

Power and Its Distribution

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A revival of authoritarianism and fundamentalism is sweeping the world today. As Unificationists, this presents a challenge, because post-Foundation Day an encroaching darkness is stealing the hearts and lives of so many millions.



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We must ask ourselves, if we truly have a foundational spiritual role to play in the development of society in the near future, how has this come about? The answer seems that there is still an outstanding issue within our movement, one that Reverend Moon spoke of as the failure of Christianity, and which we now see clearly from our Western perspective embodied within a Cheon Il Guk Constitution. We do not see Western values expressed within our own projected future.

We must look at this directly, and accept that action is needed. Too much centralization of power is fine when the person at the center is trusted and admired by everyone, but it leaves only one option when people disagree with the central person. We indeed see several instances where splinter groups have arisen from within our movement. In a post-Messianic era, we cannot cling to too much authoritarianism, and certainly as a prescription for a nation, it is a major problem.

A society with a well-educated populace can only be harmed by a concentration of power and decision-making in too few hands. People grow and mature throughout their lives by making responsible decisions and learning through the outcomes, and if the majority are expected to live solely within the parameters defined by a central powerful body, then vast numbers of people are deprived of the right to self-determination. Thus collective life is reduced to a very circumscribed existence and growth is thwarted.

Of course, it is quite acceptable that some decisions are left to a few representatives, because they know the issues best, and may have the most experience and wisdom to make decisions for the whole — but this only works if there are many levels of decision-making between the individual and the central power. On this basis, those making final decisions do so aware of the opinions and desires of others.

Centralized government only works if those elected to make decisions are cognizant of the need to be as inclusive as possible, and if they are motivated not by the desire to control but rather to serve. The worst case scenario (at least before one gets to authoritarianism) is all too common in history, and in essentially all nations of the world today: the average person is completely cut out of the political process and feels no way to get the government to listen to his or her opinion.

Surely we should be able to prevent a small minority from taking and monopolizing power. Yet, history

shows this is a much more complicated issue than it should be.

In many democracies, the role of the average person is to vote once every few years and to complain in between elections. If he or she wishes to have more input, it seems they are expected to spend an inordinate amount of time and effort to mobilize numbers of fellow citizens into such activities as letter-writing campaigns, mass emails, or eventually street demonstrations. The ears of their representatives in office are only engaged if the very position of that person is felt to be under pressure.

In general, a political system should embody three principles to maximize the input of all adults and ensure appropriate participation in the creation of a healthy collective entity:

1. Power and responsibility for collective decisions should be distributed as widely as possible;
2. Mechanisms should exist by which all opinions are heard;
3. The welfare of all living beings, including the land and planet itself, should be taken into consideration in all matters.

The best way to ensure power does not concentrate at the highest levels is to collect all taxes locally and keep the higher levels on a fixed budget, so they act within a clearly defined realm of responsibility. This restricts the expansion of power, and ensures that a voice emerges closer to the street. An inappropriate grab for power would simply result in the withholding of the money on the part of the local governments.

There are many ways to limit power, yet the fact these have not been implemented shows politicians have a problem relinquishing power. Restricting politicians to two consecutive terms would greatly reduce their need to make decisions which enhance their prospects for reelection. It would at least reduce the number of years when their primary focus is on the next election. Making all communications with lobbyists public would be a major game changer. Limiting the time and money spent on campaigning would liberate everybody and greatly simplify the process.

The people elect their representatives and must exercise oversight on their performance. Newspapers are an obvious channel to inform the public, but information is usually corrupted by partisan thinking. Once parties control newspapers, they cease to be useful in disseminating information, and there is little news today not influenced by partisan thinking. This calls out for citizens' oversight committees on the activities of law enforcement, the judicial system, and tax authorities.

Laws can too easily be used to control populations, and insulate governments from having to listen to anyone. After all, governments decide when and how law enforcement will act, and has the power to mobilize an army in extreme necessity.

Clearly we cannot restrict government from making decisions, but we can

1. Define our values clearly;
2. Keep a close watch on our representatives and publicize their actions, assessing their performance in keeping in line with the country's values;
3. Educate every citizen about the issues of concern and decisions that are involved in creating and maintaining a healthy society.
4. On this basis, hold ongoing discussion about how to govern ourselves and how to deal with current issues.

Many states have oversight committees as watchdogs on governmental activities, such as the judiciary. This is an excellent idea, and represents exactly the type of measures mentioned above. However, in keeping with the centralization of power, too often these committees consist of the same few people, usually ex-lawmakers or associates of those in power, and exhibit the same unwillingness to report to the community what is really happening. For this to work, each political unit, municipality or township should send people to fill these oversight committees, and require them to report back clearly and honestly. Of course, they must have access to factual information.

All sorts of reasons are given to restrict the release of information to the general public, starting with "national security," "ongoing investigations," "privacy," etc. Moreover, in some countries, the press can be pressured by threats of lawsuits, arrest or shutdown if they write anything unacceptable to someone in power. These are real issues which greatly increase in importance in a society where there is little trust.

Trust is low now because most governments operate in a mode no longer appropriate for people of the education and maturity level demonstrated in today's world. Actually, the current mode of governing has

extended beyond what was appropriate by at least half a century. As a result, people have become frustrated and younger generations have felt disempowered by their entry into society, not excited by the prospects for a great future. Their education has been severely misdirected, with emphasis placed on keeping them in their place rather than on encouraging creativity and personal empowerment. In modern society, a typical life cycle now involves getting into debt upon graduation from college, taking essentially any job, and immediately being encouraged to save for retirement.

How does anyone ever travel, spend time looking for the purpose of life, or volunteer to do good somewhere else in the world?



In September, on her first country visit as UN Women's Goodwill Ambassador, British actress Emma Watson (right) visited Uruguay's Parliament where she met with Vice President Danilo Astori (Photo: UN Women).

America in particular maintains such a dysfunctional government by the misuse of, and overreliance on, the rule of law. This is not the ultimate good; it is merely a stage where we have all gotten stuck because the prevailing lack of trust compels us to try to control everybody by what seems to be the only means available. However, accusation is not going to bring a healthy society; primarily it serves to further undermine trust between people. Few are bold enough to challenge the abuses within a system because they know that same system can easily be used against them.

Engaging power on its own terms is a losing proposition. Governments have already appropriated all external tools for eliminating challenges to their dominion. Even before one reaches the need for violence and oppression, there is already strong pressure to maintain the status quo. Police hide behind the need for order, relegating justice to second place; governments hide behind the need for national security, relegating freedom to second place. Some Christians use salvation as an excuse for lack of political engagement.

As Unificationists, we must make sure that we are not hiding behind the Blessing in the same way to justify our lack of action and confusion as we allow a deviant world to settle in around us. While collective action may be out of the question right now, it's really not complicated to move forward. It takes development of one person at a time to join with those citizens who are challenging the evil creeping over the world today.

A very powerful force for change exists in the world today, but it is sleeping, unaware of its power. When the women of the world decide to participate actively in local groups and local government, it will be a major step toward the good, because women naturally care about future generations, and can collaborate, discuss and come to consensus without all the formality and need for control in most of society today.

Our greatest hope is soon coming. Young women are growing up with the clear knowledge that change must come, and have stronger educational backgrounds, as is evident from college campuses. Of course the women who would have been old at 50 in previous generations now feel lively and active at 60, looking for a way to give meaning and value to their lives.

As we learn and grow through activity in our real world setting, the energy toward centralization of power will gradually diminish, and when we do get around to reassessing our own constitution, we will find it has naturally changed in response to our own growth (perhaps with a little nudge here and there).

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