

# **‘Irfán Colloquium**

One Hundred and Thirty-Second Session

*Memorials of the Faithful:  
A Centenary Celebration*

*Program and Abstracts*



Centre for Bahá'í Studies

Acuto, Italy

2-5 July 2015

## *Vision and Aims of `Irfan Colloquium*

**The Haj Mehdi Arjmand Memorial Fund** was established in 1992 to honor Haj Mehdi Arjmand (1861-1941) and is dedicated to promoting the scholarly study of the Bahá'í Faith. Haj Mehdi Arjmand was a Persian scholar and teacher of the Bahá'í Faith who became well known in Iran for his profound knowledge of the Bible, Qur'an, and Bahá'í scriptures. The primary activity of the Fund is sponsoring 'Irfán Colloquium and its publications.

In 2012, benefiting from the guidance received from the Universal House of Justice, a management board was appointed for this fund by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States to function as a Bahá'í agency and sponsor 'Irfán Colloquia, presently held in North America and Western Europe in English, Persian and German languages.

The 'Irfán Colloquium aims at promoting and supporting systematic studies of fundamental principles of the Bahá'í beliefs, the Writings of the Central Figures of the Bahá'í Faith, the interface of the Bahá'í Faith with intellectual schools of thought and religious traditions, and looking at current challenges in human society from the Bahá'í perspective. *`Irfán* is a Persian word referring to mystical, theological and spiritual knowledge.

As of July 2015 one hundred and thirty-two sessions of colloquia have been held. Papers in English presented or received at the `Irfán Colloquia are annually published in a series of volumes of the *Lights of `Irfán*.

# `Irfán Colloquium

One Hundred and Thirty-Second Session

*Memorials of the Faithful:  
A Centenary Celebration*

*Program and Abstracts*

Thursday evening, 2 July, 2015

Participants' Arrival

12:00 p.m.

Lunch

Afternoon

Registration

6: 15 p.m.

Dinner and Free Time

7:30 p.m.

**Opening Session**

**Words of Welcome and Announcements**

*Roya Ayman*

**Getting to Know Each Other**

8:00 p.m.

**Irfan Colloquium Aims, Mission, and Program**

*Iraj Ayman*

Session 1: *Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá*

8:30 – 9:15pm

*Habib Riazati*

**The Relevance of ‘Abdu'l-Baha's *Secret of Divine Civilization and Treatise on Politics* on the Future of Iran**

9:15 – 9:30pm

Discussion

10:00 – 11:00 p.m.

Free Time

**Friday Morning, July 3, 2015**

7:30 -8:00 a.m.

Devotional (*Optional*)

8:00 a.m.

Breakfast

9:15 a.m.

Opening Prayers

Announcements

9:30 a.m.

## Session 2: *Memorials of the Faithful – I*

9:30 – 10:15 a.m.

*Julio Savi*

### **An Homage to *Memorials of the Faithful* and to Eight of Its Heroes**

10:15 -- 10:30 a. m.

Discussion

10:30 a.m.

Break

11:00 – 11:45 a.m.

*Per Olaf Akerdahl*

### **Reflections on the *Memorials of the Faithful*: From the background of early Christian experiences**

11:45 a.m. – 12:00 Noon

Discussion

12:00 Noon – 2:00 p.m.

Lunch and Free Time

Friday Afternoon, July 3, 2015

Session 3: *Economics and the Bahá'í Faith*

3:00 – 3:45 p.m.

*Rama Ayman*

**The rise of extreme inequality in wealth:  
Implications of converging trends in amorality and  
globalization**

3:45 – 4:00 p.m.

Discussion

4:00 – 4:30 p.m.

Break

4:30 – 5:15 p.m.

*Nava Ashraf*

**Rethinking Human Nature:  
The New Homo Economicus**

5:15 – 5:30 p.m.

Discussion

5:30 – 6:00 p.m.

Break

6:00 p.m.

**Discussion of the day's presentations**

6:45 p.m.

Dinner and Free Time

Friday Evening, July 3, 2015

**Session 4: *Memorials of the Faithful – II***

8:30 – 9:30 p.m.

