

FLEXIBILITY IN SECONDARY MATTERS

IX.

APPEALS

X.

THE SPIRIT AND FORM OF BAHAI ADMINISTRATION

I.

The National Spiritual Assembly

I. Membership, Authority and Role

1433. Regarding the establishment of "National Assemblies", it is of vital importance that in every country, where the conditions are favourable and the number of the friends has grown and reached a considerable size, such as America, Great Britain and Germany, that a "National Spiritual Assembly" be immediately established, representative of the friends throughout that country.

Its immediate purpose is to stimulate, unify and co-ordinate, by frequent personal consultations, the manifold activities of the friends as well as the local Assemblies; and by keeping in close and constant touch with the Holy Land, initiate measures, and direct in general the affairs of the Cause in that country. It serves also another purpose, no less essential than the first, as in the course of time it shall evolve into the National House of Justice (referred to in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will as the "secondary House of Justice"), which according to the explicit text of the Testament will have, in conjunction with the other National Assemblies throughout the Bahá'í world, to elect directly the members of the International House of Justice, that Supreme Council that will guide, organize and unify the affairs of the Movement throughout the world.

It is expressly recorded in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Writings that these National Assemblies must be indirectly elected by the friends; that is, the friends in every country must elect a certain number of delegates, who in their turn will elect from among all the friends in that country the members of the National Spiritual Assembly....

This National Spiritual Assembly, which pending the establishment of the Universal House of Justice will have to be re-elected once a year, obviously assumes grave responsibilities, for it has to exercise full authority over all the local Assemblies in its province, and will have to direct the activities of the friends, guard vigilantly the Cause of God, and control and supervise the affairs of the Movement in general.

With it too rests the decision whether a certain point at issue is strictly local in its nature, and should be reserved for the consideration and decision of the local Assembly, or whether it should fall under its own province and be regarded as a matter which ought to receive its special attention. The National Spiritual Assembly will also decide upon such matters which in its opinion

should be referred to the Holy Land for consultation and decision.

(From a letter dated 12 March 1923 written by Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assemblies of the Bahá'ís of America, Australasia, France, Germany, British Isles, Italy, Japan and Switzerland, published in "Bahá'í Administration: Selected Messages 1922-1932" [rev. ed.], (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980), pp.

39

-

41

)

1434. It is, I firmly believe, of the utmost urgent importance that, with unity of purpose and action firmly established in our midst, and with every trace of the animosity and mistrust of the past banished from our hearts, we should form one united front, and combat, wisely and tactfully, every force that might darken the spirit of the Movement, cause division in its ranks, and narrow it by dogmatic and sectarian belief.

It is primarily upon the elected members of the National Spiritual Assemblies throughout the Bahá'í world that this highly important duty devolves, as in their hands the direction and management of all spiritual Bahá'í activities have been placed and centralized, and as they constitute in the eyes of the people of their country the supreme body in that land that officially represents, promotes and safeguards the various interests of the Cause. It is my fervent prayer and my most cherished desire that the unfailing guidance of Bahá'u'lláh and the blessings of our beloved Master will enable them to set a high and true example to all other Bahá'í institutions and Local Assemblies, and will show them what absolute harmony, mature deliberation and whole-hearted co-operation can achieve. Should such a representative and responsible body fail to realize this fundamental requisite for all successful achievement, the whole structure is sure to crumble, and the Great Plan of the Future, as unfolded by the Master's Will and Testament, will be rudely disturbed and grievously delayed.

(From a letter dated 9 April 1923 written by Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, published in "Bahá'í Administration: Selected Messages 1922-1932" pp.

45

-

46

)

1435. Regarding the method to be adopted for the election of the National Spiritual Assemblies, it is clear that the text of the Beloved's Testament gives us no indication as to the manner in which these Assemblies are to be elected. In one of His earliest Tablets, however, addressed to a friend in Persia, the following is expressly recorded:

"At whatever time all the beloved of God in each country appoint their

delegates, and these in turn elect their representatives, and these representatives elect a body, that body shall be regarded as the Supreme Baytu'l-'Adl (Universal House of Justice)". These words clearly indicate that a three-stage election has been provided by 'Abdu'l-Bahá for the formation of the International House of Justice, and as it is explicitly provided in His Will and Testament that the "Secondary Houses of Justice (i.e. National Assemblies) must elect the members the Universal One", it is obvious that the members of the National Spiritual Assemblies will have to be indirectly elected by the body of the believers in their respective provinces....

Should the appointing of the delegates be made a part of the functions of Local Spiritual Assemblies, who are already elected bodies, the principle of a four-stage election would be introduced, which would be at variance with the provisions explicitly laid down in the Master's Tablet. On the other hand, were the Local Spiritual Assemblies, the number of whose members is strictly confined to nine, to elect directly the members of the National Spiritual Assembly--thus maintaining the principle of a three-stage election--all Bahá'í localities, which must necessarily differ in numerical strength, would then have to share equally in the election of the National Spiritual Assembly--a practice which would be contrary to fairness and justice. Moreover, the central principle guiding for the present the administration of the Cause has been to make the Bahá'í National Spiritual Assemblies as independent as possible in the conduct of such affairs as fall within their province, and to lessen the hampering influence of any institution within their jurisdiction that might, whether directly or indirectly, impair their authority and prestige.

