

# ASSOCIATE



Newsletter of the  
Association for Bahá'í Studies  
(English Speaking Europe)

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## The Association for Bahá'í Studies (English-Speaking Europe) Annual Conference

**T**he Pursuit of Excellence 23-24 June 2001, The Cable and Wireless College, Coventry. Submissions on the above theme are invited, for papers, presentations and workshops - topics could include:

- Developing a culture of excellence in Bahá'í communities
- The pursuit of excellence in professional life
- The functioning of the Administrative Order
- Excellence in the Arts and music
- Excellence and scholarship
- and/or topics of relevance to our Special Interest Groups: Religious Studies; Science; International Law and Politics; Education.
- The conference will also include sessions devoted to Bahá'í Societies

Please send submissions in the form of an abstract (less than one page). It is intended that the conference proceedings will be made available on our website.

ABSTRACTS for papers/presentations/workshops should be sent by 4<sup>th</sup> May 2001 to the Conference Registrar, Dr Jane Aldred, 16 Magdalen Avenue, Bath BA2 4QB. Tel: 01225-447254. [janeafa@iplbath.com](mailto:janeafa@iplbath.com)

Conference Information B&B accommodation is available at the venue [£30 ensuite, single]. Pre-registration essential if child-care facilities required – further information in *Bahá'í Journal*.

## Bahá'í Studies Course for Youth

**A**n exciting opportunity offered by the Association of Bahá'í Studies (English Speaking Europe).

For the first time ever! The ABS(ESE) is running a Bahá'í Studies course as an independent course at the Arts Academy 28 July - 4 August 2001, at Sidcot School, Somerset, U.K. It's aimed particularly at young people, with excellent and well

- known Bahá'í scholars, covering all aspects of scholarship. Come and explore how to correlate the Bahá'í teachings with the contemporary world.

Registration through the Arts Academy Registrar: Margaret Appa [lmargaretappa@hotmail.com](mailto:lmargaretappa@hotmail.com); further detailed information on course content from Jane Aldred, 00 44 (0)1225 447254 [jjaneafa@iplbath.com](mailto:jjaneafa@iplbath.com).

We anticipate a good response so please register early to secure a place!

## Oxford Conference

**T**he following papers were presented at the conference on 'Foundational Issues in Bahá'í Studies' that was held at Merton College, Oxford on 1-2 April 2000. This first paper by

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## Recent Publications

Some recent and forthcoming publications (<http://www.kalimat.com>):

**Culhane**, Terry *I Beheld A Maiden: The Bahá'í Faith and the Life of the Spirit*. \$19.95

**Saiedi**, Nader *Logos And Civilization: Spirit, History, and Order in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*. \$45.00

**McMullen**, Michael *The Bahá'í: The Religious Construction of a Global Identity*. \$29.00

**Brown**, Keven and Eberhard von Kitzing *Evolution and Bahá'í Belief: 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Response to Nineteenth-*

## Pioneer/Travel Teach to Africa

In order to establish the foundation of stronger Bahá'í communities in Africa, the International Teaching Centre has been considering various approaches to increasing the number of educated Bahá'ís in that continent. In that regard the Continental Pioneer Committee for Africa has been asked (letter from the International Teaching Centre dated 26 November 2000) to encourage the Bahá'í youth from different continents to consider undertaking undergraduate, graduate and post graduate studies at universities in Africa, particularly in South Africa, where there are several universities. It is hoped that this will provide opportunities to introduce the Faith to these universities. We are also directed to encourage professional Bahá'ís from around the world to travel-teach to Africa, giving talks in institutions of higher learning which in turn may create further opportunities to present the Faith to university students and staff. In consultation with a number of counsellors and Bahá'í academics, it has emerged that to work towards the above objective it is helpful to consider the following:

1. It is necessary to gather information regarding educational opportunities at universities in Africa to assist prospective Bahá'í students in securing enrolment. We are in the process of completing this task and we welcome any enquiry in this regard. As a starting point, there is a website (<http://studysa.co.za>) which provides detailed information regarding all the 21 universities and 15 technikons in South Africa.

2. Although the educational standards among the institutions of higher learning in Africa vary widely, there are indeed universities in this continent that offer internationally recognized programmes comparable with the very best in the world. The misconception that an undergraduate degree from universities in Africa might disadvantage an individual from further studies or in one's professional life should be alleviated by the many examples of success that prove otherwise. The widespread use of email and internet has given the universities in this continent similar access to information and learning facilities as most universities in the

world.

3. There are many offers of Youth Period of Service for Africa; such offers may be combined with a study period at an educational institution where the Bahá'í volunteer could play an active role in setting up of a Bahá'í Association among the students and staff. There are several examples of successful projects such as the University of Botswana Bahá'í Association which in collaboration with the Association for Bahá'í Studies in Southern Africa have arranged for several seminars on Bahá'í themes at universities in southern Africa. The Continental Pioneer Committee for Africa can channel offers to the countries and universities where the offers may be utilized most effectively.

4. There are many university programmes world-wide that allow part of the programme to be taken elsewhere. Bahá'í students from all continents may be encouraged to choose a university in Africa for such supplementary courses.

5. Bahá'í professionals could look for professional and academic conferences in their fields which are held in Africa and make arrangements to spend some time giving talks in institutions of higher learning. Alternatively, or in addition to such programmes, travel teaching trips for such professionals may be arranged by the Continental Pioneer Committee for Africa with the help of the relevant National Spiritual Assemblies.

The Continental Pioneer Committee for Africa appeals to you for co-operation and any suggestions to fulfil the wishes of the International Teaching Centre in spreading the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh among the university students and staff in this blessed continent. A continent so close to the heart of our beloved Guardian, whose people Bahá'u'lláh referred to as the

## American Academy of Religion

**C**all For Papers The Bahá'í Faith has maintained a presence at the American Academy of Religion since about 1985. Currently, Bahá'í papers are presented at a Bahá'í Studies Colloquy, held in association with the AAR. Bahá'ís are also encouraged to submit papers dealing with aspects of the Faith to other AAR panels.

The Bahá'í Studies Colloquy will next meet at the American Academy of Religion annual meeting in Denver, CO, November 17-20, 2001. It will host one or two sessions of talks on the Bahá'í Faith as it relates to themes and interests of the American Academy of Religion, which is a professional gathering of 8,000 university professors and graduate students of religion and the Bible. The presentations should be thirty minutes in length. Talks will be selected based on 250-word abstracts describing their main points. Please submit abstracts to Dr. Robert Stockman, Institute for Bahá'í Studies, 1233 Central St., Evanston, IL 60201; [rstockman@usbnc.org](mailto:rstockman@usbnc.org). The deadline is April 30.

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Muhammad Afrán was presented at the session on 'Apologetics': the other paper in that session was given by Dr Udo Schaefer (see *Bahá'í Studies Review* 9).

## The Role of the Bahá'í Scholar in Defending the Faith

**S**ome Thoughts on Apologetics in the Bahá'í Faith  
Scholarly defence of the Bahá'í Faith is distinct from traditional apologetics in both its purpose and its method. The purpose of Bahá'í apologetics is not merely to defend the Faith against attacks, nor to prove its validity at any cost by disproving and even disparaging counter-arguments. The purpose is rather to demonstrate that the Bahá'í Faith provides the means for obtaining knowledge of the truth, and to present the truths revealed by the Bahá'í Sacred Writings. In harmony with this purpose, that of discovering the truth, Bahá'í apologetics rejects contention, disputation and other adversarial methods so often used even in academic circles. It relies instead on sharing the truth with wisdom and moderation. In this presentation I would like to examine some of the issues relating to the The Role of the Bahá'í Scholar in Defending the Faith (continued from page one)

purpose and methodology of Bahá'í apologetics.

First, let me address the role of science in the study of religion and the extent to which it is able to capture the truth of life. Modern science is primarily applied science. Basic scientific research is implemented in order to obtain practical results and the benefits of material achievements, and, to some extent, in order to quench the human desire for greater knowledge about nature.

What is knowledge? What we call knowledge is based on our discoveries of the laws responsible for the interactions between the world's phenomena. Witness to this statement is the fact that as we progress in better understanding these laws, we are better able to harness nature and use it for our benefit. Our scientific knowledge and achievements fall far short of the whole truth because the information we collect can be used only to the extent that we have discovered the laws operating in each case. At the same time, each new discovery adds to our existing knowledge and allows us to see new aspects of a system that is gradually revealed as our scientific knowledge progresses. New discoveries are thus tools for further developing existing inventions.