*Foad Seddigh*

**A Review of some of the Historic Sites Mentioned in the  
*Memorials of the Faithful***

9:30 – 10:00 p.m.

Discussion

10:00 - 11:00 p.m.

Free Time

Saturday Morning, July 4, 2015

7:30 -8:00 a.m.

Devotional (*Optional*)

8:00 a.m.

Breakfast

9:15 a.m.

Opening Prayers

Announcements

9:30 a.m.

## Session 5: *Memorials of the Faithful - III*

9:30 – 10:15 a.m.

*Iscander Tinto*

***Memorials of the Faithful:***  
**A content analysis**

10:15 – 10:30 p.m.

Discussion

10:30 - 11:00 a.m.

Break

11:00 – 11:45 a.m.

*Moojan Momen*

***Memorials of the Faithful:***  
**The Democratization of Sainthood**



11:45 a.m. – 12:00 Noon

Discussion

12:00 Noon

Lunch and Free Time

Saturday Afternoon, July 4, 2015

Session 6: *The Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and `Abdu'l-Bahá*

3:00 – 3:45p.m.

*Sivan Lerer*

**Historical and cultural motifs in Baha'u'llah's Tablet to  
Nasir al-Din Shah**

3:45 – 4:00 p.m.

Discussion

4:00 – 4:30 pm

Break

4:30 – 5:15 p.m.

*Habib Riazati*

**`Abdu'l-Bahá's Tablet of Universe:  
A review of its background and contents**

Saturday Evening, July 4, 2015

Session 7: Discussion

8:30 – 9:15pm

**General Discussion on the future of the `Irfán Colloquia**

Sunday Morning, July 5, 2015

7:30 -8:00 a.m.

Devotional (*Optional*)

8:00 a.m.

Breakfast

9:15 a.m.

Opening Prayers

Announcements

9:30 a.m.

Session 8: *Writings of the Bab and Bahá'u'lláh*

9:30 – 10:15 a.m.

*Nima Rafiei*

**The Báb's Tablet to Mullá Ḥasan Gawhar:  
A Provisional Translation and Notes**

10:15 – 10:30 a.m.

Discussion

10:30 – 11:00 a.m.

Break

11:00 – 11:45 am

*Fuad Seddigh*

**Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet of Ahmad Revealed in Persian:  
A review of its background and contents**

11:45 am – 12:00 Noon

Discussion

12:00 Noon

Lunch and Free Time

Sunday Afternoon, July 5, 2015

*Session 9: Concepts of Religion*

3:00 – 3:45 p.m.

*Daniel Grolin*

**The history of the concept of religion and its effect on  
discourses pertaining to the Bahá'í Faith**

3:45 – 4:00 p.m.

Discussion

4:00 – 4:30 p.m.

Break

4:30 – 5:15 p.m.

*Wendi Momen*

**The Concept of “Faithfulness” in the Bahá’í Texts in  
English Translation**

5:15 – 5:30 p.m.

Discussion

5:30 – 6:30 p.m.

Break

6:30 p.m.

Dinner and Free Time

8:30 p.m.

Sunday Evening, July 5, 2015

Session 10: Conclusion

8:30 – 9:15 p.m.

**General Discussion on the Papers presented**

9:15 p.m.

END OF THE PROGRAM

**Program Coordinator:**

*Roya Ayman*

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*End of the  
One-Hundred-and-Thirty-Second Session  
of `Irfán Colloquium*

# *Abstracts*

*In Alphabetical Order of Presenters' Surnames*



## **Reflections on the *Memorials of the Faithful*: From the Background of Early Christian Experiences**

*Per-Olof Akerdahl*

*Memorials of the Faithful* is a unique book for many reasons. A number of early Bábís and Bahá'ís have been described in this book and they have all been faithful to the Covenant in the Faith. The author is 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Centre of the Covenant in the Bahá'í Faith, which means that the stories are told by a person Who was in a position where he really could tell if a person had been faithful to the Covenant or not. It is a book that is central in the Bahá'í history, written by a person who had lived that history and been as close as possible to Bahá'u'lláh, the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith. There are 65 headings but as some headings describes more than one person there are close to 70 persons described and they are all important in the history of these two Religions at least to some extent, some of them being on the list of apostles of Bahá'u'lláh.

