisdom and morality. “Wisdom” and “Morality”: two words that remind me of my visit to India in 1989 to deliver the Yeats Memorial

Lecture at a great international event, sponsored partly by the government of India. Among the distinguished guests attending the lecture were Mrs. Anne Yeats, the daughter of the poet W. B. Yeats; His Excellency Karan Singh, one of India's most respected thinkers and a former Minister of Education; and the eminent English poet Kathleen Raine.

Kathleen Raine had just come back from a visit to the Sathye Sai Baba University at Puttaparti in southern India, a new university only ten years old at the time but where many thousands of students were attending academic courses. In describing her visit to that university, Kathleen Raine showed me a piece of paper on which she had written what was inscribed on the two main entrances of the university. The first inscription read: "The purpose of education is wisdom," and the second: "The purpose of knowledge is morality." She added: "Once, such words might have been found inscribed on the doors of our own colleges and places of learning but alas, we no longer find this in our own countries." Kathleen Raine was correct in her assessment of the crisis prevailing in our universities in the West. But since that time, the universities in the East have equally succumbed to the temptations of materialism that have adversely affected Western universities.

Kathleen Raine was inspired by a vision of the ideal university. Consequently she invited a selected group of individuals who shared her vision to join her in creating the Temenos Academy.<sup>2</sup> We came together to form what we believed to be the heart of the university of the future. At the inaugural meeting in 1992, Keith Critchlow publicly announced the foundation of Temenos in the following terms:

"The first sanctuary is the World," so said Plotinus. For those of us who have dedicated ourselves, to the best of our abilities, to the study, promotion and revival of the sacred traditions we chose the word "Temenos" because in the world of human action it is particularly appropriate.

Temenos is the sacred space—however, as Plotinus reminds us, there is no space that is not sacred! It is what takes place in that space that decides its sacredness.

In opening the Temenos Academy we call upon two words that have a venerable history and meaning outside of time. Temenos is the sacred enclosure, the enclosure of the heart in ourselves, the enclosure of the Church, Temple, Mosque or Synagogue in a city. The inner place where we as humans find our peace with that greatest of mysteries, the unifying god. "Academy" the place of learning in the sacred traditions links us to the arcade of trees outside of Athens where Plato chose to found one of the longest surviving educational establishments in the western world. The association is with trees; the tree of life as well as the tree of knowledge. Learning whilst walking and talking amongst the trees, or sitting beneath the trees are traditions virtually lost to the modern world. Is it surprising we have become so out of touch with the web of life on the Planet? (Critchlow, Allit, and Raine 1–2)

Thus the Temenos Academy was created and received the providential help of His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, who agreed to encourage us by establishing the Academy within his new Institute of Architecture in London.

The members of Temenos, or those of us who carried the title of Fellow, were not all university professors with academic qualifications; there were many of us who had acquired their share of the "Sacred Knowledge" through the learning of the "Imagination" as Kathleen Raine described it, or as Yeats would have it, as that "special and indispensable kind of wisdom described by the word 'Imagination'" (qtd. in Raine, *W. B. Yeats* 23). By this both of them meant not a dreamy, unrealistic approach to life that takes no account of harsh realities, but a deep and abiding inner conviction guided by the promptings of conscience and a sense of unity which, through empathy with the whole of the created universe, seeks the good of all and does harm to none. According to William Wordsworth it is that Imagination

Which in truth  
Is but another name for absolute strength

And clearest insight, amplitude of mind,  
And reason in her most exalted mood.

(468)

My Arab literary tradition helped me to understand what both Kathleen Raine and W. B. Yeats really mean by the word “Imagination.” It is, in fact, what the Sufi poets of Arabia called *al-baṣīra* (meaning insight) which is distinct from *al-baṣar* (meaning sight). The “Imagination,” or *al-baṣīra*, for the Sufi poets, is therefore that “eye of the heart” which penetrates the reality of all things.

We came together at Temenos to create the ideal university, and today we are as committed as ever to continuing what we had started then. We had a holistic approach, we were interdisciplinary, and above all we were believers in the unity of God and the unity of religion. We belonged to different faiths and came from different nationalities, but we recognized Truth as being that “universal and unanimous tradition” represented in the spiritual heritage of the human race. It is the Truth of which Ibn al-‘Arabi sang in his *Tarjumán al-Ashwáq*, a collection of mystical odes in which he celebrates the vision of God as witnessed in all created things:

He saw the lightning flash in the east [so] he longed for the east,  
but if it had flashed in the west he would have longed for the west.  
My desire is for the lightning and its gleam, and  
not from whence it flashes on earth.<sup>3</sup>

We were all aware of the sanctity of our trust, and the unity of the Truth we sought. There was a complete absence of any kind of intellectual pride or arrogance, and we all felt that we were a part of that great turning of the tide that has now enveloped the world.

When we came together we understood that our success in creating Temenos depended on an important quality, which T. S. Eliot called the “the wisdom of humility”: “The only wisdom we can hope to acquire / Is the wisdom of humility: humility is endless” (“East Coker” 14).

Every one of us understood that true humility is reflected, as Gandhi

had suggested, in a “supreme state of total surrender” (48) to almighty God and through an absolute abnegation of the self and its worldly desires. Our discussions, therefore, had always been the opposite of the typically belligerent and discourteous style of contemporary scholarship. It seemed as though we were following the example of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, whose discourses were amiable, courteous, and magnanimous. We wanted very much to raise the level of scholarly discourse from the degeneration into which it had fallen.

When I entered the “English literary world” as a Yeats scholar in the late fifties and early sixties, I realized that my whole approach and interest in Yeats and English literature had carried me on a course that divided me from the conventions of contemporary criticism. My main interests were very different from those nurtured by the critics of the time. I was interested in the Perennial Philosophy and the Western esoteric tradition. My work on Kahlil Gibran, in similar ways, was a mystical journey of discovery inspired by Gibran’s profound belief in the unity of the human race and the oneness of all religions. I was struck by the cynicism, the spiritual illiteracy of the time, and by the bitterness and discourtesy of academic discourse as reflected in literary criticism.

