

# ASSOCIATE



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

Issue 38 – Spring 2004 C.E.

## ABS (ESE) – Present and Future

**T**he purpose of this article is to summarise the current status of the ABS(ESE) – looking at its scope and how the Association attempts to carry out these duties, and to inform its membership of the changes that have been taking place over the past several months. Elsewhere in the newsletter is a retrospective of some of the achievements of the ABS(ESE) over the years, and of course these represent the efforts of the many people who have been involved at different times.

The main brief of the ABS(ESE) is to promote scholarship within English-speaking Europe. It does this by:

- An annual publication - the Bahá'í Studies Review (BSR)
- An annual meeting – the Annual Conference
- Special interest groups (SIGs)
- Scholarship workshops
- The Scholarship Academy – to date held in the summer

The ABS(ESE) Executive Committee currently communicates with ABS members through this newsletter, Associate, and through the website at [www.bahai.org.uk/abs](http://www.bahai.org.uk/abs).

### 1. The Bahá'í Studies Review

In 2002/3, the BSR had a change of editorship: Dr. Moojan Momen was appointed to be the Editor-in-Chief. Dr. Momen heads an impressive Editorial Board of Arthur Dahl (UN Environment Programme), Will van den Hoonaard (University of New Brunswick), Stephen Lambden (University of Ohio), Ulf Petresson (University of Göteborg), Todd Lawson (University of Toronto), and with Daniel Grolin as Book Review Editor. The current issue of the BSR has been typeset by Chris Manvell, proof-read by Darach Watson & Evie Watson, with Jeremy Lockyer as copy editor.

The scope of the BSR is intended to cover the central areas of Bahá'í theology, history, textual studies, translation, and social studies as well as the application of Bahá'í teachings to such areas as law, education, social and economic development, and the environment. Papers on comparative religion and inter-religious dialogue will also be accepted.

BSR will continue as an annual publication of the ABS(ESE). As a result of the change of editorship,

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there has been a delay in publication of the next edition. At the time of writing, the BSR is at the printers and will shortly be sent to all members. The current BSR is available free to members, and may be purchased for £15 by non-members. Back-issues of BSR are available free of charge on line through the ABS website, or may be purchased as hard copies. It is intended that any current BSR will be available on line after an interval of 2 years.

### 2. The Associate – Communication from Us to You

This edition of the Associate will be the final one in its current form. In future, the Association for Bahá'í Studies will communicate with its members through an online e-mail news service. Please forward any matters of interest to [abs@bahai.org.uk](mailto:abs@bahai.org.uk).

Further details of the service and how to access the information will be forwarded to members by e-mail. It is essential therefore that we have an up-to-date e-mail address for all our members. Please e-mail [abs@bahai.org.uk](mailto:abs@bahai.org.uk), putting “membership” in the subject line, with your name, postal address and e-mail address in the body.

### 3. Membership of ABS(ESE)

Current membership fees remain incredibly good value [see back page], and have remained at this level since 1999. Renewal dates are twice a year: in January and July. In view of the delay in publishing

the BSR and Associate, the ABS Executive Committee has granted all members a free extension to January 2004.

Members receive the latest BSR free and are entitled to discounts at ABS(ESE) events. In addition to these benefits, by subscribing to the ABS(ESE) members are actively supporting the promotion of Bahá'í scholarship; the income from subscriptions is essential to enable the Association to pursue its policy of making the minimum of financial demands on the funds of the NSA.

#### 4. Special Interest Groups (SIGs)

Special Interest Groups have been set up to foster dialogue and scholarship on particular topics. There are currently a number of SIGs, which occasionally meet to share Bahá'í perspectives on their special subjects.

Current SIGs include Religious Studies [contact [momen@northill.demon.co.uk](mailto:momen@northill.demon.co.uk)], Bahai International Politics and Law (BIPOLIG) [contact [nghanea@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:nghanea@yahoo.co.uk)]. Others with budding interest but requiring more manpower to get off the ground are Education, Arts, Philosophy & Ethics, Agriculture and Gender. If you are interested in these SIGs, please contact Rob Ghanea-Hercock on [robert.ghanea-hercock@bt.com](mailto:robert.ghanea-hercock@bt.com).

A SIG weekend is planned for the weekend of 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> October 2004, in Cambridge. Please keep the date free - further details will be forthcoming. Currently the SIGs participating are: BIPOLIG, Science & Religion and Philosophy & Ethics.

#### 5. Scholarship Workshops

We have all been asked to "nurture the habits of scholarship". The Association has held a number of events in England, Scotland and Ireland, and recently Sweden, to help in this process. They have proved universally popular. If you would like to run a course in your area, please contact us on [abs@bahai.org.uk](mailto:abs@bahai.org.uk).

#### 6. The Scholarship Academies

Over the last 3-4 years, the Association has organised 3-5 day courses on various aspects of scholarship as part of summer school programs in England and Ireland. These have been successful in raising the profile of scholarship in the wider Bahá'í community, and aim to encourage the next generation of budding scholars to get started. The Association intends to continue with these and the next one in the UK will be at Reading Summer School from the 7<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> August 2004. Details at [www.bahai.org.uk/ssi/](http://www.bahai.org.uk/ssi/) or e-mail [readingsummerschool@hotmail.com](mailto:readingsummerschool@hotmail.com)

The NSA of Sweden has commissioned a group in Gothenburg to plan a Nordic Bahá'í Symposium which aims to promote scholarship. It will be conducted in English, and papers are already being submitted. The dates are 20<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2004. For further information, please contact Daniel Grolin on: [Daniel@grolin.dk](mailto:Daniel@grolin.dk).

#### 7. Annual Conferences

The ABS(ESE) Annual Conference is generally regarded as one of the highlights of the scholarship calendar. The next such conference is being held jointly with the Irfan Colloquium, on 2-4<sup>th</sup> July 2004, at ICS in London [details elsewhere in this newsletter].