Regarding Christianity, there are a great number of gospels from this early time in the history of the Church, but only four has been accepted by the Church as trust able and are parts of

the New Testament. One of the authors of these gospels has written two texts: the story of the life of Jesus Christ and the story of the early Christians and this is St. Luke. Both are written as long letters to a person with the Greek name Theophilus, meaning the friend of God. This person is, however, unknown to the world except as the receiver of these two letters. Does this mean that St. Luke can be seen as a parallel to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá? It is a matter of personal faith, but there is nobody who is mentioned as the Centre of the Covenant in a testament, written and signed by Jesus Christ. It is safe to claim that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is unique in the history of religions for this reason and for other reasons as well. In the writings of the New Testament there are a number of persons that are followers of Jesus Christ and that are described as central, but nobody with the station of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. If there had been one, had the history of Christianity been different? The answer must be “yes, it would” but in what ways we can only guess. It might have been a history without wars, with very little theological disputes and with a church that was never divided. However, this never happened so we will never know.



## **Rethinking Human Nature: The New Homo Economicus**

*Nava Ashraf*

This presentation describes a short history of the assumptions underlying the nature of man within the discipline of Economics, and the exciting new developments in behavioral

economics, which incorporates psychology and economics. Behavioral economics challenges the classical economic assumption about human nature, that we make decisions to maximize a narrowly defined self-interest. Rigorous experiments carried out together between scholars, practitioners and policy makers have led to testing cherished assumptions within the discipline and to finding innovative, practical solutions in the field. The presenter will draw on her own research, drawing inspiration from the Bahá'í Writings and using field experiments conducted with local field organizations and governments to test new ideas in behavioral economics, such as altruistic capital.



## **The Rise of Extreme Inequality in Wealth: Implications of Converging Trends in Amoral and Globalization**

*Rama Ayman*

The tremendous strides made in globalization, especially since WWII, have converged with a trend in growing amorality as the fabric of international business conduct in society. This convergence has led to extreme inequality within majority of nations in the world at a time when on aggregate wealth inequality between nations actually has been falling at impressive rates. Here, we shall discuss the impact the rise of amorality and globalization have had on wealth inequality and the guidance we observe in the Bahá'í scriptures to alleviate



extremes of wealth and poverty in the context of a world that increasingly selects amorality and acting in self interest as its new ethical foundation and globalization as its tool to optimize wealth concentration.



## **The History of the Concept of Religion: Its Effect on Discourses Pertaining to the Bahá'í Faith**

*Daniel Grolin*

The current concept of religion imposes itself in a way that impedes the way in which the Bahá'í religion can present itself in the discourses of the West and places where its discourses dominate. This paper presents Foucault's idea of effective history, and then uses the methodology to explore the history of the concept of "Religion". The paper concludes the exploration of religion, by looking at the way Bahá'í discourses changes and reconfigures the concept of Religion.



## **Historical and Cultural Motifs in Baha'u'llah's Tablet to Nasir al-Din Shah**

*Sivan Lerer*

This tablet is the longest amongst Baha' Allah's tablets which are addressed to kings and rulers. Although the tablet was

composed in Edirne, it was revealed to the public during Baha' Allah's stay in Akko, in 1869.

The tablet is addressed to Nasir al-Din Shah, the fourth ruler of the Qajar dynasty, who reigned between the years 1848-1896. In August 1852, several Babis collaborated in an attempt to assassinate the Shah, and this traumatic event left its mark on him, especially in his profound fear and distaste of anything Babi.

This paper examines both the historical references given by Baha' Allah (for example, the mention of Shaykh Ansari), and the cultural and religious motifs. In many instances, the historical and the religious motifs are interconnected, and need to be approached as a whole.

The paper also discusses some of the tablet's themes, such as the role of the monarch in Baha' Allah's worldview and the treatment of minority groups in society, in light of the special relation between Nasir al-Din Shah and the Babi-Bahai religion.