I found myself in the midst of a situation that is best described by Jacob Isaacs, an astute critic, who in 1951 provided us with the following assessment: “Our own preoccupations are shown by the frequency with which we talk of frustration, bewilderment, maladjustment and disintegration, the intensity with which we discuss and are aware of cruelty, violence and sadism, the all-pervading sense of anxiety, and in the background a feeling of guilt, sin, humiliation and despair. Never faith, hope or charity” (45). Somehow I found myself, as the Sufi poet did, when he said of the world: “I am in it, but not of it.” I was not alone in facing such a predicament; James Moore, in introducing his biography of George Ivanovitch Gurdjieff, the remarkable Russian thinker in search of authentic spiritual teachings, complained bitterly about what had happened to biographical studies by saying: “Modern biography is wearisomely iconoclastic, and tends to pivot on the sexual exposé. The defenseless subject



is presented horizontally—his or her sexual proclivities, performance, and perversions graphically detailed in service to contemporary candor and to book sales.”

The ethos of civility and respect for colleagues, whether contemporary or historical, is truly lost to the world of letters in both Britain and America. This state of affairs was illustrated to me in a very personal way when Samuel Beckett granted me one of his very rare interviews. A few years later, I wrote in the *Temenos* journal an account of my conversation with Beckett:

I met Samuel Beckett at a cafe on the Boulevard Saint-Jacques in Paris on 23 May 1987. During the two hours I spent with him, our discussion was not confined to either Irish or English literature, but covered literature in general. . . . When he talked about Yeats and Joyce, he spoke with reverence and with great loyalty to their tradition and what they stood for. The greatness of Beckett seemed to come through by the way he regarded his great predecessors, and as he was expounding his views I could not help but compare his courtesy as a writer with the flippancy and unjustifiable arrogance of most contemporary professional critics. (“Samuel Beckett” 88)

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At Temenos we were all convinced, then as we are now, that the university as an institution was in deep crisis. It was being assailed by the formidable negative forces resulting from an overemphasis on modern technology, the profit motive, the rise of the sports industry, and the influence of political ideology. That the university was in deep trouble seemed to be the conclusion recently reached by a number of researchers who published their findings in several well-documented books, which provided all the evidence needed to prove the point.<sup>4</sup>

At Temenos we felt that we could, in our modest way, begin to address two things: the core curriculum which is really the heart of any university

program, and a code of ethics that inspired both our structure and our work. In our manifesto, entitled *Temenos Academy of Integral Studies*, the mission of the Academy was clearly stated as follows:

The purpose of this Academy will be to teach the humanities from a unitary point of view—that is to say those subjects rooting values and meanings in the basis of human consciousness which is fulfilled only in integrality. We do not propose to teach the empirical sciences, nor the arts from the standpoint of practice, rather their principles since these practices are adequately taught in Universities and elsewhere. Where the existing Universities have increasingly failed is to relate human studies to the unifying perspective of the *Philosophia Perennis*, or to ask the question, “What is Man?” The essence of the education we propose would be the integral approach, and specifically from the standpoint of the Platonic trinity of values, the Good, the True and the Beautiful. This integral approach was the original intent of the older Universities both in Christian Europe and in Islamic countries. Modern Universities in abandoning this unifying perspective have ceased to be universal, and become schools rather of “diversity,” each subject being taught as a specialization according to the individual standpoint of the teacher.

We were acutely aware that it was time to return to that sacred knowledge that had been ignored by the universities for so long—“the sacred heritage from our ancestors from time immemorial which it is our duty to transmit unimpaired—and enriched—to future generations” (Raine, *Temenos Academy Appeal*).

Our code of ethics, however, was simply expressed in Ten Basic Principles that have inspired our work at Temenos:

1. Acknowledgement of Divinity
2. Love of Wisdom, as the essential basis of civilization
3. Spiritual Vision as the life breath of civilization
4. Maintenance of the revered traditions of mankind

5. Understanding of tradition as continual renewal
6. The provision of teaching by the best teachers available in their disciplines and of publications which set the highest standards in both content and design
7. Mindfulness that the purpose of teaching is to enable students to apply in their own lives that which they learn
8. To make Temenos known to all those who may benefit from its work
9. Reminding ourselves and those we teach to look up and not down
10. Governance of Temenos Academy itself in the light of the above principles

Much can be learned from the Temenos example. But we must not underestimate the enormity of the crisis facing all universities in the East and in the West. Professor Stanley N. Katz, director of Princeton University's Center for Arts and Cultural Policy Studies, writing in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* in the aftermath of terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, laments the fact that since the end of the war in Vietnam "*justice* has seldom been the principle term of reference for campus debate." He also asks the question "What would it mean, in 2002, to be a just university?" The answer of course is simple enough: restore wisdom and morality to the academy. In commenting on Bill Readings's brilliant but eccentric book entitled *The University in Ruins*, Professor Katz summarizes Readings's thesis and highlights the crisis facing all universities as follows:

Readings begins by arguing that "the wider social role of the university as an institution is now up for grabs. It is no longer clear what the place of the university is within society nor what the exact nature of that society is." [Readings's] basic argument is that the university has become "a transnational bureaucratic corporation. As a result those disciplines—the humanities, in particular, that do not have a direct economic benefit no longer seem central. Excellence becomes a matter to be judged by market capitalism. And achieving and maintaining excellence depends on an ever-expanding market" (B8–9)<sup>5</sup>

To overcome the crisis, which is referred to by both Katz and Readings, requires enlightened leadership. In his *Laws*, Plato attached immense importance to the role of Minister of Education:

This is by far the most important of all the supreme offices in the state. That is why the legislator should not treat the education of children cursorily or as a secondary matter; he should regard the right choice of the man who is going to be in charge of the children as something of crucial importance, and appoint as their Minister the best all-round citizen of the state . . . each man voting for whichever Guardian of the Laws he thinks would make the best Minister of Education. (765–766)

In view of what Plato has said, it is startling to read a recent pronouncement by the holder of this office in Great Britain, Charles Clarke, that education for education's sake is "a bit dodgy," and that study of the classics, for example, should be phased out because it serves no practical purpose. This, not surprisingly, provoked a lively response. Richard Ingrams, for example, commented that Clarke "might have similar doubts about the merits of studying philosophy because it is not, at first sight, an activity which is going to help increase the gross national product in an obvious way" (28).

