ABS Bulletin

ABS 2015 Conference News Update

Conference Theme

The “power of intellectual investigation” is praised by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as “an eternal gift producing fruits of unending delight.” He says, “It is the very foundation of all individual and national development.” 1

The 2015 ABS conference theme, “Advancing the Life of the Mind,” will explore fresh approaches to generate and apply knowledge related to various disciplines and fields of study.

Participants are invited to consider how they can play a role in working with others “to earnestly strive to reflect on the implications that the truths found in the Revelation may hold for their work.” 2 This calls for a greater appreciation of the harmony of science and religion, examining scientific methods of discovery and considering how the Revelation sheds light on the process of inquiry.

How might the Bahá’í teachings illuminate study of the core theoretical concerns of economics and political science? How do they guide inquiry into history, philosophy, and the role of art in society? What insights from the teachings inform discourses about the application of the health and life sciences? How might they advance our understanding of the process of education and the development of human capabilities? These are only a few of the kinds of questions that might be considered over the course of the conference – whether in small working groups or the large plenary sessions – and which will continue to be investigated in other spaces and gatherings outside of the conference.

Program Update

The conference will be held over the weekend of 6 – 9 August at the Hyatt Regency Orange County, near Los Angeles. We are happy to announce the preliminary list of plenary speakers and give a brief outline of the program.

The program begins on Thursday morning, August 6 with a number of simultaneous workshops sessions and presentations. The opening plenary session for the conference is scheduled on Thursday evening. Each day the program runs from 9:00 am to 5:30 pm followed by an evening plenary session after dinner. There are three morning plenary sessions, on Friday, Saturday and Sunday which include plenary panels as well as stand alone presentations dealing with different aspects related to the conference theme. An arts program is scheduled on Friday evening, and the Balyuzi Lecture will be delivered on Saturday evening. The conference ends at noon on Sunday afternoon.

In this issue . . .


2 The Universal House of Justice, Letter to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Canada, 24 July 2013.
The conference program includes the following confirmed outstanding speakers who can address the theme from a number of valuable perspectives:

- Dr. Nazila Ghanea, Associate Professor of International Human Rights Law at the University of Oxford;
- Mr. Shahriar Razavi, member of the Universal House of Justice;
- Dr. John S. Hatcher, distinguished author, poet and lecturer;
- Dr. Nader Saiedi, author and Taslimi Foundation Professor of Bahá’í Studies in the department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures at UCLA.

**Program for Children and Junior Youth**

Be sure to register your children and junior youth for the educational program at the annual conference. Children/Junior youth from 5 years to 14 years old can attend this program. This program will include speakers and activities addressing the conference theme. Important note to parents: children and junior youth must be preregistered by 31 July 2015. For the latest conference updates, visit <www.bahais-studies.ca/UpcomingConference>

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**Nazila Ghanea named 2015 Balyuzi Lecturer**

The Executive Committee is pleased to announce that Dr. Nazila Ghanea will deliver the 33rd Hasan M. Balyuzi Lecture at the conference this year.

Nazila Ghanea is Associate Professor of International Human Rights Law at the University of Oxford and a member of the Advisory Panel of Experts on Freedom of Religion or Belief for the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe (an intergovernmental body of 57 member states). She serves as Associate Director of the Oxford Human Rights Hub and is on the Board of Trustees of the independent think tank, the Universal Rights Group. Her research spans freedom of religion or belief, minority rights, women’s rights and human rights in the Middle East. In recent academic research projects, she has been part of research teams examining the domestic effects of UN human rights treaty ratification and questions of religion or belief equality and discrimination in England and Wales.

The topic of the lecture is, “Striving for Human Rights in an Age of Religious Extremism.” Academic and policy attention to religion is on everybody’s agenda, but this exponential growth in concern has stemmed largely from fear rather than constituting a positive engagement. Such attention comes from numerous quarters and is very broad in scope. This lecture will single out consideration of religion and human rights.

Considering the global onslaught of religious extremism, what is the scope for seeking to bring the positive role of religion into the frame?
Members’ News

Trip Barthel has published Dynamic Consultation: 9 Keys to Unity, Create Space publisher, October 2014.
Paul Hanley has published Eleven, FriesenPress, September 2014.
Moojan Momen has published The Bahá’í Communities of Iran 1851-1921: Volume I- The North of Iran, George Ronald, March 2015.
Carol Handy has published Journey of Sorrow, Journey of Hope, Bahá’í Publishing, May 2014.

