

ABS Bulletin

A PUBLICATION OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR BAHÁ'Í STUDIES—NORTH AMERICA

Explore “Environments” in Washington, D.C.

You are warmly invited to participate in the 33rd Annual Conference of the Association for Bahá'í Studies—North America, which will be held 13–16 August 2009 at the Marriott Wardman Park Hotel, in Washington, D.C. The theme of the conference will be “Environments.”

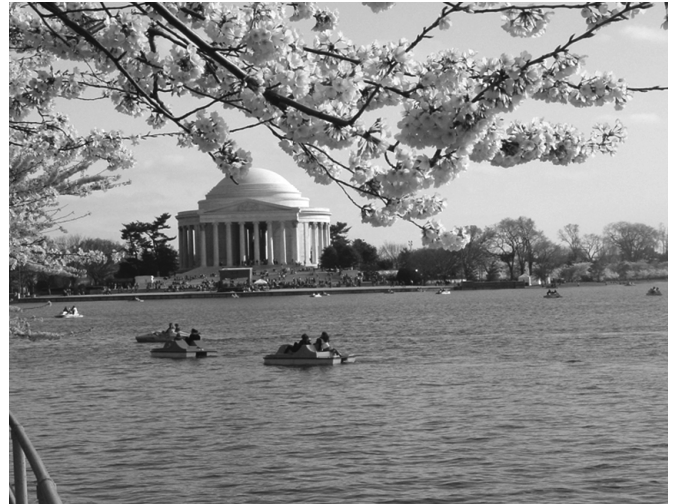
The teachings of the Bahá'í Faith shed light on the dialogue between the human soul and its environment. “We cannot segregate the human heart from the environment outside us and say that once one of these is reformed everything will be improved.” Shoghi Effendi wrote, “Man is organic with the world. His inner life moulds the environment and is itself also deeply affected by it. The one acts upon the other and every abiding change in the life of man is the result of these mutual reactions.” The nature, quality, and condition of the environments we inhabit therefore have profound implications for human well-being. In this context, how can science and religion, as complementary systems of knowledge and practice, be applied more effectively to the preservation, refinement, and improvement of the myriad environments—natural, cultural, and built—within which we live and grow?

You are invited to explore this theme at the 2009 Annual Conference. New and experienced presenters and participants, from all backgrounds and disciplines, are welcome. Possible topics for presentation might include, but are not limited to: the spiritual dimen-

sions of environmental stewardship; the impact of diverse environments on human development and well-being; understanding nature as an expression of the Divine; empowering children and youth to cope with and transform the media environment they are growing up within; beautifying and enriching our environments through the arts; understanding the environment of the study circle; refining the social environment within our communities; mobilizing communities to care for their natural environments; probing the nexus between environment and development; and applying spiritual and scientific principles to the design of our built environment.

Call for Presentations

Proposals are invited for presentations on (but not limited to) the above themes, as well as themes pertaining to creative and conceptual processes within the performing arts, visual arts, and other modes of artistic expression. Presentations must explore an original question or proposition through a clearly described method or approach. Proposals must outline the presentation in detail and provide sufficient background on the topic and on the presenter's qualifications for the review



The Jefferson Memorial in Washington, D.C. (Photo courtesy Washington D.C. Visitors and Convention Bureau)

panel to judge the value of the contribution. A broad range of qualifications is recognized, beyond purely academic and/or professional. Proposals must be for substantially original work, unpublished and not previously presented.

While many presentations are in the style of talks, the use of the arts and other diverse approaches is also encouraged. Presentations should be seen as a collaborative process, where the speaker not only presents information, but also engages conference participants in discussion which further advances the ideas. Papers will be considered for publication in the *Journal of Bahá'í Studies*. Proposals are

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2008 Conference call

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especially welcome from youth and first-time ABS presenters. Guidelines for submissions are available on the ABS website, and you can also contact ABS if you would like further assistance with preparing a proposal.

