

**ENVIRONNEMENT: PATRIMOINE DE L'HUMANITÉ**

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This volume contains the papers (in French) presented at the eighth meeting of the Association of Bahá'í Studies for French-Speaking Europe, held in Belgium 9–10 November 1991 on the subject of *Environment: Heritage of Humanity*. It includes a foreword giving an overview of the meeting, the text of five papers and two summaries, and a short selective bibliography on the environment (which, unfortunately, is inadequate and largely out of date, with 19 of 26 references dating from the 1970s). The papers, by both Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í authors, are remarkable for their diversity; as with many such meetings, there was clearly no attempt to unify the presentations around a theme apart from the very general topic of the environment.

The first paper by Professor Louis Goffin of the Luxembourg University Foundation is on environmental ethics. It first defines our interest in the environment as being due to a collection of problems resulting from human production and consumption, population growth, and increasing urbanization. The environment is seen as having four essential characteristics: it is a system of relations including human action; it has complex physical, chemical, biological, social, economic, and cultural dimensions; it is conditional to a particular place, time, and culture; and it must be seen in relation to human beings, who are both the product and creator of their environment. Professor Goffin reviews different approaches to environmental ethics before proposing four essential, interdependent values—solidarity, tolerance, autonomy, and responsibility—that must be promoted to counteract the threats to the environment produced by our recent technological and economic progress. This paper sets the tone for the whole collection with its emphasis on the human dimension of the environment.

The next two papers, “The Role of Communications in Environmental Protection: A Process of Personal and Community Transformation” by Mona Grieser-Yazdi of the University of Maryland, and “Demography, Environment, and the Emergence of a New Civilization” by François Geinoz, an engineer responsible for the environmental division of a consulting firm, are unfortunately only given in summary form.

Professor John MacLeod of the School of Landscape Architecture at the University of Montreal, in his paper “Evoking a Vision: The Creation of Places Dedicated to Peace,” describes the international movement to create peace landscapes, peace gardens, peace parks, and other places dedicated to peace as concrete symbols of the need for peace with nature and with our fellow human beings. He cites examples from many countries, predominantly in North America and Europe, where ideals of peace were expressed through

monuments, plantings, parks straddling national borders, and other physical expressions of the importance of peace, including several created by Bahá'ís, such as the gardens at the Bahá'í World Centre.

The paper by Counsellor Louis Hénuzet on "Man and Nature: Manifestations of the Divine Will" contains reflections from a Bahá'í perspective on the process of creation and its consequences for human relations with the environment, as well as on Bahá'í teachings on the means for exercising our responsibility for the environment. On the first theme, he relates the unknowable essence that is God, the primal cause that is the Word of God, and the spirit or divine will that underlies all material things, to humanity as the ultimate result of creation possessing consciousness and intelligence. These ties linking humanity to all that exists also establish our responsibility for the environment. The Bahá'í teachings related to the environment include both those addressing individual attitudes towards nature, attitudes which must be transformed through both human and divine education, and those social principles necessary to guide an advancing civilization towards that world federation which alone can solve global environmental problems. Just as our destruction of the environment comes from the lack of appropriate education, so the application of these teachings can help us to build a new order in harmony with the earth and the universe, concludes Mr. Hénuzet.

Dr. Pascale Morand-Francis, a chemist with the Swiss Federal Office for the Environment, Forests and Landscape, has provided an excellent summary of the problem of the expected change in climate and of efforts to solve it in her paper "Climate Change: The Negotiation of an International Convention and What is at Stake." She explains, with just enough technical detail, the causes and probable effects of the accumulation of greenhouse gases, the risks that these changes represent, and the actions required. She then summarizes the chronology leading up to the signature of the Convention on Climate Change, the delicate balance of interests and differentiated responsibilities reflected in the convention, and the steps that must now follow. The paper highlights the differences between industrialized and developing countries on this issue, when the former have contributed the most to causing the problem and the latter may suffer the most from its effects. It explains clearly the very high stakes for science, energy use, the economy, and political processes implicated in climate change which make the problem so difficult to solve. In conclusion it cites actions that individuals can take to respond to the problem.

The final paper by Dr. Bernard Granotier, a sociologist and professor at the agricultural school of Chalons-sur-Marne in France is titled "Democratizing the United Nations to Protect the Environment." This paper compares the existing structures of the United Nations with those elaborated for a world federal system in the Bahá'í teachings, notes some inadequacies in the present structure, and suggests some of the changes needed to create a system able to

maintain a healthy environment and thus to ensure humanity's survival. In particular Dr. Granotier suggests the need for a bicameral legislature with a directly elected Assembly of Peoples to complement the General Assembly of governments in the present United Nations. He sees the present rapid growth of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as a nascent expression of world public opinion and suggests that the organization of a world assembly of NGOs could be a step towards the eventual creation of such an Assembly of Peoples.

As will be apparent in the above summaries, this short collection of conference papers provides a wide variety of approaches to the theme of the environment as humanity's heritage, ranging from science and politics to ethics and theology via landscape architecture. The collection does not hold together very well, but this diversity of approaches is precisely one of the strengths of meetings of Associations for Bahá'í Studies. Unfortunately, much of the cross-disciplinary exchange that makes the meetings themselves so rewarding is not captured in collections of the papers presented, which fit rather awkwardly together. Nevertheless, the individual papers are of considerable interest, and with the general lack of such topical literature in French, the Association for Bahá'í Studies for Francophone Europe is to be complimented for making these papers available in such an attractive presentation.

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