

The first question here is why it is interesting to look at Bahai teachings on Church and State, given that a Bahai state is not within present possibilities.

I was also asked further questions arising from Susan Stiles Maneck's web posting "A Review of Sen McGlinn's Article on Theocracy" which is online at <http://bahaistudies.net/susanmaneck/theocracy.html>

This review relates to my article, "Theocratic Assumptions in Bahá'í Literature" which is published in S. Fazel and J. Danesh (eds) Reason and Revelation, Studies in Babi and Baha'í Religions vol. 13, Los Angeles, Kalimat Press, 2002

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From: Sen McGlinn
To: talisman9@yahooogroups.com
Subject: A Review of Sen McGlinn's Article on Theocracy
Date sent: Wed, 21 Mar 2007 00:44:50 +0100

On 20 Mar 2007 at 9:35, XX wrote:

> The problem I see with the entire discussion of the future is that
> it is all speculative in the extreme.

I agree: but when Shoghi Effendi or anyone else talks about the future they tell us what their idea of an ideal society is, they show us their *principles,* their ideas. These are interesting, but actual history is not manageable and takes unexpected courses.

> hope will come to pass in the future but they have been wrong as
> often, or more often, than they have been right. Abdu'l-Baha said in
> clear terms that the US would not enter WWI, he also expected there
> to be a line of Guardians succeeding one another, as did Shoghi
> Effendi. Shoghi Effendi appears to have expected a nuclear
> confrontation between the US and USSR. Abdu'l-Baha said the Lesser
> Peace would be established before the end of the 20th century.

I think the last of these is incorrect. The whole Y2K thing that so agitated the Bahais rests, so far as I can discover, on one reporter's report of what Abdu'l-Baha said to him through an interpreter, and on repeated mistranslations of `asr as century, rather than age or dispensation. The word is used often in the Persian notes of Abdu'l-Baha's talks, but I have not encountered anywhere where it can correctly be translated as "the 20th century."

As for the others, they rest on single unauthenticated reports, do they not? I at least have not seen any authentic source.

- > At this point in Baha'i history, the religion of Baha'u'llah is
- > stagnating and seems incapable of making significant gains in
- > adherents. ... To argue over how the Baha'i administration is going
- > to rule the world seems like an odd use of time.

One reason it is failing as a religion is that its adherents treat it as a political movement, and misrepresent it in ways that are unattractive to people today. By putting their own thoughts into the mouths of Baha'u'llah and Abdu'l-Baha and Shoghi Effendi, they make them sound like cranks with delusions of grandeur. For those with some respect for these figures, that is an issue worth a dispute.

- > Susan Maneck's review does show us that Shoghi Effendi said
- > different things about the future. For the most part he seems to
- > accept Baha'ullah and Abdu'l-Baha's preference for separation
- > between religion and politics but where religion informs political
- > debate. But he at times dreams theocratic dreams.

Whoa!

Shoghi Effendi did not say anything like that. Susan Maneck has searched his writings for anything that might support theocracy and so refute my thesis, and has come up with just two letters written by a secretary. That in itself tells you how weak the theocratic idea is. One of her quotes does not support theocracy at all, Maneck has just misread it:

"The Bahá'ís will be called upon to assume the reins of government when they will come to constitute the majority of the population in a given country, and even then their participation in political affairs is bound to be limited in scope unless they obtain a similar majority in some other countries as well."

When we remember that Abdu'l-baha clearly said that Bahais living in democracies have a duty to vote and take part in the "affairs of the republic," this is just common sense. If the majority of the population are Bahais, and if they vote and participate in secular politics, then we can expect Bahais to among those who hold the reins of government. This assumes that government and Bahai institutions are

separate. If you took a theocratic stance, having 50% Bahais would not necessarily make a difference, because the theocratists suppose that the government in some way dissolves itself and hands over to the Bahai institutions, which takes a constitutional action, not simply Bahais' participation in the electoral system.

The second quote is ambiguous, not theocratic, and is again a secretary's letter written to an individual:

Regarding the question raised in your letter, Shoghi Effendi believes that for the present the Movement, whether in the East or the West, should be dissociated entirely from politics. This was the explicit injunction of 'Abdu'l-Bahá... Eventually, however, as you have rightly conceived it, the Movement will, as soon as it is fully developed and recognized, embrace both religious and political issues. In fact Bahá'u'lláh clearly states that affairs of state as well as religious questions are to be referred to the House of Justice into which the Assemblies of the Bahá'ís will eventually evolve. (30 November 1930)

(The Universal House of Justice, 1995 Apr 27, Separation of Church and State)

The first question is, where does Baha'u'llah state this? The secretary is presumably citing from memory in the eighth Ishraqat, which is (a) a bad translation, because there is no word for "state" in the original (Ali Kuli Khan's translation has "administrative matters" should be referred to the House of Justice), and (b) in any case is clarified by Baha'u'llah himself, in the Lawh-e Dunya, where he says:

