

This starts with a discussion of public baths, curiously enough, because somebody had proposed that since the House of Justice is said (by hearsay) to have public hygiene tasks, it must be a theocracy. Then it looks at the circumstances of the name change, from House of Justice to Local Spiritual Assembly, in response to people inside and outside the community who were claiming that the House of Justice was a sort of government or court. It does not mention the accusation of the Covenant-breakers to this effect, recorded in the *Will and Testament*, which might be another reasons why Abdu'l-Baha decided to use the term "spiritual assembly."

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From: Sen McGlenn
To: Tarikh
Subject: General functions of the Universal House of Justice
Date sent: Wed, 28 Mar 2007 11:20:44 +0200

Thanks for your post XX. ... In the meantime, I wonder if you could find the tablet your refer to on the "> House of Justice and the administration of public hygiene." I don't think I've seen that one, and it would tie in nicely with the Aqdas verse about the administration of waqfs, and something Shoghi Effendi says in Baha'i Administration, p. 148-9, about public baths:

This has served to embolden the followers of the Faith to take the necessary steps, under the direction of their local Assemblies, for the institution of Bahá'í schools, for the holding of public gatherings, for the establishment of Bahá'í hostels, libraries and ****public baths,**** for the construction of official headquarters for their administrative work, and for the gradual execution among themselves, within the limits imposed upon them by the State, of the laws and ordinances revealed in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas.
(Shoghi Effendi, Baha'i Administration, p. 150)

you will find it in the third paragraph after the "formal and complete separation of Church and State" passage, which is no doubt high-lighted and dog-eared in your copy ??

What interests me about this is the Aqdas verse:

Immerse yourselves in clean water; it is not permissible to bathe yourselves in water that hath already been used. See that ye

****approach not the public pools of Persian baths;**** whoso maketh his way toward such baths will smell their fetid odour ere he entereth therein. Shun them, O people, and be not of those who ignominiously accept such vileness. In truth, they are as sinks of foulness and contamination, if ye be of them that apprehend. Avoid ye likewise the malodorous pools in the courtyards of Persian homes, and be ye of the pure and sanctified.

It looks as if there is a bit of unsung Iranian Bahai history stretching between the Aqdas verse and Shoghi Effendi's pride in the Bahais establishing public baths. Something like a "cleanliness is next to godliness" movement? A strand of the Zoroastrian purity theme? Or is it all about the Bahais being excluded from the public public baths, and having to start their own? I hope someday to read an informing and surprising paper about from one of our historians on "Public baths and bathing in the early Bahai community of Iran."

Your posting includes remarks like this:

>But this will be because the climate of local and world
> affairs will be in favour of such a change in the social order,

I don't propose to respond, because I do not know what the future holds, and neither do you. As YY says, time and the House of Justice will tell us what to do. What we need to know, as translators, is what the framework of Abdu'l-Baha's thought is, so as to correctly translate his writings. Whether it turns out as he expected, time will tell. I hope so.

Thanks for the long piece of research on the context of the tablet in which Abdu'l-Baha said

"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. The intention was to make known that by the term Spiritual Gathering (House of Spirituality), that Gathering has not the least connection with material matters, and that its whole aim and consultation is

confined to matters connected with spiritual affairs. This was also instructed (performed) in all Persia."

What you say is not surprising, but it is nice to have the details. Clearly a tablet such as the one above did not come out of the blue: this issue of people claiming that the House of Justice is a court (Tribunal) or is connected to politics or will at some time in the future get involved in government had actually come up, and the mind of the government was getting disturbed, and the public getting confused. I am not surprised at the villains of the piece either: Khayru'llah is one of the main origins of theocratic thinking in the American Bahai community. Its chain of transmission goes on through his disciples and those they taught, and their positions on the National Assembly and as editors and authors, leading to the interpolation of theocratic ideas into texts, and their incorporation into teaching materials. (The phrase "the consummate union and blending of church and state" which MacNutt interpolated into a talk by Abdu'l-Baha was used as a *theme text* in a systematic deepening programme [Later: I found that reference I was missing: [http://www.education.usbnc.org/a_themes/a_theme_2005/2005AnnualTheme.p df](http://www.education.usbnc.org/a_themes/a_theme_2005/2005AnnualTheme.pdf)

or

<http://tinyurl.com/2ekfqm>
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It is from the US National Bahai Education and Schools Office.]

