RESPONSE TO COMMENTARIES BY SUSAN BRILL AND M. K. ROHANI

I appreciate the interest that Susan Brill and M. K. Rohani have shown in my comments regarding the article “On Human Origins” and greatly value their comments as informative writings, as I do the original contribution of Dr. Craig Loehle. I had no intention of using this occasion to raise “thorny” issues (as presumed by M. K. Rohani) or to initiate an argument on matters for which we have sufficient guidance in the Bahá’í writings. It is wiser to seek the guidance of the Universal House of Justice rather than to debate these issues among ourselves. I had absolutely no intention to “criticize,” “interpret,” “correct,” or “improve upon” the translation made by Shoghi Effendi. In my note I made no evaluative statement on the translations of Shoghi Effendi. And finally, I had specially avoided entering into any judgmental argument on questions of fate, determinism, or free will. Therefore, if the readers of The Journal of Bahá’í Studies are interested in addressing such issues, I hope they will do so without referring to me as a source of any special claim on these matters.

The main point of my comments was a simple suggestion that “when using the translations of the holy Writings, it would be helpful where making inferences on the basis of single words to examine the original Persian or Arabic texts and study the historical usage of such words in Persian and Arabic literature” (emphasis added). There is no reference in this statement to the validity of authorized translations of the holy texts for the purpose of studies on the Bahá’í Faith. I have not argued that only those who know Arabic and Persian may be able to understand what is meant by the translated texts. In view of the fact that not every word or expression can have an exact equivalent in another language, one cannot confidently base the inference on a single word (not the whole text) in a translated text unless the exact connotations of the word in the original language are examined.

I agree that scholars can use authoritative translations without obligation to learn the languages from which the texts are translated. I also fully believe that the English translations by Shoghi Effendi are not merely a rendering of the text in English but that they contain elements of interpretation, clarification, and enlightenment. Those who want to make inferences on the basis of single words in the original Persian and Arabic texts of the Writings should refer to the translation of Shoghi Effendi, if such translation is available, to benefit from the clarification of those words provided by Shoghi Effendi.

May I also assure the readers of the Journal that I had absolutely no intention to promote any kind of elitism, as suggested by M. K. Rohani. The last paragraph of my comment was actually related to the last sentence of its preceding paragraph and was not a general statement by itself. Without making any dogmatic and definitive statement, I have only posed the question of
whether we can reach the conclusion that events which are not ordained by God may happen to the Manifestations of God. This observation is obviously related to their divinely ordained station and not to their station as an ordinary human being. I am sorry if the brevity of my comment has caused certain misunderstandings.

IRAJ AYMAN