What is the purpose of knowing more about nature, existence and the world? Here, we should keep in mind the fact that human life and happiness are not only physical and material but also social and spiritual, and that true civilization must be based on the healthy growth of both the rational soul and the spirit of faith. According to the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith, important as life is in this world, life after death is a thousand times more important because it is eternal. We believe that God has given a purpose to the whole system of the contingent world; in other words, the physical

world has not come into existence by accident. Therefore, human life, which belongs to a higher station of intellect, must also have a purpose to fulfil. This means that human individuals are responsible for their lives both in this world and in the world to come. Thus, knowledge of the world is not an end in itself, but a means of preparing us for life here and hereafter. If our worldly knowledge cannot help us to grow spiritually as well as physically, then it is worthless. This argument is self-evident to any independent thinker who believes that human life is not limited to material life.

According to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, there are two kinds of knowledge, intuitive and perceptive (*Some Answered Questions* XL). The knowledge that is derived from observation and perception of nature is necessarily secondary and limited, while intuitive knowledge is basic and genuine, because it is based directly on the laws of existence. It goes without saying that we cannot acquire it in its entirety. As a matter of fact, according to the Bahá'í Writings, no one can have that absolute knowledge except God. This type of knowledge is also available to the manifestations of God to the extent that is needed by their Will, as is mentioned by Bahá'u'lláh in the Tablet of Wisdom: '...whenever We desire to quote the sayings of the learned and of the wise presently there will appear before the face of thy Lord in the form of a tablet all that which hath appeared in the world and is revealed in the Holy Books and Scriptures' (*Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*: 149). Religion thus gives us access to truths and laws that are inaccessible by mere observation and human perception.

Truth is one, but at the level of human knowledge and understanding it is not absolute. In any given case, the truth may look different, depending on relative and circumstantial criteria, views of the purpose of existence, and considerations of time and place. A rigid dogmatic evaluation would lead to a clash of understandings. Just as black and white pictures are not the true reflections of the objects in the world, any idea limited to two opposite views is incomplete and a source of hostility. The history of religions shows irreconcilable differences in their practice although they are similar in their principles.

The same idea applies to the relationship between religion and science. We believe in the Bahá'í Faith in the harmony of science and religion. This does not mean that the interpretations of the facts are the same or must be in agreement in these two systems. It does mean, however, that because science and religion both deal with the truth, they relate to the same entity, though from different angles. The result is that science and religion are complementary to each other in their function and one without the other is incomplete.

According to the ancient thinkers, who are also acknowledged by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in *Some Answered Questions* (LXXX, 321-3), there are four types of causes in creation: the efficient cause, the matter, the form and the final cause. In practice, experimental science deals with two of these, matter and form, while religions, through their theological philosophy, deal with the other two, the efficient and final causes. The human mind is obviously not content with knowing only about matter and form, and the other causes of

the world of existence are even more attractive to it. For example, the concept of entropy suggests that the physical universe should be steadily drawing toward greater and greater disorder, ending finally in what physicists call 'heat death', a state of uniform distribution of energy in which there are no patterns, no structures. However, we see that, on the contrary, new information and new structures have continually emerged in the world. The very idea that this universe has no beginning or end is a proof that there is a well-balanced system at work that holds it together and prevents it from disintegrating. If this is so, then there must be a known purpose behind it. The only beings in the world that can relate to this fact through their mind and reason are human beings. Humankind partakes in the purpose of creation as a rational entity and is able to enter changes into the system and contribute to its progress.

There are some basic principles in the world of creation that are responsible for keeping it solid and stable, and which have their counterparts in the world of human relationships. Thus, both science and religion have something to say about these principles. They include:

- affinity or attraction between entities, from atomic particles to planets, which is known as love in the human world,
- equal rights to life, growth and development for members of the world of creation, which, enhanced by the responsibility given to humankind by virtue of its rational capacity, is manifested as the principle of equity in the human world,
- action and reaction in the natural world, which operates in the human world in the form of justice and is the execution of God's providence,
- a sense of purpose, collectively in the world of creation and individually in the human world.

As we have seen, to gain knowledge, of both the causes and the laws of the world of creation, we need to rely on religion as well as science. Our knowledge and progress will remain incomplete if we limit ourselves to empirical science and disregard that which is the whole purpose of human life, the efficient cause of existence, and the main means of attraction in the contingent world, that is to say, love.

Let us now examine the methods used in apologetics. One of the main goals of all religions is to teach the ideas and principles of the faith to new people and new generations. There are references to this in the Holy Writings. For example in the *Qurán* we read: 'Summon thou to the way of thy Lord with wisdom and with kindly warning: dispute with them in the kindest manner...' (The Koran, 'The Bees' XVI, 125, trans. by J.M. Rodwell). Unfortunately, the concept of 'jadal', which is translated as 'dispute', has been practised as a sort of contentious, competitive argument between two opponents. One of the topics in formal logic is dialectics, which is translated as 'jadal' in Islamic literature, probably on the basis of certain Quránic verses. Although the Qurán advises leniency and kindness in argument, historically the practice among Muslim - as well as among other theologians and scholars of empirical sciences, in many if not all disciplines -- has been and still is adversarial. This practice is so common and widespread that the word 'khasm' (foe, enemy) is the official term used in the course of theological disputations among some of the religious scholars.

Apologetics in the Bahá'í Faith shuns such forms of disputation and is rather based on Bahá'u'lláh's admonition in His Book of the Covenant that 'conflict and contention are categorically forbidden in His Book' (*T.R.A.K.A.*: 221), and on the Báb's advice in the *Bayán*: '[It] is illicit for you to torment men, even if this is only in striking them with the hand upon the elbow, ... when you wish to remonstrate with someone write your arguments and your proofs with prudence and with the most complete politeness' (*Arabic Bayán*: X.6, translated into English by Peter T. Terry from the French translation by A.M. Nicolas).

Apologetics as a means of condemning the ideas of others is unacceptable for Bahá'í scholars, because the Bahá'í Faith acknowledges the truth and validity of all religions and ideologies, each in conformity with the exigencies of its own time and place, and in accordance with the principles of relative progress and progressive revelation. Bahá'í apologetics was originally practised in a milieu where two methods were predominantly used, one called explanatory (*halli*), and the other contradictory (*naqd.i*) or binding (*ilzami*). In the first, the purpose is to help the other party to acknowledge the truth, while in the second, it is to defeat the opposition by using evidence already accepted by the other party against him. The highly accomplished Bahá'í thinker, Dr. A. M. Davoudi, has dealt with this basic issue in one of his papers under the title 'Why We Do Not Respond', where he defines the scope and addresses all aspects of Bahá'í apologetics. According to his masterly evaluation and elaboration on the subject, the method of discussion and the dialogue that is practised in all Bahá'í theological and religious papers, meetings and discussion groups should be uniquely different from outside practice. As Bahá'ís, we do not dispute or enter into opposition for its own sake. Instead of responding to attacks, which only leads to more enmity, we try to discern and acknowledge any truth there may be in the opposing argument, and find ways of reaching understanding rather than engaging in confrontation. For more information please refer to the essay in *A Collection of the Works of Dr. 'A. M. Davoudi* (volume 3: 145- 166 compiled by Dr. V. Ra'fati in Persian).

The goal of Bahá'í apologetics is to share the truth with a kindly tongue (Bahá'u'lláh, quoted in *Advent of Divine Justice*: 55), equally with every one, whether friend or foe. The methodology of discussion is based on principles of wisdom, justice and mercy: 'He that riseth to serve My Cause should manifest My wisdom, and bend every effort to banish ignorance from the earth ... Set your reliance on the army of justice, put on the armour of wisdom, let your adorning be forgiveness and mercy and that which cheereth the hearts of the well-favoured of God' (Tablet of Wisdom, *T.R.A.K.A.*: 138-9). The methods that are in practice in the social sciences for the study of by-gone civilizations are not valid for the study of the Bahá'í Faith. The Faith has its own criteria and guidelines and an established system that deals with all aspect of its cosmology, based on its fundamental principle of universality.

Muhammad Afnan

## The Future of Bahá'í Studies

This topic is too large to do it justice in a brief presentation. I will therefore limit myself to some haphazard observations that may inspire further thinking.

**Planning** The future of any endeavour, Bahá'í Studies included, depends on being intentional about where one is going. What you do has to relate to a vision and a mission. There has been very limited discussion this weekend about the vision and mission of the Bahá'í Faith itself, and almost nothing about the vision and mission of Bahá'í scholarship. We who are attending this conference are involved in scholarship because each of us thinks it to be a lot of fun. A fruitful future development would be to think through whether Bahá'í studies as a whole has a vision, and what its mission is vis-à-vis the Bahá'í community, Bahá'í institutions, individuals, and the wider world. Perhaps that mission is different for each discipline.