Ingrams, however, emphasizes the need for those in authority to be "alert to philosophical issues," with warnings of the grave consequences if they were not. In this respect, he is in tune with Plato's conviction, repeated throughout the *Republic* and other dialogues, that nobody willingly acquires a malevolent character and does wrong willingly. For Plato, if a person does wrong this is attributed to a large extent to bad educators. Plato believed that a holistic and philosophical education benefits not only the individual spiritually but the whole of society in far-reaching ways.<sup>6</sup> Yet in the *Laws* Plato was not merely a dreamy theorist far removed from

practical concerns. This dialogue was written after he had been invited to Sicily by Dion of Syracuse and given a free hand to reshape the government on philosophical principles. Plato returned a wiser man with a greater understanding of the harsh realities of political life and the need to modify his theories to take account of them.

The study of philosophy, as exemplified by Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus, and not as it is currently expounded in most philosophy departments of the academy, is certainly relevant today despite the fact that we now live in an age of increasing technological sophistication in which it is claimed that many thought processes can be carried out by computers. Kathleen Raine spoke forcefully of the drab bleakness of a world where such assumptions go unchallenged:

The schoolchildren do not want to be trained for the kind of “jobs” that the machines provide, in the technological Utopia where thinking is something computers do, where “the brain” is synonymous with mind and thought. We have even had it claimed that a computer can write poems, and truth to say the samples given were all too like many produced by human beings who conceive themselves in terms of a mechanistic science. (*Inner Journey 3*)<sup>7</sup>

An emphasis on material needs and their satisfaction at all costs increasingly pollutes humanity’s deeper spiritual longings and the world itself. “Towards the end of his life,” writes Brian Keeble in his book *Art: For Whom and For What?*, “[the distinguished craftsman] Eric Gill concluded that it was not on the grounds of its general ‘beastliness, vulgarity, inefficiency, anti-socialness [and] ugliness’ that the industrial commercial world should be denounced but because of its ‘fundamental unholiness’” (7). It seems to me that the time has come for us to restore those values inherent in the meaning of holiness to scholarly research and academic learning. Materialism also taints the world of the intellect when education is regarded, in Charles Clarke’s view, as a means to an end—that of increased productivity with qualifications supplying a passport to an enhanced

standard of living in material terms, whether the wants which it implies are genuine or not. "Degree inflation" leads to a proliferation of college courses whose content is debased and diluted to meet the requirements for those unequal to more taxing studies.<sup>8</sup>

This lowering of standards imposes a double strain on those who teach. On the one hand, it encourages a competitive, adversarial approach to academic life in which a professor's merit is measured not by his teaching skills or originality of thought but by the number of his publications, regardless of quality. On the other, the compulsion to produce ever more books and articles, many of them unreadable by anyone outside a narrow and highly specialized field, leaves teaching staff so pressed for time that they are forced to shift the burden of much of their teaching onto research assistants and young scholars at the beginning of their careers, when they are usually inexperienced and not yet capable of delivering the high-quality tuition which students need and are entitled to expect.

Corners are cut and material spun out to provide the stuff of ever more slender publications as the staff jockey for position and fight for tenure, and junior academicians not only struggle with an unacceptable teaching load but are starved of the time and energy which they need to mature and to develop their own scholarship.<sup>9</sup> It is, in fact, a horrifying situation which ultimately represents a betrayal of trust and principle in the name of materialism or modish theories. It is a betrayal of gargantuan dimensions which has been documented by three studies published in recent years: Charles J. Sykes's *ProfScam: Professors and the Demise of Higher Education*, Martin Anderson's *Imposters in the Temple: American Intellectuals are Destroying our Universities and Cheating our Students of Their Future*, and Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students*.

This is not a new danger. Once again, Plato already sensed its presence in his *Protagoras*, where the dialogue between Socrates and the sophist who provides its name peters out in mutual incomprehension and inability to agree on the terms of debate between the philosopher and the professional sophist who claims to be able to teach wisdom for payment. This misapprehension was lampooned by Aristophanes in his *Clouds*, where the

cash-strapped father in despair takes his spendthrift son Pheidippides off to the *Phrontisterion*, or “thinking-shop,” to have him taught, as he believes, how to make “the worse argument appear the better” and bamboozle his creditors—a plot which backfires, bringing the comedy to a chaotic conclusion as the disgruntled father burns down the establishment and Socrates and his disciples flee in confusion. The seeds of corruption, then, were sown early. However, it was not until centuries later, at the time of the Enlightenment, that certain philosophical and scientific influences were brought to bear which caused them to spring into rank growth.

## 4

Within a generation of the movement, Arthur Schopenhauer was pouring scorn on uncritical accumulation of factual knowledge and its indiscriminate publication. “Just as the largest library, badly arranged, is not so useful as a very moderate one that is well arranged, so the greatest amount of knowledge, if not elaborated by our own thoughts, is worth much less than a far smaller volume that has been abundantly and repeatedly thought over” (491), he declared. The Greeks, once again, had already foreseen this hazard: Heraclitus had stated, “Much learning does not teach insight” (in Cohen, Curd, and Reeve, 26), while the Jewish author of the Book of Ecclesiastes had sighed, “Of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh” (12:12).

Mere quantity, then, cannot be a criterion of excellence in education, whether in the amassing of facts or their publication to display one’s knowledge. We have seen the disastrous consequences of this approach and must now ask what, in its place, educators should hope to supply to young people who are being so dismally ill served by the current system. In the late 1980s Konrad Lorenz, the scientist and Nobel laureate, wrote: “The predicament of young people today is especially critical. Forestalling the threatening apocalypse will devolve on their perceptions of value; their sensibilities of the beautiful and worthwhile must be aroused and renewed. And just these values are those being suppressed by scientism and technomorphic thinking” (6). We must consider how the situation

described by Lorenz came about, and how the ideals on which universities were founded were ultimately betrayed.