#### 8. Bahá'í Societies

As of June 2003, the NSA decided that the Bahá'í Societies should come under the remit of the regional councils, rather than the ABS(ESE), as explained elsewhere in this newsletter.

Under the guidance of the ABS, *The Bahá'í Student Handbook* was developed 10 years ago, to encourage activity of the Bahá'í Societies. This can still be found at [www.bahai.org.uk/abs](http://www.bahai.org.uk/abs).

#### 9. The Way Forward and Vision for the Future

The challenge of scholarship is to say something new, to progress knowledge, to challenge assumptions and perceptions, to achieve new visions. The ability to ask questions is the expression of a confident community. The ABS encourages the pushing of boundaries, not for its own sake but to foster the exploration of new horizons in the spirit of learning. The ABS endeavours to encourage scholarship activities in their diversity. Scholarship takes place within different frameworks, and each makes a contribution within its own domain.

The role of the ABS is to encourage and welcome a climate of diversity.

'Bahá'í scholarship' may be classed into different categories:

- Academic scholarship exclusively concerned with the Bahá'í Faith
- Academic scholarship on topics to which the Bahá'í Faith makes a contribution (correlation)
- Scholarship on both of the above, but not within current academic frameworks

The ABS welcomes the various categories of scholarship activities equally. The aim of recognising these various categories of scholarship is to include and clarify, and encourage diversity. The realisation of this diversity is integral to a unifying appreciation of Bahá'í scholarship in its various forms.

#### *Is scholarship for everyone?*

Yes, but it offers/means different things for different people. The various audiences for Bahá'í scholarship can be divided into the following four categories. The role of the ABS for each type of audience is probably different. However all are warmly welcomed and offered encouragement.

#### *Existing Bahá'í academics/scholars*

For this category the ABS would ideally offer on the practical level: networking opportunities, the possibility of exploring future joint projects with others in related fields, useful feedback on their work and some publishing options. At the emotional and

personal level the ABS would offer a welcome and encouragement.

*Existing non-Bahá'í academics/scholars working in the Bahá'í Faith or Bahá'í perspectives*

The ABS would provide these with the opportunity to gather accurate information on the Bahá'í Faith and Bahá'í community, as well as feedback and encouragement on their work.

*Bahá'í Institutions*

Ideally, the ABS would provide Bahá'í Institutions at various levels with the opportunity to explore new ideas and perspectives, provide a venue for commissioning stance papers/fact sheets/research documents, and offer the possibility of spotting a new pool of Bahá'í speakers.

*Potential Bahá'í academics/scholars*

The ABS should provide the wider Bahá'í community with an opportunity to explore different ways of thinking, inspire deeper reflection and new perspectives, and encourage them to delve into study of the Bahá'í Faith, its Writings and its application to other fields of endeavour. It would also instill in the Bahá'í community a reassurance that scholarship is a legitimate arena of service.

## ABS(ESE) - A Retrospective

### 1. Publications

#### a) *The Bahá'í Studies Review*

Over the last few years, the Bahá'í Studies Review (BSR) has established itself as the leading Bahá'í studies periodical. Its founding editor was Seena Fazel in 1991. John Danesh and Seena Fazel coedited the BSR from 1994-2002 (ending with BSR 10), and, in 2003, Moojan Momen was appointed editor. Editorship has been non-stipendiary.

The BSR moved Bahá'í studies forward in a number of ways. Firstly, it commissioned and worked with new talent in Bahá'í studies; a large number of its contributors published for the first time in the BSR. Secondly, it focused on foundational issues in Bahá'í studies, and published groundbreaking material on interpretation, theology, ethics, spirituality, apologetics, and history. Thirdly, the BSR was the first Bahá'í studies journal to publish reflective essays ("Soundings"), review articles of Bahá'í secondary literature, extended obituaries of prominent Bahá'í intellectuals and artists (starting with Marzieh Gail in BSR 6), and previously unpublished compilations of Bahá'í writings. It published bibliographic guides to Bahá'í literature (BSR 8 and 11) and provisional translations of Bahá'í scripture (BSR 9 onwards). Fourthly, BSR commissioned renowned thinkers inside and outside the Bahá'í community to write invited commentaries, which included two pieces by a

leading philosopher of religion: John Hick (BSR 4 and 10). Fifthly, it published all back issues online and remains the only Bahá'í studies periodical to have done so.

The impact of BSR can be seen in many ways. A number of BSR articles have been reprinted, including in ABS publications in North America and Australia. Articles have been translated and published in Dutch, Polish and Persian. The BSR has been indexed in Religion Index and Index Islamicus, the most important academic bibliographic indexes in their respective fields, since 1993. Citation analysis, the most widely used method in academia to measure journal impact, has demonstrated that the BSR is the most cited Bahá'í studies periodical, a finding that reached statistical significance (see the recent paper "*Contemporary Developments in Bahá'í Studies*" at <http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/bhpapers/vol7/trends.htm>). Reference works, such as *A Concise Encyclopedia of the Bahá'í Faith* (Oneworld, 2001) and the *Curriculum Guide for the Scholarly Study of the Bahá'í Faith* (NSA of the Bahá'ís of America, 1998), cite more articles from the BSR than from other journals. The BSR remains heavily used as an Internet resource and articles from it are amongst the most downloaded from the Bahá'í Library website ([bahai-library.org](http://bahai-library.org)). On the difficult issue of what constitutes Bahá'í studies, the special issue on "*Challenges and Prospects of Bahá'í Scholarship*" (BSR 3.2) remains a valuable source of basic materials.