Dr. Peter Khan, in his talk at the inauguration of the Chair in Bahá'í Studies at Hebrew University mentioned three 'core ideas' relating to Bahá'í studies. (Peter Khan 2000 'Some Aspects of Bahá'í Scholarship', *Proceedings of the Dedication of the Chair in Bahá'í Studies*: 15-16). I think they are keys to looking into the future: The notion of evolution, progressive unfoldment, and process, is integral to Bahá'í studies. We must have a certain humility in the face of what we do not know.

Relationships are characterized by reciprocity and interconnection. Those engaged in Bahá'í studies need reciprocal relationships with institutions, community and individuals. The way the Bahá'í community is organized is unique. Bahá'í institutions are not composed of either professional priests or of people selected as managers. They are individuals of many backgrounds, elected in a process that is based on explicit directions from the Bahá'í Central Figures and Shoghi Effendi.

The future has several challenges and avenues:

**Diversification** There will be a greater diversity of scholarship, at many levels of quality and professionalism. The more there is, the less likely that any one contribution will be seen as having an inordinately high influence, and therefore the less likely to provoke negative response. 'The solution to pollution is dilution'.

**Scholarly Study by Non-Bahá'ís** A harbinger of the future is the establishment of the Chair in Bahá'í Studies at Hebrew University, held by Professor Moshe Sharon, and the stated intention to found a Centre of Bahá'í Studies in Jerusalem in which scholars will translate Bahá'í texts into Hebrew. Prof. Sharon is already working on an annotated translation of the *Kitáb-I-Aqdas* into Hebrew. Such efforts are not under Bahá'í control. They require reciprocal relations that will involve non-Bahá'ís and Bahá'ís learning from each other. Delicacy is required for the study of any living community and its belief system. It does not pay for the academic to alienate the object of study, and it does not pay for the religious community to ignore or discount the value of scholarly study.

Albert Lincoln, Secretary-General of the Bahá'í International Community, spoke at the dedication of the Chair in Bahá'í Studies words of singular appropriateness to our endeavour at this conference:

Whether we like it or not, our understanding of our religion and our community will be affected by the work of this Chair, just as the scholars involved in the endeavour will frequently be puzzled, perplexed, challenged and disturbed by their findings. Despite these legitimate grounds for anxiety, we have no choice but to plunge ahead given the unequivocal commitment in the teaching of the Bahá'í religion to dialogue, openness and the unfettered search after truth. (Albert Lincoln 2000 'Dedication Address on behalf of the Bahá'í World Centre', *Proceedings of the Dedication of the Chair in Bahá'í Studies*: 5).

Professor Sharon also spoke in terms that augured well for sympathetic investigation by scholars in the proposed Centre for Bahá'í Studies:

From its very inception to this day, the main enemy of the Bahá'í faith has been ignorance. Ignorance can be ridiculous, but when it is accompanied by intolerance, it breeds hatred and hatred breeds persecution and bloodshed of the innocent ... The aim of this chair is to fight ignorance, applying to the study of the Bahá'í faith the strict rules of scholarship. The work ahead is tremendous, the material awaiting the researchers is staggering. (Moshe Sharon 2000 'Inauguration Speech', *Proceedings of the Dedication of the Chair in Bahá'í Studies*: 8-9).

**Scholarship and Art** Scholarship often tends to be an analytical left-brained activity. The development of a connection to the artistic right brain is something that requires further development. A Bahá'í actress to whom I put the question 'What is the future of Bahá'í studies?' answered 'Art'. I suggest that increased focus on poetry, literature, music and art is an essential component of Bahá'í studies, and a necessary integrative balance to the still overwhelmingly analytical quality of much of our discussion.

**Popular Culture** Scholarship has been a rather elite activity historically. In Bahá'í scholarship this has sometimes led to what one might call 'Acceptable' (i.e. elite) topics. We choose not to address some things. What is the Bahá'í connection to and relationship with popular culture? We are fortunate to have David Piff whose dissertation on 'The Kitáb-I-Hearsay: Oral Lore in the Bahá'í Community' is a groundbreaking effort, published this year by George Ronald. Why does Bosch Bahá'í School in California have Star Trek weekends that are extremely successful? Who will study the inclusion of Bahá'í references in works of science fiction? Why are there no studies of Bahá'í humour (despite assertions that there is no such thing)? What about additional studies on the connections between the Bahá'í Faith and Sherlock Holmes, several articles on whom have already appeared? (William P. Collins 1981 'It Is Time That I Should Turn to Other Memories: Sherlock Holmes and Persia, 1893', *The Baker Street Journal* 31(4): 213-223; William P. Collins 1990 'Sherlock Holmes and the Bahá'í Faith', *Herald of the South* 24: 37-42).

**Writing in a Vigorous and Living Voice** Too much scholarly writing is dry, informed by a sometimes misplaced desire for

constant objectivity and detachment. Part of the future of Bahá'í studies is to infuse into the products of our study greater life, humour and literary quality. I still remember a passage from *The Kenosha Kicker*, a late 19<sup>th</sup>-century newspaper in Kenosha (Wisconsin) that made no effort at objectivity in its reporting, and which I delighted in quoting in an article about the Bahá'í community of Kenosha. A Christian missionary, Stoyan Krstoff Vatralsky, had been hired to preach against the Bahá'í Faith from pulpit in the city. After one such speech, a Bahá'í arose to refute Vatralsky, reported in colourful terms:

And when he finally concluded and invited questions there arose, in all his glory, from his seat in the parquette, a mighty follower of the faith of Báb, who proceeded to smite him, hip and thigh. (Quoted in William P. Collins 1982 'Kenosha, 1893-1912: History of an Early Bahá'í Community in the United States' in Moojan Momen ed. *Studies in Bábí and Bahá'í History*, vol. 1: 237).

**The Unity Paradigm** Academic inquiry must become aware of the central place that the Bahá'í community and its institutions give to the unity paradigm so frequently mentioned in the Bahá'í sacred texts. It is at the heart of the many statements from the Universal House of Justice about scholarship and the particular approaches taken by individual scholars. Fundamentally, this paradigm insists that unity is a higher principle than being 'right'. If the recent past is any indication, scholars will have a deep encounter with the essential value placed on the paradigm of unity. Bahá'í scholars have to come to terms with issues of public discourse, tone and attitude, and how to communicate new findings while preserving unity, connection, respect and reciprocal relationship with other Bahá'ís. Bahá'u'lláh's own cogent words need to be constantly in the mind of those engaged in Bahá'í studies as they prepare their work for public unveiling: 'Not everything that a man knoweth can be disclosed, nor can everything that he can disclose be regarded as timely, nor can every timely utterance be considered as suited to the capacity of those who hear it'. (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* LXXXIX).

**Coordination of Activities** One attendee has asked how information about Bahá'í studies, news of scholarly activities and controversies, and institutional and community response to issues, will be communicated. In addition to current Associations for Bahá'í Studies, two institutions that are to be formed at the World Centre in the future will have a direct and significant bearing on the carrying out of Bahá'í studies. The Centre for the Study of the Texts will involve resident and visiting scholars who will carry out textual studies of Bahá'í sacred scripture and important historical archival documents. It can be foreseen logically that it will network and communicate among scholars who carry out this kind of work. Likewise, the International Bahá'í Library, as the 'kernel of great institutions of scientific investigation and discovery', will promote increased interaction among scholars, scholarly associations, and Bahá'í institutions.

**Faith and Process** In *Star Trek VI*, Spock speaks to his Vulcan colleague about faith. When her traitorous actions betray her lack of faith, she asks him what he meant. His

explanation is so appropriate that I close with it, because I think the future of Bahá'í studies depends as much on our faith as on our scholarly abilities and the following of any academic methodologies. Spock told her that she should 'have faith that the universe is unfolding as it should'. I therefore ask that you consider, whatever is happening now and in the future for Bahá'í studies, that the universe of is unfolding as it should.

William P. Collins

## The role of the scholar in the Bahá'í community

In the Bahá'í Faith, we face a marked change in the role of the scholar compared to other religious communities. In other religious communities, the religious scholar is frequently a religious professional and often a religious leader. This means that there is a long tradition of deference and high degrees of status and honour being accorded to the scholar. So basically the bottom line is that scholars have picked the wrong religion to be scholars in. In the Bahá'í Faith, power is accorded to elected institutions, while status and honour tend not to go to those who are knowledgeable but rather to those who serve the community most.

So what is the role of the scholar in the Bahá'í community? Would it be too simple I wonder to suggest that the role of the scholar is the same as that of any other Bahá'í - that is to serve the Bahá'í community and ultimately to serve the world of humanity? Of course the scholar may be able to serve in ways that are different to other Bahá'ís, but I would suggest that the goal of service is for Bahá'í scholars, as for all other Bahá'ís, the highest goal that can be achieved, the ultimate criterion of the worth of their services. This is an idea that may at first sound somewhat strange - people do not often think of the work of scholars as consisting of being of service. I would contend however, that this is what is regarded as the highest level of human achievement, according to the Bahá'í scriptures and all other achievements - no matter how highly they may be praised by fellow scholars and academics - are of a low level.