It may be helpful at this point to consider the case of a comparatively recent foundation, the University of Berlin, established in 1811 by Wilhelm von Humboldt, then Prussia's Minister of Education. The new institution started out with the highest ideals as a focus of excellence in a country gradually recovering from Napoleon's invasion of 1806; some of the most prominent minds of the day, including Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Friedrich Ernst Daniel Schleiermacher, were invited to take up professorships there. Yet less than ten years later Humboldt himself had resigned from office in disgust. The primary reason for this was the rise in the tide of politicization which had swept over Prussia. This opened the way for universities, especially if state funded, to be compromised by the need to comply with government dictates, not least in the political views of teaching staff and the manipulation of the content of the syllabus to meet the perceived needs of an increasingly industrialized society.

This process was not confined to the universities; in France, for example, the home of Auguste Comte's positivist philosophy, the nineteenth century saw the increasing secularization of schools and the establishment of *lycées techniques* and *écoles polytechniques* to cater to the demands of business and industry, satirized by Flaubert in his novel *Madame Bovary* with its portrait of the apothecary Homais, the small-town "man of science" proclaiming his belief in *le progrès* and scorning the superstitions of religion. Dickens, similarly, in his novel *Hard Times*, drew a harsh caricature of such attitudes in the person of the materialistic Mr. Gradgrind with his insistence that education should be confined to facts and nothing else.

Humboldt's contemporary and friend, Friedrich von Schiller, saw far beyond his own times in contending that the modern age, being a time of specialization, bifurcation, and materialism, is not the norm, but a stage in the development of man's cultural progress. Just as Humboldt envisaged an educational system which would provide vocational training in addition to, not instead of, a firm grounding in classical culture and the humanities, Schiller likewise aspired to balance and wholeness, proposing



an aesthetic education in which the spirit could be liberated to act as a solvent dissolving all contradictions. Summarizing Schiller's analysis of the predicament of modern humanity, the translators and editors of the English edition of Schiller's *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* record the following:

[Schiller addresses] the evils of specialization, whether of knowledge or skill, or of one function of the psyche at the expense of the others; the dissociation of what once was united—sensibility and thought, feeling and morality, body and mind; the cleavage between different branches of learning, between the sciences and the arts, between the development of the individual and the welfare of the community, between those who are too exhausted by the struggle for existence to think for themselves and those who are too indolent to make creative use of their leisure; the reduction of man to a mere cog in the wheel of an over-developed society; the de-humanization of the citizen in a State where he is valued for the function he performs rather than the being that he is, treated as a classifiable abstraction and administered by laws which seem irrelevant to him as person. [Schiller's is an] analysis, in short, of problems which have become the stock talking-points of cultural Jeremiahs in our own day and age. (Wilkinson and Willoughby xii)

It cannot be denied that the nineteenth century saw many advances in science and technology, but it was also characterized by spiritual doubt and loss of faith in conventional religion, as is apparent from the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche and of Matthew Arnold, to name but two. Among those who noted the paradox of faith in a materialistic and rationalistic climate was Søren Kierkegaard, who stated, "If I am capable of grasping God objectively, I do not believe, but precisely because I cannot do this I must believe" (215). This declaration of the limitations of reason and objectivity was the expression of a deeply critical and unfashionable outlook.

The willful separation of the intellect from spirituality reached its

apotheosis under the preeminently evil sociopolitical systems of the twentieth century, fascism and communism. Those ideologies both proclaimed the infallibility of human attributes and numbered among their most ardent proponents men who were by training or aspiration intellectuals, including Lenin, Stalin, Goebbels, and Mussolini. The Nazi death camps and the Communist gulags are terrible monuments to an intellect untempered by morality, and an intellectual impulse which values people only to the extent that they serve The Idea, whatever political form it may take; as Paul Johnson has said: "The worst of all despotisms is the heartless tyranny of ideas" (342). Notwithstanding the great contributions that the rational faculty can make to the progress and development of man, its power bereft of the divine spark of humanity is brutally dangerous and destructive.

## 5

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, then, as what W. H. Auden termed "the age of anxiety" approached, there was an ever stronger tendency for a cleft to open up between the arts and the humanities on the one hand and science and technology on the other, resulting in C. P. Snow's "two cultures" of mutual incomprehension between scientists and nonscientists, and between the intellect and the spirit. One of those who perceived this division most acutely was the poet W. B. Yeats, and much of his writing was concerned with attempts to capture and rehabilitate the values of myth, mysticism, and spirituality, and the consequences of attempting to establish a state which dispensed with them. In 1924, for example, in a speech at the opening of the Tailteann Games, he delivered these words: "The world can never be the same. The stream has turned backwards, and generations to come will have for their task, not the widening of liberty, but recovery from its errors—the building up of authority, the restoration of discipline, the discovery of a life sufficiently heroic to live without the opium dream" (qtd. in Fryer 95).

Yeats spoke these words eight years after the failure of the Easter Rising of 1916 and seven years after the outbreak of the Russian

Revolution, both of which sharpened his awareness of the importance of spiritual values in contemporary society. The Soviet viewpoint was increasingly traceable to the uncritical adulation of science, mechanization, and industrial progress from the early twentieth century onwards as Russia hastened to adopt Western practice as a means of escaping backwardness and poverty. Soviet reformers were also attempting to overcome the consequences of the oppression of Russian universities and thinkers during the nineteenth century. Also lost were the rich traditions of Orthodox spirituality stretching back over many centuries. This led many academicians to retreat into highly specialized and desiccated work as a “safe” way of gaining prestige while remaining aloof from the challenging moral issues and responsibilities associated with involvement in the wider world, as exemplified in Yeats’s poem entitled “The Scholars”:

Bald heads forgetful of their sins,  
Old, learned, respectable bald heads  
Edit and annotate the lines  
That young men, tossing on their beds,  
Rhymed out in love’s despair  
To flatter beauty’s ignorant ear.

All shuffle there; all cough in ink;  
All wear the carpet with their shoes;  
All think what other people think;  
All know the man their neighbour knows.  
Lord, what would they say  
Did their Catullus walk that way?