The comments of Bahá'ís interested in developing the intellectual life of the community represent another measure of the BSR's excellent reputation. The editors have received much positive feedback about past issues. For example, unsolicited comments about the last issue (BSR 10) include:

"Excellent and most interesting... the surveys on methodology were very good and complemented one another," Ian Semple, member of the Universal House of Justice

"The inside is pure gold," Dr Robert Stockman, Director, Research Office, National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the USA

"A magnificent issue... will be referred to for decades to come," Tony Lee, Managing Editor, Kalimat Press

"An excellent issue, highly interesting," Dr Udo Schaefer, Baha'i author and scholar

"Brilliant," Professor Franklin Lewis, Emory University

"A triumph," Professor Christopher Buck, Michigan State University.

A selection of papers from the first decade of the BSR was recently reprinted by Kalimat Press in their *Studies in Bábí and Bahá'í Religions* series, under the title "*Reason and Revelation: New Directions in Bahá'í Thought*" (Kalimat, 2002).

Among those who have been involved in the publication of the BSR over the years, is Chris Manvell, who continues to typeset, as he has done over the past nine issues, and without any charge. Over 30 individuals have acted as anonymous peer reviewers.

#### b) Associate

The newsletter of the ABS(ESE), *Associate*, has published 37 issues. It has been a useful resource for individuals to keep abreast of current developments in Bahá'í studies. For example, it has reported Bahá'í participation at the American Academy of Religion, the Middle Eastern Studies Association, and other non-Bahá'í conferences. *Associate* also reported on the Irfan Colloquia, ABS conferences around the world, and other relevant activities. It provided a more complete listing of such reports than other ABS newsletters or the abbreviated descriptions of Bahá'í scholarship activities in Bahá'í yearbooks. In addition, *Associate* published short papers on a number of subjects, including Bahá'í history in Poland and Australia, human rights, the development of Bahá'í studies, and gender issues. Issue 33/34 included articles by Muhammad Afnan, William Collins, Moojan Momen, Wendi Momen, and Robert Stockman on aspects of Bahá'í studies. It printed occasional bibliographic updates, and short summaries of articles on the Bábí-Bahá'í Faiths that appeared in non-Bahá'í periodicals.

*Associate* has been produced by several people over the years: Seena Fazel, Iarfhlaith Watson and latterly Jane Aldred.

#### c) Other Publications

The ABS(ESE) has published three editions of an online journal, "Solas", being the proceedings of annual conferences held in the Republic of Ireland. These date from 2000 and are edited by Iarfhlaith Watson.

A selection of papers from conferences held by the Special Interest Group on Politics and International Law (BIPOLIG) was published under the title "*Processes of the Lesser Peace*" (George Ronald, 2003).

The ABS(ESE) in conjunction with the European Bahá'í Youth Council, published two editions of "*The Bahá'í Student Handbook*", a resource for Bahá'í activities at universities and colleges. Although all copies of this handbook have been distributed, it remains online at the ABS(ESE) website and is mirrored on other websites.

## 2. Conferences

The ABS(ESE) has convened many conferences over the last decade. Annual conferences have been a regular feature of the Association and have provided opportunities to hear presentations on a range of subjects of broad interest to the Bahá'í community. Themes for the conference have included "*Shoghi Effendi in Oxford*", during which a tour of sites associated with Shoghi Effendi's education at Oxford was offered, and also memorable presentations from

individuals who had met the Guardian such as Philip Hainsworth. Recent conferences have been on the theme of "*Fundamentalism*", with thoughtful presentations by Professor Sholeh Quinn, Dr Moojan Momen, and others. Other conferences have discussed "*Growth Trends in the Bahá'í Community*" with an overview of Bahá'í writings by Shahriar Razavi and a review of the sociological and psychological research on conversions to the Faith by Seena Fazel – reflecting the view of the ABS(ESE) that "teaching" and Bahá'í scholarship are closely interrelated. Conference themes have also included social issues, such as development economics, education, and gender issues. Annual conferences have also been held in the Republic of Ireland. Regional conferences have been held in Scotland and Northern Ireland. Special sessions of the Irish summer school have been organized by the ABS(ESE), starting with a seminar on moral development in 1999 that was run by Masoud Afnan.

## 3. Special Interest Groups (SIGs)

The outstanding Religious Studies SIG has continued under the direction of Stephen Lambden and Moojan Momen. This special interest group built on work of the Bahá'í Studies Seminar, formed in the 1970s. The Seminar accepted the invitation of the ABS(ESE) to become a SIG in 1992. This SIG currently meets biannually, and has attracted Bahá'í scholars from around the world including Todd Lawson, John Walbridge, Robert Stockman, Udo Schaefer, Nicola Towfigh, Sholeh Quinn, Will van den Hoonaard, and Peter Smith.

The other SIG that met regularly, in the mid-late 1990s, and has recently been re-activated, was one on International Law and Politics (BIPOLIG) that was coordinated by Naz Ghanea-Hercock and Babak Bahador. BIPOLIG held a number of large conferences at the LSE with international speakers such as Arthur Dahl, Charles Lerche, Augusto Lopez-Claros, and experts working in the UK such as Geeta Gandhi Kingdon, Dan Sarooshi, and Michael Richards.

Other SIGs include gender studies, science and religion, education, and sociology but their work has not yet been sustained. This remains a problem for the ABS(ESE) – that the human resources in the Bahá'í community make it a challenge to maintain SIGs beyond the initial enthusiasm that surrounds their formation.

## 4. Training

A number of training weekends were held by the ABS(ESE) aimed at developing skills for research for young Bahá'ís. The first was jointly run by Seena Fazel and Shahriar Razavi in Swindon in 1995, and attracted 10 young Bahá'ís – a number of whom have subsequently made important contributions to Bahá'í studies. Two weekend training seminars were held in the Republic of Ireland, the first in Dublin in 1997 and the second in Ennis in 1998. A scholarship weekend was held in Stockholm at the request of the Swedish National Youth Committee in 2000. Seena Fazel ran

these three seminars. Talks at summer schools in England and Ireland were given on the importance of Bahá'í studies. The Religious Studies SIG has held one-day introductory seminars in Bahá'í studies run by Stephen Lambden and Moojan Momen for many years.