(From a letter dated 12 May 1925 written by Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, published in "Bahá'í Administration: Selected Messages 1922-1932", pp.

84

-

85

)

1436. High aims and pure motives, however laudable in themselves, will surely not suffice if unsupported by measures that are practicable and methods that are sound. Wealth of sentiment, abundance of goodwill and effort, will prove of little avail if we should fail to exercise discrimination and restraint and neglect to direct their flow along the most profitable channels. The unfettered freedom of the individual should be tempered with mutual consultation and sacrifice, and the spirit of initiative and enterprise should be reinforced by a deeper realization of the supreme necessity for concerted action and a fuller devotion to the common weal.

It would be impossible at this stage to ignore the indispensability or to overestimate the unique significance of the institution of the National Spiritual Assembly--the pivot round which revolve the activities of the believers throughout the American continent. Supreme is their position, grave

their responsibilities, manifold and arduous their duties. How great the privilege, how delicate the task of the assembled delegates whose function it is to elect such national representatives as would by their record of service ennoble and enrich the annals of the Cause! If we but turn our gaze to the high qualifications of the members of Bahá'í Assemblies, as enumerated in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Tablets, we are filled with feelings of unworthiness and dismay, and would feel truly disheartened but for the comforting thought that if we rise to play nobly our part every deficiency in our lives will be more than compensated by the all-conquering spirit of His grace and power. Hence it is incumbent upon the chosen delegates to consider without the least trace of passion and prejudice, and irrespective of any material consideration, the names of only those who can best combine the necessary qualities of unquestioned loyalty, of selfless devotion, of a well-trained mind, of recognized ability and mature experience. May the incoming National Spiritual Assembly --the privileged and chosen servants of the Cause--immortalize their term of stewardship by deeds of loving service, deeds that will redound to the honour, the glory and the power of the Most Great Name.

(From a letter dated 3 June 1925 written by Shoghi Effendi to the delegates and visitors at the Convention of the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, published in "Bahá'í Administration: Selected Messages 1922-1932" pp.

87

-

88

)

1437. The administrative machinery of the Cause having now sufficiently evolved, its aim and object fairly well grasped and understood, and its method and working made more familiar to every believer, I feel the time is ripe when it should be fully and consciously utilized to further the purpose for which it has been created. It should, I strongly feel, be made to serve a twofold purpose. On one hand, it should aim at a steady and gradual expansion of the Movement along lines that are at once broad, sound and universal; and on the other, it should ensure the internal consolidation of the work already achieved. It should both provide the impulse whereby the dynamic forces latent in the Faith can unfold, crystallize, and shape the lives and conduct of men, and serve as a medium for the interchange of thought and the co-ordination of activities among the divers elements that constitute the Bahá'í community.

Such in their broad outline are the guiding principles which those who have been placed in charge of the administration of the affairs of the Cause should at present endeavour to promote, explain and securely establish. Nothing short of the spirit of unwavering faith, of continuous vigilance and patient endeavour can hope to secure eventually the realization of this our cherished desire.

May America's national representatives arise with clear vision, with unswerving determination and renewed vigour to carry out in its entirety the sacred task

they have purposed to perform.

(From a letter dated 11 May 1926 written by Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, published in "Bahá'í Administration: Selected Messages 1922-1932", pp.

109

-

110

)

1438. Now that the N.S.A. has been properly constituted and its officers duly appointed, it is incumbent upon each and all to introduce and promote such measures as will consolidate the work that you have so well begun. The institution of the National Fund, a Bahá'í Bulletin similar to the News Letter issued by the American N.S.A., a vigorous and well-conceived campaign of Teaching, a continuous and purposeful endeavour to co-ordinate the activities of the Local Assemblies and groups throughout India and Burma and the sending of detailed and frequent reports to the Holy Land are among the most primary and urgent requirements of the new day that has dawned upon India. I eagerly await your reports and assure you of my continued prayers for the success of your arduous labours.

(In the handwriting of Shoghi Effendi, appended to a letter dated 28 October 1926 written on his behalf to the National Spiritual Assembly of India and Burma, published in "Dawn of a New Day" (New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, n.d. [1970]), pp.

14

-

15

)

1439. I wish to reaffirm, in clear and categorical language, the principle already enunciated upholding the supreme authority of the National Assembly in all matters that affect the interests of the Faith in that land. There can be no conflict of authority, no duality under any form or circumstances in any sphere of Bahá'í jurisdiction whether local, national or international. The National Assembly, however, although the sole interpreter of its Declaration of Trust and by-laws, is directly and morally responsible if it allows any body or institution within its jurisdiction to abuse its privileges or to decline in the exercise of its rights and prerogatives. It is the trusted guardian and the mainspring of the manifold activities and interests of every national community in the Bahá'í world. It constitutes the sole link that binds these communities to the International House of Justice--the supreme administrative body in the Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh.