*(Collected Poems 158)*

The image here is one of a self-absorbed sterility which is out of touch not only with the outside world but also with the very spirit of the poet whose work provides scholars with their livelihood. This retreat may also be interpreted as a withdrawal from involvement with the young of the present day through failing to teach and stimulate them to think, develop, and

explore ideas for themselves and to grow in spiritual qualities which the scholars might be expected to prize above the things of this world and to transmit to their pupils. This is, in fact, symptomatic of the crisis facing modern universities described by Bloom, Anderson, and Sykes, where the professors are actively shirking their duties or failing to fulfill them out of sheer exhaustion generated by the artificial pressures of an increasingly competitive environment. The great scholar and teacher T. R. Henn was well aware of the responsibilities of the “principal voice of conscience” within the educational system:

We who presume to teach literature (however haltingly and feebly) are, I believe, under bond to transmit such comment from our own experience as may serve to relate it, however gropingly, to the fundamental values. So far as we have known love, war, death, in all their permutations, it is for us to make known our experiences, in terms of literature, to our pupils. If we fail to do this, whether because of some personal inhibition, or lack of experience, or the fear of ridicule from those we teach because we are not “with it”—with, that is to say, the current conceptions of a world by turns empty, or absurd or irresponsible—then we are acting out a new Treason of the Clerks. Perhaps we are acting it even by keeping silence. (43)

Yeats summarized his own position succinctly as follows: “I have always considered myself a voice of what I believe to be a greater renaissance—the revolt of the soul against the intellect—now beginning in the world” (*Letters* 211). Yet, sadly, nowadays the academic world seems to understand Yeats no better than his contemporaries did in the 1930s. “The Universities, having replaced new criticism, marxism, behaviourism, existentialism, and the rest with minimalism, post-modernism, feminism, deconstructionism, political correctness and whatever other ‘original’ theories ingenious ignorance is able to generate,” still continue in their failure to understand Yeats, because “materialism remains an unquestioned orthodoxy” (Raine, *W. B. Yeats* 3) fatal to comprehension of a poet who

saw that what passed for “progress” led not to utopia but to a spiritual void and the breakdown of civilization, and whose own deepest knowledge had as its sources mind, spirit, and imagination—not matter.

Throughout the ages, it has been the poets who, more than anyone else, have perceived the dangers of this dichotomy and sought to remedy it. Even before the Enlightenment, in 1611, John Donne had commented:

And new Philosophy calls all in doubt,  
The Element of fire is quite put out;  
The Sun is lost, and th’earth, and no man’s wit  
Can well direct him, where to look for it.  
. . . . .  
'Tis all in pieces, all coherence gone.

(73)<sup>10</sup>

Blake wrote caustically in his *Milton* of “the idiot Questioner”:

To bathe in the Waters of Life, to wash off the Not Human,  
I come in Self-annihilation & the grandeur of Inspiration,  
To cast off Rational Demonstration by Faith in the Saviour,  
To cast off the rotten rags of Memory by Inspiration,  
To cast off Bacon, Locke & Newton from Albion’s covering,  
To take off his filthy garments & clothe him with Imagination,  
To cast aside from Poetry all that is not Inspiration,  
. . . . .  
To cast off the idiot Questioner who is always questioning  
But never capable of answering, who sits with a sly grin  
Silent plotting when to question, like a thief in a cave,  
Who publishes doubt & calls it knowledge, whose Science is Despair. . . .

(546)

Finally, and perhaps most memorably, T. S. Eliot spoke for the twentieth century:

The endless cycle of idea and action,  
 Endless invention, endless experiment,  
 Brings knowledge of motion, but not of stillness;  
 Knowledge of speech, but not of silence;  
 Knowledge of words, and ignorance of the Word.  
 All our knowledge brings us nearer to our ignorance,  
 All our ignorance brings us nearer to death,  
 But nearness to death no nearer to God.  
 Where is the Life we have lost in living?  
 Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?  
 Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?  
 The cycles of Heaven in twenty centuries  
 Bring us farther from God and nearer to the Dust.  
 ("The Rock" 96)

What an ironically appropriate ring these words have in the age of "Information Technology"!

Eliot's reference to the "cycles" of Heaven also has resonances of the cyclical view of history as eternal recurrence propounded by Hegel and his successors. Yeats had no doubt of the pernicious influence Hegel's dialectic has exerted over the development of Western philosophy: "Hegel's historical dialectic is, I am persuaded, false. . . . Hegel in his more popular writings seems to misrepresent his own thought. Mind cannot be the ultimate reality seeing that in his 'Logic' both mind and matter have their ground in spirit. To Hegel, as to the ancient Indian Sages, spirit is that which has value in itself" (*On the Boiler* 22).

This was especially topical in relation to the political developments of the twentieth century. Deterministic methodology ignores the complexity of the real world by artificially reducing individual and societal circumstances to a single favored element, as in the case of Darwin's theory of natural selection, Freud's of sexual trauma, and of course Marx's of class struggle. Materialism, the quintessence of Marxism, was doomed to fail because it ignores the truth that human values are not contingent on individual or collective possessions, as witnessed by the fact that wealthy people

and affluent societies are not demonstrably more moral or happy than their poor counterparts.<sup>11</sup>

## 6

The malevolent influence of the cult of the intellect continues to linger in the universities, manifesting itself in the skewed orthodoxies of postmodernism which advocate the latest reductionist “ism” rather than the reading of Milton, terminological inexactitude and bewildering jargon, arrogance for the absurdities of academic publishing, and outright contempt for teaching.

We must, as the twenty-first century begins, move beyond the intellect and its attendant cult and acknowledge that the mind, when divorced from the heart, is not a reliable instrument for accurate perception. One of the most lucid and urgent appeals on behalf of this position was made in 1995 by Philip Sherrard, in which he calls for “the reversing of a process of ignorance, through which the distortion of our capacity to perceive the reality of things leads to our enslavement to an illusory world entirely of our own invention” (1), requisite for our regeneration and the averting of a disaster threatened by technology gone mad. Sherrard comments on the distortion of our capacity to perceive things truly as the origin of our dangerously unquestioned belief in the truth of appearances and consequent tendency to overvalue what can never be more than partial and incomplete knowledge derived from these imperfect perceptions. By doing so, those who glorify the intellect at the expense of other elements in the human being block themselves off from any possibility of perceiving reality. He calls for a new approach to the reading of the book of nature, not in a materialistic or deterministic sense, as a first step in developing a new habit of perception and discarding false “knowledge” based on ignorance to arrive at a positive state of unknowing in which true wisdom can develop.

