

A REVIEW OF *PRINCIPLES OF PROGRESS: ESSAYS ON RELIGION AND MODERNITY* BY 'ABDUL-BAHĀ, BY SEN MCGLINN. LEIDEN: LEIDEN UNIVERSITY PRESS (IRANIAN STUDIES SERIES), 2018

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McGlinn's work is a welcome introduction to the works of 'Abdul-Bahā: a luminary and in many ways a humanist whose scope of engagement far exceeded his time and place. His insistence on educating the elite is a prudent preamble to the literary and social events that led up to the Constitutional Revolution (1905-1911) of Iran. This work is a translation but translations, as they go, can have a profound impact on their society and time: this work does that and the translations do capture the hermeneutic of 'Abdul-Bahā's original's time and place, and his poetics. All in all, this reviewer would recommend this book on two fronts: first, its content and the way it can appeal to our society today; and second, it is a tour de force in translation rigor where the translator quite obviously displays a mastery of philological underpinnings of meaning in the complex process of linguistics transition. The first few subsections of the book give a thorough introduction to the time of 'Abdul-Bahā and are informative discourses that aid in highlighting his works. The general introduction to the work speaks to the many possible influences on 'Abdul-Bahā such as luminaries alike Tahtawi and Mohammad Abdu and many other aspects of his life that have had a profound influence on him: 1) Bābis and Bahā'is; 2) Reformist Writing in Persian; 3) The Religious Intellectuals; 4) Intellectual Position of Azali Authors; 5) Ottoman and Arabic Reformist Writers; 6) Newspapers; and 7) Masonic Lodges and Sufi Orders. Of note was the short section of reformist writing in Iran which traces some of its intellectual impetus to the time of Nāsir al-Din Shah. These are foundationally important snippets of information that allow for a better understanding of 'Abdul-Bahā's discourse in the rest of the book. Of particular importance are McGlinn's notes that follow the translations. They, along with the semi-long general introduction do allow for a smooth navigation of the primary text. I personally found these notes extremely prudent in delineating the discourse presented by 'Abdul-Bahā. In his explanations in the early introductory chapters of the book the author highlights the role of freemasonry in the political and social events of the time and how they, as a "stratum", and regardless of place and social class, wanted social and political change. These explanations, I believe, are fundamentally prudent insertions which extend the comprehension of a reader in their approach to the text. The author

makes good use of travel diaries of the late eighteenth and nineteenth century and shows how essential they were in fact in creating the road map for the intelligentsia. Their observations of Europe and European governance served as ample inspiration for these intelligentsia to export such manners of approach to governance to their respective regions in the Middle East. Astutely the author observes,

In addition to the direct observations of Europe in the travel literature in Persian (and in Arabic and Turkish, which I have omitted [the author notes], travel and travel literature are in themselves an important element in the evolution of modernity in East and West. One of the key elements in both modernity and postmodernity is the awareness of Others as persons, and the resulting relativization of traditional authorities and separate cultural and religious identities. (p. 28)

Also, in a work that has is comprised of parallel text one would be remiss not to mention the translations in the work. As mentioned, they are brilliant, and I include an example of the author's (translator's) hand at translation of Persian text:

dar quṭb-i amkān-i sha'n-i a'zam va maqam-i akbar-i arfa'-i afkham zāhīran va bāṭīnan [i] avvalan va ākhiran anbiyā-yi ilāhī-rāst va ḥāl ānki aktharishān bi ḥasb-i zāhīr juz faqr-i širf nadāshā, va kadhālik 'izzat-i kullīyya-yi awliyā-yi ḥaqq va muqarribān-i dargāh-i aḥadiyyat rā mukhtaṣṣ va ḥāl ān ki abadan dar fikr-i ghanā-yi zāhīr-i khud nabūdand.

At the zenith of creation, the highest rank and station, the greatest elevation, outwardly and inwardly, in the beginning and in the end, is that of the Prophets of God, although outwardly most of them have had nothing but pure poverty. In the same way, a pre-eminent glory has been vouchsafed especially to the Holy Ones and those who are nearest to the Threshold of God, although such as these have never for a moment concerned themselves with outward wealth. (pp. 120-121)

The theosophical, theological, and social and cultural linguistic aspects of the text, that may be apparent in Persian to the native speaker are not so easily understood by an inexperienced reader. Here, the translator, in my opinion, has done a praiseworthy job of transferring the meaning by being ever so observant of syntactical difficulties that one may encounter in Persian and a few heed.

All in all, an absolute gem of a work for the value of its presence in the field as an accessible source and a role model for great translation. Iranian Studies Series at Leiden has been a most welcome venue and a nurturing cradle for niche scholarship in Persian studies. The works are apt, fill vacuums in the field, and inspire. This is an example of a work that needs to be here and here we are. Kudos to the translator (and author) of this wonderful addition to the series.