

Notes from 3rd Intercontinental Conference, USA National Convention

1958 May

Notes by Anonymous ¹

All sessions of the [3rd Intl] Conference opened with prayer—sometimes in two, three or more languages.

On the first morning it was announced by the chairman, Mr Borah Kavelin, that our NSA had arranged with the British National Spiritual Assembly to place a wreath on the Tomb in honor of Shoghi Effendi [on our behalf] at exactly 10 o'clock. A few moments of silence were observed by all those in attendance.

Many letters and cables and telegrams of greeting were read from the friends all over the world, and one was aware of the hearts and prayers attuned to our gathering.

Total attendance reached 1,650, representing 32 countries. Five Hands of the Cause were also present throughout all the sessions, including Dr Ugo Giachery, the personal representative of the Guardian, appointed by Shoghi Effendi, to serve in that capacity at this Conference only.

Miss Adelaide Sharpe, who has for 30 years taught in the Bahá'í School for Girls in Tehran, and is able to speak Persian, came in just as the Convention [opened]—[she] flew in [after] the Convention had closed in Persia. She brought messages and news from the friends in that part of the World.

Miss Jessie Revell, also arrived just after the opening of the Conference with warm-hearted greetings from the other Hands of the Cause in the Holy Land. Miss Revell shared with us gems and experiences of her several years' service with the Guardian, at the World Center.

The purpose of the Conference was 5 fold:

1. To offer humble thanks to Bahá'u'lláh for making possible the first Five Year Crusade.
2. To celebrate the victories of the past 5 years.
3. To deliberate on how to successfully consummate the unique tasks remaining.
4. To stimulate the process of individual conversion.
5. To assist in the completion of the mother Temples in Australia and Africa.

The Conference recognized the presence of the official delegates of other NSA's throughout the world; [and] representatives of other committees.

¹ This document is from the Emma Maxie Jones Collection, https://bahai-library.com/emma_maxwell_jones_collection, prepared by E. Jones, M. Thomas, and J. Winters (2021-2022). Transcribed with minor typographical and spelling corrections and eliminating abbreviations of names etc., from scanned photographic images of typewritten copy.

Discussed ways and means of fulfilling the Crusade goals.

Miss Revell stated that Shoghi Effendi had said that the “Spirit of the Cause is not enough—[it] must have Institutions as they embody or make the channel for the Spirit. Education will never be effective without an institution that serves as a body for the idea to function through in order for it to have power in the world. Institutions are bodies manifest in the world. The Bahá’í Institutions have been founded by the Master Himself, not by us. The Christian church institutions are man-made. Ours are not similar, as Bahá’u’lláh established these Himself through His Covenant.” “We must get closer to Bahá’u’lláh and constantly struggle with our natures—study, but not only in schools, and classes, but in our own rooms.” “The Holy Land will always be the spiritual and administrative center of the World because our institutions are centered there”.

Mrs Campbell, who has traveled in South America, said she had never appreciated Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings on the extremes of rich and poor until going to South America—there they are so poor they can hardly feed their families, much less educate them.

Dr Giachery, personal representative of Shoghi Effendi, showed an authentic copy of the map that the Guardian was working on the day he passed away. It had 18 colors—the artist who copied [it] had to mix colors to obtain the proper shades [that] Shoghi Effendi had used—and no one knows where Shoghi Effendi obtained them. This map was in very minute detail—down to the very odd cent of expenditures and the very exact number of figures—such as that 748 people had visited the Temple in Wilmette since the beginning of the Ten Year Crusade. It contained the names and numbers of tribes that had been contacted by the Faith—the languages into which literature has been translated. Dr Giachery expressed the thought that Shoghi Effendi wanted to have the whole world picture before him in one glance, and also compact.

It was brought out by Dr Giachery that the youngest enrolled Bahá’í was 15, the year set by Bahá’u’lláh Himself, and that the oldest to be enrolled was 87 years of age.

Alaska was Shoghi Effendi’s pet project, because they achieved so much in so short times. He was very proud of the friends there. Barrow is the largest Eskimo population in the world.

One of the older friends said she found that as one grows in years it is the natural way to become set and get into a rut, but she has found that by moving around in the Faith she was staying young, and [it] keeps her from getting into a rut.

One of the friends from Canada stated that the Indians there are about 300–400 years behind in civilization, and living standards.

The Hand of the Cause from Africa told of one of the African converts who had gone to his first Bahá’í meeting and after listening for about an hour to the talk on the Teachings, he said.

“Do you mean I would love all people if I become a Bahá’í? But I cannot; there are some I cannot love.” But after a while, he came back and said “I used to go to bed at night nursing my hate feelings, but now I have learned to love.” Awhile after he became a Bahá’í, one of the officials of the school where he taught came to this Hand and asked about the Faith, as he said he had become interested due to the change in the teacher, and he also became a Bahá’í.

Dr Giachery again spoke and this time mentioned the Bahá’í Institutions. He referred us to the Tablet of Carmel, written by Bahá’u’lláh, and which is the charter for the founding of the Institutions on Mt. Carmel. He said we would better understand the meaning if we memorized it. “Of all the religions—dead or alive—the Bahá’í World Faith is the only one that has both administrative and spiritual centers in one place, and that both of ours are in the same spot—on Mt. Carmel. The other religions are like dismembered bodies—scattered institutions. The Holy Land is the Spiritual center of ALL the Faiths: the Christian administrative center is divided between the Episcopal [Church] in England and the [Roman] Catholic in Rome; the Muslim administrative head is in Tehran, and that the Arabs are trying to get together again, but so far not successfully; and the Jews have no Administrative center.” Dr Giachery spoke very much and in detail about the Holy Mountain of God. He said that Shoghi Effendi did not always follow orthodox manners in having or doing things—but followed Divine inspiration, and they were always done in the quickest and best manner.