(In the hand writing of Shoghi Effendi, appended to a letter dated 11 June 1934 written on his behalf to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada)

1440. ...the Guardian was very pleased to learn of the progress made by the

Indian National Spiritual Assembly in its efforts to consolidate, widen and maintain the scope of its national activities. The difficulties in your way are tremendous. The differences of language and of social and intellectual background do, undoubtedly, render the work somewhat difficult to carry out and may temporarily check the efficient and smooth working of the national administrative machinery of the Faith. They, nevertheless, impart to the deliberations of the National Assembly a universality which they would be otherwise lacking, and give to its members a breadth of view which is their duty to cultivate and foster. It is not uniformity which we should seek in the formation of any National or Local Assembly. For the bedrock of the Bahá'í administrative order is the principle of unity in diversity, which has been so strongly and so repeatedly emphasized in the writings of the Cause. Differences which are not fundamental and contrary to the basic teachings of the Cause should be maintained, while the underlying unity of the administrative order should be at any cost preserved and ensured. Unity, both of purpose and of means, is, indeed, indispensable to the safe and speedy working of every Assembly, whether local or national.

(From a letter dated 2 January 1934 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of India and Burma, published in "Dawn of a New Day" pp.

47

-

48

)

1441. With regard to your question concerning the right of a member of the National Spiritual Assembly to disclose to that body any facts which he possesses as a member of a Local Spiritual Assembly, the Guardian thinks that the adequate presentation of all such facts is not only the right but the duty of every member of the National Spiritual Assembly. It is, indeed, the responsibility of every conscientious and loyal believer who has the privilege of being a member of the National Spiritual Assembly to provide for the general information of his co-workers in that body, all the facts which the latter requires for the study and settlement of the cases under its consideration.

(From a letter dated 14 January 1935 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of India and Burma)

1442. The formation of every new National Assembly must, indeed, be viewed as a step forward in the evolution of the Administration of the Faith. And not until a sufficient number of such National Assemblies has been duly constituted can there be any hope for the future expansion of the Cause.

(From a letter dated 26 March 1934 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, published in "Bahá'í News" 91 (April 1935), p. 15)

1443. With regard to your question as to the advisability of disclosing to an individual believer the contents of the National Spiritual Assembly's correspondence: The Guardian thinks that although this cannot be considered as

constituting an obligation which a believer can impose upon the national body, yet it would seem highly advisable that the National Spiritual Assembly should give a sympathetic consideration to any such request made to it by a believer. This, he feels, would avoid giving the impression that the Assembly is working in an atmosphere of complete secrecy, and that it is motivated by dictatorial motives. The final decision in such matters, however, is entirely left to the discretion of the National Spiritual Assembly. The basic principle that should always be remembered is that the National Spiritual Assembly cannot be required to reveal to any outsider all the details concerning its work. It may choose to do so if it wishes, but nobody has the right to enforce upon it any such action. This is, of course, the purely legal side of the question. But a purely legalistic attitude in matters affecting the Cause, particularly now that the Faith is still in a state of infancy, is not only inadequate but fraught with unforeseen dangers and difficulties. The individuals and Assemblies must learn to co-operate and to co-operate intelligently, if they desire to adequately discharge their duties and obligations towards the Faith. And no such co-operation is possible without mutual confidence and trust.

(From a letter dated 19 June 1935 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Australia and New Zealand, published in "Letters from the Guardian to Australia and New Zealand, 1923-1957" (Sydney: National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Australia, 1970), p.

9
)

1444. ...Shoghi Effendi wishes to urge once more your Assembly to give careful and sympathetic consideration to this case, which has already engaged their attention for several months. The situation must be carefully studied, and all its aspects thoroughly investigated, and a decision should be reached and fearlessly and immediately carried out. Too much delay does not only harm the interests of the petitioner but will, in addition, have the effect of detracting from the authority and prestige of your Assembly.

(From a letter dated 12 August 1935 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of India and Burma)

1445. The evolution of the Plan imposes a threefold obligation, which all individual believers, all Local Assemblies, as well as the National Assembly itself, must respectively recognize and conscientiously fulfil. Each and every believer, undaunted by the uncertainties, the perils and the financial stringency afflicting the nation, must arise and ensure, to the full measure of his or her capacity, that continuous and abundant flow of funds into the national Treasury, on which the successful prosecution of the Plan must chiefly depend. Upon the Local Assemblies, whose special function and high privilege is to facilitate the admission of new believers into the community, and thereby stimulate the infusion of fresh blood into its organic institutions, a duty no less binding in character devolves. To them I wish particularly to appeal, at this present hour, when the call of God is being raised throughout the length and breadth of both continents in the New World, to desist from insisting too

rigidly on the minor observances and beliefs, which might prove a stumbling-block in the way of any sincere applicant, whose eager desire is to enlist under the banner of Bahá'u'lláh. While conscientiously adhering to the fundamental qualifications already laid down, the members of each and every Assembly should endeavour, by their patience, their love, their tact and wisdom, to nurse, subsequent to his admission, the newcomer into Bahá'í maturity, and win him over gradually to the unreserved acceptance of whatever has been ordained in the teachings. As to the National Assembly, whose inescapable responsibility is to guard the integrity, co-ordinate the activities, and stimulate the life, of the entire community, its chief concern, at the present moment, should be to anxiously deliberate as how best to enable both individual believers and Local Assemblies to fulfil their respective tasks. Through their repeated appeals, through their readiness to dispel all misunderstandings and remove all obstacles, through the example of their lives, their unrelaxing vigilance, their high sense of justice, their humility, consecration and courage, they must demonstrate to those whom they represent their capacity to play their part in the progress of the Plan in which they, no less than the rest of the community, are involved. May the all-conquering Spirit of Bahá'u'lláh be so infused into each component part of this harmoniously functioning System as to enable it to contribute its proper share to the consummation of the Plan.