An important initiative of the ABS(ESE), after consultation with the Continental Board of Counsellors, was to run a training course for youth in Bahá'í studies. The first of these was organized jointly by Jane Aldred and Seena Fazel, and held during the Arts Academy at Sidcot in 2001, and called the Bahá'í Scholarship Academy. It included lectures by Lil Abdo, Dominic Brookshaw, Seena Fazel, Stephen Lambden, Moojan Momen, Wendi Momen, and Sholeh Quinn. In 2002, it was held at the Irish summer school at Waterford, and speakers included Amin Banani, Sheila Banani, Stephen Lambden, Todd Lawson, Sholeh Quinn and Iarfhlaith Watson. The ABS(ESE) also organized a weekend study course on the Covenant in Dublin run by Todd Lawson in 2001.

### 5. Bahá'í Societies

The ABS(ESE) administered the running of Bahá'í Societies from 1992. Initially it appointed a sub-committee and subsequently a taskforce. Annual Bahá'í Society conferences were held in the early 1990s with large attendances, and latterly Bahá'í Society sessions have been held during part of the ABS(ESE) annual conference. The ABS(ESE) worked with this sub-committee to publish the Bahá'í Student Handbook, and corresponded on behalf of the sub-committee with the House of Justice over the development of its own constitution. This led to important changes in the constitution that meant that Bahá'í Societies could be formed in some universities. Bahá'í Societies events have been reported regularly in the Associate, which acted as a vehicle for sharing ideas and best practice.

The NSA decided in June 2003 to de-centralise responsibility for Bahá'í Societies to the Councils, and it is to these that requests for guidance and information should now be directed (see elsewhere in this newsletter).

### 6. Collaborations

The ABS(ESE) has met with representatives of the Learned Arm on three occasions, including a training day where committee members deepened on aspects of the guidance from the Universal House of Justice on Bahá'í scholarship. The ABS(ESE) also has met with liaison members of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the UK (Wendi Momen) and Republic of Ireland (Seosamh Watson) on a regular basis. Members of the ABS(ESE) Executive Committee met with the UK NSA at a national conference in Manchester in 1995, and a representative of the executive committee met with the Irish NSA in 1996. Both NSAs have funded activities of the ABS(ESE) when requested, although the ABS(ESE) has been self-financing for 9 of the last 12 years.

Collaborations with other ABS's have been less developed, although members of the Committee have attended ABS activities in Australia, North America, India, and Germany. Although the ABS was first started in Canada, affiliate ABS's remain relatively autonomous and are under the administrative auspices of their respective National Spiritual Assemblies.

### 7. Website

Through the excellent work of Chris Manvell, the ABS(ESE) has a website that includes all past issues of the BSR, recent issues of *Associate*, copies of *Solas*, and the *Bahá'í Student Handbook*. Also a facility was set up to pay membership and purchase back issues of the BSR online. The website includes news and information about upcoming ABS(ESE) events. It is at [www.bahai.org.uk/abs/](http://www.bahai.org.uk/abs/)

## National Assembly Transfers Institutional Responsibility for University/College Bahá'í Societies to The Councils

*Extracts and digest from a letter by the National Spiritual Assembly to all four Bahá'í Councils in the United Kingdom (July 2003).*

**T**he National Spiritual Assembly strongly believes that the societies continue to have a range of extremely valuable roles. Such roles include:

- Focusing and developing the three core activities of the Plan
- Proclaiming the Faith to the university and college populations - which are viewed as potentially receptive populations by the National Assembly
- Encouraging Bahá'í scholarship
- Pastoral care activities
- External affairs activities.

The constitution of Bahá'í Societies was clearly defined by the Universal House of Justice more than twenty years ago.

“The major responsibilities that the Councils will now have in relation to Bahá'í Societies are as follows:

- Encouraging Bahá'í students at universities and colleges to form Bahá'í Societies whenever feasible
- Helping Bahá'í students to recognize the importance of developing the activities detailed above on a regular basis (especially the core activities of the Plan)

- Encouraging the Societies to apply to their union (or similar administrative body) for whatever type of grants that may be available to them
- Liaising with Local Spiritual Assemblies to help them understand the administrative relationship between them and the Bahá'í Societies.

In order to service the needs of Bahá'í Societies in the United Kingdom the National Spiritual Assembly has established an Office of University Bahá'í Societies (OUBS). This Office will be specifically asked to organise annual or bi-annual UK-wide Bahá'í Society events and activities."

## Reports

to bring us up-to-date since Associate 37

### Report of ABS-NA Conference, 2003

**T**he ABS North America conference in San Francisco lasted three and half days, beginning the morning of Friday 29<sup>th</sup> August, through to lunch time Monday 1<sup>st</sup> September 2003.

#### 1. The Program

The conference program included meetings of 12 "Special Interest Groups", three "plenary sessions", and 24 "simultaneous breakout sessions". The printed program also advertised two 'networking sessions'. There were opportunities to meet eight authors. I counted approximately 115 presenters on the program, some of whom presented twice, thus making approximately 120 advertised presentations, ranging from formal presentations to open discussions. Those presenting ranged from well-known names in various sub-fields of Bahá'í scholarship, to others presenting for the first time. They ranged from full professors and graduate students through to those whose scholarly activities are well outside the academy.

This was indeed an astonishing array of choices. On the first session of the conference, the morning of Friday 29<sup>th</sup>, for instance, one had to choose between one of twelve simultaneous sessions to attend.

In addition to these formal sessions there were performances ranging from Opera and classical to folk and jazz. The Association held its AGM on Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> following the lunch break. Its annual report was included in the conference pack.