What then is the service that Bahá'í scholars can perform for the community?

**Propagation:** The scholar is able to assist by preparing specialised material for the propagation of the Bahá'í Faith. This is not just in fields such as religious apologetics but also in the application of the Bahá'í teachings to current social, economic and governmental problems, etc.

**Protection:** Few attacks on the Bahá'í Faith have any originality to them. The Bahá'í scholar, from his or her knowledge of lines of attack and defence used in previous religious debates is able to suggest ways of defending the Bahá'í Faith from new attacks. Also the scholar is often best placed to detect where those attacking the Faith are distorting information and misusing quotations.

**Deepening:** The scholar is able to prepare and deliver programmes of deepening Bahá'ís in their own faith often from viewpoints that are unusual.

Contacts with the academic world: Of course the Bahá'í scholar is ideally suited to act as a focal point for those in the academic community who want to have more information about the Bahá'í Faith. Academics are frequently put in the position of needing to be knowledgeable about areas in which they really have very little information. People who are writing material for books, newspapers, and the television approach for their opinion on subjects which they should be knowledgeable about. But no-one can be knowledgeable about the whole of a field. It therefore helps if Bahá'í academics are well-known in their disciplines and are also known to be Bahá'ís. Then when information is sought about the Bahá'í Faith, they will be consulted and, one would hope, that more accurate information about the Bahá'í Faith would be the result.

Dr Moojan Momen

## Fostering Good Working Relations between Bahá'í Institutions and Bahá'í Scholars

**B**ahá'í studies and scholarship is recognized by the Bahá'í Faith and its institutions

- to have a significant place in Bahá'í community life

- to be an important factor in the development of the Bahá'í Faith as a worldwide organization
- to make a major contribution to the thinking of Bahá'ís and their institutions on issues of social importance
- and thus to the sorts of social and economic development activities in which Bahá'ís are engaged
- and also thereby influencing the processes towards peace, which is one of the goals of the external affairs strategy of National Spiritual Assemblies
- to be necessary for the defence of the religion
- to be an aspect of the Covenant

The relationship between Bahá'í institutions and Bahá'í scholars, therefore, needs to be one of mutual support and collaboration. I am not today speaking on behalf of the National Spiritual Assembly of the United Kingdom, but I will use it as an example, as it is the institution of the Faith with which I am most familiar and have the most experience. There is a long tradition of Bahá'í scholarship in the United Kingdom, which everyone is anxious to continue. The National Spiritual Assembly is also a co-trustee of the Afnan Library, a research library, which it has made the deposit library of the United Kingdom Bahá'í community.

In the United Kingdom, the National Spiritual Assembly takes the view that the institutions of the Faith should support Bahá'í scholarship and help to identify those who might be influenced to participate more fully in it and in the academic study of the Bahá'í Faith. The 'rainbow' policy of the National Spiritual Assembly promotes the concept that each individual has a unique contribution to make to the Faith and seeks to create the climate in which that contribution can be made and valued by the whole community.

The National Spiritual Assembly of the UK is particularly concerned to promote scholarship for the following reasons:

- For its own sake, as a measure of the health of the Bahá'í community
- To assist the Bahá'í community to correlate the teachings of the Faith to current affairs and activities
- To defend the Faith

The National Spiritual Assembly of the UK feels that there is presently and has been for many years a good working relationship between scholars of the Faith and the institutions, particularly with the National Spiritual Assembly itself. This has not always been the case but has been so for at least the past two decades. Many years ago the National Spiritual Assembly gave its blessing to the informal Bahá'í Studies group and its publication, *The Bulletin*, became an official organ of the National Spiritual Assembly. This group was later absorbed into the Association of Bahá'í Studies - English-Speaking Europe, which has an active and vigorously functioning executive committee supported by the National Spiritual Assembly.

The National Spiritual Assembly of the UK uses the environmental principle as the basis of its policy regarding the defence of the Faith: 'the solution to pollution is dilution'; that is, the best way to deal with attacks on the Faith from any quarter is to encourage the publication of good scholarship to such an extent that it overwhelms in volume and quality inferior, vexatious or malicious accounts of the Faith. The National Spiritual Assembly is therefore anxious to promote good scholarship and its publication in academic journals and books.

The National Spiritual Assembly has a review panel for ordinary publications, which works quickly and effectively, and an academic review panel comprising Bahá'í academics from around the world to whom academic or specialist works are sent for review, which is by the way of peer review. The National Spiritual Assembly's review policy is that there should be a presumption in favour of publication and it adheres rigorously to the 1971 Memorandum on Publishing which, at one level, limits the extent of review by institutions.

The National Spiritual Assembly of the UK believes that fostering, establishing and maintaining a good working relationship between the Bahá'í institutions and Bahá'í scholars is a two-way street. Both Bahá'í institutions and Bahá'í scholars have a role in creating the climate and fostering the attitudes and behaviours in the community which will assist Bahá'í scholars in the pursuit of their work and will assist Bahá'í institutions in the pursuit of theirs. Suspicion, anxiety and fear on both sides, if they exist, need to be overcome. Institutions need to make it clear to believers that Bahá'í scholarship is a legitimate and valued activity; to help the Bahá'ís and their communities understand that they need to 'develop greater tolerance toward ideas that may not coincide with their current understanding, and remain open to new insights . . .' (Letter of the Universal House of Justice, 18.4.89). Bahá'í scholars need to make it clear through their attitudes and actions that they are not a breed apart from other Bahá'ís.

All Bahá'ís are working together towards a common purpose:

to establish the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh and to help the world implement the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh for its own spiritual and material well-being. The Administrative Order has been provided for this purpose and it is important for all Bahá'ís to work through the institutions of the Faith. 'Scholarly endeavours are not an activity apart from this organic process . . .' (Letter of the Universal House of Justice, 5.10.93; p. 9) For example, 'Bahá'ís are "fully entitled to address criticisms to their Assemblies" and offer their recommendations. When Bahá'ís have addressed their criticisms, suggestions and advice to their Assemblies, including their views "about policies or individual members of elected bodies", they must "whole-heartedly accept the advice or decision of the Assembly".' (Letter of the Universal House of Justice, 2.7.96; p. 26) This is true for all Bahá'ís in all circumstances. It is important for the institutions of the Faith to accept, even welcome criticism - a compilation on this subject has recently been sent by the House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the UK and has been the subject of its own deepening.

I believe there are a few steps that could be taken by Bahá'í

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L-R: Dr Iarfhlaith Watson, E. McCloughan, Brian Corvin, Betsy Omidvarin, Brian O'Flanagan, Dr Iain Palin, Eamonn Moane, Prof. Seosamh Watson, Dr Vivien Hick and Edwin Graham. ABS(ESE) Conference, Letterkenny 28-9 Oct. 2000.

Bahá'í Community Now: Its Principles and Practice', there were stimulating and challenging papers on such subjects as the Four Year Plan, equality, the independent investigation of truth, the global economy, early Islam, electronic communications and the international auxiliary language. In all there were ten participants.

In his opening address, Dr Iarfhlaith Watson (Dublin) stressed the vital importance of scholarship and the necessity of having knowledgeable believers who can answer difficult questions in relation to both teaching and protecting the Faith. He then introduced Brian Corvin from Dublin.

Brian proceeded to give a personal and frank assessment of the Four Year Plan in the Republic of Ireland, looking at the successes and failures of the period and highlighting the part played by the Training Institutes and Study Circles in advancing the process of entry by troops. His paper welcomed the various initiatives undertaken and the beginning of a more systematic approach to teaching, proclamation and consolidation, while also questioning the efficacy of the unadapted Ruhi textbooks for use in Study Circles in Ireland.

Edwin Graham from Lurgan presented a paper on Equality Legislation in Northern Ireland, which asked some pertinent questions about social categorisation and discrimination; it suggested that we need to look more carefully at what we mean by equality in a community divided by political and religious allegiances. He pointed out that equality, as explained by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His Western addresses, applied most clearly to educational opportunity.

Edwin McCloughan's (Letterkenny) paper, 'Asking Questions', examined the primary Bahá'í principle of the independent investigation of truth. In particular it questioned those who seem to imply that we cease to investigate or search once we recognise the Manifestation of God (truth itself), and refreshingly drew on Internet sources of reference. He also explored the emerging discipline of a distinctive Bahá'í theology.

Following a most appetising meal prepared by local believers Sodabeh Foley and Ferdows Hashemi-Zadeh, Eamonn Moane (Dublin) gave an overview of the global economy from the 19th to the 21st centuries, moving on to speculate on economic trends and spiritual forces which will face humanity in the next hundred or more years. Interestingly, it proposed that thrift will become a dominant socio-economic approach in the years ahead.



