

Abstracts and provisional programme.

FRIDAY 7.00 Welcome & Refreshments

■ Roger Prentice (Burnlaw) (8.00 pm.)

Spiritualised Learning; Aspects of the 'interior dimension' of scholarship

This presentation and the discussion that will follow will explore the question, "Does the Baha'i Religion require that a new, spiritualised, form of scholarship be developed (in due course)? If yes, what might be some of the characteristics of that new form of scholarship? Will those characteristics be the same as now, but more highly developed, or will the characteristics be new and different? Might there be a new, feminised, holistic form of scholarship? What might the implications be for reason, logic and knowledge creation and for the communities of scholars? What relationships ought there be between scholarship and education?"

OPEN FORUM

SATURDAY

■ Ismael Velasco (Edinburgh). 10.00-11.00

Where the ink leaves but a blot: hermeneutical musings on the language of unsaying.

This paper will concentrate on the implications for Bahā'ī hermeneutics and scholarship of what may be termed Bahā'ī apophatic mysticism. It will seek to relate the sometimes (seemingly) anti-intellectualist strain in the Writings concerning scriptural understanding to an epistemology that postulates a realm of understanding beyond language, for which language can act as a bridge. Evidence will be sought in the Bahā'ī writings for this epistemological realm beyond language and a preliminary exploration of the Bahā'ī concept of "mysteries" will be pursued, with particular reference to the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahā. Suggestive links will be made between this concept of "mysteries" and the concept of "mysteries" found in the writings of the great Christian theologian Origen. Implications for Bahā'ī hermeneutics and scholars will be suggested.

■ Lil Abdo (London), (11.30)

Networking in the women's Suffrage and Bahā'ī Movements - another look at the early British Bahā'ī Community.

This paper is made up of some preliminary notes intended for a much larger piece of research, concerning the networks and ideology of the British Bahā'ī community during the Heroic Age. Much previously published material has concentrated only on the activities of individuals within the Baha'i Movement, my objective has been to attempt to place them within a context.

In doing so I have discovered that for many Baha'ism was only part of a larger pattern of activities encompassing such diverse beliefs and practices as the Labour Party and the psychic healing of dogs. This paper deals with the activities of people involved with both the movement for women's suffrage and the Bahā'ī Movement..

LUNCH 12.30 -> 2.00

2. 00 - 3.00

■ Dominic Brookshaw (London)
ABSTRACT TO FOLLOW

3. 30 OPEN SESSION

SUNDAY 10.00 am

■ Moojan Momen. (Sandy, UK).

A Survey of Islamic Doctrinal Attacks on the Bahā'ī Faith

The Bahā'ī Faith and its predecessor the Bābī movement have been attacked from the earliest days of their history by Muslim scholars. This paper is a survey of those Muslim attacks on Bābī and Bahā'ī interpretations of the Qur'an and Islamic doctrine especially in relation to passages that have been used by Muslims to refute the Bahā'ī Faith. Such passages include the doctrine of the Seal of the Prophets, the perfection and completion of Islam as God's religion, the inimitability of the Qur'an, and the interpretation of "Resurrection", "Return" and the Signs of the Advent of the Maḥdī. The Muslim attacks on Bahā'ī literature in relation to these questions is summarized and the Bahā'ī response is also described.

SUNDAY cntd.

■ Stephen Lambden (Newcastle, UK). (11. 30)

The interpretation of the Sūrat al-kaḥf (Surah of the Cave) in Bābī-Bahā'ī scripture.

Interpretations of narratives, themes and motifs contained in the important, rich and fascinating qur'anic *Surat al-kaḥf* (Surah of the Cave; Q. 18; especially Q. 18:60-102) have an important place in the writings of the founders of the Bābī and Bahā'ī religions; the two contemporary messianic figures of the Iranian Qājār period, Sayyid `Alī Muḥammad Shīrāzī, known as the Bāb ("Gate" 1819-50) and Mirzā Husayn `Alī Nūrī (1817-92) entitled, Bahā'-Allāh (The Splendour of God). Within the extensive and largely unpublished Arabic and Persian writings of these two successive, revolutionary claimants there exist quite a number of exegetical-eisegetical treatments of Q. 18:60ff.