(In the handwriting of Shoghi Effendi, appended to a letter dated 30 January 1938 written on his behalf to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, published in "Messages to America: Selected Letters and Cablegrams Addressed to the Bahá'ís of North America 1932-1946" (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1947), pp.

11

-

12

)

1446. Such a rectitude of conduct[1] must manifest itself, with ever-increasing potency, in every verdict which the elected representatives of the Bahá'í

—

[1]... with its implications of justice, equity, truthfulness, honesty, fair-mindedness, reliability and trustworthiness... (see "The Advent of Divine Justice", p.

23

)

community, in whatever capacity they may find themselves, may be called upon to pronounce....It must be exemplified in the conduct of all Bahá'í electors, when exercising their sacred rights and functions.... It must constitute the brightest ornament of the life, the pursuits, the exertions, and the utterances of every Bahá'í teacher, whether laboring at home or abroad, whether in the front ranks of the teaching force, o

occupying a less active and responsible position. It must be made the hallmark of that numerically small, yet intensely dynamic and highly responsible body of the elected national representatives of every Bahá'í community, which constitutes the sustaining pillar, and the sole instrument for the election, in every community, of that Universal House whose very name and title, as ordained by Bahá'u'lláh, symbolizes that rectitude of conduct which is its highest mission to safeguard and enforce.

So great and transcendental is this principle of Divine justice, a principle that must be regarded as the crowning distinction of all Local and National Assemblies, in their capacity as forerunners of the Universal House of Justice, that Bahá'u'lláh Himself subordinates His personal inclination and wish to the all-compelling force of its demands and implications. "God is My witness!" He thus explains, "were it not contrary to the Law of God, I would have kissed the hand of My would-be murderer, and would cause him to inherit My earthly goods. I am restrained, however, by the binding Law laid down in the Book, and am Myself bereft of all worldly possessions." "Know thou, of a truth," He significantly affirms, "these great oppressions that have befallen the world are preparing it for the advent of the Most Great Justice." "Say," He again asserts, "he hath appeared with that Justice wherewith mankind hath been adorned, and yet the people are, for the most part, asleep." "The light of men is Justice," He moreover states, "(Quench it not with the contrary winds of oppression and tyranny. The purpose of justice is the appearance of unity among men." "No radiance," He declares, "can compare with that of justice. The organization of the world and the tranquility of mankind depend upon it." "O people of God!" He exclaims, "That which traineth the world is Justice, for it is upheld by two pillars, reward and punishment. These two pillars are the sources of life to the world.... Small wonder, therefore, that the Author of the Bahá'í Revelation should have chosen to associate the name and title of that House, which is to be the crowning glory of His administrative institutions, not with forgiveness but with justice, to have made justice the only basis and the permanent foundation of His Most Great Peace, and to have proclaimed it in His Hidden Words as "the (best beloved of all things" in His sight.

("The Advent of Divine Justice" (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1984), pp. 26 - 29)

1447. In countries where the local Bahá'í communities had sufficiently advanced in number and in influence measures were taken for the initiation of National Assemblies, the pivots round which all national undertakings must revolve. Designated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His Will as the "(Secondary Houses of Justice," they constitute the electoral bodies in the formation of the International House of Justice, and are empowered to direct, unify, coordinate

and stimulate the activities of individuals as well as local Assemblies within their jurisdiction. Resting on the broad base of organized local communities, themselves pillars sustaining the institution which must be regarded as the apex of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, these Assemblies are elected, according to the principle of proportional representation, by delegates representative of Bahá'í local communities assembled at Convention during the period of the Ridvan Festival; are possessed of the necessary authority to enable them to insure the harmonious and efficient development of Bahá'í activity within their respective spheres; are freed from all direct responsibility for their policies and decisions to their electorates; are charged with the sacred duty of consulting the views, of inviting the recommendations and of securing the confidence and cooperation of the delegates and of acquainting them with their plans, problems and actions; and are supported by the resources of national funds to which all ranks of the faithful are urged to contribute....

("God Passes By", rev. ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1987), pp.

332

-

333

)

1448. Now that you have been elected to the National Spiritual Assembly he feels that this offers you your greatest field of service at the present time. Every other work for the Cause should be subordinated to this, and you should conserve your strength for this work--if you feel you have not enough to go around to all the other tasks as well! Your long and devoted services to the Cause have all been a training and preparation for wider activities, and this election to the N.S.A. itself is a preparation, he hopes, for still greater work in the future.

(From a letter dated 28 July 1944 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

1449. He was very happy to see that changes had been made in the membership of the National Spiritual Assembly this year, not from any reasons of personality, but because change itself is good and brings a fresh outlook into the discussions of any Assembly. He was also pleased to see that these changes involved more younger people being on the National Spiritual Assembly; with the tremendous amount of work which this second Seven Year Plan is going to involve, this will be a great help to the older members of that body.

