

Udo Schaefer has made unique contributions to Bahai studies for more than half a century. His body of work speaks for itself – and its continuing appeal is reflected in the large number of his books and articles that have been translated. I will not attempt to review his contributions, which would require a much longer piece, but will highlight some features of his service as a Bahai scholar that stand out.

The first is the methodological rigour that he brings to his work. As a lawyer, he approaches questions systematically and carefully – not only does he support his arguments with extensive references, but he responds to counter-arguments within the same piece of work. This approach brings clarity and focus to his writing. A recent example is his widely discussed paper examining the meaning of the infallibility of the Universal House of Justice, published in “Reason and Revelation” (Kalimat, 2002), where he addresses possible objections to his views and addresses them one by one. This approach also characterises his contributions to “Making the Crooked Straight” (George Ronald, 2002).

The second feature of his Bahai service that stands out is his mentorship of younger Bahai scholars. The encouragement of a new generation of Bahai scholars has exercised Bahais and Bahai institutions, such as the Association for Bahai Studies (ABS), for many years. My personal experience of being mentored and attempting to do so is that mentorship is best accomplished as part of an ongoing relationship with a person, which has been demonstrated over centuries in professional and academic life. Over the last decade, there has been an impressive group of young Bahais in Germany who are writing on the history and theology of the Faith, and they almost always cite Udo Schaefer as an invaluable source of advice and encouragement. His achievement in this regard seems unique in Europe. The Universal House of Justice wrote in 1981 of the importance of “encouraging budding scholars”, and that:

“In the field of Bahá'í scholarship . . . the Boards of Counsellors can render valuable services in this area by encouraging budding scholars and by promoting within the Bahá'í community an atmosphere of tolerance for the views of others.”
(From a communication dated 10 February 1981 written by the Universal House of Justice to the International Teaching Centre)

A third feature of Dr Schaefer's life is his contribution to the development of an atmosphere of tolerance in the Bahai community – also highlighted in the aforementioned quotation from the Universal House of Justice. He has shown a motivation, determination and strength of character in pursuing his academic interests in situations which may well have demoralised others. Three issues have particularly concerned him, and in raising them, he has helped diminish problems with how the academic study of the Bahai writings is viewed by the wider community. In his article, “Challenges to Bahai Studies” (*Bahai Studies Review* vol. 2, no.1, 1992; http://www.bahai-library.org/bsr/bsr02/23_schaefer_challenges.htm), Dr Schaefer discussed the damaging effects of arrogance, whether it comes from intellectuals or from those who “who rely only on the spirit, who regard rational thought to be inconsequential, unspiritual, and contrary to the spirit of the Faith.” In relation to

the latter he adds, "One cannot but wonder how this attitude has become so strong in the communities when we consider Bahá'u'lláh's statements on the mind, which He calls 'First and foremost' among the favours 'which the Almighty hath conferred upon man' (*Gleanings* 194)..." (See also his related comments in: (http://www.familieschaefer.de/pdf/loyalty_engl.pdf)).

Another issue that Dr Schaefer has raised is the importance of an appropriate use of Bahai institutional review. Although the situation has changed since Dr Schaefer wrote on these matters, his general comments are still relevant - reviewers need to focus on the guidance of the Universal House of Justice and not to interfere in the author's writing style: "the reviewers sometimes examine literary style, and interfere with the author's personal style... Indeed, on occasion, individual reviewers consider themselves to be a kind of co-author and try to impose upon the author their own view on a subject, and the structure and style of the essay. I think the administrative bodies should be aware of the detrimental effects such an abuse of this process has..." ("Challenges to Bahai Studies", *Bahai Studies Review* 2.1 [1992]).

A final challenge for the Bahai community that Dr Schaefer has highlighted is perhaps the most important. Dr Schaefer has noted that there is a possible confusion for some Bahais that any form of critical thinking is tantamount to disloyalty to Bahai institutions and therefore the Bahai covenant. He finds this diametrically at odds with Bahai scripture (and the guidance of the Universal House of Justice) that promotes tolerance, forbearance, humility, and open-mindedness. (See http://www.familieschaefer.de/pdf/loyalty_engl.pdf)

A final noteworthy feature of Dr Schaefer's work is how he has raised the importance of apologetic scholarship. Apologetics – or responding to attacks to the Faith – needs no justification as it was highlighted by Baha'u'llah as a vital service for Bahai scholars (*Gleanings* p. 329). Despite this, there is scarce apologetic literature and Dr Schaefer has placed apologetics in a more prominent position from his first publication in English, "The Light Shineth in the Darkness" (1977) to his recent essay on Bahai apologetics in the *Bahai Studies Review* vol. 10 (2001/02). Interestingly, considering recent events, "The Light Shineth in the Darkness" has an essay on Islam and war, demonstrating the importance of Bahai scholars providing a less biased view of Islam as part of their wider service to interfaith relations and promoting peace amongst the religions.

In summary, Dr Schaefer has fulfilled a unique role during his lifetime of service to the Bahai community through his scholarship. He has set high standards of methodological rigour in tackling foundational and apologetic issues in Bahai thought. He has been a model in terms of mentorship and the patient and persistent way he has continued to contribute to Bahai studies.