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Under postings, church + state, objections

Postings responding to objections to my thesis, that the Bahai Teachings unequivocally support the separation of church and state, and oppose theocratic and caesaropapist governments.

A response to an objection based on "The Bahá'í theocracy, ... is both divinely ordained as a system and, of course, based on the teachings of the Prophet Himself...." (Shoghi Effendi, *Directives from the Guardian*, p. 78) . Tarjuman, 30 March 2007

The same posting deals with the phrase "consummate union and blending of church and state" which has been interpolated into *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, page 455.

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From: Sen McGlinn
To: Translation <TARJUMAN-LIST@LISTSERV.BUFFALO.EDU>
Subject: Re: General functions of the Universal House of Justice
Date sent: Fri, 30 Mar 2007 22:53:06 +0200

Dear XX,

the first of your passages [from PUP page 455] has been interpolated: the bit about church and state was not in the original. Some of the early believers were very keen on the idea of Bahai theocracy and did some fairly remarkable things to get the idea accepted. I guess most of the list members know the details of this text, so I'll take it as given and attach the details for you at the bottom of this message. It is only interesting in so far as Bahai translators must be careful not to allow such material to influence the picture of Abdu'l-Baha's thinking that they take as the framework for their translations.

The second passage is more interesting:

"What the Guardian was referring to was the Theocratic systems, such as the Catholic Church and the Caliphate, which are not divinely given as systems, but man-made and yet, having partly derived from the teachings of Christ and Muhammad are, in a sense, theocracies. The Bahá'í theocracy, on the contrary, is both divinely ordained as a system and, of course, based on the teachings of the Prophet Himself...." (Shoghi Effendi, *Directives from the Guardian*, p. 78)

I dealt with this from page 240 in *Church and State*. It is evident that the secretary is replying to a question, and is explaining a reference in a text by Shoghi Effendi himself, which will have to be located. We can also see that the definition of 'theocracy' here is 'a

system derived from the teachings of a prophet.' It is not stated that it is a system of governing a country. While both the Catholic Church and the Caliphate have at times exercised the power of civil government, this was not the case when Shoghi Effendi was writing. The last of the several 'caliphates' that could be referred to is the caliphate claimed in the late Ottoman empire by the Sultan, according to which he would be the spiritual leader – not ruler – of the world's Moslems. On the several occasions when Shoghi Effendi refers to the end of the Caliphate in his writings, he is referring to this spiritual caliphate. Its abolition, two years after the abolition of the Sultanate, was a renunciation of the idea of a pan-Islamic union that the Sultans had fostered. Thus the theocracies, including the Bahai theocracy, that the Guardian's secretary is referring to here are systems of leading and guiding a religious community, they are not systems of government.

If we try to locate the earlier passage from Shoghi Effendi that the secretary is explaining (in 1949), two possibilities present themselves. The earlier is in his 1934 letter, 'The Dispensation of Baha'u'llah,' a letter that is entirely devoted to explaining the principles underlying the Bahai Administrative Order, and in particular the relationship between the hereditary guardianship and the elected Houses of Justice. He says:

The Baha'i Commonwealth of the future, of which this vast Administrative Order is the sole framework, is, both in theory and practice, not only unique in the entire history of political institutions, but can find no parallel in the annals of any of the world's recognized religious systems. No form of democratic government; no system of autocracy or of dictatorship, whether monarchical or republican; no intermediary scheme of a purely aristocratic order; nor even any of the recognized types of theocracy, whether it be the Hebrew Commonwealth, or the various Christian ecclesiastical organizations, or the Imamate or the Caliphate in Islam – none of these can be identified or be said to conform with the Administrative Order ... [which] ... incorporates within its structure certain elements which are to be found in each of the three recognized forms of secular government, without being in any sense a mere replica of any one of them ...

The letter continues in this vein for some time, comparing and contrasting the Bahai Administrative Order to democracy, autocracy, ecclesiastical government (with the examples of the Papacy and the Imamate), and aristocratic and hereditary government. It is not describing a system of governing a country or a world, but the system of "the Baha'i Commonwealth," a commonwealth in the sense Gibbon refers to the Christian commonwealth, operating and growing within the pagan Roman Empire. The passage refers repeatedly to 'The Administrative Order' and cannot be made to apply to the institutions

of the world political order envisioned by Baha'u'llah and explained by Shoghi Effendi in 'The Unfoldment of World Civilization,' which was quoted above. For instance, the Administrative Order, he says, is not purely democratic, in that "the members of the Universal House of Justice" are not "responsible to those whom they represent," whereas Abdu'l-Baha said that elected members of national governments should be answerable to the people, and that the leaders who conclude the international pact should "obtain for it the sanction of all the human race." The Administrative Order also incorporates an hereditary element, which is absent in Shoghi Effendi's description of the world political order. The Bahai Commonwealth and the Administrative Order are said to be unlike any previous or existing system, whereas Shoghi Effendi goes to some length, in *The Promised Day is Come*, to demonstrate that in its political teachings, the Bahai Faith endorses constitutional monarchy combined with democracy – a modern, but existing, system. He says there that Baha'u'llah's "teachings embody no principle that can, in any way, be construed as a repudiation, or even a disparagement, however veiled, of the institution of kingship" – an institution that is entirely absent in the Bahai Administrative Order.

