



The Lamp

A NEWSLETTER PRODUCED BY THE WILMETTE INSTITUTE

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Courses Demonstrate Steady Expansion of International Outreach

The international expansion of the Wilmette Institute, which accelerated in January when sixty students from India signed up for the course "The Epistle to the Son of the Wolf," has continued and gained momentum. The course "Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed After the Kitáb-i-Aqdas" began on May 15 with thirteen North American students and at least seventy Indian students (registration information is still arriving). Whereas the course on Epistle to the Son of the Wolf had seven study groups in India and surrounding territories, the "Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh" course has twenty-seven mentors and twenty-six study groups scattered among thirteen of India's states. Not all the Indian students are Bahá'ís; at least one is a friend of a local Bahá'í community. E-mail from the Indian students considerably exceeds that generated by the rest of the course, with many informative postings on

Everything is Set for the Summer Program

All plans are finalized for the Spiritual Foundations for a Global Civilization's sixth summer program, July 28 to August 11, 2001, at Kendall College in Evanston, Illinois. Eleven faculty will teach various segments of the sixty-six hours of face-to-face classes. Use of one classroom, dormitory rooms, and the cafeteria is finalized. Enrollments this year will be the same or slightly higher than last year. One former student, Patricia Haynie from Jupiter, Florida, has agreed to come to help organize the daily activities and foster the summer program's spiritual and social life. The two weeks of friendship and creating a small model Bahá'í community in the vicinity of the Wilmette Temple, together, is one of the most important aspects of the Spiritual Foundations program and cannot be duplicated via the Internet.

June: Month of Promise

The month of June saw the launching of the Wilmette Institute's sixth distance-learning course in 2001, "The Bahá'í Faith: A Comprehensive Introduction." Among the twelve students are some veteran Bahá'ís, some new members of the Faith seeking a deeper understanding, at least one spouse of a Bahá'í, and one friend of the Faith. Questions have already begun to pour in and range from "what is a pioneer?" to a request for a description of the concept of "reason" in the Bahá'í scriptures. The faculty come from California (though originally from Germany), Illinois, Indiana, Maine, North Carolina, Texas, and Virginia.

On June 15 the course "Christianity for Deepening and Dialogue" began with faculty from British Columbia, Florida, Indiana, Maine, New Mexico, and Washington state. Drawing on the feedback from students in the Judaism course recently completed, the course will feature more structured writing assignments and a focus on how the material learned can be applied in dialogue between Bahá'ís and Christians.

The month of June ends with preparations for the course on The Secret of Divine Civilization, scheduled to run July 1 through September 30. The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States has asked American Bahá'ís to study the book during the second half of 2001, hence registration is expected to be strong. Study materials for the book include a description of its contents and significance by Amin Banani and 131 study questions prepared by Habib Riazati. Both tools will also be available on the United States Bahá'í Education and School Office's website, so that anyone can use them in planning deepenings. The book provides considerable material for discussion

of the Bahá'í Faith's approach to Marxism, capitalism, democracy, monarchy, scholarship, a liberal arts education, business, agriculture, science, journalism, international development, legal systems, and dozens of other areas.

Julio Savi on the Virgin Birth and the Immaculate Conception

[This comment was posted to the listserver for the Theology course as a result of a discussion of two different Christian teachings: the virgin birth of Jesus Christ and the immaculate conception of Mary. Students asked whether the latter Christian teaching referred also to a virgin birth, but of Mary, not Jesus. -Editor]

As far as I understand, the dogmas of the virgin birth of Jesus and of the immaculate conception of Mary are two different things, strictly connected to one another. As to the virgin birth of Jesus, it implies for Him to be born as immaculate, that is as free from the original sin. It also implies for Him to have been conceived "without any semen [without a human father], through the power of the Holy Spirit alone."

As to the immaculate conception, it implies that Mary was born "highly favoured," ["full of grace (charisma)" in the Knock translation from the Greek] (Luke 1:28), that is, as free from original sin. But she is described as having had both a father and a mother. Immaculate conception implies for Mary also to have been immaculate, that is free from any sin, throughout her life.

These two dogmas should be seen in the light of the Christian idea that sexual intercourse is not a worthy action for a holy (or immaculate) human being, who is expected not to know sex for his/her whole life,

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aspects of the various tablets. Indeed, the course is generating more e-mail than most previous courses; the first twenty days saw 190 e-mail messages sent to the listserver, or an average of almost ten per day.