The Executive Committee welcomes news regarding grants, honors, publications, and other accomplishments by ABS members.
As you may note from our latest issue focused on “spirituality and the poetic voice,” we are continuing to have most volumes centered around various themes related to the discourses of society. The Spring issue will be an example of how Bahá’í scholarship offers a special lens through which one can examine discrete fields of study, and, conversely, how intensive study in a field can help inform us as Bahá’ís about the manifold ways in which knowledge about reality—and those laws and relationships governing the material world, human nature, and human relationships—can increase our understanding and appreciation of the authoritative texts.

In the coming issues we will be focusing on such subjects as spirituality in the field of medicine; the concept of the essential self, especially as confirmed in the field of science; the plight and experience of indigenous peoples; racial identity in relation to the Bahá’í Faith; aging and dementia; the value of studying history to our understanding of the Bahá’í perspective of humankind on planet Earth; anxiety and depressive disorders; creative study of the Holy Texts; evolution and the Bahá’í teachings; the process of building a just society from the ground up; and many other topics.

In order for us to do the best job possible in carrying out these ambitious plans for the next several years and beyond, we would benefit from consistent feedback from you on what we are doing, suggestions for other topics, submissions of articles or proposals for articles, and contact information for scholars who have not as yet published articles in the journals or may not yet be members of Association for Bahá’í Studies. We especially want to hear from those scholars in the United States some of whom may have come to think of ABS as a “Canadian” thing. But as the name of the organization reminds us, ABS is for the whole of North America.

Finally, our decision taken last year to have book reviews appear on our web site rather than in the Journal will now take effect. The spring issue will have the final book reviews in print. However, this should not be inferred to mean we think book reviews unimportant. Quite the reverse is true. We feel, instead, that by having the reviews appear online whenever they have been completed, we can give our membership up-to-date information about works that have relevance to our audience, whereas the reviews appearing in the Journal have taken far too long to get into print and thereby provide valuable information about new work related to Bahá’í studies. Therefore, we have added to our web site the guidelines for those who wish to submit a book review for consideration.

We look forward to your suggestions and your submission of articles, proposals, book reviews, as well as news of grants, honors, publications, and other accomplishments by ABS members.

John S. Hatcher, Editor
The Journal of Bahá’í Studies
editor@bahai-studies.ca
The 2015 Bahá’í Chair for World Peace Spring Symposium
Frontiers of Globalization and Governance Series
April 29, 2015 - 4:00pm
University of Maryland, College Park, MD, USA

“Global Governance in a Multiplex World”
Amitav Acharya, Ph.D., UNESCO Chair in Transnational Challenges and Governance, Professor of International Relations, School of International Service, American University, Washington, D.C.

“Private Authority in Global Governance”
Virginia Haufler, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Government and Politics, Director of Global Communities, University of Maryland, College Park

May 6, 2015 - 4:00 pm
“Nonviolent Islam: Social Change for a Better Society”
Dr. Rashid Ahmad, Visiting Scholar University of Peshawar, Pakistan
Adele H. Stamp Student Union
University of Maryland, College Park, MD

Bosch Bahá’í School: Santa Cruz, California, USA
‘Irfán Colloquium session (English)
May 22–25, 2015
The annual sessions of the ‘Irfán Colloquium in 2015 will be held in English and Persian at Bosch Bahá’í School in Santa Cruz, California, May 22 to 25. This year’s sessions coincide with the centenary of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Memorials of the Faithful, a unique work among religious texts, and are dedicated to its celebration.

To register contact:
bosch@usbnc.org

Louhelen Bahá’í School
Santa Cruz, California, USA
Davison, MI, USA
April 23-26, 2015
BNASAA Conference: “Confronting and Facing our Challenging Issues”
The stated purpose of the Bahá’í Network on Aids, Sexuality, Addictions and Abuse (BNASAA) is to explore Bahá’í principles and concepts related to AIDS, human sexuality, addictions, abuse and other challenging personal issues, and to consider questions and concerns that arise in the application of these principles to Bahá’í community development. The committee is appointed by and under the guidance of the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada. This year’s conference will focus on ways we can acknowledge and address difficult issues that we deal with in developing a spiritual response to the challenges we face.