A preliminary program was available for download from the ABS North America website. I do not know

the extent of changes to that program that took effect by the time of the conference.

Having noted the extent of the program, I will make some more detailed comments.

#### 2. Special Interest Groups (SIGs)

Special interest groups are described in the annual report as being formed "when at least nine or ten individuals have come together around a particular area of interest and apply to the Association for recognition. Among other things, this has allowed the group space and publicity to organize their own programs at the annual conference, under the guidance of the Association".

A number of SIGs have been established for some time. These include "Agriculture and Ecology", "Bahá'í Institute for the Arts", "Bahá'í Language Educators", "Consultation and Conflict Resolution", "Education", "Marriage and Family", "Philosophy", "Racial Unity/Intercultural Issues", "Science and Religion", and "Study of Religion".

SIGs appearing for the first time were "Communication" and the "Tawacin Waste Win Indigenous Studies Circle".

Each of these SIGs convened an almost-full day's program, making it difficult to sample more than one or two of the 12 on offer. The lack of easily available documentation makes it difficult to know how many of these SIGs have a clear program of research. Some were convened as workshops rather than presentation sessions, and the number of presenters in the SIGs ranged from one (Conflict Resolution) to six or more for a number of others. It would be beneficial to find some way for each SIG to share its terms of reference, or mandate, and a brief overview of its activities - past, present, and future. Whereas some SIGs have established continuity in leadership and participation (notably the "Bahá'í Language Educators", "Science and Religion", "Bahá'í Institute for the Arts", and "Study of Religion", others have not yet established a shared research agenda or stable clientele. Nonetheless even SIGs with new combinations of presenters and participants, such as the Education SIG convened by Kamilla Bahbahani, provided a useful opportunity to hear from and to meet others with similar interests in the field of education. This particular SIG immediately established a website and is commencing dialogue on a mission statement and on what activities might be undertaken between conferences. The Tawacin Waste Win Indigenous Studies Circle" convened by Pauline Tuttle was very inspiring and her rigorous approach to planning and convening the event is admirable: this group holds great promise for producing innovative scholarly practices.

#### 3. Simultaneous Breakout Sessions

The 24 "simultaneous breakout sessions" varied from formal presentations, to discussion panels, to workshops, to meetings of already established communities of interest - the latter including the World Association for the promotion of Bahá'í Libraries and

Archives", the "Bahá'í Association of Mental Health Professionals", and the "Association for Bahá'í Studies in Persian". These associations would have fit more logically as "special interest groups", but who would have wanted them grouped for this reason with the other 12 that convened on the Friday?

Again, the existence of so many presentations streamed concurrently over a short period of time made one wish that contact information or even copies of papers could have been made available for the many papers that one could not attend. The Association allocated a "networking room", and it is not much of a further step to invite presenters to come to the conference with multiple copies of their papers for distribution.

#### 4. Networking

With so many scholars attending, and so little time available outside formal session times, networking was as difficult at this conference as at any previous ABS conference. Surely some information technologies can be employed to remedy this. A number of scholars took the initiative and emailed their communities of practice prior to the event, to arrange meetings, or group dinners. Another practice I have experimented with is staying up very late each evening - but when combined with 7.30 am breakfasts this tends to result in a tendency to pass out on the fourth day.

It is quite reasonable for observers to comment on the social practices associated with such Bahá'í Studies conferences, because there are not so many examples of other scholarly communities that attract to their events large numbers of participants who are not themselves constantly or currently engaged in scholarship practices. To my mind, the way in which the broader Bahá'í community has embraced its scholarly community is admirable, and is one sign of the emergence of a 'community-based scholarship' that bridges some of the modern divides between the 'academy' and 'the community'. The ABS Committee took the care to provide childcare, and such promising scholars as Jenny Mennon forsook participation in the sessions in order to provide this service.

What struck me at this conference was the punctual attendance of participants at breakout sessions, even when scheduled first up in the morning. Clearly, a great number of people came to this conference for the purpose of finding out what was going on.

My personal journey through this conference brought me into contact with treasured friends of long-standing, as well as with numerous people whom I was meeting for the first time. I was particularly interested in the stories of graduate students who are currently feeling challenged to find their authentic voice as Bahá'í scholars while meeting the (sometimes politically correct or otherwise ideologically mandated) requirements of the academy. I was pleased that 30 participants came to the Bahá'í Libraries and Archives meetings, and that progress was made with this particular initiative.

My frustration was that there were many specific individuals I would have liked to meet, but was unable to find in the time available. Thus I took the opportunity made available at the AGM to suggest to the ABS executive committee that greater attention be given at future meetings to the association's communicative practices.

#### 5. Associations for Bahá'í Studies Elsewhere

It should be noted that ABS North America is one of approximately 25 Associations for Bahá'í Studies worldwide. A number have been quite vigorous in their activities for more than a decade, but there still remains a considerable gap between them, in terms of understanding each others circumstances, current activities, and future plans. A number of Associations have produced journals and monographs which receive little exposure, and a conference such as that of ABS North America might be the most likely of them to provide a meeting point for those who have a genuine interest in learning what is going on with Bahá'í scholarship in other countries, cultures, and regions. Bahá'í scholarship is both a local and a global practice, and I am sure that all of use hope that our own efforts are not influenced by our own cultures in ways that prevent us from seeking a global perspective.

*Graham Hassall*

## Report from Bahá'í Studies Conference, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Dec 2003

**A** group of scholars interested in the study of the Bahá'í Faith have been getting together in Newcastle on an annual basis for 20 years. These conferences do not have a theme and are intended for scholars to present recent research findings and draft papers. The 2003 conference was one of the largest ever, with 33 participants and the presentation of 10 papers.

