

Criticism

Extracts from letters written on behalf of the Guardian to individual believers

Included with a letter dated 2 July 1995 on “Criticism of Institutions”

1. “At such a time when the political world is chaotic and society seems to be on the verge of death, as a result of the activities of societies that contain only half-truths, the friends of God should be united and act as one single organism. The greater their unity the surer they can be of winning the day. And this unity cannot be achieved save through obedience to the Assemblies. It is true that these are still immature and may at times act unwisely. But supporting them will help more their advance toward an administration that is truly representative of the Cause, than by criticizing them and ignoring their advice. Bahá'u'lláh has not only advocated certain principles, but has also provided a mechanism whereby that ideal can be established and perpetuated. Both of these phases are essential for the realization of His goal of world unity.”
(February 27, 1933)
2. “The Bahá'ís are fully entitled to address criticisms to their Assemblies; they can freely air their views about policies or individual members of elected bodies to the Assembly, local or National, but then they must wholeheartedly accept the advice or decision of the Assembly, according to the principles already laid down for such matters in Bahá'í administration.”
(May 13, 1945)
3. “The Guardian...noted with keen interest the various suggestions you had offered to the National Spiritual Assembly in its last meeting. ...
“The spirit of frank and constructive criticism behind your suggestions must have surely impressed them, and awakened them to a fresh and deeper realization of the unique responsibilities which they have to shoulder in this day.”
(August 19, 1938)
4. “...you had asked whether the believers have the right to openly express their criticism of any Assembly action or policy: it is not only the right, but the vital responsibility of every loyal and intelligent member of the Community to offer fully and frankly, but with due respect and consideration to the authority of the Assembly, any suggestion, recommendation or criticism he conscientiously feels he should in order to improve and remedy certain existing conditions or trends in his local Community, and it is the duty of the Assembly also to give careful consideration to any such views submitted to them by any one of the believers. The best occasion chosen for this purpose is the Nineteen Day Feast, which, besides its social and spiritual aspects, fulfils various administrative needs and requirements of the Community, chief among them being the need for open and constructive criticism and deliberation regarding the state of affairs within the local Bahá'í Community.
“But again it should be stressed that all criticisms and discussions of a negative character which may result in undermining the authority of the Assembly as a body should be strictly avoided. For otherwise the order of the Cause itself will be endangered, and confusion and discord will reign in the Community.”
(December 13, 1939)

5. "The Guardian believes that a great deal of the difficulties from which the believers ... feel themselves to be suffering are caused by their neither correctly understanding nor putting into practice the administration. They seem - many of them - to be prone to continually challenging and criticizing the decisions of their Assemblies. If the Bahá'ís undermine the very bodies which are, however immaturely, seeking to co-ordinate Bahá'í activities and administer Bahá'í affairs, if they continually criticize their acts and challenge or belittle their decisions, they not only prevent any real rapid progress in the Faith's development from taking place, but they repel outsiders who quite rightly may ask how we ever expect to unite the whole world when we are so disunited among ourselves!

"There is only one remedy for this: to study the administration, to obey the Assemblies, and each believer seek to perfect his own character as a Bahá'í. We can never exert the influence over others which we can exert over ourselves. If we are better, if we show love, patience, and understanding of the weaknesses of others; if we seek to never criticize but rather encourage, others will do likewise, and we can really help the Cause through our example and spiritual strength. The Bahá'ís everywhere, when the administration is first established, find it very difficult to adjust themselves. They have to learn to obey, even when the Assembly may be wrong, for the sake of unity. They have to sacrifice their personalities, to a certain extent, in order that the community life may grow and develop as a whole. These things are difficult - but we must realize that they will lead us to a very much greater, more perfect, way of life when the Faith is properly established according to the administration."

(October 26, 1943)

6. "Vicious criticism is indeed a calamity. But its root is lack of faith in the system of Bahá'u'lláh (i.e. the administrative order) and lack of obedience to Him - for He has forbidden it. If the Bahá'ís would follow the Bahá'í laws in voting, in electing, in serving, and in abiding by assembly decisions, all this waste of strength through criticizing others could be diverted into cooperation and achieving the Plan."

(December 18, 1949)