To register contact:
louhelenregistrar@usbnc.org

Green Acre Bahá’í School
Eliot, ME, USA
May 23–25, 2015
Educators’ Gathering
In their work each day, teachers are preparing the world’s next citizens and leaders. Parents and communities greatly depend on educators to carry out this task, which is by no means simple and concise. We all know that schools play an active role in the betterment of society and the ennoblement of its citizenry. Recent guidance from various institutions make clear suggestions that can be considered in a variety of settings where learning is taking place – essentially, a mode of gathering knowledge through study, reflection, action and consultation that transcends cultural realities and erroneous assumptions while gaining progress towards a new order.
This session will allow participants to explore the guidance, as well as documents from the Bahá’í International Community and the Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity, to see how they can inform our role as educators.

To register contact:
greenacreregistrar@usbnc.org

Wilmette Institute
2015 Course Schedule
http://wilmetteinstitute.org/our-courses/upcoming/

Rediscovering the Dawnbreakers: The Báb and the Bábí Religion, 1844-53
April 20 – June 12

The Badi (Bahá’í) Calendar:
Reshaping our Material, Social, and Spiritual Reality
May 1 - June 4

The Tablet of the Branch (Webinar)
May 6 - May 26

Religious Myths and Visions of America
May 10 - June 27

Writing Biographies and Histories
May 15 - July 8

Judaism for Deepening and Dialogue
May 20 - July 8

The Bahá’í Faith: A Comprehensive Introduction
June 1 - July 19
“Re-Telling Reconciliation”: Legal scholar Roshan Danesh says Faith reframes intercultural healing

Two simple words that Ali Nakhjavani whispered to a First Nations leader seven years ago in Vancouver, British Columbia, have set a standard for the attitude of North American Bahá’ís as they work toward the justice necessary for bringing estranged peoples together, Roshan Danesh asserted in his Aug. 10 talk, “Re-Telling Reconciliation.”

Those two words: “Help us.”

With that simple sentence, Nakhjavani — a former member of the Universal House of Justice — made “a sharp turn from the traditional way that we have been taught, that we talk about … the discourse between indigenous and non-indigenous,” Danesh said.

An attorney and legal educator in Vancouver who works for the rights of First Nations, Danesh made clear that the “we” in his point represents the predominant cultures in North America and in most of its Bahá’í communities.

By and large, he said, these dominant groups have been sheltered from the history of how the European conquest of this continent afflicted the peoples who were already here. Even if knowledgeable, those who reach out to reconcile often end up taking an approach of “let us help you.”

Though it seems noble, Danesh noted, “More often than not, ‘Let us help you’ is a stand-in … for elevating oneself over others … the notion that we are somehow better and we can help.”

Unfortunately, over the years America’s conquerors have cloaked destructive actions in that sentiment: forced religious conversion, suppression of native languages and ceremonies, and more.

This condescension still infects society. The Bahá’í community is as susceptible as any, Danesh said, and it shows in the way many of us talk and think.

A contrast can be found in Bahá’í guidance, he said. In 1916, before any Native Americans were Bahá’ís, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote in a Tablet of the Divine Plan: “Attach great importance to the indigenous population of America. … [S]hould they be educated and guided, there is no doubt that they will become so illumined as to enlighten the whole world.”

Most Bahá’ís seem to take that as a “let us help you” statement, Danesh said, but “actually I think it’s exactly the opposite.” He contended that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá sought to undermine feelings of privileged position among early Bahá’ís by singling out the “most oppressed, most ignored, most unseen.”
and elevating them “to the status of the future.”

One powerful expression of this view comes from an extraordinary letter written by the Hand of the Cause Amatu’l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum in 1969 to indigenous Bahá’ís in North America.

That letter, Danesh said, rejected the idea that American Indians and other indigenous peoples have to assimilate into white society and deny their heritage to contribute to the progress of humanity. Instead, it affirms that when indigenous Bahá’ís take the forefront in serving the Cause and society, it will advance and enrich all of humanity.

Where deep divides between cultures and races exist, the Bahá’í teachings require all of us to be agents in reconciliation, Danesh said — not just through a dominant culture’s generosity or guilt over past injustices, but simply as a way of carrying out the divine will on this earth. And that process starts from inside every one of us, “at the level of how we perceive, talk, see.”

A just process of reconciliation demands that “all of the world’s peoples, systems of knowledge … lived experiences and traditions and insights and ways of reading the Revelation are contributing and shaping and moving it forward.”