On the Friday evening there was an introductory session with the presentation of a translation of a short invocation by the Báb, made by Dr Todd Lawson of the University of Toronto. On Saturday morning Roger Prentice, who is completing a PhD thesis at the University of Sunderland, presented a paper on "*Spiritual Inspiration in the Art of Bill Viola*", looking at the religious inspiration behind the work of this artist who currently has an exhibition at the National Gallery. The second paper: "*State and Religion in the Era of Kemalist reform: Persecutions of Bahá'ís in Turkey, 1928*" was by Necati Alkan who is shortly presenting his PhD thesis at Bochum University, Germany. This was followed by a paper presented by Dr David Palmer, who is Eileen Barker Fellow in Religion and Contemporary Society,

at the Department of Sociology, London School of Economics, with the title "*The Institutional Economy of Knowledge and the Science-Religion Dichotomy: the Case of Modern China*". The paper compared and contrasted the Bahá'í Faith with the Chi Gong movement in modern China and its attempt to unify religious and scientific knowledge.

On Saturday afternoon, the conference heard a paper from Joan Barden of California State University: "Discovering Faith in the Age of Modernity: A Journey from Islam to Bahá'í", which looked at feminine aspects of the Bahá'í scriptures. Oliver Scharbrodt, who is shortly to present his PhD thesis at the School of Oriental and African Studies, read a paper on the relationship between the Bahá'í leader 'Abdu'l-Baha and the father of Islamic modernism Muhammad 'Abduh: "*Encounters in the Land of Bá: Muslim and Bahá'í Accounts on the Relationship between 'Abdu'l-Baha and Muhammad 'Abduh*". The last paper on the Saturday afternoon was "*The Conversion of Zoroastrians and Jews to the Bahá'í Faith in Iran*" by Dr Moojan Momen.

On Sunday morning, Dr Anne-Sophie Lamine, who is Professeur d'Université, Membre du Centre d'Etudes Interdisciplinaires des Faits Religieux (CNRS - EHESS), presented a paper on inter-religious dialogue: "*Religious Truth, Identities, and Recognition of Otherness*".

Dr Cyrus Agahi of the University of Sheffield presented his preliminary findings on the attitude of Iranians in Iran to the Bahá'í Faith under the title "*Sociological Research in Contemporary Iran: A Case Study*". Lastly Dr Stephen Lambden, of Ohio University, presented a paper "*A New Jerusalem on Mount Carmel? An Overview of the Báb and Judaism, Scriptural Tablets of Baha'u'llah to Jews with Some Aspects of the Bahá'í Approach to Ancient Israelite Religion and Modern Judaisms*".

As has become traditional, the conference also had sessions where scholars discussed problems and issues relating to Bahá'í Studies, and also such matters as the publishing of scholarly work and exchanging information on sources for research material. As is also traditional, most of the participants gathered together on the Saturday evening for a meal together.

**Moojan Momen**

## ABS Programme at Irish Summer School 2002 a success!

**I**N 2002, the Irish NSA asked the ABS to organise a programme at the summer school in Waterford. This programme was run by Dr Masoud Afnan and Dr Seena Fazel. The Irish NSA considered the programme to have been a success and has stated that they would like it to be an annual feature of the school.

The ABS programme at the Irish summer school in Waterford, on the south east coast, was facilitated by Dr Seena Fazel and Dr Masoud Afnan. Dr Fazel's programme dealt with the study skills and was attended by thirty participants. The title was 'Correlating the Bahá'í writings - a study skills workshop'.

Two afternoons were spent exploring how to study the Bahá'í writings systematically and to consider how to correlate Bahá'í teachings with the needs and problems of the contemporary society drawing on some of the Bahá'í scholarship that has been written over the past decade. The focus of the sessions was on acquiring skills, particularly over how to access relevant information on the Bahá'í Faith.

Dr Afnan's programme dealt with moral development. The aim was to improve understanding of what this means and entails in order for us to develop such morality within the Bahá'í Faith and to influence moral development outside of the Bahá'í Faith. Session 1 focused on the definition and understanding of the concepts of moral development according to Bahá'í literature. Session 2 gave an understanding of the current non-Bahá'í agenda as it pertains to moral development. Session 3 gave an understanding of the current Bahá'í agenda, including a perspective of the current needs of the Bahá'í Faith. Session 4 gave examples of projects on moral development that have worked and why they have worked. Sessions 5 and 6 were a review of some of the more salient points, with a discussion of the ongoing 'homework' that was planned. These were essentially quotations from the writings for personal thought and reflection. There was also an opportunity for those present to plan activities on moral development, which will hopefully be carried out.

The course was held over 2 afternoons on the Friday and Saturday towards the end of the school. There were parallel activities during the afternoons, notably with speakers such as Adib and Lesley Taherzadeh on the Saturday.

Fifteen people attended the first session, and ten the second. Overall the course was well received.

The subject of moral development was chosen by the NSA as one of the 4 areas of external affairs that NSAs have been asked to focus on. The speaker illustrated how to go about preparing such a course with reference to the Bahá'í Faith and the outside world.

The scene was set initially with the information from the Universal House of Justice about the importance of moral development in external affairs. Reference



was made to the source of the Writings and which books were studied in preparation for the study course. A deepening based on the writings was then conducted, and points of understanding and insight were then discussed.

At the outset we set the aim of the study course was to come up with practical suggestions that may be of use to the NSA. The last quarter of the course was therefore dedicated to this end.

These suggestions are set out below:

Moral development in the corporate world - initially adopt a learning posture, talking to those in the corporate world about their perceived relevance of the subject, what currently goes on etc. In addition, it would be worth contacting the EBBF (European Bahá'í Business Forum) for their input. (they have already presented papers on this subject).

With regards to moral education there appears to be a difficulty in schools deciding what to teach and how to teach it. One suggestion is to offer teacher-training courses. At the World Centre, they are developing the idea of teaching. This theme can be further developed.