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But Khayru'lah is not the only source: Dreyfus is another, and the phrase "that a court is signified" may be addressing misunderstandings that go back to him: he thought the international tribunal was another name for the House of Justice, and he inserted this in two footnotes to his translation of Some Answered Questions.

It is a complicated story, and the largest factor - in my opinion - is not a concrete source or teacher, or the millennialist expectations of the early believers, but influence from a mood in society at large, from a vague societal unease about the doctrinal compatibility between the separation of church and state and true religion. People felt that the separation might be a good and practical thing, but as religion it was a bit of a fix. Back when the first amendment was passed, separation had been a high religious ideal that was preached up by

fiery evangelists as God's will, and the contrary as the devil's work. In the early 21st century, it is the American evangelicals who are most suspicious of it. The early 20th century is a half-way point in this slide.

- > "For reasons which are not difficult to discover, it has
- > been found advisable to bestow upon the elected representatives of
- > Bahá'í communities throughout the world the temporary appellation of
- > Spiritual Assemblies, a term which, as the position and aims of the
- > Bahá'í Faith are better understood and more fully recognized, will
- > gradually be superseded by the permanent and more appropriate
- > designation of House of Justice."

- > How explicit and plain and unambiguous can one get Sen? Whats not
- > "difficult to discover"?

Nothing is difficult to discover: Shoghi Effendi says so. What is difficult is to get people to accept it. The reference which is so obvious (to Shoghi Effendi's contemporary audience) is to a tablet of Abdu'l-Baha which may be familiar by now:

"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. The intention was to make known that by the term Spiritual Gathering (House of Spirituality), that Gathering has not the least connection with material matters, and that its whole aim and consultation is confined to matters connected with spiritual affairs. This was also instructed (performed) in all Persia."

So the reason that is not difficult to discover, is that the term "House of Justice" might make the government think that a court is signified, that it is connected with political affairs, or that at any time it will interfere with governmental affairs. And, as you have pointed out, because there were actually theocratists active in spreading their ideas in the American Bahai community and leading people astray, and causing poor Mirza Abu'l-Fadl such misery.

I have one more piece of the background to Shoghi Effendi's statement that the House of Justice and Spiritual Assembly are the same thing. In 1922, a disaffected Bahai couple, the Dyars, had published the text of claims they had presented in Bahai meetings in 1921, according to which the 'earlier' Bahai teachings concerning an organised Bahai religion, literalist in character and governed by a House of Justice, had failed and had been changed by Abdu'l-Baha into 'The New Bahaism.' "Gone are the sacred writings and their authority ... Gone is the House of Justice, and with it all religious interference in secular affairs!" (Dyar & Dyar, 'The New Bahaism' Short Talks, 59.) The earlier teachings, according to the Dyars, were associated with Mirza Abu'l-Fadl Gulpaygani, whom Abdu'l-Baha had sent to America, and the new teachings with Jenab-e Fadl Mazandarani, likewise sent by Abdu'l-Baha, to change old Bahaism into new Bahaism. The Dyars' fantasy has no value as an indicator of what these gentlemen actually taught (see for example Letters and Essays pp 88- 91). In response a statement commissioned by the National Spiritual Assembly in the United States in 1923, and actually drawn up by Louis Gregory, Agnes Parsons and Mariam Haney, was published. This speaks of the Bahai Administrative Order as one part of the Bahai teachings, and "the International Arbitral Court and the federation of the world" as another part. In other words, something like my "full gospel" approach: all of the institutions mandated in the Writings are permanent, complementary organs.

The Dyars are the earliest explicit example I have found of the Bahai dispensationalist approach to the church and state question, and they say explicitly what others only imply - that they are aware of Abdu'l-Baha's *real* teachings, (pp 99-100).

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