Back to Ali Nakhjavani’s 2007 meeting with First Nations leaders: In the leadup to that event he didn’t just rely on what Danesh called his “vast learned knowledge.” He sought advice on respecting the people, their history and their position, and that simple appeal — “Help us” — was the result.

If such a learned personage in the Faith prepares that deeply for that meeting, he reasoned, what does that say about how the rest of the Bahá’í community needs to prepare for the challenge of reconciliation?

**Panel sees in the social sciences opportunities for Bahá’í-led inquiry**

How human behavior and invention can work toward common as well as personal good was a common thread as three social scientists spoke in the first of three panels at the 2014 ABS Conference. This panel and the two that followed, on the natural and life sciences and the humanities, were designed to address opportunities for advancement of discourse within fields of endeavor.

**The Prospect of Collective Action in Political Science**

*Geoffrey Cameron, doctoral student in political science; principal researcher, Department of External Affairs, Bahá’í Community of Canada*

The Bahá’í teachings provide concepts, assumptions, processes and insights that can help generate new categories of analysis, said Cameron. These are neither dismissive nor unquestioning of current theories.

As a field, political science deals with questions of why, how and when people cooperate, he said. In examining collective action, two areas have helped our understanding: increasing nuanced understanding of human nature and appreciation of norms of trust and reciprocity.

Most theories of social change, noted Cameron, assume people act from self-interest — that they will not support wider collective action or long-term goals. But studies are now showing that people can cooperate even when it’s not in their immediate self-interest. Attractors include unity, the pursuit of justice, concern for community, benevolence over self-interest and solidarity.

Similarly, studies about the management of common resources reveal that people are highly adaptive and voluntarily seek out opportunities for cooperation, he said. These relationships produce human capital — networks, norms and social trust for mutual benefit. Social capital increases as used and depletes as unused.

These are promising lines of inquiry for Bahá’ís, Cameron concluded.

**Discourse Matters: The Potential of Qualitative Sociology to Shed Light on Bahá’í Studies**

*Deborah van den Hoonaard, professor of sociology and qualitative research, St. Thomas University, New Brunswick*

‘Abdu’l-Bahá espoused inductive reasoning (the search for knowledge) over deductive (the search for physical laws) when examining the behaviors of people around us, said van den Hoonaard. This approach, she said, reflects principles of the Faith such as consultation and collective decision making.

In her field of women and aging,
other researchers talk first with doctors but she prefers to talk with the women themselves about how they tackle their own lives. For those following this line of inquiry, statements on social action by Bahá’í institutions and agencies that speak of the importance of interdependence rather than dependence or independence “are music to a sociologist’s ears.”

Van den Hoonaard told of a study she conducted for the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada into how believers perceived the equality of women and men within the Bahá’í community. She began by asking Local Spiritual Assemblies what questions should be asked and proceeded to hold focus groups involving Bahá’ís of different ages and ethnicities.

“People enjoyed these focus groups,” she reflected. “They’re not used to discussing in-depth issues of equality, and for first time they were seeing some implications and applications of equality.” She added, “If I did this study today, would our experience with reflection gatherings enhance how we see these implications and applications?”

Powerful components of society often define dialogue, she noted. Bahá’ís need to be aware that terms they use might cause them to be unwittingly misunderstood. Example: Globalization connotes oneness to a Bahá’í but the domination of First World countries to others.

Challenges for Social Science from the Perspective of Urban Practice

June Manning Thomas, professor of urban and regional planning, University of Michigan; president, Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning

Social science is about improving the world, said Thomas. It tackles dilemmas that can’t be solved by one discipline alone and surmounts barriers erected by human beings.

“People think if we only can have better medicine or engineering we can have a better humanity, but everything has social implications,” she said. “Social science … makes physical science work. For their inventions to work, we need to understand” how to use them as effectively as possible.

In examining the issues of urban America, Thomas said she asks how her understanding of the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh can inform solutions. Ask the right questions, she advised, then follow with action.

She outlined two projects in Detroit. In one she interviewed urban planners about what social justice means to them and how it can lead to hope for people who have lost hope. In the other she has been asking people in two neighborhoods what they have done to protect their neighborhood in the face of incredible loss; she is finding people who are doing things to save their homes and neighborhood, to change their corner of the world.