The government (in the UK) is very keen on teaching citizenship (see report of the commission on teaching citizenship in schools - Sept. 1998). This gives the Bahá'ís an ideal opportunity to promote one aspect of this - moral development. We could approach MPs, schools, and others under this banner, and offer to contribute to the discussion, and also directly by teaching the subject.

It may be possible to offer parenting classes - antenatally - to youth. Most parents are concerned about the moral character of their child.

Seek to work with other groups who share some of the goals of this aspect of the Bahá'í Faith's work - such as other religious organizations and charities e.g. I(N)SPCC.

There was some concern about terminology - whether the term 'moral' would put some people off, as religion or spiritual may also do. This may be the reason why the government chose the term 'citizenship'. It may of course be possible to utilise this term in the wider sense, as already used by the Bahá'ís. The conclusion was that the Bahá'ís should be wise in the way they approach others on this subject.

Activities such as the world citizenship project were thought to be useful.

Encourage Bahá'í scholars to participate actively in this arena, and publish papers in the non-Bahá'í arena.

As an aside, there was some discussion on the ethics of investing in different companies. Should Bahá'ís invest only in those companies with ethical ideals?

Interesting debate ensued - no conclusions.

**Darach Watson**

## The First Meeting of SABS

*13-15<sup>th</sup> December 2002, Moffat in the Scottish Borders*

**T**he weekend meeting at Jeremy and Caroline Fox's home in Moffat was very likely a true first in the development of The Bahá'í Faith in Scotland. Twelve Bahá'ís from several areas of Scotland took part in sessions given by Bahá'í scholar Dr. Moojan Momen. This was the first Association of Bahá'í Studies meeting held in Scotland, though there may have been an investigatory meeting in Edinburgh some years ago. It was felt that this weekend marked the introduction of Bahá'í scholarship on the national level in Scotland.

The sessions included a history of Bahá'í scholarship, where we learnt that scholarship was a feature from the inception of the Bábí movement; the significance of Persian titles and names; Persian pronunciation; the role of scholarship in the Bahá'í community; both pure and applied scholarship; the role of the Bahá'í scholar in defending, promoting, developing and preservation of the Faith; and problems and dangers of Bahá'í scholarship. We studied parts of the "Secret of Divine Civilization" by 'Abdu'l-Bahá that informed us of the qualities necessary for Bahá'í scholars. We were referred to the book "The Craft of Research", University of Chicago Press, ISBN 0-226-06584-7 (a new revised edition of which was due out in March 03), and advised to read certain works that deal with the social and global aspects of life today.

On Sunday we discussed mysticism and the Bahá'í community, and learnt about the differences between strong hierarchical structures in other Faiths where knowledge comes from oral traditions, and how Baha'u'llah condemns blind imitation. This he replaced by reading and meditating on the Bahá'í scriptures, and by the tapping into spiritual wisdom by consultation, and by interaction capable of creating an atmosphere of love and unity. Moojan quoted from 'Abdu'l-Baha, that the closer we get to the Divine the more we engage in service to others.

At the end of Sunday morning Parvin Morrissey led the consultation regarding how we should all take the SABS work forward in Scotland. We decided on the title "Scottish Association of Bahá'í Studies" - SABS.

We felt it important to have youth involved, especially those seeking a career which they could further through the university. We would have an annual regional conference in Scotland. This would become a platform for exchange of ideas, our preliminary papers would be read at the conference, and a special journal would be published. The date of the first meeting would be arranged through the auspices of the Scottish Bahá'í Newsletter. We suggest those interested in joining SABS should get in touch with Board Members. We should have a presence at the Scottish Bahá'í Gathering in mid June. The time limit

for presentation of papers at the conference would be 30-40 minutes, and 20 minutes discussion time. We will also have workshops to teach research and writing skills run by keynote speakers. We will endeavour to get feedback from scholars from all over the world.

Dr. Moojan Momen emphasized the great importance that has always been attached to Bahá'í scholarship, and how vital is the role of Bahá'í scholars in the Faith today. This is especially important in defending the faith against attack, as well as for teaching purposes.

The most amazing aspect of this weekend is how a group of Bahá'ís of different ages and backgrounds are now prepared to confidently immerse themselves in the intricacies of Bahá'í scholarship. The vitality of this meeting matched its relevance as an historic event for teaching the faith of Bahá'u'lláh in Scotland, through its becoming a platform for scholarship within our community. We are indebted to the learned skills of Dr. Moojan Momen who made such a daunting subject as Bahá'í scholarship a necessary and obtainable skill that all Bahá'ís should involve themselves in. We are likewise grateful to Caroline and Jeremy Fox for their bountiful hospitality in making it possible for us all to come together for this event.

*Harold F. Lane, Dornoch, 5<sup>th</sup> January 2003*

## The Wilmette Institute

The Wilmette Institute offers many programmes of systematic study of different aspects of the Bahá'í Faith. These typically involve an annual programme of two weeks of intensive classes and seminars in Wilmette, USA, and four and a half months of reading and learning projects at home. In addition, there are many entirely web-based distance learning courses.

If you would like more information, please write Robert Stockman at [rstockman@usbnc.org](mailto:rstockman@usbnc.org) or Pamela Mondschein (the programme's registrar) at [pmondschein@usbnc.org](mailto:pmondschein@usbnc.org). Telephone and fax queries should be directed to the toll free number, 1-877-WILMETTE. Further information and application forms are available at <http://www.wilmetteinstitute.org>.

## German Irfan Colloquium

The German Irfan Colloquium will be held in Tambach, Germany, 15-18 July 2004.

For more information contact Dr. Farah Dustdar [dustdar@compuserve.com](mailto:dustdar@compuserve.com).

## ABS(ESE) Religious Studies SIG – Advance Notice!

The dates for the popular Newcastle meeting of the ABS-ESE Religious Studies Special Interest Group have already been set for 10-12 December 2004.