In particular, we might add, intellectuals must learn a new humility in place of that overbearing quality identified by Paul Johnson in Karl Marx: “He was not interested in finding the truth but in proclaiming it” (54).

This overbearing quality leads us to disregard those ethical values which allow us to be open-minded in our approach and sincere in our work and which encourage us not to question timeless values such as loving one's neighbor. In this respect, the distinguished psychologist Alfred Adler in assessing Freudian techniques arrived at the conclusion that Freudian psychology lacked a moral foundation. Adler remarked that "It is a spoiled child psychology," and added, "but what can be expected from a man [Freud] who asks, 'Why should I love my neighbour?'" (qtd. in Frager and Fadiman 100). In fact, the current core curriculum of psychology in the university remains centered on Freudian theory, while generally ignoring the work of, for example, C. G. Jung, whose ideas remain as an invaluable approach to the psyche which does not dismiss religion as "neurosis." It is possible, therefore, to develop a more honest approach which permits one to state categorically that one is against the cult of the intellect but not anti-intellectual, and against the deification of science but not anti-scientific (an essential distinction).

Beyond the cult of intellect, there is knowledge of another kind, taught by sages whose works are the sacred books of all spiritual traditions, poets and visionaries. They are united by their zeal for the truth, as Plotinus declared, "there is nothing higher than the truth." Centuries later, the Arab philosopher al-Kindi testified to this when he wrote:

It behooves us never to shy away from showing approbation of the truth wherever it comes from, be it from faraway races or from strange and different nations. For nothing is more worthy of him who seeks the truth than to recognise it [whatever its source]. It also behooves us never to degrade the truth, nor to disparage him who speaks it or him who conveys it. For no man is degraded by the truth; all are honoured and elevated by it. (Qtd. in Bushrui, *Wisdom* 72)

It is that particular virtue which Plato, at the core of his philosophy, ranked with Good and Beauty and which has no place in a materialist science. Yeats evoked these sages in his writings as representatives of the "perennial wisdom" set forth by Plotinus and the Hermetics; the Gita and



the Upanishads; the Sufi philosophers; and the poets whom he revered most, Shelley and Blake, transmitting their own “mysterious wisdom won by toil” (*Collected Poems* 184),<sup>12</sup> a wisdom higher than the stuff of doctoral theses, whose purpose is not academic advancement but the bestowing on humanity “whatever most can bless/The mind of man or elevate a rhyme” (*Collected Poems* 276). How much more serious this must be in the context of our approach to the Sacred Writings of Bahá’u’lláh which have been revealed not to become the subject of academic debate or doctoral theses, but to fulfill, in the words of Shoghi Effendi, “the divine purpose for this age, which is no less than the establishment of the reign of divine love, justice, and wisdom in the world, under and in conformity to the Divine Law” (*Guidance* 110), and to bring about, as Bahá’u’lláh Himself has declared “the healing of all the world . . . [and] the union of all its peoples” (qtd. in Shoghi Effendi, *World Order* 40).

## 7

It is this same regard for the truth which is one of the most characteristic features of Bahá’í scholarship, together with its habit of courtesy to those of different persuasions. Bahá’u’lláh leaves us in no doubt as to the indisputable law of courtesy for He states clearly that “courtesy . . . above all else . . . is the prince of virtues” (*Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh* 88). In *Kitáb-i-Badí’* Bahá’u’lláh further adds that “he who does not possess courtesy does not possess faith” (205).<sup>13</sup> The implications of this last statement go beyond the issues of manners of speech, behavior, and treatment of others to the core of one’s own belief in the Truth. Furthermore, under no circumstances should the language, the tone, or the style of contemporary academic scholarship, with its total disregard for courtesy, be adopted by a Bahá’í scholar. I cannot help but remember in this respect a hadith in which the Prophet Muhammad establishes a code of ethics that is echoed in many a statement by Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá: “Let him who believes in God and the Day of Judgment either speak the good word or remain silent.”

Contemporary academic scholarship is often vindictively vicious in attacking an idea or an author regardless of the merit of the thesis proposed.

Bahá'ís are bound by a code of ethics not established by mortal beings but revealed unto them by the Manifestation of God Himself. And let us not forget that summary of Bahá'í ethics which Bahá'u'lláh includes in the *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* in which He begins with the words, "Be generous in prosperity, and thankful in adversity" (93). In this passage Bahá'u'lláh sets the standards to be followed by all Bahá'ís, scholars and nonscholars alike. In another Tablet, Bahá'u'lláh's specific instructions to Bahá'í authors engaged in any scholarly activity is as follows:

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-Hikmat*: "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 fair-minded souls, and not lead to cavilling by the people. (*Compilation of Compilations* 407)

Yet at present the Bahá'í community itself is being challenged by the cult of the intellect, which is the basis of most scholarly pursuits, especially in Western universities. Let us not forget that every religion of God has faced such challenges at some phase of its development; indeed, it might be said that the chief source of schism and disunity in the history of religion has been the learned.

Two dangers, in particular, call for special attention. The first is the tendency to foment dissension and disunity. Scholarship in the non-Bahá'í world, like so many other aspects of the old world order, is based on a perversion of Darwin's theory: that one's success in life depends upon the defeat of others. In such a world, disunity is regarded as natural within a tradition that fosters distrust and places a high value on stubborn mutual opposition between individuals and groups, reducing scholarship to an adversarial process like a court case with one winner and one loser. Such antagonism, which has devastated academia, cannot be allowed to take root in the Bahá'í community, despite indications that it is attempting to do so, as discussed in the statement issued by the Universal House of Justice entitled *Individual Rights and Freedoms in the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* (25–26).