The best model for social action is the Universal House of Justice, said Thomas. Before 1996 there was a great desire to enroll new believers but no clear method for doing so. The House of Justice investigated, identified problems, looked for innovation, “found this very humble thing called the Ruhi Institute” and guided Bahá’ís to adopt its process. It all came about through a “wonderful collaboration” of the Supreme Body and the International Teaching Center, she said.
The convergence of God’s Word and the humanities

The human sciences — as the French call the humanities — are the least empirical, but “there’s quite a lot in the Revelation [of Bahá’u’lláh]” that addresses” the issues they raise, said Robert Stockman in introducing this final panel at the 2014 ABS Conference. And the three panelists tackled in striking ways the Revelation’s relevance for them.

Reading Utopias: From Dichotomy to Complementarity

Elham Afnan, doctoral candidate in English literature at McMaster University in Ontario; translation facilitator at the Bahá’í World Center

The Universal House of Justice, in its Dec. 28, 2010, message, emphasized the complementarity of being and doing and the importance of avoiding false dichotomies, noted Afnan. “This issue is also relevant to wider society, where the dominant tendency is to define the world in terms of binary oppositions,” and the “field of literature is no exception.”

Afnan offered as a case study the genre of utopian literature — “the presentation of visions of an ideal society, often removed in time or space. As we read utopias we are suspended between two alternatives: the real world and the imagined world, neither or which is sustainable or satisfactory.”

But the novel The Dispossessed by Ursula K. Le Guin is instructive in that it approaches the dystopia on a planet and utopia on its moon as complementary states. It is an account of the protagonist’s journey from the utopian society to the dystopian and back after two centuries of no contact between two worlds.

“… it seems obvious that the moral colony is superior,” said Afnan. “Why then … does a citizen of utopia have to visit dystopia? It becomes evident quite early that the utopia not quite what one might expect: It’s a harsh and barren world. Survival requires extreme sacrifice. And the dystopia is not completely so: It’s beautiful and prosperous with abundant natural resources that people have learned to preserve and protect.

“So the relationship between the two is more complex than one of simple opposition,” she said. “They complement each other, and this complementarity is essential to the achievement of their utopian ideals.”

So, too, said Afnan, does the principle apply to the activities being pursued by Bahá’ís today. “… the harmonious relationship between expansion and consolidation, individual action and collective campaigns, refinement of inner character and consecration to selfless service, are in fact complementary activities, and to recognize that the diverse elements of a program of growth are also complementary.”

Global History and the Oneness of Humanity

Susan Maneck, associate professor of history, Jackson State University in Mississippi

Dreaded by untold numbers of collegians and professors alike, the survey course on world history is nonetheless the most important Maneck teaches, she maintained. History is the “study of what matters most to us in the past. History is about humanity. This class is the only chance I have to undo the damage” that “Coach” — the stereotypical teacher untrained in history — and many media outlets have done.

Maneck said she asks her students the question Coach asked them as well, “Why do we study history?” “Coach said it is so we can avoid the mistakes of the past. But that’s nonsense. Trying to avoid the mistakes of the past leads to other, sometimes bigger mistakes. So what is it good for? If we look at global history, the most important function for history is that it can create understanding so we avoid new mistakes.”

Another traditional justification, she said, is conveying a shared heritage: “to understand our own path and better appreciate how we got where we are.” While that approach is understandable, “it wouldn’t help us understand 9/11. In fact, such a treatment of history might contribute to it. A heritage conveyance model tempts us to present history in ways that support our own self-image and self-esteem.”

The history teacher’s task, then, is to ensure that such courses “are truly global and not teaching the mythology of western civilization under the guise of world history. … If history is to be of any value to us it must be global in perspective. Only this can create the kind of understanding which prevents the ‘othering’ process that makes 9/11s possible.”
Reading Philosophy in a New Culture of Learning

Gerald Filson, public affairs director, Bahá’í Community of Canada

Filson set out nine points related to the study of philosophy and its uses in our lives. Among them:

One point reflects a philosopher’s statement that “the fountainhead of Western philosophy was the first of the ten Commandments: ‘Thou shall have no other gods before me.’ It has to do,” he said, “with the fact that idle thoughts and vain imaginings, fixed and rigid frameworks, should not take up our worship, but that God is our Source of philosophy.”

Another deals with the inequalities of intellect and experience that exist in people, said Filson. “There is oppression only if those inequalities prevent those participating in a discourse from learning from each other in a way that expresses itself in action that is socially transformative,” he said. “We know from accompaniment and consultation that inequalities of experience and intellect are opportunities for learning. It can be argued that without inequalities there could be no learning.”

