

ABS RELIGIOUS STUDIES SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP, BI-ANNUAL SEMINAR NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE
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ABSTRACTS

■ Lil Abdo, London, UK.

The Early Baha'is and the British Mystery Traditions.

This paper is part of a larger work which examines the networking of the early British Baha'is. One network, referred to as the Celtic Network, was particularly concerned with the British Mystery traditions centred upon Glastonbury and the Holy Grail. Central to this network was Wellesley Tudor Pole and his family who were deeply involved with spiritualism and occult practises centred upon a blue bowl which they believed symbolic of the Holy Grail. The bowl was kept in the Oratory, a room in the guest house they ran in Clifton, Bristol and it was there that it was handled by 'Abdu'l Baha. Also involved with the Grail tradition at Glastonbury was Alice Buckton, a feminist and educationalist who founded a community of craftswomen at Glastonbury as well writing a number of plays (including "Eagar Heart" which was seen by Abdu'l Baha).

The Celtic Network represents a phase in the development of the British Baha'i community, which was eventually subsumed by events. It is of interest because it exposes how people were drawn into the Baha'i milieu in the first decades of the last century and suggests a point of contact with the growing number of individuals who declare their interest in the British Mystery Tradition at the present time.

■ Stephen N. Lambden, Ohio University

"Some Further Aspects of the Shaykhi, Babi, and Baha'i Interpretations of the Khutbat al-tutunjiyya Ascribed to Imam 'Ali (d. 40/661)"

"Scriptural Citations in Babi and Baha'i Literatures with Special Reference to the Biblical Quotations in the *Javahir al-asrar* and the *Kitab-i iqan*"

■ Erfan Sabeti, Lancaster University

Phoenix and the Ashes: Abdolkarim Soroush and His Critics

It is more than two centuries that Muslim thinkers have been mainly concerned with modernity and its consequences for Muslim societies. In fact, contemporary Islamic history has witnessed the rise and fall of different intellectual trends in response to the crisis caused by the encounter with modernity. Abdolkarim Soroush has been the most influential Iranian Muslim thinker over the past few years. Known in western academia as the Luther of Islam, he has tried to reconcile Islam with modernity. His controversial ideas have been the subject of numerous books and articles. By reviewing some recurrent motifs in his writings and giving an account of the most valid critiques of his thought, we will try to show that the time of his discourse has passed and Iranian Muslims can no longer appeal to his ideas as a reliable source for facing the challenges of modern age.

■ Roger Prentice, Burnlaw, UK

Out-living the Lust for Certainty

How a Bahá'í mystical perspective might heal what Eagleton calls the 'fetishism' & 'necrophilia' of fundamentalism

A presentation for the ABS SIG Religious Studies

Newcastle-upon-Tyne, UK January 2006

This presentation draws upon surprisingly mystical implications in the view of fundamentalism presented by the Marxist cultural critic Terry Eagleton and links them to a set of principles in Bahá'í writings that constitute a preventative, or antidote, to fundamentalist mentality.

■ Moojan Momen, Cambridge, UK

The Baha'is of Iran: the Creation of an "Enemy Within"

"Towards a Baha'i History of Hamadan"

Abstract

There has been a great deal written on the role of minorities in the Constitutional Revolution. In particular, Bayat (Iran's First Revolution) has written extensively and convincingly of the important role of the Azalis in the Revolution. In this paper, it is proposed to look at the part played by the Baha'i community of Iran in the constitutional Revolution. In 1890-1906, it was emerging as a dynamic and progressive element in Iranian society. The Baha'is had a discourse on modernity, constitutionalism and social reform, involving democracy, the advancement of education and raising the social role of women, that was attractive to many Iranians, especially in that it offered a native and culturally more sympathetic pathway to modernization. The religion was gaining converts especially among the more educated and enlightened parts of society -- and there was a much larger constituency that, while not converted, was much influenced.

Despite Bayat's work on the major role played by the Azalis in the Revolution, this paper will advance the thesis that when the anti-Constitutionalist ulama attacked the Constitution by asserting that it was the work of "Babis", it was not the Azalis to which they referred but the Baha'is (the Baha'is being still called "Babis" by the generality of Iranian at this time). The main evidence advanced for this is the fact that the Azalis concealed their beliefs and argued their case based on the Qur'an and Islam, while the Baha'is not only had their own discourse on constitutionalism and social reform, but they were also taking practical steps such as electing their ruling councils, building schools and advancing the social role of women.

Despite the Constitutionalist reformers and the Baha'is being so close to each other ideologically, however, the Revolution itself ended up with almost no overt Baha'i support and with many of the Constitutionlists inimical towards the Baha'is. This matter is discussed in the paper in relation to the role of the ulama and the Azalis in creating an atmosphere of hatred against the Baha'is -creating an "enemy within". As a result of the activities of the ulama and the Azalis the Baha'is were excluded from the Constitution itself, thus creating the legal background for the scapegoating and persecutions of the Baha'i community that continued up to the Islamic revolution of 1979. The paper ends with some reflections on what that exclusion has meant, not so much for the Baha'i community, but the damage that it has done to the Iranian nation itself.