As Bahá'u'lláh wrote in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*:

Weigh not the Book of God with such standards and sciences as are current amongst you, for the Book itself is the unerring Balance established amongst men. In this most perfect Balance whatsoever the peoples and kindreds of the earth possess must be weighed, while the measure of its weight should be tested according to its own standard, did ye but know it. (Par. 99)

In a letter dated 27 May 1966, the Universal House of Justice makes clear the grave danger of applying the standards of a corrupt age to Bahá'í scholarship:

In past dispensations many errors arose because the believers in God's Revelation were overanxious 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 necessary. Such compromises with essential truth, such intellectual pride, we must scrupulously avoid. (87–88)

When Bahá'í scholars compare their own tradition with the theories of modern social thought as exemplified by Darwin, Freud, and Marx, they will understand that the latter are the limited products of mere mortals, based on a tragically mistaken deterministic view of science, and that the standards set by Bahá'u'lláh, to which we are all privileged in this Day of God to give allegiance, transcend the entire history of human thought and being. Chief among these is His revolutionary attitude to the concept of "the learned," based on wholly new and unique ideals. He has decreed that the world as a whole has been recreated by His revelation; in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* itself He revealed: "The world's equilibrium hath been upset through the vibrating influence of this most great, this new World Order. Mankind's ordered life hath been revolutionized through the agency of this unique, this wondrous System—the like of which mortal eyes have never witnessed" (par. 181).

Having acknowledged, however, that the realm of human scholarship falls within the terms of this decree, we must neither reject the vast treasury of knowledge we have inherited from our ancestors, nor fail to communicate with non-Bahá'í colleagues, many of whom are outstanding both morally and intellectually. Yet in doing so, we must bear in mind several standards of Bahá'í scholarship. The first is that knowledge is of two kinds, man-made and divine; while human knowledge is of great benefit to the world and must be diligently pursued by all, divine knowledge is the ultimate purpose of the learning process. It is, however, in the final analysis, beyond understanding.

The Word of God is not subject to human reason, logic, rational argument, or scientific analysis. It transcends the powers of the mind, which, however great they may be in this world, are as nothing in the realm of God's Manifestations. It is for this reason that the seat of God's revelation is not the mind but the heart.<sup>14</sup> While both the mind and the heart are intimately involved in the individual's experience of the divine teachings, it is of the utmost importance that their roles should not be confused, and that the rational mind should not mistakenly believe itself to be superior to the mystical qualities of spiritual life. In this context all knowledge, in the Bahá'í point of view, is measured by its benevolent

influence and contribution to the unity and prosperity of the human race. Acquiring such knowledge is incumbent upon everyone and is regarded by Bahá'u'lláh as the “wings to man’s life, and a ladder for his ascent” (*Epistle* 26). But He also warns us against that knowledge which serves ulterior motives and is of no benefit to humanity, describing it as “the most grievous veil between man and his Creator” (*Kitáb-i-Íqán* 44). He further warns of the consequences of being deluded by the wrong kind of knowledge: “When a true seeker determines to take the step of search in the path leading to the knowledge of the Ancient of Days, he must, before all else, cleanse and purify his heart, which is the seat of the revelation of the inner mysteries of God, from the obscuring dust of all acquired knowledge, and the allusions of the embodiments of satanic fancy” (*Kitáb-i-Íqán* 123).

Second, the function of Bahá'í scholarship is to serve humanity by conveying, accurately and lovingly, the spirit and guidance of the divine teachings, through scholars engaged not with esoteric issues but with the fulfillment of the deepest human needs of the soul and the community. As the soul is a divine mystery which “no mind, however acute, can ever hope to unravel” (*Gleanings* 158–59), the scholar must necessarily base his vision on the healing message and spiritual nourishment provided by the Sacred Texts, not on his own ideas and imaginings; he must become a faithful vessel for the spreading of the divine teachings. By upholding the fundamental principles of their Faith while adhering to the highest standards of scholarship, Bahá'í academicians can help bridge the divide between secular and religious viewpoints. The urgency of this task should not be underestimated. Writing in the pages of the *New York Times*, a columnist recently noted that “[o]ne of the most poisonous divides is the one between intellectual and religious America” (Kristof). In helping to bring together the religious and secular communities of America, Bahá'í scholars will indeed be serving the cause of unity. In addition to this, a major contribution of Bahá'í scholars to today’s world is to address pressing global issues such as environmental degradation, widespread poverty, the decline in public and private morality, the need for new educational standards, and the necessity for comprehensive disarmament and the establishment of universal peace.

While engaging colleagues of all perspectives, it is essential for Bahá'í scholars to render their services by maintaining the unity and sanctity of the Word of God. Shoghi Effendi notes in his account of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh that it includes aspects of older forms of government yet is identical to none of them; similarly, Bahá'í scholarship takes advantage of the strengths of older forms and methods of scholarship but transcends them all. It is this precious tradition which must be guarded against the temptation to mix its concepts with the methods, theories, and standards of the society around us. Shoghi Effendi expressly warned against “compromise with the theories, the standards, the habits, and the excesses of a decadent age” (*Advent* 30). Rather, the task of the Bahá'í scholar is to help create a new world order and to follow its lofty standards, not to bring the Bahá'í community into conformity with the dying civilizations around us.

This is a unique task, and can never be an easy one, not least because of its unprecedented nature and its differences from the scholarship of Islam, Christianity, Judaism, or the academies. Bahá'í scholarship is not only open to all, regardless of birth or background, but is the duty of all, as stated in a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice: “there should be room within the scope of Bahá'í scholarship to accommodate . . . those believers who may lack formal academic qualifications but who have, through their perceptive study of the Teachings, acquired insights which are of interest to others. . . .” (*Scholarship* 7). This approach prevents scholarship from becoming a platform for leadership in the community, and promotes a spirit of humility among scholars.

