

of the consequences if they did not do this:

"If ye
pay no heed ... Divine chastisement shall assail you from every direction, and
the
sentence of His justice shall be pronounced against you."

They all
rejected His message out of hand, apart from Queen Victoria, who is reported to
have remarked that, "If this is of God, it will endure; if not, it can do no
harm".

Twenty
years later Bahá'u'lláh wrote:

"From
two ranks among men power hath been seized: kings and ecclesiastics".

Since then
most monarchies have indeed disappeared and been replaced by elected
governments. Certainly the ones who received letters from Bahá'u'lláh have
all
now gone, except for the British throne. The power and influence of the
priesthood in the various religions has also declined noticeably.

Hereditary
Rule

Monarchy
has traditionally meant that power or authority have been transferred to
younger
members of the same family. Such hereditary monarchy has been largely replaced
by republican forms of government, but in practice, although mankind has
experimented with many political systems, rule by one family line frequently
reappears. Within recent decades, power has been inherited within the family by
communist leaders, dictators, prime ministers, and even directly-elected
presidents.

Elected
Government

Bahá'u'lláh's message concerns the unity of humanity, and He ordained the
foundation of an elected world body known as the Universal House of Justice.

Its
function is to enact laws at a planetary level and its members should regard
themselves as "the trustees of all who dwell on earth". Within the Bahá'í
community, similar bodies also exist at local and national levels.

Because of
this system, it might be thought that Bahá'ís expect monarchy to be replaced
at
this stage of human social evolution, and yet the opposite is in fact the case.

Constitutional Monarchy

However, a different kind of monarchy is envisaged to that which was current at the time of Bahá'u'lláh:

"One of the signs of the maturity of the world is that no one will accept to bear the weight of kingship. Kingship will remain with none willing to bear alone its weight. That day will be the day whereon wisdom will be manifested among mankind".

Having sole responsibility for the welfare of an entire nation will be recognised as too much of a burden and the responsibility will need to be shared.

It is also clear from the above quotation that Bahá'u'lláh envisages monarchy of the constitutional type, rather than the historic pattern of absolute monarchy. As he wrote to Queen Victoria:

"We have also heard that thou hast entrusted the reins of counsel into the hands of the representatives of the people. Thou, indeed, hast done well, for thereby the foundations of the edifice of thine affairs will be strengthened, and the hearts of all that are beneath thy shadow, whether high or low, will be tranquillized."

He also suggested Britain as a working example of a country which had combined representation with monarchy:

"The system of government which the British people have adopted in London appeareth to be good, for it is adorned with the light of both kingship and of the consultation of the people."

Bahá'u'lláh saw advantages to humanity in monarchy as well as an elected government:

"Although a republican form of government profiteth all the peoples of the world, yet the majesty of kingship is one of the signs of God. We do not wish that the countries of the world should remain deprived thereof. If the sagacious combine the two forms into one, great will be their reward in the presence of God."

The
Role of the Monarch

As it states in the previous quotation, a monarch is a symbol of the majesty and power of God. As a symbol of God in this sense, the monarch should also reflect the qualities of God by showing a concern for justice, for the poor and the disadvantaged. Bahá'u'lláh addressed one monarch with the following words:

"Thou art God's shadow on earth. Strive, therefore, to act in such a manner as becometh so eminent, so august a station."

Someone who holds such a respected position could easily fall prey to feelings of superiority. It takes a noble person to remain humble and realise that it is the office which is exalted, not the individual.

This is perhaps why Bahá'u'lláh said, "A just king enjoyeth nearer access unto God than anyone."

A monarch whose duties are performed in the right spirit will be an example of selfless service and dedication and a true representative of the nation which he or she serves.

It is not possible at this stage to foresee exactly how monarchy will develop and integrate with the elected representatives of the people. It may, however, be similar to the British example already mentioned. As mankind as a whole comes of age, we will need new structures and institutions to reflect our new mature status and to ensure the peace and well-being of the entire planet.

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