

From the Editor's Desk

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A NEW STAGE

Volume 23 begins a new stage in Bahá'í Studies regarding the Association and the Journal. Inspired by the Universal House of Justice letter of 24 July 2013, the Editorial Committee has decided, first of all, to increase the frequency of the journal to more than the current publication rate of one issue per year. This issue will thus be the last one representing an entire volume—a year's worth of articles (2013).

A second change—a full-time editor with a new editorial committee—will result in a faster turn-around time for submissions. All papers will be immediately triaged to assess their viability, and authors will be given feedback at every step of the editorial process. The entire procedure will be extremely efficient. Because the Journal is the editor's full-time job, submissions, suggestions, and queries will be answered promptly.

Third, as noted in the ABS Bulletin, many issues will be theme-based. This does not mean that an article of merit need await publication until an issue related to the subject of the piece is scheduled; an article will be published as soon as possible after it is peer-reviewed and edited. But the theme orientation does mean that most issues will have a coherence that the Editorial Committee hopes the readership will find helpful in exploring matters of pressing concern to the Bahá'í community and to discourse in the wider community of interest.

In this context, the Journal will try to establish an ongoing exchange by encouraging readers and contributors alike to offer suggested topics and themes of interest and by encouraging scholars from various disciplines to contact the Editorial Committee with proposals for articles. Such processes will increase the outreach of the Journal without in any way diminishing or compromising the caliber of the scholarship itself.

Another change that the Editorial Committee will implement is to place

future book reviews on the ABS Website rather than publishing them in the Journal. This change will allow for a more timely assessment of new books and allow for a greater number of works to be reviewed. Furthermore, if the reviews are published online, more space in the costly printed issue of the Journal can then be allotted to articles.

Naturally, feedback from the readership on this and other decisions will be taken into account. Please address comments to Editor, Journal of Bahá'í Studies (editor@bahai-studies.ca). The new introductory section "From the Editor's Desk" will serve to provide an opportunity to share with readers these observations and the Editorial Committee's response to them. "From the Editor's Desk" will also serve to ask for feedback on other important matters concerning the Journal, and, most important, it will provide an overview of the thematic structure of each particular number.

All previous standards regarding peer review and relevance of submissions to specific fields of study and to the Faith still apply (details at: <https://www.bahai-studies.ca/journal/submissions>). In addition, the Editorial Committee welcomes submissions for cover art and hopes readers will find the somewhat more bold color of the journal and its variety of cover art enjoyable and inspiring. Furthermore, the Editorial Committee calls on those who wish to be considered as possible peer reviewers to send a brief CV to the Editor. The Editorial Committee is happy to consider using such services in helping the Journal respond to the rapidly increasing need for Bahá'í scholars to participate in the vital discourses affecting this critical turning point in human history.

THE FIRST CENTURY OF THE FORMATIVE AGE

As we begin this new stage in the evolution of the Journal of Bahá'í Studies, we are extremely fortunate to include articles by former Universal House of Justice member Mr. Douglas Martin and House of Justice member Mr. Paul Lample, the well-received Balyuzi lecture by Dr. Shapour Rassekh, and book reviews by Yale Professor Emeritus Firuz Kazemzadeh, by lawyer, author, and former Bahá'í World Centre staff member, Mrs. Kathryn Jewett Hogenson, and by Professor Graham Hassall.

All of the articles in this volume, as well as three of the four books reviewed, are tightly focused on a retrospective view of the first century of the Formative Age of the Faith, especially as this age was set in motion by the example, guidance, and foresight of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Whether discussing His vision for a world polity or the themes and plentitude of talks that He delivered in His visit to the West, each piece in this issue examines the significance of this age, now in its fifth epoch, as Bahá'ís worldwide labor to establish a network of communities in clusters throughout our global neighborhood to assist an ailing humanity in dealing with present social dysfunction and to prepare for those trials and tribulations that most surely lie ahead.