(From a letter dated 21 May 1946 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

1450. We should respect the National Spiritual Assembly and the Local Spiritual Assembly because they are institutions founded by Bahá'u'lláh. It has nothing to do with personality, but is far above it. It will be a great day when the friends, on and off the Assemblies, come to fully grasp the fact that it is not the individuals on an Assembly which is important, but the Assembly as an

institution.

(From a letter dated 7 July 1949 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

1451. The Guardian regrets that, in the light of the Master's statement that the deliberations of Assemblies must be secret and confidential, it is not possible to have a non-Assembly member in the National Spiritual Assembly meeting. You must always remember that, in matters of principle, there can be no deviation; in America it may be possible for you to find a wholly trustworthy believer; but if your Assembly is permitted to have non-Assembly secretaries present, then the same privilege must be accorded oriental and Latin American Assemblies; and can these other countries be assured of finding people of the calibre you have found? Highly personal subjects, damaging to the honour and happiness of others, are often taken up by National Assemblies, and the danger that confidence will be betrayed is already great enough with the 9 chosen representatives of the whole Community, let alone introducing non-Assembly members. You will just have to make your minutes a little more compact and sacrifice, if necessary, a certain amount of efficiency in order to follow this very important principle.

(From a letter dated 5 July 1950 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States)

1452. EVIDENCES INCREASING HOSTILITY WITHOUT PERSISTENT MACHINATIONS WITHIN FORESHADOWING DIRE CONTEST DESTINED RANGE ARMY LIGHT FORCES DARKNESS BOTH SECULAR RELIGIOUS PREDICTED UNEQUIVOCAL LANGUAGE 'ABDU'L-BAHA NECESSITATE THIS CRUCIAL HOUR CLOSER ASSOCIATION HANDS FIVE CONTINENTS BODIES ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES NATIONAL BAHAI COMMUNITIES WORLD OVER JOINT INVESTIGATION NEFARIOUS ACTIVITIES INTERNAL ENEMIES ADOPTION WISE EFFECTIVE MEASURES COUNTERACT THEIR TREACHEROUS SCHEMES PROTECT MASS BELIEVERS ARREST SPREAD EVIL INFLUENCE. CALL UPON HANDS NATIONAL ASSEMBLIES EACH CONTINENT SEPARATELY ESTABLISH HENCEFORTH DIRECT CONTACT DELIBERATE WHENEVER FEASIBLE AS FREQUENTLY POSSIBLE EXCHANGE REPORTS TO BE SUBMITTED THEIR RESPECTIVE AUXILIARY BOARDS NATIONAL COMMITTEES EXERCISE UNRELAXING VIGILANCE CARRY OUT UNFLINCHINGLY SACRED INESCAPABLE DUTIES. SECURITY PRECIOUS FAITH PRESERVATION SPIRITUAL HEALTH BAHAI COMMUNITIES VITALITY FAITH ITS INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS PROPER FUNCTIONING ITS LABORIOUSLY ERECTED INSTITUTIONS FRUITION ITS WORLD-WIDE ENTERPRISES FULFILMENT ITS ULTIMATE DESTINY ALL DIRECTLY DEPENDENT BEFITTING DISCHARGE WEIGHTY RESPONSIBILITIES NOW RESTING MEMBERS THESE TWO INSTITUTIONS OCCUPYING WITH UNIVERSAL HOUSE JUSTICE NEXT INSTITUTION GUARDIANSHIP FOREMOST RANK DIVINELY ORDAINED ADMINISTRATIVE HIERARCHY WORLD ORDER BAHAU'LLAH.

(From a cable dated 4 July 1957 sent by Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, published in "Messages to the Bahá'í World 1950-1957" (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1971), p.

123

)

II. Relation to Convention

1453. Hitherto the National Convention has been primarily called together for the consideration of the various circumstances attending the election of the National Spiritual Assembly. I feel, however, that in view of the expansion and the growing importance of the administrative sphere of the Cause, the general sentiments and tendencies prevailing among the friends, and the signs of increasing interdependence among the National Spiritual Assemblies throughout the world, the assembled accredited representatives of the American believers should exercise not only the vital and responsible right of electing the National Assembly, but should also fulfil the functions of an enlightened, consultative and co-operative body that will enrich the experience, enhance the prestige, support the authority, and assist the deliberations of the National Spiritual Assembly. It is my firm conviction that it is the bounden duty, in the interests of the Cause we all love and serve, of the members of the incoming National Assembly, once elected by the delegates at Convention time, to seek and have the utmost regard, individually as well as collectively, for the advice, the considered opinion and the true sentiments of the assembled delegates. Banishing every vestige of secrecy, of undue reticence, of dictatorial aloofness, from their midst, they should radiantly and abundantly unfold to the eyes of the delegates, by whom they are elected, their plans, their hopes, and their cares. They should familiarize the delegates with the various matters that will have to be considered in the current year, and calmly and conscientiously study and weigh the opinions and judgments of the delegates. The newly elected National Assembly, during the few days when the Convention is in session and after the dispersal of the delegates, should seek ways and means to cultivate understanding, facilitate and maintain the exchange of views, deepen confidence, and vindicate by every tangible evidence their one desire to serve and advance the common weal. Not infrequently, nay oftentimes, the most lowly, untutored, and inexperienced among the friends will, by the sheer inspiring force of selfless and ardent devotion, contribute a distinct and memorable share to a highly involved discussion in any given assembly. Great must be the regard paid by those whom the delegates call upon to serve in high position to this all-important though inconspicuous manifestation of the revealing power of sincere and earnest devotion.