Proposals must be submitted online (go to <www.bahai-studies.ca>). Potential presenters unable to submit online may contact the address below for further information on alternate means of submission. Association for Bahá'í Studies, 34 Copernicus St., Ottawa, ON Canada K1N 7K4. Tel.: (613) 233-1903; fax: (613) 233-3644 or email: <abs-na@bahai-studies.ca>. The deadline for submitting proposals is **1 April 2009**.

Guidelines for submission—2009

These guidelines are written with all presenters in mind, regardless of level of experience, formal academic qualification, or discipline or field. Bahá'í Studies calls for diverse participants and approaches.

Choosing your presentation format

Simultaneous breakout sessions are scheduled for the afternoons of the second and third days of the conference, 14 and 15 August. Most sessions are for one hour, to allow time for establishing background for a diverse audience. Panel presentations can be organized and can be up to two hours in length, depending on the number of participants. Presentations can be in lecture or discussion format, but all must allow substantial time for discussion. At least one third of the total time period is recommended as a suitable allotment for questions and discussion. One hour poster sessions are also possible (please read <<http://www.bahai-studies.ca/conferences/PosterSessionGuidelines.doc>>).

Audiovisual equipment and screens can be provided. However, the cost of

renting digital projectors and shortages in technical assistance requires that presenters request digital projectors only when it is absolutely necessary (for example, if animated images or video are integral to the presentation). For non-animated images, both black and white and color digital slides can easily be converted to overhead slides or 35 mm slides, and presenters who don't have their own digital projectors should expect to rely on these media.

Writing your proposal

The content of the 200-word proposal is important since it will be the basis for the decision whether to accept it for the conference, and where to best place it in the schedule. For more formal, academically styled presentations, it is helpful to begin a proposal with identifying which specific question(s) the presentation will consider, explain why the question is important with respect to current thinking and/or practice, and what means will be used to address the question (related theory, methods of research, presentation style, etc.). It can also briefly comment on known or anticipated results.

Presentations which vary from the above academic norm are welcome and encouraged. In an arts-based presentation, for example, the "results" may be a performance or visual work, which evokes an audience response. Other approaches to exploring ideas and knowledge exist, and can be presented in the proposal with an explanation of their use.

Whatever the approach, the foremost goal of the Association for Bahá'í Studies, as distinct from the Bahá'í schools and other conferences, is to have new, "leading edge" work, presented to a group of peers working in similar areas and to others especially interested in new areas of research. This audience differs from those looking for direct application in society or in their personal lives. Consequently,

the requirements for presentation content are that (1) it represents new and original work, and that (2) it has not been presented elsewhere in a school, workshop, seminar or study-class format.

Identifying appropriate topics for the Annual Conference

It is important to realize that presentations at the Annual Conference are focused on the exploration stage of research, or on the reporting of new results, or on assessing the coherence of new research, analyses, or practice, or the application of new research, analysis, or practice. The Bahá'í schools and other conferences are more often directed toward educating people on better established ideas and principles, or about those applications which have resulted from previous, more established research on the Writings and the world's problems. In other words, the ABS presentations should inspire people to look for and find new knowledge in new ways, or provide constructive feedback on work being done, or both. One conference

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International Affiliates

Italy

From 12 to 14 September the 6th Conference of the Italian Association for Bahá'í Studies was held in Acuto, Rome. Forty-five persons attended the conference, which was an important success for the Association. The theme was "Spiritual Transformation," and both Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í speakers presented papers.

At the opening session on Friday evening Faezeh Mardani Mazzoli and Julio Savi read and commented on a *qasídh* by Bahá'u'lláh, an ode with a dialogue between the Friend and the lover. It was a very moving moment because of the beauty of this ode and the particular ability of the two speakers to render it accessible to all.