## ABS Meeting In Letterkenny A Great Success

'... the National Assembly is delighted to see this conference taking place, and it hopes that from these small beginnings a thriving movement will grow which embraces scholarship of our dear Faith in this country...' from Caroline Smith, on behalf of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the Republic of Ireland, 27th October 2000.

The first meeting of the reconstituted Association for Bahá'í Studies (ABS-ESE) in Ireland was held over the weekend of October 28th-29th in the attractive Bahá'í Centre in the Oldtown, Letterkenny, Co. Donegal. Under the theme of 'The

The final paper of the day was given by Betsy Omidvaran (Dublin), who presented an alternative view of the early Islamic community from that usually found in Bahá'í circles. The paper focused on the reigns of the First Four Caliphs [Successors], from Abu Bakr until 'Ali, from a Sunni perspective. This sparked vibrant debate as it challenged our Shi'ih-centred assumptions about the evolution of Muhammad's religion.

The two papers on Sunday morning were preceded by a conversation about the once-again threatened peace process in Northern Ireland. The first paper by Dr Iain Palin (Londonderry), who frequently delighted everyone with his witty comments, teased out some of the issues raised by the Internet for the Bahá'í community in Britain with regard to both e-mails and Bahá'í websites. The talk demonstrated how electronically aware the British community is compared with that in Ireland; a national Bahá'í website has been promised by the Irish National Assembly before year's end, however.

The concluding paper by Prof. Seosamh Watson (Dublin), already presented at the Annual ABS (ESE) Conference held in London at the start of October, discussed cultural imperialism, and sought to emphasise the dangers of adopting English as an international auxiliary language due to its colonial resonances and its current commercial/economic dominance, which is serving to erode so many minority languages. This talk, with its broad range of scholarly references, provided some of the liveliest debate of the weekend, many of those present having strong and decided views on the subject.

During the assessment of the weekend after lunch, a number of crucial points were aired, including the importance of developing a structured programme of regular meetings each year, the greater involvement of younger people and the publication of the seven papers in some form next year. It was claimed that while the size of the Conference was a little discouraging for Bahá'í studies in Ireland, it nevertheless facilitated open and incisive discussion; such conferences can make an impact on the wider Bahá'í community which bigger conferences sometimes miss. It was argued that we need different kinds of Conference for more - and less - finished papers. Also the link with the ABS in Britain should be strengthened.

In his closing address, Iarfhlaith stressed the need for humility on the part of Bahá'í scholars and for a balance between faith and reason, and reminded everyone that the ABS is not simply for academics, but will welcome papers from believers with something interesting to contribute to the ever-expanding realm of Bahá'í knowledge; he hoped there would be more cross-Border cooperation from now on, as this was seen to be a very beneficial aspect of the weekend.

Brian Corvin and Edwin McCloughan

## The Covenant: A Study Weekend

The Association for Bahá'í Studies (ABS) Weekend on the Covenant took place at the National Bahá'í Centre in Dublin on 10th and 11th February. A reading pack was sent to those who'd registered. It included a 46-page paper, 'Seeing Double: The Covenant and the Tablet of Ahmad', by Dr Todd Lawson, who facilitated the study sessions, and seven articles on the subject of the Covenant, several excerpted from Encyclopaedias of Islam, Judaism, Religion and Ethics and the Bible and also the first two chapters from Dr Moojan Momen's *An Introduction to Shi'i*

*Islam* (1985). Overall the intensive two-day sessions were both intellectually stimulating and spiritually beneficial.

Todd, a distinguished Canadian academic in Islamic Studies based at McGill University in Canada, became interested in Islam after reading that, according to Shoghi Effendi, a study of Islam for Bahá'ís, as the source and background of their Faith, was 'absolutely indispensable' if they were to gain a sound understanding of their own religion. Since the early 1970s, his initial interest in Islam has become a lifelong passion. Despite some jet lag, Todd showed himself to be a congenial, skilful and enthusiastic facilitator during the two days of interactive study.

Todd commenced sessions on Saturday morning by explaining that the idea of the Covenant is one of the oldest and most enduring in religious history and that it denotes a promise from God to humanity to continue to bless, guide and reward humanity on the grounds that it conform to His Will. He reminded those participating that all religion had come from the same Divine source and suggested that the best way of approaching a religion was to learn about its covenantal arrangement. He further explained that religious Covenants had come down to us from the area of Mesopotamia through Judaism and Christianity, but that God's Will had been more clearly and completely expressed in Islam (literally, 'peace' or 'submission'), the religion founded by Muhammad (570-632 CE), than in either of these earlier dispensations. The sessions aimed to focus on the different aspects of the Islamic Covenant. Participants responded with language, the concept of time, accountability, trade, law and obedience as reasons for the Covenant originating in the Mesopotamian basin.

Todd then gave participants a digestible 'crash course' on Islam, concentrating on the birth of Muhammad's Faith in the largely desert peninsula of Arabia, on the classical period when the civilisation ushered in by the Qur'an (literally 'reading' or 'recitation') and seminal documents like the civil Constitution of Medina (622 CE) came into its own and on the crisis within Islam brought about by the Mongol invasions of the 13th century. Much was learned about the hadith (sayings and traditions of the Prophet, compiled and stringently verified for publication by Muslim scholars soon after His passing) and how the Mongol invasions compelled

## 25th Annual Conference of the Association for Bahá'í Studies-North America

**T**owards a Spiritual Civilization Friday, 31 August-Monday, 3 September 2001. Sheraton Seattle Hotel and Towers, Seattle, Washington, USA

The historic completion of the buildings and terraces of the Arc Projects on Mount Carmel in the Holy Land has been identified by Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, as marking the 'culmination of the development' of the Bahá'í Administrative Order. He indicated that this 'vast and irresistible process', unprecedented in humanity's spiritual history, would synchronize with two other significant developments – one outside and one within the Bahá'í world – 'the establishment of the Lesser Peace and the evolution of Bahá'í national and local institutions'.

To mark this historic event in 2001, the Annual Conference of the Association for Bahá'í Studies-North America will explore aspects and implications of these processes and our role within them, including the textual basis of these processes in the Bahá'í Writings; the Lesser Peace as a prelude to the Most Great Peace; the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh as the matrix of the spiritual civilization of the future; the evolution of Bahá'í Administrative institutions; the nature and character of a spiritual civilization and its implications for all aspects of society; the Mount Carmel projects and their significance in the transformation both of human relationships-individual and collective, and of human environments - physical and social; the role and contribution of Native peoples in relation to the concept of 'spiritual civilization'; the role of women and the process of establishing the equality of women and men; and the role of scholarship and Bahá'í Studies in representing, explaining, participating in, and advancing these processes.

Presenters from every field, discipline, and profession are invited to analyze these topics in relationship to their own area of specialization, to explore their role as contributors to and participants in a spiritual civilization, and to examine the ways in which the Bahá'í teachings illuminate their object of study as well as how knowledge generated in these fields of endeavor can contribute to the understanding and advancement of these processes.

Proposals are invited for presentations and workshops on the themes described above (though not limited to those topics). Proposals should

## Bahá'í International Community Launches News Service

**T**he Bahá'í International Community, representing and encompassing the five million members of the Bahá'í Faith worldwide, has launched an Internet-based news service at [www.bahaiworldnews.org](http://www.bahaiworldnews.org).

The Bahá'í World News Service carries reports on the activities, projects and events of the worldwide Bahá'í community. The Web site offers the latest headlines, searchable news and photo archives, and a subscription feature that allows users to receive articles by email.

The main purpose of the news service is to provide timely reports to the news media about Bahá'í involvement in a broad range of issues, including youth, the arts, scholarship, social and economic development, human rights, race unity, interfaith relations, the advancement of women, and moral education, as well as news about the growth and development of the worldwide Bahá'í community. In addition to the news media, Bahá'í-sponsored magazines and newsletters around the world are expected to draw on the service.