The National Spiritual Assembly, however, in view of the unavoidable limitations imposed upon the convening of frequent and long-standing sessions of the Convention, will have to retain in its hands the final decision on all matters that affect the interests of the Cause in America, such as the right to decide whether any Local Assembly is functioning in accordance with the principles laid down for the conduct and the advancement of the Cause. It is my earnest prayer that they will utilize their highly responsible position, not only for the wise and efficient conduct of the affairs of the Cause, but also for the extension and deepening of the spirit of cordiality and whole-hearted and mutual support in their co-operation with the body of their co-workers throughout the land. The seating of delegates to the Convention, i.e. the right to decide upon the validity of the credentials of the delegates at a given Convention is vested in the outgoing National Assembly, and the right to decide

who has the voting privilege is also ultimately placed in the hands of the National Spiritual Assembly, either when a Local Spiritual Assembly is for the first time being formed in a given locality or when differences arise between a new applicant and an already established Local Assembly. While the Convention is in session and the accredited delegates have already elected from among the believers throughout the country the members of the National Spiritual Assembly for the current year, it is of infinite value and a supreme necessity that as far as possible all matters requiring immediate decision should be fully and publicly considered, and an endeavour be made to obtain after mature deliberation unanimity in vital decisions. Indeed it has ever been the cherished desire of our Master 'Abdu'l-Bahá that the friends in their councils, local as well as national, should by their candour, their honesty of purpose, their singleness of mind, and the thoroughness of their discussions achieve unanimity in all things. Should this in certain cases prove impracticable the verdict of the majority should prevail, to which decision the minority must under all circumstances gladly, spontaneously and continually submit. Nothing short of the all-encompassing, all-pervading power of His Guidance and Love can enable this newly-enfolded order to gather strength and flourish amid the storm and stress of a turbulent age, and in the fullness of time vindicate its high claim to be universally recognized as the one Haven of abiding felicity and peace.

(From a letter dated 29 January 1925 written by Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, published in "Bahá'í Administration: Selected Messages 1922-1932", pp.

78

-

80

)

1454. In connection with the annual holding of the Bahá'í Convention and Congress, I feel that although such a representative body need not be convened necessarily every year, yet it is highly desirable, in view of the unique functions it fulfils in promoting harmony and goodwill, in removing misunderstandings and in enhancing the prestige of the Cause, that the National Spiritual Assembly should exert itself to gather together annually the elected representatives of the American believers. It would in some ways be obviously convenient and eminently desirable, though not absolutely essential, if the National Spiritual Assembly could arrange that the holding of such a Congress should synchronize with the time at which the national elections are renewed, and that both events should take place, if not on the first of Ridvan, at least during the twelve joyous days of what may be justly regarded as the foremost Bahá'í Festival. Apart from the local elections, which universally are to be renewed on the 21st of April, it is entirely left to the discretion of the National Spiritual Assembly to decide, after having given due consideration to the above-mentioned observations, on whatever time and place the Bahá'í Convention as well as the annual elections are to be held. Were the National Spiritual Assembly to decide after mature deliberation to omit the holding of

the Bahá'í Convention and Congress in a given year, then they could, only in such a case, devise ways and means to ensure that the annual election of the National Spiritual Assembly should be held by mail, provided it can be conducted with sufficient thoroughness, efficiency and dispatch. It would also appear to me unobjectionable to enable and even to require in the last resort such delegates as cannot possibly undertake the journey to the seat of the Bahá'í Convention to send their votes, for the election of the National Spiritual Assembly only, by mail to the National Secretary, as in my view the advantages of such a procedure outweigh the considerations referred to in your letter. It should however be made clear to every elected delegate--who should be continually reminded--that it is a sacred responsibility and admittedly preferable to attend if possible in person the sessions of the Convention, to take an active part in all its proceedings, and to acquaint his fellow-workers on his return with the accomplishments, the decisions, and the aspirations of the assembled representatives of the American believers.

(From a letter dated 24 October 1925 written by Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, published in "Bahá'í Administration: Selected Messages 1922-1932", pp.

91

-

92

)

1455. The Guardian wishes the National Spiritual Assembly to remind, and make it quite clear to, the believers in that land that the supreme body in the United States and Canada, whose privilege and function is to lay down, amend and abrogate the administrative principles of the Faith with the approval of the Guardian, is not the Convention, however representative it may be, but the National Spiritual Assembly. On the other hand, it is the sacred obligation and the primary function of the National Assembly not to restrict, under any circumstances, the freedom of the assembled delegates, whose twofold function is to elect their national representatives and to submit to them any recommendations they may feel inclined to make. The function of the Convention is purely advisory and though the advice it gives is not binding in its effects on those on whom rests the final decision in purely administrative matters, yet, the utmost caution and care should be exercised lest anything should hamper the delegates in the full and free exercise of their functions. In discharging this sacred function no influence whatever, no pressure from any quarter, even though it be from the National Assembly, should under any circumstances affect their views or restrict their freedom. The delegates must be wholly independent of any administrative agency, must approach their task with absolute detachment and must concentrate their attention on the most important and pressing issues.

