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To: talisman9@yahooogroups.com  
Subject: Bahai goals  
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> When I was a practicing Bahai I remember reading Shoghi Effendi  
> saying that we must build the administrative order so that when  
> civilization and its means of governance is destroyed there will be  
> something in evidence to take its place. What are Bahais to make of  
> that?  
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> I guess I should read Sen's book, but does he point out errors in  
> the Guardian's writing?

No, just errors in what people think the Guardian said - such as this one.

Survivalism is a hobby and subculture in which people imagine themselves coming out after some catastrophe and restarting the world, but better this time. There are Bahai survivalists, atheist and anarchist survivalists, ecological survivalists and so on. But not all Bahais have this mindset, and Shoghi Effendi was certainly not one of them.

There is nothing complicated about finding the Bahai teachings on religion & politics in the Writings: it is there at every turn, and I could summarise it in a compilation no bigger than an A4 teaching pamphlet. You could read the second part of the Iqan (most people stop at the first part - part two explains the nature of the sovereignty of the Qa'im). Baha'u'llah explains:

... by sovereignty is meant the all-encompassing, all-pervading power which is inherently exercised by the Qa'im whether or not He appear to the world clothed in the majesty of earthly dominion.  
... That sovereignty is the spiritual ascendancy ... which in due time revealeth itself to the world ... (pp. 107--8)

He gives the example of Muhammad's lack of worldly power during the time he was in Mecca, and contrasts it with the spiritual authority which was accorded to Muhammad in Baha'u'llah's own time. The sovereignty of the prophets resides in the power to attract devotion

and to change hearts, to reform morals, call forth sacrifices, and to create a new form of human community. While it is clearly differentiated from worldly dominion, and superior in as much as it is long-lasting, Baha'u'llah does not say that it over-rules or displaces temporal government:

Were sovereignty to mean earthly sovereignty and worldly dominion, were it to imply the subjection and external allegiance of all the peoples and kindreds of the earth -- whereby His loved ones should be exalted and be made to live in peace, and His enemies be abased and tormented -- such [a] form of sovereignty would not be true of God Himself, the Source of all dominion, Whose majesty and power all things testify. ... (p. 125)

Baha'u'llah is saying that the ways of God do not change: if God does not force belief or obedience on humanity, then the Qa'im cannot. But he is also saying that the distinction between earthly and spiritual sovereignty is proper to God's self: that the Kingdom of God created by the Qa'im must be 'true of God Himself', it must reflect the nature of dominion, majesty and power in the Kingdom in Heaven -- not the way humans tend to think of power!

In the letters to the Kings, Baha'u'llah says things like:

God hath committed into your hands the reins of the government of the people, that ye may rule with justice over them, safeguard the rights of the down-trodden, and punish the wrong-doers. If ye neglect the duty prescribed unto you by God in His Book, your names shall be numbered with those of the unjust in His sight.

and he tells the Bahais (in Gleanings CII)

The one true God ... hath ever regarded, and will continue to regard, the hearts of men as His own, His exclusive possession. All else, whether pertaining to land or sea, whether riches or glory, He hath bequeathed unto the Kings and rulers of the earth. ... The instruments which are essential to the immediate protection, the security and assurance of the human race have been entrusted to the hands, and lie in the grasp, of the governors of human society. This is the wish of God and His decree....

In the Aqdas, Baha'u'llah recognises and honours the institution of human government, in the forms of monarchy, democracy and republican

government, and enjoins all people to obey "those who wield authority". He says:

He Who is the sovereign Lord of all is come ... from the heart of Zion there cometh the cry: "The promise is fulfilled" ... Ye are but vassals, O kings of the earth! He Who is the King of Kings hath appeared, ... Arise, and serve Him Who is the Desire of all nations, Who hath created you through a word from Him, and ordained you to be, for all time, the emblems of His sovereignty. ... By the righteousness of God! It is not Our wish to lay hands on your kingdoms. Our mission is to seize and possess the hearts of men. ...

All we have to do to understand this teaching, is just take Baha'u'llah seriously. Suppose he really meant what he says? Suppose it's true ?

He tells the Pope: "Abandon thy kingdom unto the kings, ... Exhort the kings and say: 'Deal equitably with men. Beware lest ye transgress the bounds fixed in the Book.'"

That's the role of religious institutions in politics: not to rule, but to remind those who have power why they have it - what purpose power is supposed to serve.

In the Epistle to the Son of the Wolf (pages 89-92, Baha'u'llah endorses the principle of 'render unto Caesar', and in his Kitab-e `Ahd (his Will and Testament) he warns the Bahais and the Houses of Justice in particular:

"O ye the loved ones and the trustees of God! Kings are the manifestations of the power, and the daysprings of the might and riches, of God. Pray ye on their behalf. He hath invested them with the rulership of the earth, and hath singled out the hearts of men as His Own domain. Conflict and contention are categorically forbidden in His Book. This is a decree of God in this Most Great Revelation. It is divinely preserved from annulment ... "

Shoghi Effendi made his own compilations on the topic: one is Gleanings, in which he chose to include many of Baha'u'llah's references to religion and politics, along with other topics. Another is in The Promised Day is Come, starting at page 70, starting "Let

none, however, mistake or unwittingly misrepresent the purpose of Baha'u'llah ...." That's the Bahais he's talking to - the people who mistake or unwitting misrepresent the purpose of Baha'u'llah. Shoghi Effendi is dealing with people are plugging along, head down and blinkers on, towards a theocratic world government, and he pulls and tugs and shouts to get them to go the other way -- but doesn't win in his lifetime. He directly refutes the survivalist idea that the assemblies would eventually take over the government:

Theirs is not the purpose, while endeavoring to conduct and perfect the administrative affairs of their Faith, to violate, under any circumstances, the provisions of their country's constitution, much less to allow the machinery of their administration to supersede the government of their respective countries. (The World Order of Baha'u'llah, p. 65)

However ...

I couldn't earn a master's degree (not a PhD) for writing a pamphlet like this, consisting mainly of quotations. So I wrote a book, which adds 4 more bits to this simple core:

1) Baha'u'llah seems to say that this is not a new teaching, that it has always been God's way to claim the hearts for himself and delegate worldly rule to governments. But what about Islam? Doesn't "everybody know" that Islam does not recognise the distinction between religion and politics? That question took 100-odd pages to answer, and it's technical in places. I know it makes my book less accessible to the Bahais, and less coherent to read, but I accept that because Islamophobia and Islamism are such big threats to the well-being of the world that I don't mind turning my book into a shapeless bean bag if I can help in any way. Bahai readers can skip it if they are not interested.

2) If it's so clear, why do so many Bahai authors get it wrong? Did I miss something? Could they have their reasons? That took another hundred or so pages

3) 'Abdu'l-Baha wrote a book on the topic, and it has never been translated and published. 'Abdu'l-Baha did not write many books, so that is rather odd, don't you think? The book was important enough to 'Abdu'l-Baha for him to have it published in Persian twice: once in Bombay, and again in Tehran (which he did not live to see). So I

translated the book, and put it in an appendix, and wrote a foreword and some comments: there goes another 50 or so pages.

4) The Bahai teachings on this (and on science and religion, which I did not discuss) led me to some thoughts about the meaning of organic unity and how it fits with the shape of a postmodern society. This is the only part of the book that's a bit abstract, but it is also simple at core: I think organic unity is the kind of unity you find in a body, where essentially different organs each do their own thing, according to their own laws, but each needs the others to be itself: the liver needs the heart to pump, so the liver can purify, the lungs can oxygenate, etc

And that's how you turn a simple pamphlet into a university degree !