The courses with heavy international participation are also enriching the system of distance learning followed by the Wilmette Institute. The Indian Bahá'í Academy developed a study sheet for its students that the Wilmette Institute has begun to circulate to its other students as well. Discussion between North American and Indian faculty has resulted in a greater stress on practical aspects of studying the writings of Bahá'u'lláh. The relationship of study to the Five Year Plan is considered an important aspect of the courses. Optional memorization exercises will be added to future courses as an experiment. Mr. Ramsey Zeine, who is now a full-time faculty member for the Indian Bahá'í Academy, will serve as faculty member for the Wilmette Institute's Spiritual Foundations summer session thereby strengthening the relationship between the two educational institutions. No doubt collaboration will continue to produce many new improvements.

To be ready for their intensive classes, the students began their home study on May 1 with a reading assignment of half of *God Passes By* and the statement on Bahá'u'lláh. In early June the assigned topic shifts to the nature of the development of the individual. Students will read *The Reality of Man*, which is a compilation of Bahá'í scriptures, and *The Good Life*, a compilation of readings from such philosophers as Aristotle, St. Augustine, Karl Marx, William James, and Martin Buber. Readings on marriage and family follow. After the summer program ends, additional readings may be assigned, and students will be expected to produce a final written exercise at either the introductory, intermediate (undergraduate) or advanced (graduate) levels. They will also give one or more presentations on at least one of the subjects studied this year.

Student News

From Mitra Deliri Sabet, on the conclusion of the "Theology" course

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Wilmette Institute for all the wonderful work it is doing. I must admit that although I have always been involved in direct teaching, but with the insight that I have acquired through the Wilmette Institute I am more confident and my words have more influence on people. The quality of the firesides that I host now is much better than before. In March 2001 I started a weekly fireside/deepening on Thursdays, in which we read different papers and articles on different issues of life. This is designed for prominent people. There are 10 regular attendees and all love it. These firesides are the fruit of the Theology class to me.

Thank you with much love and deep appreciation.

Irfan Colloquium and Seminar

The next session of the Irfán Colloquium and Seminar will be held at Louhelen Bahá'í School, October 5-8, 2001. It will be conducted in separate gatherings, one in English and the other one in Persian. This year's theme of the Colloquium is "Mysticism and the Bahá'í Faith." The Irfán Seminar will be devoted to the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh revealed during the latter part of the Akka period. Wilmette Institute students and alums are welcome to attend and participate in the dialogues and discussions. Participants will receive publications of the Irfán Colloquium including a volume of the papers presented last year at the Colloquium. Those interested in making presentations at the Colloquia or the Seminar are invited to contact the Irfán Colloquium's office at the following address:

Irfán Colloquium
Bahá'í National Center
1233 Central Street
Evanston, IL 60201-1611
Phone: 847-733-3501

An Announcement from the Yerrinbool Centre of Learning in Australia

The Wilmette Institute and Yerrinbool have been discussing ways the two institutions can collaborate. As a start, the Institute is offering Yerrinbool an opportunity to announce its programs in The Lamp. -Ed.

Are you interested in a systematic study of the Faith on your own time when and where it is possible?

Would you also like to have a mentor to assess your work and to consult with him/her when there is a need?

Are you seeking materials that can assist you in your study as if you had a personal tutor?

Are you interested to study in a learning circle with your friends, to reflect and consult together systematically, combined with personal study afterwards to consolidate your understanding?

Are you keen to be in contact with other students from around the world, who are also studying the same course, through an Internet-based Virtual Campus?

Then please read on. The Yerrinbool Bahá'í Centre of Learning (YBCL) Distance Education courses are uniquely designed to satisfy all the above expectations. Currently, the Yerrinbool Bahá'í Centre of Learning offers the following courses:

- "Foundation course on the Bahá'í Faith"-an in-depth study (not a basic course) on the fundamental verities of the Faith"
- A tutorial on The Advent of Divine Justice
- A tutorial on the "Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh"
- A tutorial on The Kitáb-i-Íqán
- A course on the ministry of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "Drawing near to 'Abdu'l-Bahá"

For more information on these courses and copies of sample lessons, please visit the Yerrinbool Bahá'í Centre of Learning Website at www.bahai.org.au/yerrinbool.

because marriage is seen as a remedy for concupiscence ("if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn" [1 Corinthians 7:9]). Therefore immaculate conception implies for Mary to have conceived Jesus without having "known" a man. According to the Catholics, it also implies for Mary not to have "known" a man for her whole life. And thus Catholics deny the existence of Jesus' brothers or sisters.