All stories and photographs produced by the Bahá'í World News Service

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## Wilmette Institute Courses

### Spiritual Foundations for a Global Civilization

**T**he Wilmette Institute is pleased to announce that it is now accepting registrations for the 2001-02 school year for its Spiritual Foundations for a Global Civilization program. This is a four-year university-level program for Bahá'ís only that new students can enter at any time. Its purpose is to raise up a new generation of knowledgeable, articulate teachers and administrators of the Bahá'í Faith by imparting knowledge developing various skills, including teaching skills; inculcating a spirit of service; and fostering Bahá'í identity and a sense of Bahá'í community. It consists of both home-study and has a two-week residential component held in Wilmette each summer. Deadline for Application: April 1, 2001

### Studies in the Bahá'í Faith Program: Bahá'í History Series: Rediscovering the Dawn-Breakers: The Báb and the Bábi Faith

**T**he Bahá'í Faith is a religion that particularly emphasizes study of its history. Bahá'í history provides one with a sense of the Faith's ongoing development, its crises and victories, and teaches lessons relevant to contemporary communities and efforts. Study of the earliest period of history - the Dawn-Breakers of the Heroic Age - provides many opportunities to meditate on the spiritual qualities we must develop to be examples of the Bahá'í life and to re-examine our efforts to serve the Faith. As Shoghi Effendi's secretary noted, 'Shoghi Effendi undertook the translation of *The Dawn-Breakers* only after being convinced that its publication will arouse the friends to greater self-sacrifice and a more determined way of teaching. Otherwise he would not have devoted so much time to it. . . . Reading about the life and activities of those heroic souls is bound to influence our mode of living and the importance we attach to our services in the Cause'. (Shoghi Effendi *The Importance of Deepening*, p. 216)

DATES: March 1, 2001 to May 31, 2001

TEXTS: *Nabil's Narrative*, *God Passes By*, and various supplemental readings assembled by the Institute.

FACULTY: Dr. Iraj Ayman, Dr. Todd Lawson, Mr. Stephen Lambden, Dr. Moojan Momen, Mr. Michael Sours, Dr. Robert Stockman and Mr. Peter Terry.

COST: \$150. Scholarships are available, and all students who join as members of local study groups of three or more people will also receive

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Islam to turn inwards and thereafter to develop its unique style of mysticism exemplified by Sufism.

The sessions on this opening day allowed for some lively discussion and debate, especially on the status of women in Islam, Muhammad's having fourteen wives and the vexed question of Holy War. Todd offered a spirited defence of the Islamic position on these and other issues - explaining that the word 'jihad' actually means 'struggle' (that is, with oneself) - and advised that we shouldn't allow media reports and current attitudes - which tend to sensationalise and scandalise Islam - to determine our own views of it and its place in history. He stressed that Islam still has many positive features, and made clear that it was more important to ask the right questions than to claim that Bahá'ís themselves had all the right answers.

On Sunday sessions started at 9 a.m. with a devotional followed by a workshop in which three groups of between five and seven participants examined and then commented upon a short passage from the Qur'an (5:35). Known as 'The Light Verse', it reads:

God is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The parable of His Light is like this: There is a niche, In the niche there is a lamp; The lamp is (placed) in a globe of glass, The globe is as it were a brilliant planet [star], It is lighted with the oil of a blessed olive-tree which is neither of the East nor of the West, The oil thereof well-nigh [virtually] gives light though no fire touches it: There is Light upon Light. God guides towards His light him who wishes (it). And God sets forth parables for mankind, because God knows all [created] things.

In 'Seeing Double', Todd proposes that a thorough study of this verse would help to define more clearly the relationship between Islam and the Bahá'í Faith. After some forty minutes' consultation, the three groups each produced in their interpretations of this richly figurative passage some varied, profound and cogent exegeses, including a passage from a 1952 letter by the Guardian, in which the 'oil' (i.e. crushed seed) was symbolised by the martyrdom of the Báb. This exercise also provided a practical demonstration of how Muslim scholars themselves approach interpretation of the Qur'an and related hadith.

After a break, Todd discoursed on the highly subtle use of language, script and calligraphy in the universe of Islam and outlined its theology, philosophy and poetry over successive periods of its evolution as a major religio-cultural force by citing, and describing, outstanding figures from each of these disciplines, including the logician Avicenna and the poet Rumi.

After lunch, Todd explored the similarities and differences between the two main branches of Islam Sunni (constituting 80% of Muslims) and Shi'ih (constituting about 20% and found mostly in Iran) - and identified the distinctive characteristics of each. He paid particular attention to the line of Imams (leaders) in Shi'ih Islam, which eventually led

to the heterodox, esoteric but immensely popular and attractive teachings of Shaykh Ahmad (1753-1826), from within whose matrix emerged the Revelations of the Báb and then Bahá'u'lláh. Todd pointed out that the main differences or disagreements within Islam arose because of the increasingly divergent interpretations of the Covenant - particularly the disputes concerning Muhammad's rightful successors - and he touched on how Bahá'u'lláh and then 'Abdu'l-Bahá tackled and resolved these problems through specific appointments in Their respective Will and Testaments.

Todd had an inexhaustible fund of knowledge and anecdotes about diverse aspects of Islam and a seemingly effortless ability to communicate his insights and understandings with gusto: at all times he provided everyone with ample food for thought. Bahá'ís possibly appreciate the imperative part that Islam has played in humanity's gradual progress towards global unity and the immense debt that the Bahá'í Faith owes to its immediate predecessor. (At least 70% of the Kitáb-i-Íqán, Bahá'u'lláh's pre-eminent doctrinal opus, contains references and allusions to Shi'ih Islam.) The question is: Do Bahá'ís sufficiently appreciate the richness and exuberance of Islamic culture, the ardour found in its religious love poetry (e.g. the stream of 'white-hot' paeans to Muhammad) and the subtle and intricate use of allusion, metaphor and symbol in its language? These aspects of the relationship between the two religions were highlighted by Todd during the Weekend. He said that it is vital to ask questions at every opportunity, even if they reflect only our frustrations, and that as a community, Bahá'ís still had a considerable amount to learn from and about Islam.

At least half of the participants attending were young people, and two had come specially from Britain. Hopefully the next ABS Conference on the theme of 'Diversity in Unity' and scheduled to be held in west Cork this summer will prove as rewarding, thought-provoking and well-organised as this event.

With two ABS Weekends held during the Twelve Month Plan and an ABS Journal planned for publication this year, the wheels of Bahá'í scholarship in Ireland are in motion at last.

Brian Corvin and Edwin McCloughan

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institutions to foster, establish and maintain a good working relationship with Bahá'í scholars and academics:

- to include the promotion of scholarship and activities of Bahá'í scholars as a part of any national plan and to make some budgetary allocation for this
  - frequent, perhaps annual, meetings between the institutions and Bahá'í scholars to discuss strategies for the further promotion of scholarship in the Bahá'í community. At the national level, these meetings would include members of the ABS but not be limited to them. These meetings can do much to allay fears and overcome suspicion, should they exist.
  - at a national level, annual meetings between the ABS and the National Spiritual Assembly
  - visible support of the institutions of the Faith by attendance of members at events organised by ABS and other agencies, such as the Irfan Colloquium
  - calling upon scholars of the Faith to assist in the creation of programmes of study for residential schools, etc.
  - at a national level, calling upon scholars of the Faith to advise the National Spiritual Assembly of developments in academia that would have a bearing on the progress of the Faith
  - at a national level, calling upon scholars of the Faith to advise the National Spiritual Assembly in the preparation of any programmes designed to defend the Faith or promote its interests in its external affairs activities, widely defined
  - providing scholars of the Faith, through the Association of Bahá'í Studies and other agencies, with opportunities to discuss with colleagues some of the challenges of being a Bahá'í scholar and academic
  - listening to the concerns of scholars and academics
  - fostering a spirit of inquiry, learning, inclusiveness and unity among all believers
- I also believe there are a few steps Bahá'í scholars and academics could take that would foster a good relationship with Bahá'í institutions:
- participating, to the extent possible, in the general activities of the Bahá'í community
  - taking an active role in the programmes of residential schools and other community educational activities, such as community schools
  - serving on committees and other agencies when called upon to do so
  - advising the institutions of the Faith when called upon to do so
  - offering to the institutions insights into current affairs and ways of correlating the Faith's teaching with them
  - cooperating with the review procedures set up by the National Spiritual Assembly and offering their assistance to improve them or facilitate their working
  - continuing to seek new avenues for the publication of their work and taking part in professional conferences, media events and other activities where a scholarly point of view would be appreciated
  - assisting Bahá'ís, particularly young Bahá'ís, in their efforts

to become Bahá'í scholars and to offer a mentoring programme where feasible

- participating in the teaching activities of their Bahá'í communities
- listening to the concerns of Bahá'í institutions

Dr Wendi Momen

## Comments On Scholarship and the Bahá'í Institutions

**M**y comments on the relationship between 'scholars' and the Institutions fall in four separate categories, rather than following a single theme.