While the Bāb, for example, eisegetically rewrote or re-revealed the story of Dhu'l-Qarnayn ("The Possessor of the Two Horns") in the *Sūrat al-waraqa* (Surah of the Leaf; LXXVI) of his first major work, the lengthy Arabic *Qayyūm al-asmā* (mid. 1844), Bahā'u'llāh wrote a detailed non-literal commentary on Q. 18:60ff. Various key figures, motifs and expressions occurring in the *Sūrat al-kaḥf* receive novel interpretations in Babi-Baha'i sacred scripture. Attention is given, for example, to the *Aṣḥāb al-kaḥf* ("Companions of the Cave") and to the multi-faceted and influential account of Moses and the page/youth.. [Khidr...] along with the associated, highly suggestive phrase *majma' al-baḥrayn* ('confluence of the two seas'). The story of Dhu'l-Qarnayn ('The Possessor of Two Horns') in which *Yājūj* and *Mājūj* (Gog and Magog) also figure is likewise given a range of interpretations within Babi-Baha'i scripture. Such material was drawn upon and interpreted in diverse non-literal (allegorical, typological...) ways.

Both the Bāb and Bahā'u'llāh occasionally expressed their claims based upon phrases or figures mentioned in the *Surat al-kaḥf*. The latter, for example, in his *Lawḥ-i qinā* ('Tablet of the Veil') called the Shaykhi leader Karīm Khān Kirmānī (d.1871) to listen to him as the "Khidr of [these] days" capable of leading him to the "Kawthar [Fount] of Eternal Subsistence". Addressing a certain "letter *qāf* between two *alifs* (=Āqā [Mirzā Āqā]?) in another untitled Tablet he bade the addressee "hearken" unto his message as the

messianic personification of the *majma al-baḥrayn* ("Confluence of the Two Seas").

In this paper translations from *Qayyūm al-asmā* LXXVI and from Bahā'u'llāh's Tablet commenting upon the *Surah of the Cave* will be introduced and presented as will supplementary interpretations of `Abdu'l-Bahā. Comments upon the Abrahamic exegesis, the biblical-qur'anic interpretive background and significance of select narratives and motifs will also be registered.

LUNCH 12.30 -> 2.00

2.00 - 3.00

■ Roger Prentice

A liberal perspective of Bahā'ī Teachings

In the matter of values is the Bahā'ī Faith, and its Teachings Liberal? With special reference to liberal traditions and education As civilized human beings, we are the inheritors, neither of an inquiry about ourselves and the world, nor of an accumulating body of information, but of a conversation, begun in the primeval forests and extended and made more articulate in the course of centuries. It is a conversation which goes on both in public and within each of ourselves. Of course there is argument and inquiry and information, but (and?) wherever these are profitable they are to be recognized as passages in this conversation, and perhaps they are not the most captivating of the passages.... Conversation is not an enterprize designed to yield an extrinsic profit, a contest where a winner gets a prize, nor is it an activity of exegesis (exposition, esp. of scripture); it is an unrehearsed intellectual adventure.....

....Education, properly speaking, is an initiation into the skill and partnership of this conversation which, in the end, gives place and character to every human activity and utterance. Professor Michael Oakeshott *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays* (London: Methuen, 1962), 198-9

This presentation asks; How, and in what ways, is the Bahā'ī Community, and its Teachings, liberal? What do the Teachings, including the concept of moderation, the 'middle way', lead us to include or exclude?The presentation is concerned with aspects of individual and community functioning, including ramifications for education.

What responsibilities does the Bahā'ī Community have to the past? What efforts ought be made here and now to

further perpetuate certain views, perspectives and knowledge that have come down to us under the term 'liberal'? If there is responsibility, it is not simply for the selfish exercise of freedoms. It is, so the presentation argues, because of the 'gems of civilization', hard won by past generations, which ought be included in the Bahā'ī model for the sake of future generations?