On Saturday Mrs Saberan from France presented a talk on "The Transforming Power of the Word of God." The next session saw a roundtable well directed by Gianni Mazzoli with speakers from various backgrounds on the theme of "The Impact of Religion and Spirituality on the Social and Political Transformation of Society." The speakers were Marco Guzzi, a philosopher with a Christian background; Sandra Luschi, representing the Bahá'í community; and Khalid Chaouki, representing Islam. There was a very interesting consultation and dialogue about what is a delicate topic in Italy.

Guido Morisco spoke about inter-religious dialogue and its implications regarding the relationship between the various religions present in Italy.

A session was dedicated to presenting the concept of transformation as it is found in Sufism and in the writings of Rumi.

The last session on Saturday was on the relationship between the author, the reader, and the text in the Sacred Writings, given by Iscander Micael Tinto.

Saturday evening there was a beautiful concert with music from various cultures touching on the theme of "The Mediterranean." It was a very interesting example of how various cultures can be mixed together in unity.

Sunday morning featured a session on conducting research, by Iscander Tinto. The last part of the meeting was dedicated to the general meeting of the Association during which time the new Board was elected and consultation by the participants took place. —*Report by Iscander Micael Tinto*

Japan

The 16th annual conference of ABS-Japan was held 13–15 September in Kyoto at the Kyoto Kokusai Koryu Kaikan, with the theme of "Understanding More about the Themes in the Ruhi Institute."

The first presentation, "The Ruhi Institute: Its Creation and Purpose," was by Ms. Yoshiko Alexander, National Coordinator of the Bahá'í Institute for Development of Japan. She spoke in detail about the Institute Process: how its contents were produced, and how its approach and the study methods originated from the Holy Writings of the Bahá'í Faith.

Next was a presentation titled "Innovative Language Pedagogy and Community-Building Features of the Ruhi Study Process" by Dr. Sandra Fotos. She proved the universality of the Institute by both analysis of the theories of two famous scholars and the result of her own research.

This was followed by a panel discussion titled "Youth and the Ruhi Institute," coordinated by Mr. Nozomu Sonda. The panelists, female college students from different parts of Japan, talked about their experiences taking the Ruhi courses.

The public meeting featured a panel discussion on "The Importance of Arts

in Life" coordinated by Mr. Koki Sugimoto, a music producer, with Mr. Hiroshi Tsunoi, Chair of ABS-Japan and a performer of Noh, a Japanese traditional art; Ms. Barbara Casterline, a painter; Mr. Sonda, a singer/songwriter, and Mr. Hindin Miller, a professional playwright and singer/songwriter.

Sunday morning began with a devotional meeting on the theme of World Peace, followed a presentation by Hiroko Ando on "Some Suggestions for Devotional Meetings Involving the Community of Interest Based on the Actual Experience of the Takamatsu Bahá'í Community."

Next was Mr. Hindin Miller's talk on "The Nature and Function of Stories." The afternoon program began with Mr. Sugimoto's presentation "Promoting Arts at the Grass Roots Level for the Development of Study Circles," followed by "Incorporating Arts into the Ruhi Institute," by Ms. Jennifer Sharpe.

Mr. Sonda explained his creative efforts in his talk, "Writing Bahá'í Songs in Japanese," and Mr. Tsunoi presented "Religion and Science," which was based on his long experience in the field of Japanese education. Another very interesting presentation, "Faith, Material Progress, and the Environment" was presented by Mr. Ndumiso Dlamini, an African graduate student at Kyoto University.

Next was Ms. Suzanna Kawamura's presentation, "Life After Death: A Bahá'í Perspective for the Living." After a dinner break, a special concert titled "Illumine Kyoto" by Mr. Hindin Miller was held at the Conference Hall.

The last day of the conference began with a presentation titled "The Ruhi Institute and the Regeneration of Community Assets in our Global Age" by Ms. Marilyn Higgins.