Dr Giachery spoke of the Shrines—the Tomb of Bahá’u’lláh—a beautiful new door at the entrance to the Tomb makes you feel you are in a beautiful garden of flowers. If emotion overtakes you, you have to stop and bow your head to the dust until you have strength to go on, and then you take a few steps more to enter the Shrine itself, and then you let emotion overtake you. Not only Bahá’ís feel this repose, but others who come from all over the world feel so keenly the repose nowhere [else] to be found. The Minister of Agriculture of Iran came with his wife and two other companions and were surprised to be allowed to enter the Shrine [of Bahá’u’lláh]. At the door they were asked to remove their shoes, and they didn’t feel this was proper as they were Muslim. When it was explained to them that it was an oriental custom, they assented, and when the wife saw the inside she whispered to her husband, “Isn’t this beautiful? Why can’t we do this for some of our shrines?” The mayor of Haifa recently requested the Bahá’ís to leave the flood lights of the Shrine on at night during their celebration of their first anniversary and this was quite an honor and their way of showing their love to the Bahá’ís for what they are doing in the Holy Land. He mentioned the great respect that was always shown Shoghi Effendi—he had precedence over all other religious heads because he was the head of both the Spiritual and Administrative centers of the Faith. No other religion has this. They have divided.

Mr Holley, the American Hand of the Cause, spoke about the significance of the Temples; said that he had looked through the Writings for its mention and found that it was to have nine doors—not for each of the other religions to have as an entrance—and that it is not to have a conglomeration of services—readings are to be from the extant religious books—the Old and New testaments; the Qur’án, and the Bahá’í Writings. No instruments whatever. “Temples symbolize the Divine uniting Force that man may recall the fact the Law has been revealed for him, and that all must turn to it.” That is why Bahá’u’lláh commanded a building for worship. It is to have five buildings around it—orphange; hospital; college; hospice; and a home for the aged—thus bringing the handmaids of science and religion together. The temple thus represents the wholeness of life—the one theme of religion—an immeasurable spiritual influence. The one Power that can redeem humanity from its own sins.

In discussing the tools of success it was brought out that the main ones are: faith, devotion, and sincerity.

Ted Cardell and the Fred Laws; ...

Arden Thur whom many of you have met—she showed pictures—came in from a mission, on the last day and half, and told of her thrilling trip into interesting countries.

The experiences of most of those returning from their missions, would sound like a list of miracles, and the truth is that they are really, in the light of man’s understanding, but one finds that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said, that as our faith is, so will our powers be. It is obedience to the Divine instructions and commands. One said our journeys we take as Bahá’ís are much greater than the children in school talk about—they talk about trips to the Moon and Mars—when we go pioneering we enter the valley of nothingness—the eternal journey from self to God.

Another pioneer who was there from Alaska told of his experience of 5 years ago when he was present at the first Intercontinental Conference—Rúhíyyih Khánum was speaking to the vast audience, and said, “Don’t write to Shoghi Effendi and ask him if this means you—it does mean you, and he felt she was pointing her finger at him when she pointed at the audience, and he went home and sold everything he could, and that what he could not sell he gave away and went to the Alaskan goal and so far has not found it possible to sacrifice, because the more he does the more he has, and the supply is overwhelming. He could not now possibly return to his [old] way of life.

One who had been a minister in the Christian Faith for 11 years, and 3 of those on a radio program, shed tears in gratitude because the Bahá’ís did not let him go. They kept along with him until he saw the Light, and now his heart weeps for those ministers who cannot see the promises of Christ being fulfilled before their eyes. He quoted from Shoghi Effendi “America is

crying for the Faith, but neither knows the source of its difficulty or its remedy.”¹ He hopes that the other pre-divinity students he met at the Conference will proclaim the message to all the ministers, that Christ has come and His Promise is fulfilled. Another minister spoke. He is a Negro, and had been a minister for 52 years—a Baptist, and he is aflame with the fire of the love of Bahá’u’lláh, and is ready to go anywhere the NSA wishes him to go to work with the ministers in the Christian Faith.

There were humorous moments—one of the Persians who has been in this country for 14 years had trouble as [an] interpreter as his Persian was so rusty that another came forward to assist him!

When a tape recorder made a screeching noise the chairman said that’s the steamboat whistle for those who are going pioneering!

Over 100 volunteered—19 on the first night before the session had hardly gotten under way—all youths, under 25.

There was a time for greeting those present who had been on foreign missions—78, and 89 of those who had done work on the home front, as special assignments.

It was announced at one of the sessions that a Colonel in the army of Brazil had sent word that he would be in the YMCA lobby and wanted someone who spoke his language to come and tell him about the Faith as he had heard of it.

Mr Ioas, from the Holy Land, told of one day musing to himself about Shoghi Effendi making statements publicly that by such and such a time a certain thing would be completed. And that about a year later one day he was talking with Shoghi Effendi and he said to Leroy, “The friends didn’t think I knew what I was talking about!”

Dr Giachery gave us a very loving and personal description of the Guardian. Of his tremendous capacity for work. His love, his fire, his humor, his uncompromising manner with principle. His understanding and tenderness. His love for beauty, and simplicity, and order.

The spiritual pitch of the entire gathering was set by the opening with the memorial by the British NSA, and soared every hour thereafter. It took all of us about 3 days to realize we were not anymore in that exalted atmosphere—it gives one a sense of what true spirituality is like.

Conference closed with the “Remover of Difficulties” prayer being said in 14 languages.

¹ Not located. “*They can neither discover the cause of the disease, nor have they any knowledge of the remedy.*” (Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 213)