1. Scholarship is a useful term, but scholar is not. Scholarship is a process of producing a body of knowledge about a subject, bit by bit, through research, writing, publication, and debate over the results. It is a term that is understood widely, and the process is to some extent familiar. It is something that professionals can contribute to particularly well, but others can as well, especially if they can find a specialized aspect of the process. But the word scholar unfortunately is not parallel to the word scholarship; in other words, scholar does not mean 'someone who contributes to scholarship'. Instead, it has come to carry two different contradictory meanings in the Bahá'í community, at least in North America. From a popular point of view, scholar connotes a brain, someone with great knowledge and training; someone different from everyone else. Some of the 'scholars' have enjoyed the sense of specialness this has produced. On the other hand, Shoghi Effendi has defined the term this way: 'The Cause needs more Baha'i scholars, people who not only are devoted to it and believe in it and are anxious to tell others about it, but also who have a deep grasp of the Teachings and their significance, and who can correlate its beliefs with the current thoughts and problems of the people of the world'. This definition by Shoghi Effendi really includes any deepened Bahá'í, and by extension can include just about all Bahá'ís. And there is a long history of abuse of this definition, using it to mean that everyone is a Bahá'í scholar. And of course, if everyone is a Bahá'í scholar, one could just as easily say that no one is a Bahá'í scholar. So I, personally, have all but abandoned the word, preferring easily definable and clear terms, such as Bahá'í researcher, Bahá'í writer, Bahá'í author, or Bahá'í academic, at least until a clear and useful definition of the word comes to be widely understood.

2. The relationship between scholarship and faith (and by extension, with the Bahá'í institutions) is analogous to the relationship between science and religion. This does not seem like particularly profound observation until one asks what the relationship between science and religion really is. The answer, I think, is that the harmony between the two is an ideal state; in other words, in the realm of ideas, we know that truth is one, and therefore scientific and religious truth cannot contradict. But we live in the real world, not the world of ideas, and in the real world contradictions between the two are often apparent. Bahá'ís can react to the hint of

contradiction between science and religion in various ways. I think the predominant reaction is to pretend the contradiction does not exist and that harmony reigns. But this reaction, I would contend, is contrary to the spirit of investigation of truth; furthermore, it demonstrates lack of faith. Instead, I would argue that in the real world, belief in the harmony of science and religion is to assert faith in a process that will eventually lead to clarity of understanding of both and harmony between them. In faith, we must leap right into the contradictions, embrace them, rigorously examine them, and gradually - maybe slowly - resolve them. Bahá'í scholarship faces exactly the same challenge. There will be apparent contradictions between true scholarship and the 'proper' Bahá'í approach to things. Some will argue that the methodologies of scholarship are wrong; others, that the Bahá'í principles and values are either wrong or have been misunderstood. The process of working through the apparent contradictions will sometimes be painful and will be a test of faith. But it will not help to deny the existence of the apparent contradictions or downplay their seriousness.

The relationship of scholarship to the Bahá'í institutions is an extension of this process because of the Bahá'í claim that the Universal House of Justice is infallible. That makes a tendency or desire to disagree with the Universal House of Justice to be felt as a severe test of faith. But one must attain to a recognition that a process is happening, that one's own understanding is in process, that one has to have faith that one will eventually see and understand, and that one must pursue the truth bravely and actively.

One approach that I think will help smooth out the relationship between scholarship and the community (for the community and its institutions embody the Bahá'í values that seem to contradict the principles of scholarship) will be the development of a code of ethical conduct by Bahá'í researchers. Such a code would call for research to be conducted to high standards of accuracy; would outline qualities Bahá'í research should strive to achieve, such as fairness, open-mindedness, rigor, and clarity; would call for creation of a consultative atmosphere with both fellow researchers and with Bahá'í institutions; and would stress respect for the safety of persons whose lives might be endangered by the research.

3. The relationship between scholarship and the Institutions in North America. The conference organisers asked me to address this matter in my remarks, and it is not a simple matter to discuss. The North American Bahá'í community has had an active community of Bahá'í researchers, many of them academics, for almost 25 years, and the relationship between them and the institutions - not just the National Spiritual Assembly, but the Counsellors, the International Teaching Centre, and the Universal House of Justice - has not always been the best. It is important to remember that the Universal House of Justice has been intimately involved as an actor in North America, because otherwise it is easy to blame fallible North American institutions for the problems. Rather, a process of maturation has been going on where it is probably safe to say that mistakes have been made by all parties (though it is difficult to be sure of this

because so much information is, necessarily, confidential, and thus we have no access to it).

In some measurable ways, the American National Spiritual Assembly's commitment to scholarship has been steadily growing. It established *World Order* magazine in 1966, which exists to publish scholarly works on the Faith. It established an archives office in about 1975, now with a full-time professional staff of two, whose main task is to organize historical materials so that researchers have access to them. It began to support the Association for Bahá'í Studies in 1980, a commitment of about \$30,000 per year currently. It established the Encyclopedia project in 1986, which also has a full-time staff of two. It established the Research Office in 1989, again now with a staff of three, partly because literature review required a significant upgrade in quality and partly because scholarship needed a 'home' in the office structure in Wilmette. It established the Institute for Bahá'í Studies and Wilmette Institute in 1994 and 1995 respectively to expand its ability to collaborate with non-Bahá'í academic institutions and to educate the Bahá'í community. These commitments together involve the expenditure of some \$400,000 per year. It has also lent considerable support to the Bahá'í Chair in Peace Studies at the University of Maryland. Thus the pattern over the last 25 years has been one of expanding support for scholarship, in spite of rocky relations with some scholars at different times. Furthermore, speaking personally, I have not detected a drift toward more 'conservative' or 'reactionary' or 'fundamentalist' views in the last few years.

The Research Office has been very concerned with routinizing the relationship between the United States Bahá'í National Centre and researchers, whether Bahá'í or non-Bahá'í. A major concern has been literature review, which it has been able to improve in quality and make more consultative. It has been gradually developing a document defining the criteria of accuracy, dignity, timeliness, and respect for ethically defined standards of privacy and confidentiality; outlining appeal processes; and calling for transparency in the review process.

Dr. Robert H. Stockman

## The International Criminal Court – A Bahá'í Perspective

**T**he International Criminal Court exists currently as a Treaty, a paper entity. In the next two to three years a brick and mortar building will be erected in the Hague, Holland. It will house judges, prosecutors, lawyers and researchers. It will be an entirely new global institution with the power to investigate, indict, prosecute and sentence individuals around the world who commit serious breaches of humanitarian law.

Following the end of World War Two, the victorious allies

established two tribunals, at Nuremberg in Germany and Tokyo in Japan. What emerged from the Nuremberg tribunals was a set of laws by which individuals were held to account for their actions. In 1948 the Genocide Convention was established at the UN. One of its first actions was to call for the creation of a permanent international court. Here the history of the ICC is frozen for a period of nearly fifty years in the era of Cold War politics.

The very year that the Berlin Wall fell Trinidad and Tobago reintroduced the idea of a permanent ICC at the UN General Assembly. Support for such an initiative grew as evidence of crimes of mass violence emerged in first Bosnia and then Rwanda. In 1993 the UN Security Council established the ICTY and a year later the CTR. Whilst these institutions represented the first efforts since Nuremberg to punish serious violations of human rights, they were both ad hoc and limited to a mandate delineated by territory and time.

In November of 1994 the International Law Commission presented a draft statute to the General Assembly. The following month the General Assembly renewed a mandate of a Preparatory Committee and decided that a diplomatic conference should be held in June and July of 1998 to establish the court treaty.

The treaty conference was held in Rome, where 120 states voted to adopt the Rome Treaty for the ICC. 7 states voted against the treaty, including Libya, Iran, Israel, China and, to the great regret of many people, the USA. The court will be empowered to investigate, prosecute and punish individuals who commit certain specific and very serious crimes. These are as follows: crimes of genocide (6), as defined by the 1948 Genocide Convention, crimes against humanity (7), including sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, enforced pregnancy and apartheid, and war crimes (8), several of which are provided for in Protocol 2 of the Geneva Conventions, this includes starvation of civilians, use of human shields to give just 2 examples. The court will also have the power to prosecute the crime of aggression, but state parties to the treaty cannot as yet agree on a legal definition of what constitutes aggression.

There are several trigger mechanisms that will allow the court to start an investigation. A state party to the treaty (i.e a state that has ratified the Rome treaty) or the Security Council may refer a case to the court. The court will also have an office of the prosecutor that will have the capacity to initiate investigations on receipt of credible information that an ICC crime has taken place.

The Security Council will however retain the right to invoke powers under Chapter 7 of the UN Charter to defer ICC investigations or prosecutions for a period of 12 months, which can be renewed indefinitely, when an ICC investigation is deemed to be a threat to international peace and security (article 16).

The principle of complementarity is enshrined in the ICC treaty, which means that national legal systems will have precedence in trying those accused of serious violations of

humanitarian law. The ICC is intended to act when national judicial systems are either unable or unwilling to act.