After that, Hiroko Ando presented

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Special Interest Group conference reports

Education

Valerie Davis led the audience through the logic of incorporating divine revelation into epistemological models by showing the evolution of our current models of inquiry. Feminist literature, as well as the Bahá'í writings, offer perspectives on a more holistic way of studying reality that incorporates reference to revelation as well as other sources of knowledge. Parallels between 'Abdu'l-Bahá's description of the four ways of knowing (senses, reason, tradition, and the Holy Spirit) and four contemporary paradigms of knowledge highlight the need for a holistic approach to knowledge.

Kamilla Bahbahani and Marie Gervais facilitated an analysis of the evolution of children's classes and junior youth groups. Through application of an analytic framework (origins, human resources, challenges and social integration, and impacts) to four case studies, participants enhanced their abilities to understand the processes at work in their own communities and recognize what might be needed to advance their work. Comparisons across case studies showed the diversity of site-specific factors which teachers and animators face, emphasizing the need to be in a learning mode in order to understand one's circumstances and adapt to them.

A breakfast meeting was held for the Education Special Interest Group. Major ideas that emerged include developing online collaboration on writing projects, gathering members for a focused retreat where we would use our collected resources to meet local educational needs and reflect on them, and collecting resources on the website to enhance access to educational materials.

Philosophy

The first combined session by the Philosophy SIG and the Science and Religion SIG featured three twenty-minute presentations followed by a panel discussion on "The New Atheism." The session attracted an overflow crowd. In the first part, Dinesh Singh spoke on "Addressing Expected Atheist Challenges Against the Bahá'í Perspective on Science and Religion." Luisa Priddy (collaborating with Maya Bohnhoff) presented "A Bahá'í Response to the 'New' Atheism," and Ian Kluge surveyed philosophical and logical problems with the new atheists' arguments as well as some areas of agreement with the Writings.

Following these presentations, Steven Friberg moderated a Q & A period between members of the audience and Dinesh Singh, Maya Bohnhoff, and Ian Kluge.

The second part of the Philosophy SIG featured three lectures each followed by Q & A. Wolfgang Klebel spoke on "Work and Evolution: Karl Marx in Bahá'í Perspective"; Jack McLean presented on "Living the Bahá'í Life and Existential Philosophy"; and Iscander Tinto discussed "Text, Author, Reader and the Relationship to the Sacred."

International Affiliates

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"Establishing a Junior Youth Program in Takamatsu." The next presentation was Mr. Zafar Moghbel's "Quotations from the Writings Appearing in Ruhi Books."

The final presentation was Mr. Sonda's "The Ruhi Institute: Approach, Method or Procedure?" Through the three days of the ABS Conference, all were uplifted and re-energized.

—Report by Hiroko Ando

2009 Conference call

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goal is to identify new work for publication in the *Journal of Bahá'í Studies*. In this light, all presentations can be viewed as "works in progress," with the greater purpose of furthering scholarship in general.

Registration and Hotel Information

Conference registration and hotel information are available on the ABS website: <www.bahai-studies.ca>. For further inquiries, please contact the Association for Bahá'í Studies, 34 Copernicus St., Ottawa, ON, Canada K1N 7K4; tel.: 613-233-1903; fax: 613-233-3644; e-mail: <abs-na@bahai-studies.ca>.

Hotel reservations must be made directly with the conference hotel, the Marriott Wardman Park Hotel, 2660 Woodley Rd. NW, Washington, D.C. 20008; Tel.: 202-328-2000; toll-free reservation number: 800-228-9290. Mention the Association for Bahá'í Studies conference to receive the special conference rate. Room rates: \$129 single/double; \$139 triple; \$149 quad. The conference rates are extended to four days before and after the conference dates.

Members' News

Necati Alkan (Istanbul, Turkey) has published his PhD thesis as *Dissent and Heterodoxy in the Late Ottoman Empire: Reformers, Bábís, and Bahá'ís* (The Isis Press, 2008). **Abdu'l-Missagh Ghadirian (Montreal, Quebec)** received an Award of Excellence for his contribution and service to substance abuse prevention in China. The award was presented at the National Conference on Drug Dependence in Xian, China, 22-25 October 2008.