The Guardian believes that the right to elect the Chairman and the Secretary of the Convention should be vested in the assembled delegates, lest any objection be raised that the members of the outgoing National Assembly are seeking to

direct the course of the discussions in a manner that would be conducive to their own personal interests. The National Assembly, however, must at all times vigilantly uphold, defend, justify and enforce the provisions of the Declaration of Trust and By-Laws, which are binding on the Convention no less than on themselves. The National Spiritual Assembly has the right to lay down, enforce and interpret the National Constitution of the Bahá'ís in that land. It cannot, if it wishes to remain faithful to that Constitution, lay down any regulations, however secondary in character, that would in the least hamper the unrestricted liberty of the delegates to advise and elect those whom they feel best combine the necessary qualifications for membership of so exalted a body.

Non-delegates, however, according to the Guardian's considered opinion, should not be given the right to intervene directly during the sessions of the Convention. Only through an accredited delegate should they be given indirectly the chance to voice their sentiments and to participate in the deliberations of the Convention. Much confusion and complications must inevitably result, in the days to come, if such a restriction be not imposed on a gathering which is primarily intended for the accredited delegates of the Bahá'í communities. Bearing this restriction in mind, it is the duty of the National Spiritual Assembly to devise ways and means which would enable them to obtain valuable suggestions, not only from the total number of the elected delegates, but from as large a body of their fellow-workers as is humanly possible.

Shoghi Effendi has not departed from any established administrative principle. He feels he has neither curtailed the legitimate authority of the National Spiritual Assembly, nor invested the Convention with undue powers enabling it to rival or supersede those whom it has to elect. What the Guardian is aiming at is to remind the friends, more fully than before, of the two cardinal principles of Bahá'í Administration, namely, the supreme and unchallengeable authority of the National Spiritual Assembly in national affairs and working within the limits imposed by the Declaration of Trust and By-Laws, and the untrammelled freedom of the Convention delegates to advise, deliberate on the actions, and appoint the successors of their National Assembly. The Guardian is confident that you will elucidate and give the widest publicity to these already established principles, upon which the progress, the unity and welfare of Bahá'í administrative institutions must ultimately depend.

[Postscript in the handwriting of Shoghi Effendi:]

The utmost care and vigilance should be exercised lest any fresh misunderstandings arise regarding these fundamental issues. The root principle of Bahá'í Administration is unreservedly maintained. No departure from its established tenets is contemplated. The undisputed authority of America's supreme Bahá'í Administrative Body has been reaffirmed, while, on the other hand, the untrammelled freedom of individual believers and delegates to exercise their functions has been once again reaffirmed and strengthened. On the continuous and harmonious co-operation of the two leading Bahá'í institutions in America the growth and success of the Administration bequeathed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá must ultimately depend. May next year's Convention witness the

triumph of these basic principles.

(From a letter dated 12 August 1933 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada)

1456. Concerning the status, rights and prerogatives of the Annual Bahá'í Convention, the Guardian wishes to make it quite clear to all the believers that this annual meeting of the delegates is by no means a continuous consultative body all through the year; that its twofold function of electing the body of the National Spiritual Assembly, and of offering any constructive suggestions in regard to the general administration of the Cause is limited to a definite period; and that consequently the opinion current among some of the believers that the delegates are to serve as a consultative body throughout the year is at variance with the fundamental, though as yet unspecified, principles underlying the Administration. Shoghi Effendi firmly believes that consultation must be maintained between the National Spiritual Assembly and the entire body of the believers, and that such a consultation, when the Convention is not in session, can best be maintained through the agency of the Local Assemblies, one of whose essential functions is to act as intermediaries between the local communities and their national representatives. The main purpose of the Nineteen Day Feasts is to enable individual believers to offer any suggestion to the Local Assembly, which in its turn will pass it to the National Spiritual Assembly. The Local Assembly is, therefore, the proper medium through which local Bahá'í communities can communicate with the body of the national representatives. The Convention should be regarded as a temporary gathering, having certain specific functions to perform during a limited period of time. Its status is thus limited in time to the Convention sessions, the function of consultation at all other times being vested in the entire body of the believers through the Local Spiritual Assemblies.

