

Bahá'í Sacred Writings, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, #468

'Abdu'l-Bahá

Translated by Committee from Persian



It is obvious that not until the people are educated, not until public opinion is rightly focused, not until government officials, even minor ones, are free from even the least remnant of corruption, can the country be properly administered. Not until discipline, order and good government reach the degree where an individual, even if he should put forth his utmost efforts to do so, would still find himself unable to deviate by so much as a hair's breadth from righteousness, can the desired reforms be regarded as fully established.

Furthermore, any agency whatever, though it be the instrument of mankind's greatest good, is capable of misuse. Its proper use or abuse depends on the varying degrees of enlightenment, capacity, faith, honesty, devotion and high-mindedness of the leaders of public opinion....

Otherwise it is clear that the results will prove unacceptable. For it has been directly witnessed in certain foreign countries that following on the establishment of parliaments those bodies actually distressed and confused the people and their well-meant reforms produced maleficent results. While the setting up of parliaments, the organizing of assemblies of consultation, constitutes the very foundation and bedrock of government, there are several essential requirements which these institutions must fulfil. First, the elected members must be righteous, God-fearing, high-minded, incorruptible. Second, they must be fully cognizant, in every particular, of the laws of God, informed as to the highest principles of law, versed in the rules which govern the management of internal affairs and the conduct of foreign relations, skilled in the useful arts of civilization, and content with their lawful emoluments.

Let it not be imagined that members of this type would be impossible to find. Through the grace of God and His chosen ones, and the high endeavours of the devoted and the consecrated, every difficulty can be easily resolved, every problem however complex will prove simpler than blinking an eye.

If, however, the members of these consultative assemblies are inferior, ignorant, uninformed of the laws of government and administration, unwise, of low aim, indifferent, idle, self-seeking, no benefit will accrue from the organizing of such bodies. Where, in the past, if a poor man wanted his rights he had only to offer a gift to one individual, now he would either have to renounce all hope of justice or else satisfy the entire membership.

Close investigation will show that the primary cause of oppression and injustice, of unrighteousness, irregularity and disorder, is the people's lack of religious faith and the fact that they are uneducated. When, for example, the people are genuinely religious and are literate and well-schooled, and a difficulty presents itself, they can apply to the local authorities; if they do not meet with justice and secure their rights and if they see that the conduct of the local



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government is incompatible with the divine good pleasure and the king's justice, they can then take their case to higher courts and describe the deviation of the local administration from the spiritual law. Those courts can then send for the local records of the case and in this way justice will be done. At present, however, because of their inadequate schooling, most of the population lack even the vocabulary to explain what they want.

As to those persons who, here and there, are considered leaders of the people: Because this is only the beginning of the new administrative process, they are not yet sufficiently advanced in their education to have experienced the delights of dispensing justice or to have tasted the exhilaration of promoting righteousness or to have drunk from the springs of a clear conscience and a sincere intent. They have not properly understood that man's supreme honour and real happiness lie in self-respect, in high resolves and noble purposes, in integrity and moral quality, in immaculacy of mind. They have, rather, imagined that their greatness consists in the accumulation, by whatever means may offer, of worldly goods.

A man should pause and reflect and be just: His Lord, out of measureless grace, has made him a human being and honoured him with the words: "Verily, We created man in the goodliest of forms"—and caused His mercy which rises out of the dawn of oneness to shine down upon him, until he became the wellspring of the words of God and the place where the mysteries of heaven alighted, and on the morning of creation he was covered with the rays of the qualities of perfection and the graces of holiness. How can he stain this immaculate garment with the filth of selfish desires, or exchange this everlasting honour for infamy? "Dost thou think thyself only a puny form, when the universe is folded up within thee?"