"The Next Stage," by Mr. Douglas Martin, is based on his talk given at the 2012 ABS conference in and alludes to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's visit to the West and to the next stage in this Formative Age. It also focuses on the present challenge of the Association to combat the "haughty intellectualism" that pervades the contemporary academy. In particular, Martin frankly sets forth how matters of spirituality, and metaphysics in general, are casually dismissed by contemporary scholars who seem content to ignore the empirical evidence of the Faith's power, as evidenced in the efficacy of the worldwide influence of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation and the achievements of the Faith in community-building. He concludes by admonishing members of the Association, and Bahá'ís in general, to respond to this challenge by finding "avenues through which knowledge of the Bahá'í Cause may legitimately find expression in institutions of higher learning."

The second article, by Mr. Paul Lample, is a more lengthy and intricate overview of how the Faith has developed during the first century of the Formative Age. He especially concentrates on what steps had to be taken as Bahá'ís prepared for the first teaching plan unveiled by the Guardian in 1937 and on all that has since been learned through the successive teaching plans and the critical points of transition as the administrative order evolved after the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Of particular interest is his explanation of how the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá established the charter that formed the foundation of the Bahá'í administrative order

and how this flexible structure has enabled the Bahá'í community to traverse successfully every major point of transition and to respond to the challenges inherent in its mandate to bring about a viable global community.

At the heart of his study is the exploration of six particular concepts in relation to Bahá'í Administration, whose flexible framework allows for—and, indeed, insists upon—organic growth and development in order to establish the process of community-building that is so critical at the present stage of rapid decline in the ability of secular governance to respond effectively to the needs of a global society in travail. In sum, Lample offers his view of the fundamental nature of what is intended by the concept of “a formative age” and what, consequently, is our mandate in becoming its fully informed participants.

Dr. Shapour Rassekh's Balyuzi lecture, “Abdu'l-Bahá, The Standard Bearer of a New Civilization,” given at the 2012 ABS conference in , appears here first in French—the language of the presentation itself—and will appear in translation in a future issue. As the title implies, Rassekh focuses on 'Abdu'l-Bahá's journey to the West, its purposes, and the Master's discussions about what lay ahead regarding conflict and social change. But the article primarily discusses 'Abdu'l-Bahá's pronouncements regarding the need to establish the foundation for some form of global alliance or federation. Rassekh also probes 'Abdu'l-Bahá's insights about the potential for the West to lead the way in establishing an alliance between the material expertise of the West and the spiritual traditions and perspectives of the East.

Rassekh concludes by alluding to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's forewarning about rampant materialism as well as His more hopeful challenge to the Bahá'í community in North America regarding its potential to ensure that “the light of universal peace may shine and this darkness of estrangement and enmity may be dispelled from amongst men. . . .” (Promulgation of Universal Peace 469–70).

The book reviews by Dr. Firuz Kazemzadeh, Mrs. Kathryn Jewett Hogenson, and Dr. Graham Hassall provide an excellent assessment of the value of volumes related to this same period and to some more recent

events related to the unfolding of the Formative Age. Kazemzadeh examines 'Abdu'l-Bahá in America by Dr. Robert Stockman and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Journey West: The Course of Human Solidarity, a collection of essays edited by Dr. Negar Mottahedeh. Jewett Hogenson does a splendid job of explaining the intriguing process by which the two-volume work *The Maxwells of Montreal*, by Violette Nakhjavani, was assembled over time, much of it from the notes of Rúhíyyih Khánum who had herself intended to pen such a work. And Hassall reviews the accomplishments of Sovaida Ma'ani Ewing in her examination of progress toward a global commonwealth in *Collective Security within Reach*.

Finally, in light of the theme of this volume, it seems most appropriate to conclude this introduction with the opening words of the House of Justice letter of 5 December 2013 to the Bahá'ís of the world as they memorialized the conclusion of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's journey to the West:

When He arrived in the Holy Land, exactly one hundred years ago today, at the conclusion of His “epoch-making journeys” to Egypt and the West, 'Abdu'l-Bahá eschewed any ceremony or fanfare just as He had at His departure. But between His going and His return, a defining period in Bahá'í history had unfolded—a “glorious chapter”, in the words of Shoghi Effendi, during which “seeds of undreamt-of potentialities” had been sown, “with the hand of the Centre of the Covenant Himself”, in the “fertile fields” to the west.