The ICC will only have jurisdiction over individuals who are either of the nationality of a state party to the treaty or are on the territory of a state party to the treaty. Obviously the most egregious abusers of human rights are unlikely to ratify the court, but the Security Council will have the power to order court investigations into areas of mass human rights abuse anywhere under the UN charter.

The Rome treaty will not act retrospectively. It will come into effect when 60 states have enacted the legislation to ratify the treaty into their own domestic legal systems - 114 states have signed it and, to date, 21 states have ratified the treaty, and it is anticipated that the necessary 60 ratifications will be reached some time in 2002.

The UK signed the treaty on 30 November 1998 at a ceremony at the UN in New York. On 25 August 2000 the Foreign and Commonwealth Office published draft legislation to enable the UK to enable the ICC into UK law. The Bahá'í community was one of 12 human rights organizations that met with the Minister of State to receive the first copies of the draft bill. The draft bill is currently open for consultation. Human rights organizations have several key concerns about the document e.g. it does not provide for universal jurisdiction for ICC crimes, which may prevent the ability to prosecute non-UK nationals. Equally controversial is the absence from the draft bill of any inclusion of article 27 of the Rome treaty, which provides that no individual, even a Head of State, can be immune from prosecution. The UK draft bill does not incorporate this section.

Practically, the Bahá'í community worldwide has been a long-standing supporter of the ICC. The BIC New York office was a founding member of the Coalition for the International Criminal Court. Support for the court emanates from the highest authority in the Bahá'í world, the Universal House of Justice. In the Ridvan message for this year it was noted '...attempts at implementing and elaborating the methods of collective security were earnestly made, bringing to mind one of Bahá'u'lláh's prescriptions for maintaining peace; a call was raised for an international criminal court to be established'. Here in the UK, the Office of External Affairs (OEA) sits on the UK Coalition for the ICC and is the facilitator on the interfaith caucus for the ICC, which has met with officials at the Foreign Office. Nationwide, Bahá'í communities have written to hundreds of MPs in support of the court and this has raised our profile with government.

At a recent conference on international law at the Bahá'í conference centre in Depoort an eminent Bahá'í scholar addressed the role of spiritual transformation in the emergence of Bahá'í law. The ICC is not of course, the Supreme Tribunal that is promised in the Bahá'í writings, but its creation represents a surge of movement towards a world where an evermore unified humanity will one day embrace the institutions which Bahá'u'lláh has ordained.

When Shoghi Effendi elucidates upon the Supreme Tribunal

he makes clear that in the future world order of Bahá'u'lláh nations will be bound by the tribunal's judgements, whether they voluntarily submit to them or not. I suggest that what the Beloved Guardian is clarifying is that the Supreme Tribunal would have universal jurisdiction. The ICC may prove to be a vital proving ground for advancing the universal jurisdiction of certain global laws, reflecting global norms.

This court will most likely come into being within 24 to 36 months. In pragmatic terms it has the potential to do great service in eroding, and I hope, eradicating the culture of serious violations of human rights. But more than that it will help to give rise to new values, new ideas about human beings and human relationships. It will advance the unity of the human race. We as Bahá'ís recognise also the spiritual origins of justice and that the healing nature of justice ultimately flows from the realm of the Divine. As a community therefore we will continue to work hard for the success of the ICC, never forgetting the spiritual realities that are at its core.

Dan Wheatley

## Irfan Colloquium

Irfan Colloquium is the annual gathering of those engaged or seriously interested in studies related to the fundamental principles of the Bahá'í belief system; academic studies in the Bahá'í holy texts; and comparative studies of the world religions in relation to Bahá'í Faith. The main theme of the Irfan Colloquium in 2001 is Mysticism and the Bahá'í Faith. The colloquium will be followed by a seminar on the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh revealed during the late Akka period. Proposals for paper presentation are welcome and must be submitted before the end of March 2001.

Thirty-Fifth session of the Irfan Colloquium will be held at the London School of Economics, 13-15 July 2001. Programme starts at the evening of the first day and ends at the evening of the last day. There is a registration fee that includes Irfan publications and handouts. Participants at the Colloquium will receive a volume containing the texts of the papers presented at the Colloquium in 2000 and a booklet of the

abstracts of the papers to be presented in 2001. For further information on paper presentation contact: Dr. Moojan Momen, Wixamtree, Sand Lane, Northill, nr. Biggleswade, Beds. SG18 9AD, U. K. Phone Fax: 44-1767-627-626 [momen@northill.demon.co.uk](mailto:momen@northill.demon.co.uk). For information on registration and accommodation contact: Mrs. Mirta Lopez 64 Addison Road, Flat 1, London W14 8JL. Phone & Fax: 0171 371 6022 [mirta@compuserve.com](mailto:mirta@compuserve.com). For general information on Irfan Colloquium contact: Irfan Colloquium, National Bahá'í Centre, 1233 Central Street, Evanston, 60210-1911, USA. Telephone: 847-733-3501, Fax: 847-733-3502 [jayman@usbnc.org](mailto:jayman@usbnc.org).

## Jerusalem Conference

**M**odern Religions and Religious Movements and the Bábí & Bahá'í Faiths. More than 50 papers were presented at the First International Conference jointly sponsored by the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Landegg Academy, Switzerland. The conference was organized by the Chair for Bahá'í Studies and held at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem from 17-21 December 2000. In recognition of the significance of this conference, the President of the University, Professor M. Magidor, and the Dean of the Faculty of Humanities, Professor Y. Zakovitch, participated in the opening ceremonies. The Mayor of Jerusalem, the Hon. Ehud Olmert was also present to welcome conference participants. Following the introductory comments of Professor Moshe Sharon, Professor of Bahá'í Studies at the Hebrew University, Dr Hossain Danesh, Rector of Landegg Academy gave the keynote address. The evening concluded with a superb performance by the King David String Ensemble, under the direction of Anita Kamien.

Over the next three days papers were presented on a variety of themes drawn from the fields of Jewish, Islamic, Christian and Bahá'í Studies. The closing session of the conference likewise was a special event, attended by the Rector of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and featured world-renowned santour virtuoso, Kiumars Haghghi. The fifth day of the conference comprised a day trip to Haifa and Acre, for visits to the Bahá'í Holy places and institutions.

The conference proceedings are to be published, both electronically and in print format and details will appear in a later Landegg Monthly Newsletter. A number of papers presented at the conference are now available on the website of Landegg Academy.

## ADVANCE NOTICE and CALL FOR PAPERS

### *Diversity in Unity*

9-10 June 2001

Venue: Inchigeelagh, Co. Cork, Republic of Ireland

The Conference will be held in West Cork, one of the most beautiful parts of Ireland. We invite submissions for papers, presentations and workshops - topics are open. Participants will also have the opportunity to discuss Bahá'í studies in Ireland.

It is envisioned that each participant will have a time-slot of 30-40 minutes for their presentation, followed by 15-20 minutes for discussion.

Please send your abstracts of 100-200 words by 18 May 2001 to the Conference Registrar, Dr Iarfhlaith Watson, c/o The National Bahá'í Centre, 24 Burlington Road, Dublin 4, Republic of Ireland or to [iwatson@ucd.ie](mailto:iwatson@ucd.ie)

There is a limited number of places, which will be reserved

### Resource Guide for the Scholarly Study of the Bahá'í Faith

The compilers of the 'Resource Guide for the Scholarly Study of the Bahá'í Faith' will be preparing an eighth edition this year and seek help in making it a complete and useful resource. The new edition will be updated with annotated citations of any noteworthy scholarship, arranged by topic, published since the 1997 edition, as well as any other citations we might have neglected to include earlier. We are seeking assistance in collecting these references, and suggestions for ones we might either have missed or not had access to, such as from limited-circulation academic or regional journals. We also need some specific lists, such as addresses for Bahá'í Publishers, or of useful videos. As well, we would appreciate feedback on any other aspects of the Guide's content or mandate, and would consider adding relevant sections, bibliographies, curriculum guides, or essays, as proposed.

Please consult edition seven of the Resource Guide at <http://bahai-library.org/books/rg> and write to Jonah Winters, [winters@bahai-library.org](mailto:winters@bahai-library.org), to assist or offer feedback

### Submissions for *Associate* to:

[absese@hotmail.com](mailto:absese@hotmail.com)

Or by post (preferably on disk) to:

Associate, ABS-ESE, 27 Rutland Gate, London, SW7 1PD, United

### Membership of ABS(ESE)

- Individual membership: £15 Sterling per year
- Unwaged membership: £10 Sterling per year (including full-time students and senior citizens)
- Sponsoring membership: £25 Sterling per year (supporting a Bahá'í in Central or Eastern Europe)

Membership Secretary, ABS-ESE, 27 Rutland Gate, London, SW7 1PD, United Kingdom.

Large Print copies of *Associate* are available on

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