Filson’s final point, on conceptual frameworks, is the one he said he could talk about forever. A conceptual framework is a “raft of knowledge in a sea of reality. … We have concepts as Bahá’ís. Often, though, these are in the background as we engage in discourse with someone who doesn’t have same framework. We tend to talk on their grounds without bringing in our background concepts. We can more and more bring them to fore.”

But other background concepts are assumptions we should question, said Filson. “You can legislate human rights, but responsibilities are in the moral realm. Bahá’í understanding is that perhaps the coercive nature of law will become less important than the moral area as we’re trained and educated and self-disciplined.”

Three scholars explore balance of spirituality with natural sciences

‘Abdu’l-Bahá described science and religion as two wings that balance each other to lift human intelligence. The three contributors to this natural and life sciences panel on the third morning of the 2014 ABS Conference pursued a vision of how those vital forces can work together to advance knowledge.

“Let your vision be world-embracing” — Why Health Sciences and Bioethics?

Elizabeth Bowen, public health physician in Georgia

Four questions inspired Bowen’s offering: How might one “let your vision be world-embracing” personally, professionally and as a Bahá’í? How might one best apply the Bahá’í teachings intelligently to the life of humanity? How does one envision transforming one’s discipline to bring it under the shelter of the Bahá’í revelation? How might one participate in a unified effort to apply Bahá’í teachings to the construction of a divine civilization?

Bowen herself has traveled widely, and with the Internet becoming more prevalent “you’re going to see other parts of the world whether you like to or not.” A key for Bahá’ís is learning to use that growing awareness as a tool for communication and for raising our own consciousness.

In her own profession, Bowen said she has been learning to pay attention to the spiritual as well as physical states of patients. She has also been spreading (and encouraging others to spread) the importance of a peaceful state of mind and heart as an integral part of health.

The outward influence of Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation on our professions will grow as more Bahá’ís become experts and more experts become Bahá’ís. As an example she cited an official of the Centers for Disease Control who had an assignment crucial to AIDS-prevention policy, and he focused not only on physical causes but also on educating youth morally with a view to reducing risky behaviors.

Bahá’ís “have in the Writings the answers” for issues that touch on the short- and long-term concerns of humanity, said Bowen. “We need to learn, though, to translate them [for colleagues and other fellow humans] … so that it touches their hearts.”

The Human Mind and its Interaction with the World

Kamran Sedig, associate professor of computer science at the University of Western Ontario, focusing on cognitive research

It’s reasonable to assume we all have some interest in how the mind works,
Sedig said. But academia tends to divide its views of the mind in ways that limit its inquiry.

The Bahá’í teachings, specifically statements of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, associate mind with the brain but don’t confine it there. The mind, said the Master, has “no outward existence” but rather is an expression of the spirit.

These days, Sedig said, the dominant academic approach to the mind centers on the brain and biochemistry. Other views examine the mind through its roles in the realms of mapping, computation, epistemology (organizing knowledge), invention of physical and cultural artifacts, social processes, and spiritual space.

Bahá’í scholars can be heartened, Sedig indicated, by the emergence of theories that present unified views of all these functions. He provided glimpses of two such theories:

Distributed cognition: “The mind is not solely the product of inner functionings of the brain, but … the external environment is our partner in mental activities.”

Activity theory: This views the “inseparability of the mind and activity. … We act upon the world and the world acts upon us. … There is this dialectic between doing and becoming.”

Both those theories have obvious points of resonance with the Bahá’í concepts of investigation of truth, the power of consultation and the cycle of study, action and reflection, he said.

In a larger sense, Sedig said, it’s up to scholars inspired by Bahá’í teachings to infuse the their work with the spirit of a Revelation that, in words attributed to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “enlarges the sphere of thought … illumines the horizon of the intellect … [and] expands the arena of comprehension.”

Natural Sciences and Society
Arthur Lyon Dahl, president, International Environment Forum

With the help of science, “the collective human mind has expanded to the global level,” Dahl said in a fact-packed presentation. But a number of barriers impede unity and coherence in the way that global mind works.

The urgency of action on climate change on a large scale, and the dangers of cigarette smoking on a smaller one, are examples of how “scientific understanding does not change behavior. … There are all kinds of things that we know are bad for us, but it doesn’t change our habits.”