## **A Sugary Concoction of Mindless Hagiography: What is New about *Memorials of the Faithful***

*Moojan Momen*

This paper considers the literary genre and literary history behind *Memorials of the Faithful* (*Tadhkiratu'l-Vafa*) as well as

examining what is new about the book. The paper will first consider the genre of hagiography in Christianity and Judaism. It will then look at the specific literary precedent set by Faridu'd-Din's *Tadhkiratu'l-Awliya* (“Memorials of the Saints”), which is the oldest work of this genre in Persian. Finally it looks at the contents of ‘Abdu'l-Baha's book, giving some examples of the manner in which ‘Abdu'l-Baha highlights particular virtues that related to the needs of the Faith. Finally the paper will examine the manner in which ‘Abdu'l-Baha took this traditional literary format and used it in an innovative manner to make a profound statement about a fundamental principle of the World Order of Baha'u'llah.



## **The Báb's Tablet to Mullá Ḥasan Gawhar: A Provisional Translation and Notes**

*Nima Rafiel*

Among the Writings of The Báb there are epistles and letters addressed to prominent Shaykhís during His ministry, including the infamous Ḥájí Karím Khán Kirmání. When The Báb tasked one of His disciples, one of the Letters of the Living (*hurúf-i-ḥayy*), Mullá ‘Alí Bastámí to Iráq in 1846, he was apprehended and a forum consisting of both Shí’ih and Sunní clergymen, charged the author of the new religions dispensation with apostasy and deserving of death for the claims contained in His Writings. One of those present in the forum was a certain Shaykhí from Tabríz in Iranian Ádhirbayján, Shaykh Ḥasan

Gawhar, who had been a student of Siyyid Kázim Rashtí and had attempted to advance a claim of leadership among the Shaykhís after the former's death. In the late Abu'l Qásim Afnán's book, *'Ahd-i-'A'lá: Zindigáníy-i Hadrat-i Báb*, there can be found many reproductions of original tablets and letters of The Báb and of important figures from the Bábí Dispensation in Iran, including passages from a letter addressed to Mullá Hasan Gawhar. In this presentation, a provisional English translation of the Arabic tablet will be presented, in addition to offering some thoughts and comments on the content of the letter and the manner in which it fits into the context of The Báb's revelation.



## **Tablet of Universe: An Introductory Review\***

*Habib Riazati*

Abdu'l-Bahá in the *Lawh-i-Aflákiyyih*, translated as “Tablet of the Universe,” describes different aspects of what he refers to as “the holy realities” and the reality as “established in both the hidden and manifest worlds”, the realities that are “capable neither of being defined by limits nor contained within the

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\* The original Tablet in Arabic is published in *Makátib-i 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, Vol. 1, pages 13-32. There is also a provisional translation of this Tablet that can be found at [www.bahai-library.com/abdulbaha\\_lawh\\_aflakiyyih](http://www.bahai-library.com/abdulbaha_lawh_aflakiyyih)

compass of signs and allusions"; He moreover, describes how through "the power of attraction and propagation," the existence has become manifested and been "set in order" and each and every being has become the recipients and the manifestations of "the Divine conditions and Eternal signs. Emerging from behind the veils". He furthermore explains how natural "evolution" takes place within the realm of "creation". Lastly Abdu'l-Bahá touches on the various descriptions of the Universe as explained by Ptolemy and Al-Farabi.



## ***The Relevance of Abdu'l-Baha's *Secret of Divine Civilization* and *Treatise on Politics* on the Future of Iran***

*Habib Riazati*

The appreciation and practical implications of the concept of Modernity and Renewal in all aspects of humanity seems to be at the core of creating a New World Order as `Abdu'l-Bahá envisions for the future of the World as a whole and the future of Iran in particular.