The second possible reference is to Shoghi Effendi's review of the first century of the Babi and Bahai history, *God Passes By* (1944). In it he says that:

The Administrative Order ... is ... unique in the annals of the world's religious systems. ... Nor is the principle governing its operation similar to that which underlies any system, whether theocratic or otherwise, which the minds of men have devised for the government of human institutions. Neither in theory nor in practice can the Administrative Order of the Faith of Baha'u'llah be said to conform to any type of democratic government, to any system of autocracy, to any purely aristocratic order, or to any of the various theocracies, whether Jewish, Christian or Islamic which mankind has witnessed in the past.

This echoes his earlier statement, more briefly. These are the only two instances in which Shoghi Effendi uses the word theocracy in connection with the Bahai Faith, and both refer to its internal organisation as a religious community, not to its theories about the organisation of the state (its political theology). Since the secretary also answers a question about the term 'theophany,' and this term is used by Shoghi Effendi in another of the letters published in *The World Order of Baha'u'llah*, it seems likely that the original question put to the secretary concerned the longer discussion of the Administrative Order in 'The Dispensation of Baha'u'llah.' The answer must be taken also to apply only to the Bahai Administrative Order, which is distinct from the world order.

This administrative order can never be a government because the same author had written, just two years earlier, in words that deserve to be repeated, recited and indelibly memorised, that the Bahais must never "allow the machinery of their administration to supersede the government of their respective countries." (*The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* 66)

It is hardly surprising that the Administrative order is described as a theocracy. It is after all the order of a religious community. If theocracy is defined as rule by the institutions of the religious order, any self-governing religious order is by definition theocratic. The Methodists and Quakers are internally theocratic in this sense, since they hope and have faith that the church, as part of the body of Christ, will be guided (through its elected system) by God. This is not the same as 'theocracy' in the political sense, which is the kind of government that was attempted in Iran after 1979, a government in which the persons and institutions of the religious order either control or replace the organs of the civil government. In this, the usual sense of 'theocracy,' the Bahai teachings are decidedly anti-theocratic, since they forbid and condemn this usurpation of the power that God has granted to the Kings and Rulers.

I doubt that this 1949 letter from the Guardian's secretary could have been an important factor in the development of theocratic ideas, because of the date. These ideas were already thoroughly entrenched by then.

Now to return to your first text: the phrase "consummate union and blending of church and state" is an editorial insertion into the original English notes of the talk, published in *Star of the West* Vol 4, No. 15 (and repeated with minor differences in *Bahai World Faith*). The original reads:

"The eleventh teaching is the organization called, The House of Justice, which is endowed with a political as well as a religious aspect. It embodies both aspects, and it is protected by the Preserving Power of Baha'o'llah Himself."

Which MacNutt, the editor of the first edition of PUP, revises to read:

"He has ordained and established the House of Justice, which is endowed with a political as well as a religious function, the consummate union and blending of church and state. This institution is under the protecting power of Baha'u'llah Himself."

Thus the key phrase is a deliberate corruption of the text. The original continues:

"A Universal or World House of Justice shall be organized. That which it orders shall be the Truth in explaining the Commands of Baha'o'llah, and that which the House of Justice ordains concerning the Commands of Baha'o'llah shall be obeyed by all."

Which MacNutt revises to read:

"A universal, or international, House of Justice shall also be organized. Its rulings shall be in accordance with the commands and teachings of Baha'u'llah, and that which the Universal House of Justice ordains shall be obeyed by all mankind."

By removing the phrase "in explaining the Commands of Baha'o'llah," MacNutt makes it appear that the Universal House of Justice has an unlimited authority, whereas the original says only that it is the authority is elucidating Baha'i laws.

Howard MacNutt was taught the Faith in Kheirella's lessons, was appointed by him as the 'teacher' for New York, and remained close to him even after Kheirella had split with 'Abdu'l Baha. (Stockman, R., *The Baha'i Faith in America*, vol. 1, pp.125, 177; see also 'The Mac Nutt Case', chapter 22 in Marzieh Gail's *Arches of the Years*). Kheirella's views of Baha'i teachings owe more to Christian eschatology than the Baha'i Writings. From notes taken during Kheirella's lessons (Browne, *Materials for the Study of the Babi Religion*, 138) we know that Kheirella taught in his eleventh lesson that Baha'u'llah's Tablets to the Rulers called on the rulers "to throw their kingdoms at his feet", whereas in fact it was only the Pope whom Baha'u'llah called on to do abandon his kingdom (and he was to pass it to the kings and not to Baha'u'llah) (*Proclamation of Baha'u'llah*, p. 85).

So one strand of the lineage of theocratic beliefs in the Baha'i community leads from Christian eschatology to Kheirella's teachings and his disciples, and then to an important Baha'i book as a result of this remarkable exercise of editorial freedom by MacNutt, and from there even into the academic literature (Loni Bramson Lerche, in *Emergence*, 1991, page 40; Christopher Sprung, 'Baha'i Institutions and Human Governance' in *Law and International Order*. London, Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1996, page 160) and to more influential media such as David Hofman's lectures on theocracy at Maxwell Baha'i School, which have been distributed in audio tape form.

We can see that the authenticity of texts is not just an academic interest -- reliance on unauthentic texts has produced major distortions in the Baha'i teachings, and affects the Bahai communities today. If the friends think that the UHJ is destined to become the

world government, LSA members will conclude that their LSA is destined to be the local government, and will adopt the stance of rulers rather than of servants. With a false understanding of what the institutions are, the believers will have false expectations, and both institutions and believers will suffer as they struggle to fit the institutions into the wrong framework.