During these 2-3 days academic papers will be presented and discussed, and sessions covering many aspects of Bahá'í scholarship and publication will be held. Over the last few decades the Religious Studies (SIG) seminars have attracted participation from leading Bahá'í scholars from many parts of the world.

Formal academic qualifications are not required though the papers and discussions are usually of a high academic standard. However, the Seminar also provides opportunity for informal discussion, and it is hoped that participants will be socially and spiritually invigorated as well as intellectually stimulated.

Details and programme will be advertised later, contact: Stephen Lambden

e-mail: [hurqalya@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:hurqalya@blueyonder.co.uk)

or [quinn@oak.cats.ohiou.edu](mailto:quinn@oak.cats.ohiou.edu).

## Some Published Work

Grolin, Daniel *Jesus and Early Christianity in The Gospels – a New Dialogue*, George Ronald, 2002

Ghanea, Nazila *Human Rights, the UN and the Bahá'ís in Iran*, Oxford, George Ronald, 2003

Bahador, Babak and Ghanea, Nazila *Processes of the Lesser Peace*, Oxford, George Ronald, 2003

See George Ronald website: [www.grbooks.com](http://www.grbooks.com) for details of other publications

and Kalimat Press at: <http://www.kalimat.com>

## Australian Bahá'í Studies Journal

The Association of Bahá'í Studies Australia has recently published the first issue of its journal *Australian Bahá'í Studies* with articles on project development, consultation, spiritual education and a report on scholarship.

Joint Meeting  
**ABS(ESE) Annual Conference**  
 &  
**Irfan Colloquium**

Fri 2<sup>nd</sup> – Sun 4<sup>th</sup> July 2004

The Institute of Commonwealth Studies (ICS)  
 University of London

28 Russell Square, London WC1B 5DS

*Programme to date:*

**Moshe Sharon:** The translation of al-Kitab al-Aqdas into Hebrew: Some notes on contents and style

**Nabil Perdu:** Translation of Scripture

**Moojan Momen:** Power and the Bahá'í Community

**Stephen Lambden:** The Bab's "Seven Proofs" (the section in Arabic)

**Augusto Lopez-Claros:** Coping with the Challenges of Globalization: Five Key Lessons

**Jack McLean:** The Writings of Shoghi Effendi: Assessing Their Import For Baha'i Studies

**Enoch Tanyi:** A Bahá'í Perspective on Superstition and Idol Worship and Some of its Implications in Some Selected Beliefs and Concepts

**Iscander Tinto:** "Beauty and Wonder" from a philosophical and spiritual point of view

**Erfan Sabeti:** Secularization: A Baha'i Perspective

**Martin Cortazzi:** Metaphors as Maieutics of Learning

**Roger Prentice:** The Spirituality of Cinematic Experience

**Farah Dustdar:** Abdu'l-Baha's Tablet of Two Calls

**Oliver Scharbrodt:** Role-models and anti-models: Islam and 'the West' in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's *Treatise on Civilisation*

**Bruce Wannell:** A Preliminary Account of Shi'i Esoteric Commentary on the Hadith-e Haqiqat

**Daniel Grolin:** A conflict of frameworks

*PLUS (organised by the ABS):*

*Roundtable Saturday lunchtime discussions*

*Panel discussion on 'Power and Responsibility'*

Conference information:

No pre-registration necessary. Further details from Registrar Oliver Scharbrodt: e-mail: [scharbrodt@gmx.de](mailto:scharbrodt@gmx.de). Oliver may also be able to advise on accommodation.

Nearest Underground Stations to the ICS : Russell Square, Euston, Euston Square, Goodge Street, King's Cross (in order of proximity). **Please note: car parking is not advised.**

Event cost: £10 ABS(ESE) members; £25 non-members [concessions £20] – all for one or all days; hard copy of papers relating to the Irfan presentations £10. [note: the cost for non-members includes a free subscription to ABS(ESE)]



## 3<sup>rd</sup> ABS(ESE) Scholarship Academy

The South of England Summer School

7<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> August 2004

Leighton Park Quaker School  
(near Reading)

Course Tutors: Daniel Grolin and Oliver Scharbrodt

### How can we contribute to Bahá'í scholarship?

This set of courses will look at development of skills for scholarship - how Bahá'ís can develop skills that will help them to research and write materials for publication.

We will explore:

- What does Bahá'í scholarship cover?
- What are the methods for studying the writings?
- How does one study Bahá'í history?
- How does one write material for publication?

The course will run in parallel with other courses at the summer school, so it is essential to book your place.

Further details of the course content from:

[scharbrodt@gmx.de](mailto:scharbrodt@gmx.de)

Details and application forms can be found on the summer schools website: [www.bahai.org.uk/ssi/](http://www.bahai.org.uk/ssi/)

*Note: all levels of experience welcome*

Booking deadline 10<sup>th</sup> July 2004.

## Membership of ABS(ESE)

**Individual membership:**

£15 per year

£40 for 3 years

**Unwaged/Students:**

£10 per year

£25 for 3 years

*ABS(ESE) also sponsors nominated students and scholars in other countries; if you would like to contribute, please increase your membership to £25 per year.*

Subscriptions\* to: **Membership Secretary**  
**ABS(ESE), c/o 27 Rutland Gate, London, SW7 1PD**  
**United Kingdom**

*\*By cheque please, payable to The NSA of the Bahá'ís of the UK*

**We welcome submissions of notice of forthcoming events and other items which may be of interest to the membership of the ABS(ESE). Please send them:**

By e-mail to [abs@bahai.org.uk](mailto:abs@bahai.org.uk)

or by return e-mail

or by post (preferably on disk) to:

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

The ABS(ESE) webpage can be accessed through:

<http://www.bahai.org.uk/abs>

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new ABS(ESE)  
logo



The old logo