The multidimensional crisis of our age all seem to be rooted in upholding the ancient, colonial, nationalistic, and value free belief systems that have no practical universal applications in our day to day lives as an individuals and society as a whole. Most if not all of the standards that humankind uses today are inheritably flawed as far as the requirements of the

New Age is concerned. Hardly we can find any arena of human affairs that is not affected by these ancient and value-free doctrines and belief systems. Crisis in Political systems and governance, challenges posed by the current systems of education, the obvious irreverence of ancient and traditional meanings assigned to the metaphysical concepts such as God, Religion and Ethics contributing to the escalation of Fundamentalism, Fanaticism and Radicalism across the World. the Crisis in Family, The lack of proper understanding of the definition of Liberty and its association with individual and social responsibilities, the prostitutions of Art and Sciences, The dangers of Institutionalized religions employing indoctrination the souls and minds of humanity yielding to mental & spiritual slavery where individual has lost its vitality as the Nobel being and has been reduced to a aimless and robotic creature; biased based governing systems resulting in the abuse of powers by their members, The erosion of middle class and economical imbalances and shifts in the definition of ownership of the wealth of nations; The improper conclusions of Darwinism leading to reductionism are just a few examples of the crisis of our age.

The purpose of this presentation is to examine how Abdul Baha Abbas in some of his major works such as *Treatise on Politics*, *Secret of Divine Civilization*, *Some Answered Questions* and his talks across Europe and America addresses majority of the aforementioned crisis and then reflect on some of his new revolutionized ideas that he has offered that may result in creating new set of mindsets for understanding and addressing these most challenging issues resulting in a new

World Order in which the rights and the responsibilities of individuals and society can be safeguarded.



## **An Homage to *Memorials of the Faithful* and to Eight of Its Heroes<sup>\*</sup>**

*Julio Savi*

*Memorials of the Faithful* is described as an inspiring “book of prototypes,” that not only portrays “all of the archetypes that the various personality theorists have given us in this century” and “all the human dichotomies” that we may find in our lives, but also addresses “us in our time . . . [and] on our own travels . . . [in our] tacit dimension, the silent root of human life.” These features of the book have lead the author to compose eight poems on eight of the personages of the book. They have not been chosen because they were considered in any way superior to or better than all the others. They were chosen because some of their personal qualities and of the events in their lives raised louder echoes in the author’s heart and mind. The eight poems are presented, with short explanations of the details that have moved the author to write them.

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<sup>\*</sup> Shaykh Salmán, Nabíl-i-Zarandí, Darvish-i-Şidq-‘Alí, Shaykh Şádiq-i-Yazdí, Zaynu’l-‘Ábidín Yazdí, Shaykh ‘Alí Akbar-i-Mazgání, ‘Abdu’lláh Baghdádí and Jináb-i-Muníb



## **Provisional Translation of the Persian Tablet of Aḥmad and a Review of Its Contents**

*Foad Seddigh*

The Persian Tablet of Aḥmad is one of the Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed in Adrianople addressed to a person by the name Aḥmad who is a native of Káshán, a city in the Central Iran. It may not be regarded as a lengthy Tablet but it contains invaluable exhortations to its recipient, the people of the Bayan, as well as other people. The Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith selected certain paragraphs from this Tablet perhaps based on the suitability of their contents and then translated them into English. Such translated paragraphs appear, in scattered form, in the body of the authorized and authentic translation of the Bahá'í Scriptures in English. Since, the original sources for most of the small passages translated by the Guardian are not readily available, the author made an effort to search and to identify the Persian counterpart for those paragraphs of this Tablet translated by the Guardian. These passages constitute almost half of the Table. Then, translated passages were placed together in the same order as that appearing in the original Tablet. However, such paragraphs did not form a continuous text and presented many gaps in between these paragraphs which were to be filled by the author of this paper through the process of translation. Such task posed a challenge arising from the fact that the author's translation of the new passages required to be compatible with and conform to the style of the



translation of the Guardian both in terms of the selection of words, and poetic expressions and sentence structure.

The outcome of this endeavour were to be a wholesome translated text of the entire Tablet which would ensure that any reader of this Tablet could not distinguish between the styles of the two translations; otherwise such a reader would be confronted with two different styles of translation which would keep switching back and forth, an exercise which would ultimately defeat the purpose of the translation. Of course, this requirement is not unique to this translation alone and may be present in cases where a significant part of a Tablet is translated by the Guardian. The author is confident that such objectives are achieved in this case and the outcome of the translation is a text which exhibits smooth transition from one paragraph to another as anyone reads through the Tablet. In this paper the historical background for, and the circumstances which lead to, the revelation of this Tablet is reviewed and some of the concepts which characterise this Tablet are discussed.