“Bahá'í scholarship,” as most of us use this term, does not fully encompass the community of Bahá'í scholars worldwide. Most often, “Bahá'í scholarship” is a descriptive category applied to two sets of qualifying researchers: a group of scholars working within the Western tradition, and another group of scholars working within the Iranian tradition. However, as Bahá'ís with a global perspective, we must always ask: What is happening under the rubric of “Bahá'í scholarship” in other parts of the world such as India, Pakistan, and Africa? At the moment, Western scholars dominate the field of Bahá'í scholarship and the language in which this scholarship is expressed is predominantly English. Even if Bahá'í research

in parts of the world other than the West and Iran is not yet fully developed, we as Bahá'í scholars must be welcoming and supportive of all such endeavors. The Bahá'í Faith itself is neither of the East nor of the West; similarly, Bahá'í scholarship must be inclusive in its scope. Just as we must resist any form of separation between "Western" and "Iranian" Bahá'í scholarship, so must we make every effort to remain unified with Bahá'í scholars working throughout the world and within many diverse intellectual contexts. For in the final analysis, the greatest contribution that Bahá'í scholars can make is to uphold the unity of the wider Bahá'í community.

As yet, with only a limited portion of the Sacred Texts available in translation, it is still too early to have an accurate vision of the potential of the learned in the Bahá'í community. No doubt the noble aim of establishing a tradition of its scholarship will eventually be achieved, but only through patience, perseverance, and humility based on the understanding that the Texts in question convey the sacred Faith of God. This understanding protects the scholar from producing, solely to promote their academic careers, work which conforms to the cynical, amoral, and godless standards of the prevailing system. Or as Eliot reminds us:

Servant of God has chance of greater sin  
And sorrow, than the man who serves a king.  
For those who serve the greater cause may make the  
cause serve them.

*(Murder 45)*

To compromise one's integrity and most sacred beliefs for the sake of gaining glory in a profession which tends to denigrate all religious life and spirituality can only lead to regrettable results. On the other hand, the benefits of conducting scholarship in this Day of God are beyond calculation. In making His supreme revelation, Bahá'u'lláh has disclosed the hidden treasures of God's mysteries and released us from the oppression of clerical orders and of religious and intellectual prejudices, while at the same time providing us, in the form of the Universal House of Justice,

with a guide who can prevent the believers from going astray. To us is given the inestimable privilege of continuing the projects which Shoghi Effendi would have brought to fulfillment had it not been for the burdens which oppressed him. In the spirit of love and humility, let us conclude with the incomparable words of that beloved Guardian himself, who recognized that under God's inviolable Covenant there is no exclusion from closer knowledge of Him for any of His creatures:

How often—and the early history of the Faith in the land of its birth offers many a striking testimony—have the lowliest adherents of the Faith, unschooled and utterly inexperienced, and with no standing whatever, and in some cases devoid of intelligence, been capable of winning victories for their Cause, before which the most brilliant achievements of the learned, the wise, and the experienced have paled. (*Advent of Divine Justice* 45–46)

The state of the academy is in disarray, the world is in great travail, and we who are the bearers of the “name of God in this day” are faced with a great challenge. Are we to succumb to the transient fads and fashions of an ephemeral world and impose the values of that world on our Faith, or are we instead able to bring the values of our Faith to enrich, transform, and spiritualize not only the academy, but also the world itself?

#### NOTES

Presented at the 27th Annual Conference of the Association for Bahá'í Studies—North America, San Francisco, California, 31 August 2003.

1. See Plato, *Protagoras* 320.

2. These included Karan Singh and Ramanchandra Gandhi from India; Wendell Berry and Jocelyn Goodwin from the United States; Madame Stella Corbin, the widow of the distinguished French scholar Henri Corbin from France; Sayyed Hussein Nasr from Iran; Keith Critchlow, John Allitt, John Carey, Brian Keeble, Philip Sherrard, and Noel Cobb from the U.K.; Laurens van der Post from South Africa; and myself from the Arab world.



3. Based on Nicholson's translation in Bushrui, *Wisdom of the Arabs* 71.

4. These books included the following titles: Arthur M. Cohen, *The Shaping of American Higher Education*; Julie A. Reuben, *The Making of the Modern University*; Bill Readings, *The University in Ruins*; Sheila Slaughter and Larry L. Leslie, *Academic Capitalism: Politics, Policies, and the Entrepreneurial University*; and Stanley Aronowitz, *The Knowledge Factory: Dismantling the Corporate University and Creating True Higher Learning*.

5. See also Readings 2, 4, 10–11. It would, however, be both unfair and unjust to say that in the midst of such a crisis there are no universities that are exerting every effort to promote those values of the spirit that restore the balance and uphold the tradition of wisdom and morality. I have been very fortunate to find myself at the University of Maryland, where every assistance was given me to establish the Bahá'í Chair for World Peace. The president of the university, the deans of my college, the directors of the Center for International Development and Conflict Management, and a team of marvellous colleagues and students who recognized the noble ideals expressed in the Chair's mission, must receive all the credit for the Chair's successes. The efforts of my colleagues and friends at the University helped to consolidate the Chair, win the respect and credibility it needed, and establish its academic reputation and standing in the university.

6. See *Plato: Timaeus and Critias* 118.

7. On the same page she points out the inevitable cynicism and dissatisfaction bred by advertisements which delude "the purchasers of cigarettes and convenience foods, underwear and insurance policies" with specious images of material utopias.

8. T. S. Eliot had already sounded a warning about this: "The culture of Europe has deteriorated visibly within the memory of many who are by no means the oldest among us. . . . For there is no doubt that in our headlong rush to educate everybody, we are lowering our standards, and more and more abandoning the study of those subjects by which the essentials of our culture—or that part of it which is transmissible by education—is transmitted; destroying our ancient edifices to make ready the ground upon which the barbarian nomads of the future will encamp in their mechanised caravans" (qtd. in Kathleen Raine, *Defining the Times* 47).

9. Compare, for example, Philip Roth's portrayal of such a campus community in his novel *The Human Stain*.
10. Spelling in the quoted text is modernized.
11. In economic terms India is certainly poorer than the post-industrial democracies of the West, yet in spiritual terms it is surely richer.
12. See also Raine, *Yeats* 5–6.
13. Author's paraphrasing from the Arabic text.
14. See Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words* Arabic no. 59, p. 17.

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