With that inertia added to pressures from business, public policy, and even the “iron curtains” that discourage scholars in various disciplines from communicating with each other — many in the scientific community grudgingly acknowledge that some other element is needed to carry the messages they need to get out.

While religious inspiration for those messages is often rejected outright, Dahl identified several relevant concepts that resonate with Bahá’í teachings and practices.

For instance, a growing “systems perspective” is influencing scholars to approach their fields in a way that “breaks down the silos” by taking multiple disciplines into account — for example, study of economics that is not divorced from environmental concerns. These approaches often encourage a wider sense of responsibility.

Conversely, Bahá’ís can learn to share lessons from natural systems such as coral reefs that demonstrate unity in diversity. One small example he cited was “cleaner fish” that “eat the parasites out of a bigger fish’s mouth but don’t get eaten themselves.”

At the grass roots, “citizen science” movements such as Reef Watch and Stream Watch raise awareness by recruiting people from all walks of life to take appropriate hands-on roles in research. This type of activity can fit naturally as a service component for local core activities.

Involvement by larger numbers of people, Dahl said, can be a powerful tool in ensuring science ceases to be “the patrimony of advantaged segments of society,” in the words of a Bahá’í International Community statement, and becomes a vital component in the moral and material prosperity of society as a whole.

- Report by Editors of The American Bahá’í
Please register for EACH person attending the conference by fax: 1-613-233-3644, by phone: 1-613-233-1903,
online at http://www.bahai-studies.ca or by mail: 34 Copernicus Street, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, K1N 7K4.

Name ______________________________________________________________

Address ___________________________________________________________

City ___________________________ Province/State ___________________________

Country __________________________ Postal/ZIP Code _______________________

Telephone ___________________________ E-Mail ___________________________

If this registrant is a child, please indicate age __________ Do you have any special needs? ________________

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<td>$80</td>
<td>$120*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By July 31</td>
<td>$90</td>
<td>$130*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After July 31</td>
<td>$100</td>
<td>$140*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unwaged</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>By May 31</td>
<td>$80</td>
<td>$120*</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>After July 31</td>
<td>$100</td>
<td>$140*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children (ages 5–14) must be registered by July 31</td>
<td>$70</td>
<td>$35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Family discount 20% off total registration fee***

Total Fees: _______________ Method of Payment

Scholarship Contribution: _______________

☐ Cheque ☐ Money Order
☐ VISA ☐ MasterCard ☐ American Express

Postal surcharge † _______________

GRAND TOTAL _______________

† Non-members residing outside North America, please add $30.

CANCELLATION POLICY: Registration fees are refundable, less 10% administrative fees if the Association is notified by July 31, and less 20% administrative fees if notified after July 31.

Registrants from outside Canada, please note: fees paid by credit card are processed in Canada. Some credit card companies apply a service charge for transactions taking place in another Country.

Credit Card Number

Credit Card Expiration Date

Cardholder’s Name (please print clearly)

Cardholder’s Signature
**HOTEL AND RESERVATIONS**

**Hyatt Regency Orange County**  
11999 Harbor Boulevard,  
Garden Grove, CA, 92840 USA  
Tel: (714) 750-1234; Fax: (714) 740-0465

- **Single/double occupancy** —  
  $139 per night (plus tax)
- **Triple/quad. occupancy** —  
  $159 per night (plus tax)

**Maximum occupancy:** 4 persons per room.

**Toll-free reservations:** 1-888-421-1442  
**Online booking:**  

*Conference attendees must make hotel reservations directly with the hotel. To receive the special rate ask for the Association for Bahá’í Studies special conference rate when making your reservation.*

**PLEASE NOTE:** these rates are guaranteed only until the room-block is filled or until July 15, 2015, whichever comes first. Reservations made after the cut-off dates will be based on availability at the Hotel’s prevailing rates. The conference rates are extended to three days before and three days after the conference dates.

**ROOM SHARING**

Reduce your conference costs (and make new friends!) by sharing a room at the hotel. To contact other attendees interested in sharing a room, please join the Yahoo! Group “ABS-NA Conference” by visiting its site [http://groups.yahoo.com/group/absconference](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/absconference) or by sending an e-mail to: absconference-subscribe@yahoogroups.com. **NOTE:** attendees must make their own hotel reservations and are responsible for contacting interested parties to make their own sharing arrangements. If you encounter difficulties with the Yahoo! Group system, please contact the Association for Bahá’í Studies office for assistance.