I think that the explanations of Shoghi Effendi should be understood in the light of the fact that our teachings deny the Christian dogma of the original sin and ascribe a quite different meaning and value to sex. Therefore the two dogmas acquire a different meaning. As to Jesus, they imply His Great Infallibility (ismati-kubr ). As to Mary, they imply her immaculacy throughout her life, although she conceived other children in the normal way.

The terms "immaculate conception," "virgin birth," and "immaculacy," appear to have quite different meanings in the Christian context and in the Bah '  context. Think for example of the meaning the Bah '  writings ascribe to the virgin birth of Jesus. Whereas Christians consider Jesus' virgin birth as a sign of His superiority as compared to any other human being, Bah ' s consider it as a test (a metaphorical veil) for Jesus' contemporaries: how can a man born without a known father be the Messiah? I would not think of "a misunderstanding of a technical term of another religion" by an "infallible" Guardian, but certainly of a redefinition of a religious terminology, which that infallible Guardian was entitled, and expected, to do.

Wilmette Institute & Bah '  Academy 1st Collaboration

Course: *(A Report From the April Newsletter of the Bah '  Academy, India)*

The first distance-learning course on "Epistle to the Son of the Wolf" is about to finish. Participants in Bhubaneswar, Delhi, Panchgani and Port Blair are preparing their final papers and presentations that can include giving a deepening class or fireside, an artistic work, poetry, presentation to the community or a group of friends.

A comment from the participants of Bhubaneswar Centre reads:

"With hearts full of joy and gratitude we would like to inform you that the distance learning course on the Epistle to the Son of the Wolf has brought about a lot of excitement in our community. Friends over here are calling it a golden opportunity to follow in the footsteps of the Bah ' s of Iran who have themselves endless zeal for learning and have immersed themselves in the ocean of Bah ' u'll h's revelation. We express our heartfelt thanks to the Academy who made it possible for us to take part in this unique course."

Nadia Moghbelpour, Mentor, on behalf of fifteen participants

Wilmette Institute Distance-Learning Course Schedule

The Wilmette Institute is offering a strong lineup of courses in the fall and early winter of 2001:

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas and Related Texts (Sept. 1-Dec. 31, 2001)

`Abdu'l-Bahá: The Exemplar (Oct. 1-Dec. 31, 2001)

Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation: A Systematic Summary

(Nov. 1, 2001-Feb. 28, 2002)

The Physical, Mental, and Spiritual Development of the

Individual (Nov. 15, 2001-Feb. 15, 2002)

The Bible (Dec. 1, 2001-Feb. 28, 2002)

All distance-learning courses include e-mail listservers for students and faculty, regular conference calls, systematic lesson plans, and a wide variety of learning projects to help students apply their learning in their local communities. All courses are available at the "introductory" level for those unsure they can commit to taking a university-level course, the "intermediate" level for those wishing to go into more

depth, and the "advanced" (graduate) level for those wishing to do extensive research or writing. More information on all of them can be found on the Web at <http://www.wilmetteinstitute.org>.

Schedule for the Spiritual Foundations for a Global Civilization Program

May 1	Home Study I begins
July 25	Home Study I ends
July 28	Summer session begins, 2 p.m.
Aug. 11	Summer session ends, 12 noon
Aug. 15	Home Study II begins (integrative work)
September 30	Home Study II ends
Oct 1-Apr. 30	Spiritual Foundations students free to take distance-learning courses for \$25 registration fee



For more information about the Bahá'í Faith, the Wilmette Institute, or its courses, contact:

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Wilmette, IL 60091 USA

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THE LAMP is the newsletter of the Wilmette Institute, established in January 1995 by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States to offer academic, professional, and service-oriented courses related to the Bahá'í Faith. In addition to offering university-level courses on Bahá'í topics, the Wilmette Institute fosters Bahá'í scholarship; develops new, innovative curricular materials; creates high-quality courses on teaching the Faith; and refines Bahá'í concepts of pedagogy. It aims to produce teachers and administrators of the Bahá'í Faith of great capacity, capable of sharing and demonstrating Bahá'í truths in their lives and speech.

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