

Extracts from Letters Written by or on Behalf of Shoghi Effendi
Regarding the Absence of Clergy in the Bahá'í Faith

From a Letter Written by Shoghi Effendi

It [the Bahá'í Faith] is free from any form of ecclesiasticism, has neither priesthood nor ritual and is supported exclusively by voluntary contributions made by its avowed adherents....
(14 July 1947 to the United Nations Special Commission on Palestine) [1]

From Letters Written on Behalf of Shoghi Effendi

That the spread of the Teachings is an essential and indispensable part of every Bahá'í's obligations to the Cause has been repeatedly and emphatically stressed by Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá in all Their writings, and the Guardian himself has urged each and every believer to fully realize what a tremendous responsibility such an obligation places on his shoulders. That a Cause which possesses no form of clerical organization, and which depends for its spread on no special class of teachers, must proclaim its Message through the combined and united efforts of its followers, irrespective of their social standing and their cultural background, is quite evident to every dispassionate observer sufficiently acquainted with the essential purpose and the distinguishing features of this mighty Revelation....
(28 October 1933 to an individual believer) [2]

But he thinks that in view of Bahá'u'lláh's emphatic command, as recorded in His Book of Laws, that every person should be engaged in some sort of profession, it would be better and more in conformity with the Teachings if you remain in your profession and teach the Cause at the same time. As you rightly suggest, the middle path, that is to say practising one's profession and also teaching the Cause, is the best way for you to follow.

For it must be clearly understood that working for the Cause does not and cannot constitute a sort of professional activity, of the type current in ecclesiastical organizations, whether Christian, Muslim or otherwise. We have no priesthood, no specialized class of people who can make the Cause their only life-work. In the Bahá'í Cause, where practical considerations are harmoniously combined with those of a more theoretical character, where idealism and realism are each duly recognized and are fused into a harmonious whole, men and women are commanded to work for the Cause not as a substitute for their daily professional occupations but in addition to them.
(30 June 1936 to an individual believer) [3]

Regarding the question of paid teachers: as we have no clergy or priests there is no paid career open to Bahá'í teachers. This, however, does not mean that teachers going out to spread the Faith, and unable to support themselves, should not receive money from the National Spiritual Assembly or a Local Assembly. At present it would be quite impossible to spread the Cause if those who arise to serve it as teachers or pioneers were not given financial assistance. All must realize, however, that the moneys they receive are only to enable them to fulfil their objectives,

and that they cannot consider themselves permanently entitled to be supported by the Cause. In America the pioneers have made every effort to establish themselves in some position in the place they have gone to settle in, and thus be freed from the necessity of drawing further upon Bahá'í funds.

(12 August 1944 to a National Spiritual Assembly) [4]

Likewise travelling teachers should be assisted financially to carry out the “projects” assigned to them. The friends should not for a moment confuse this type of support with the creation of a paid clergy. Any Bahá'í can, at the discretion of the National Spiritual Assembly, receive this necessary assistance, and it is clearly understood it is temporary and only to carry out a specific plan. Bahá'u'lláh Himself has not only enjoined on every one the duty of teaching His Faith, but stated if you cannot go yourself, to send someone in your stead....

(29 May 1946 to a National Spiritual Assembly) [5]

We have no people in the Bahá'í Faith whose position is comparable to professional clergymen or priests. No paid teachers, in other words. However, it is difficult to see how the ever-increasing work of the Cause is to be run unless those devoting all their time to it are not supported from the Fund while doing so. This is administrative work, and there is no objection to those doing it being paid a regular salary if they have not the independent means to do it free of any charge. We cannot lay down a rule that no one receiving remuneration for Bahá'í administrative work should be elected to Assemblies, as this would interfere with the free choice of electing the best qualified people for such service on Assemblies.

(9 October 1947 to an individual believer) [6]