

This posting relates to the interpolation of the phrase ""The consummate union and blending of church and state" in Promulgation of Universal Peace p. 455, and goes on to look at the reasons for such changes – also in the New Testament texts. Then it looks at the meanings of the Persian word siyasiyyah, incorrectly translated in the 8th Ishraqat as 'state.'

--

From: Sen McGlinn
Subject: Re: "The consummate union and blending of church and state"
To: Tarikh
Date sent: Wed, 01 Nov 2006 11:35:33 +0100

Dear XX,

when an editor adds an "editorial flourish" into a text, I call that an interpolation. Editors shouldn't do that sort of thing. But I do think - and have said on several occasions - that the prime purpose of the changes introduced into Paris Talks and Promulgation of Universal Peace was to raise the level of the language and make it conform to the editors' ideas of good style. I have no evidence at all that there was a conspiracy, and have never said there was - you are putting words in my mouth in an obvious way that only diminishes your own credibility.

From the type of changes made to these texts, it appears to me that the editors were not deliberately trying to change the Bahai teachings. This was an accidental by-product which would probably horrify them if they knew. That is, they sincerely thought that their ideas, which they put in Abdu'l-Baha's mouth, were Bahai teachings. ...

And I think we should see the changes in New Testament and Qur'anic texts in the same light: we should assume that people would not deliberately change texts that they consider sacred, and conversely, where we see actual evidence of deliberate changes, we would have to deduce that the people responsible could not have considered those texts to be sacred.

In my contribution in Reason and Revelation I have examined why Bahai authors from various backgrounds have injected the same set of pre-suppositions into the Bahai teachings (and also found some authors who do not). There is no single reason, and certainly no appeal to a conspiracy of people bent on imposing an ideological agenda. Influence, accident, and common human shortcomings are sufficient cause.

I entirely agree with you about the quality of Ali Kuli Khan's translations, and

his particular ability to translate texts on political issues, both from his own background and from his discussions with Abdu'l-Baha. It was Ali Kuli Khan who, quite correctly, translated the 8th Ishraqat to say:

"The affairs of the people are in charge of the men of the House of Justice of God ... Administrative affairs (amuur-e siyasiyyah) are all in charge of the House of Justice, and devotional acts must be observed according as they are revealed in the Book."

So it is not terribly convincing if you call Ali Kuli Khan to your aid, in support of the present - incorrect - translation found in Tablets of Baha'u'llah. So yes, I do want to rehash the translation issue, if you are still not convinced. Siyasiyyah can mean politics, it can mean administrative matters, or it can mean the way the punishments not specified in the religious law are determined with regard to the social circumstances, in order to train the people to virtue. The last is closest to its etymological roots. In the Risalih-ye siyasiyyah, Abdu'l-Baha uses it both in the sense of civil politics and, in the title (which he approved and used, even if he did not choose it himself), in the sense of the way God gives laws and principles to guide the people to virtue. So we have God's Siyasiyyah, which he says comes to us in two forms - through religion and through siyasiyyah, and the leaders of religion should not interfere in the latter.

Translation has to be context-dependent, and we have to start with the supposition (which may be questioned later if necessary) that the author is consistent in his ideas, even if not consistent in his terminology. If one insisted on translating siyasiyyah always as "politics," the translator's consistency would lead to an inconsistent Abdu'l-Baha who contradicts himself.

The passage from WOB page 6 that you cite is discussed in Church and State from page 236, and again at 312: it is important to read the paragraph from Abdu'l-Baha which Shoghi Effendi points to - this is quoted and discussed in C&S from page 220