## **Significance of some Historical and Holy Places Cited in the *Memorials of the Faithful***

*Foad Seddigh*

*Memorials of the Faithful* is not merely a book devoted to the biography of some believers and historical narrative of their lives, rather a depository of matchless beauty in Persian writing,

an exquisite text of profound meaning, and a testimonial to the devotion to the Cause of God and the Covenant, of some believers among whom were low as well as high in rank, poor and rich, semi-literate and learned. In the book *Memorials of the Faithful*, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in the course of portraying the life history of some believers, has cited many villages, cities, and sites, some of which are blessed by the foot-steps of the twin manifestations of God for this age, and others are important due to being the scene of significant historical events of the Faith.

In this paper four such places are selected from among them and their niche in history is further elaborated. These are: (1) The Most Great House in Baghdad, (2) The ruins of Madaen, located some thirty km south of Baghdad, on the banks of Tigris, where Blessed Beauty visited many times, and once graced the palaces of great kings of Sassanid dynasty which were destroyed by the army of Arab invaders and subsequently lost their glory, (3) Surroundings of the Sheikh Tabarsi's tomb where Baha'u'llah visited once, and (4) City of Mosul in the northern Iraq at the banks of River Tigris which is built on the ruins of the ancient and historical city of Nineveh where a number of believers and the Holy family were kept as captives for several years, and Bahá'u'lláh's caravan in His exile to the seat of the Ottoman Empire passed through it.



## **Memorials of the Faithful: Hagiography and Models to Set Examples in a Religious Community**

*Iscander Micael Tinto*

This paper presents a mode of suggesting examples of life to a religious community, which is that of hagiography: the story of the lives of the saints. In the Christian world, the life of Jesus was the example against which saints were measured, and the lives of saints were the examples against which the general population measured itself. In the Middle Age hagiography became a literary genre par excellence for teaching a largely illiterate audience.

An example of Muslim hagiography is *Tadhkirat al-Awliya*, “Muslim Saints and Mystics: Episodes” by the famous poet Attar (c. 1145 – c. 1221). This paper will propose a brief comparison between the two works, using the example of a two biographies in Attar’s work *Rābi’a Al-‘Adawiyya* and Shaykh Bayazid al-Bistami and two from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s *Memorials of the Faithful*, that is Mishkín Qalam, and *Shams-i-Duhá*, to show that hagiography offers examples for people to imitate.

# *Notes*

# *Notes*

## *‘Irfán Colloquia Publications*

Moojan. Momen (ed.), *Scripture and Revelation* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1997)

Moojan Momen (ed.), *The Bahá’í Faith and the World Religions* (Oxford: George Ronald, 2005)

Iraj Ayman (ed.), *The Lights of ‘Irfán: Compilations of Papers Presented at ‘Irfán Colloquia* (in English), Books One to Sixteen (2000–2015)

Iraj Ayman (ed.), *Safini-yi Irfán: Compilations of Papers Presented at ‘Irfán Colloquia* (in Persian). Books One to Seventeen (1998–2014)

Farah Dustdar (ed.), *Beiträge des ‘Irfán-Kolloquiums: Compilations of Papers Presented at ‘Irfán Colloquia* (in German) Books One to Five (Hofheim, Germany: Bahá’í Verlag, 2004–2009)

Maryam Afshar, *Images of Christ in the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* (2004)

Wolfgang Klebel, *Revelation of Unity, Unity of Revelation* (Darmsdat, Germany: Reyhani Verlag, 2009)

Vahid Rafati, *Áftab Ámad Dalíl-i Áftáb* (The proof of the Sun is the Sun) (Darmsdat, Germany: Reyhani Verlag, 2010)

Vahid Rafati, *Badáy’-i-Ma’áni va Tafsír* (The Wonders of Inner Meanings and Interpretation): *Selected Commentaries of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá on Qur’anic Verses and Islamic Traditions* (Darmsdat, Germany: Reyhani Verlag, 2013)

Shahbaz Fatheazam, *The Last Refuge* (Darmsdat, Germany: Reyhani Verlag, 2015)

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