

Khalifa Uthman bin Affan - Uthman's Letter to the Pilgrims

Analytic study of the letter

If this letter is studied analytically, it will be seen that the letter is couched in general terms. There is nothing therein calling upon the supporters of Government to muster in strength and come to Madina for relief. In the accounts that have come down to us it appears that the Governors of Syria and Basra sent some relief forces, but that when they were a few stages from Madina they came to know that Uthman had been assassinated, and on coming to know of this tragedy they returned to their provinces. If these forces had come to fight for Uthman, there is no reason why they should have returned on coming to know of the tragedy. On the other hand such tragedy should have spurred them to violent action against the rioters. Apparently they had come in aid of maintaining law and order. When the Caliph had been killed it implied that the law and order situation had become grave. In such context the responsibility of these forces was to rush to Madina to preserve law and order, and take the law breakers to task. The truth of the matter is that no force came from any of the provinces because Uthman wanted to avoid a civil war. It may be recalled that when Muawiyah had offered to send a contingent from Syria to act as a guard, Uthman had not accepted the offer, because he did not want any blood to be shed in the city of the Holy Prophet. It may also be recalled that when the slaves of Uthman volunteered to take up arms he restrained them from such action, and said, "He who does not take up arms is free". When Imam Hasan and some other persons sought the permission of Uthman to fight against the rebels, Uthman did not permit them to do so and asked them to retire to their houses. In this crisis, Uthman set the noble example of resignation to the will of God. He preferred to sacrifice his own life, rather than lead the people to civil war. The story that the provincial forces came late and returned when they came to know of the assassination of Uthman appears to have been invented by the party opposed to Uthman to create the impression that Uthman had become unpopular even in provinces where his relatives were the Governors. The memory of Uthman deserves to be cherished as a great soul who sacrificed his life in vindication of the principles for which he stood. May God have mercy on the soul of Uthman.

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