According to the fundamental laws which We have formerly revealed in the Kitab-e Aqdas and other Tablets, all affairs are committed to the care of just kings and presidents and of the Trustees of the House of Justice

I dealt with the translation issues in the Ishraqat in Church and State pages 180-186. (available from Amazon and http://www.kalimat.com/church_and_state.htm)

The secretary claims "Bahá'u'lláh clearly states that affairs of state as well as religious questions are to be referred to the House of Justice into which the Assemblies of the Bahá'ís will eventually evolve." The first question as we have seen is "did Baha'u'llah really

say this?" The second is, if he did, what did it mean? Even if such an authentic text could be found, in which Baha'u'llah actually mentions the HoJ and State in the same breath, it could simply mean that issues about the relationship of the Faith to the State should be referred to the HoJ. Only a pre-convinced theocratist could assume that this meant that the HoJ should *become* the state. That is why I say the quote is ambiguous rather than clearly theocratic.

The third question is, why are the Assemblies not called Houses of Justice? Abdu'l-Baha explains:

"The signature of that meeting should be the Spiritual Gathering (House of Spirituality) and the wisdom therein is that hereafter the government should not infer from the term "House of Justice" that a court is signified, that it is connected with political affairs, or that **at any time it will interfere with governmental affairs.** Hereafter, enemies will be many. They would use this subject as a cause for disturbing the mind of the government and confusing the thoughts of the public." (Tablets of Abdu'l-Baha Abbas vol. 1, page 5, also printed with minor editorial changes in Baha'i World Faith 405).

They are not called Houses of Justice because this might support the enemies - and the Bahai theocratists - who want to present these institutions as having a role in government affairs. Later Abdu'l-Baha was more emphatic:

"Should they place in the arena the crown of the government of the whole world, and invite each one of us to accept it, undoubtedly we shall not condescend, and shall refuse to accept it." (Tablets of the Divine Plan 51)

A fourth and minor question is, why is the letter of November 30 edited in this way? Part of the letter is printed in *Unfolding Destiny*, from page 425, and the section quoted by the UHJ presumably fits in the elipses on page 428 third paragraph. Reconstructed it would read:

Regarding the question raised in your letter, Shoghi Effendi believes that for the present the Movement, whether in the East or the West, should be dissociated entirely from politics. This was the explicit injunction of 'Abdu'l-Bahá...The Bahá'ís in Persia avoid political posts and positions, abstain from any interference

in matters pertaining to the policy of the state, but fill the more important administrative posts that have no political character. They feel that in this manner they can best serve the interest of their country and prove by their action their integrity and attachment to Persia....Eventually, however, as you have rightly conceived it, the Movement will, as soon as it is fully developed and recognized, embrace both religious and political issues. In fact Bahá'u'lláh clearly states that affairs of state as well as religious questions are to be referred to the House of Justice into which the Assemblies of the Bahá'ís will eventually evolve.

There may be more text missing at the ellipses. The point is clearer with the more complete text I think: it says that the refusal of Bahais to hold political posts is temporary, so when this restriction has been relaxed, and when Bahais are in a majority, we would expect to see Bahais in parliament, in cabinet, even as presidents and prime ministers. None of that makes a theocracy. After all, Britain and the US both have Christian heads of the executive arm, but neither country is a Christian theocracy.

> I suspect that the future will turn out quite different from
> anything Shoghi Effendi expected. ... My forecast is that the
> secularists and the post-denominationalists have the forces of
> history on their side and will likely be in the ascendancy by the
> end of this century. But I wouldn't bet on it.

You are in good company with your predictions. Shoghi Effendi wrote:

"... in the slow and hidden process of secularization ... a discerning eye can easily discover the symptoms that augur well for a future that is sure to witness the formal and complete separation of Church and State." (Baha'i Administration 147)

and

Such institutions as have strayed far from the spirit and teachings of Jesus Christ must of necessity, as the embryonic World Order of Baha'u'llah takes shape and unfolds, recede into the background, and make way for the progress of the divinely-ordained institutions that stand inextricably interwoven with His teachings. The indwelling Spirit of God which, in the

Apostolic Age of the Church, animated its members, the pristine purity of its teachings, the primitive brilliancy of its light, will, no doubt, be reborn and revived as the inevitable consequences of this redefinition of its fundamental verities, and the clarification of its original purpose.

This is not quite non-denominational religion, but it clearly foresees that some at least of the institutions of religions will vanish, while the religions themselves will continue. That is just what is happening, at least in Europe: church membership declines while belief and religiosity rises, and new institutions are developing across denominational and religious lines. The future is turning out vastly more interesting than the millennialists' idea of a titanic struggle and eventual assured victory of the righteous