[Postscript in the handwriting of Shoghi Effendi:]

I wish to affirm, without the least hesitation or ambiguity, that the annual Convention is not to be regarded as a body entitled to exercise functions similar to those which an ordinary parliament possesses under a democratic form of government. The Administrative Order which lies embedded in the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, and which the American believers have championed and are now establishing, should, under no circumstances, be identified with the principles underlying present-day democracies. Nor is it identical with any purely aristocratic or autocratic form of government. The objectionable features inherent in each of these political systems are entirely avoided. It blends, as no system of human polity has as yet achieved, those salutary truths and beneficial elements which constitute the valuable contributions which each of these forms of government have made to society in the past. Consultation, frank and unfettered, is the bedrock of this unique Order. Authority is concentrated in the hands of the elected members of the National Assembly. Power and initiative are primarily vested in the entire body of the believers acting through their local representatives. To generate those forces which must give birth to the body of their national administrators, and to confer, freely and

fully and at fixed intervals, with both the incoming and outgoing National Assemblies, are the twofold functions, the supreme responsibility and sole prerogative of the delegates assembled in Convention. Nothing short of close and constant interaction between these various organs of Bahá'í administration can enable it to fulfil its high destiny.

(From a letter dated 18 November 1933 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada)

1457. Concerning the status of members of the National Spiritual Assembly at Convention sessions the Guardian feels that the members of both the incoming and the outgoing Assemblies should be given the full right to participate in the Convention discussions. Those members of the National Spiritual Assembly who have been elected delegates will, in addition to the right of participation, be entitled to vote. The Guardian wishes thereby to render more effective the deliberations and the recommendations of the national representatives. He feels that the exercise of such a right by the members of the National Spiritual Assembly will enable them to consult more fully with the assembled delegates, to exchange fully and frankly with them their views, and to consider collectively the interests, needs and requirements of the Cause. This, he believes, is one of the primary functions of the Convention.

(From a letter dated 25 December 1933 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, published in "Bahá'í News" 81 (February 1934), p. 3)

1458. In connection with the circular letter you have sent the Local Assemblies in order to define the specific rights and functions of the Annual Bahá'í Convention, and to explain once more the relationships binding that body to the National Spiritual Assembly, the Guardian wishes me to again affirm his view that the authority of the National Spiritual Assembly is undivided and unchallengeable in all matters pertaining to the administration of the Faith throughout the United States and Canada, and that, therefore, the obedience of individual Bahá'ís, delegates, groups, and Assemblies to that authority is imperative, and should be whole-hearted and unqualified. He is convinced that the unreserved acceptance and complete application of this vital provision of the Administration is essential to the maintenance of the highest degree of unity among the believers, and is indispensable to the effective working of the administrative machinery of the Faith in every country.

Hoping that through your efforts the friends will co-operate in carrying out the Guardian's instructions on this point, and with the renewed assurance of his prayers and supplications on your behalf, and on behalf of your collaborators in the National Assembly.

(From a letter dated 11 June 1934 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada)

III. Relation to the Community

1459. What has given me still greater pleasure is to learn that the members of

this Central Body, which has assumed so grave a responsibility and is facing such delicate and difficult tasks, command individually and collectively not only the sympathy of their spiritual brethren and sisters but also can confidently rely on their active and whole-hearted support in the campaign of service to the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh. It is indeed as it should be, for if genuine and sustained co-operation and mutual confidence cease to exist between individual friends and their Local and National Assemblies, the all-beneficent work of the Cause must cease and nothing else can enable it to function harmoniously and effectively in future.

True, the Cause as every other movement has its own obstacles, complications and unforeseen difficulties, but unlike any other human organization it inspires a spirit of Faith and Devotion which can never fail to induce us to make sincere and renewed efforts to face these difficulties and smooth any differences that may and must arise.

I look forward with fervent hope to hear of these renewed efforts on your part and of the strong determination which you will never suffer to slacken, to maintain at any cost the unity, the effectiveness and the dignity of the Cause.

(From a letter dated 23 December 1922 written by Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, published in "Bahá'í Administration: Selected Messages 1922-1932", p.

28

)

1460. The need for the centralization of authority in the National Spiritual Assembly, and the concentration of power in the various local Assemblies, is made manifest when we reflect that the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh is still in its age of tender growth and in a stage of transition; when we remember that the full implications and the exact significance of the Master's world-wide Instructions, as laid down in His Will are as yet not fully grasped, and the whole Movement has not sufficiently crystallized in the eyes of the world.

It is our primary task to keep the most vigilant eye on the manner and character of its growth, to combat effectively the forces of separatism and of sectarian tendencies, lest the Spirit of the Cause be obscured, its unity be threatened, its Teachings suffer corruption, lest extreme orthodoxy on one hand, and irresponsible freedom on the other, cause it to deviate from that Straight Path which alone can lead it to success.

(From a letter dated 12 March 1923 written by Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of America, Australasia, France, Germany, British Isles, Italy, Japan and Switzerland, published in "Bahá'í Administration: Selected Messages 1922-1932", p.

42

)

1461. Let us . . . remember that at the very root of the Cause lies the principle of the undoubted right of the individual to self-expression, his

freedom to declare his conscience and set forth his views....

Let us also bear in mind that the keynote of the Cause of God is not dictatorial authority, but humble fellowship, not arbitrary power, but the spirit of frank and loving consultation. Nothing short of the spirit of a true Bahá'í can hope to reconcile the principles of mercy and justice, of freedom and submission, of the sanctity of the right of the individual and of self-surrender, of vigilance, discretion and prudence on the one hand and fellowship, candour and courage on the other. The duties of those whom the friends have freely and conscientiously elected as their representatives are no less vital and binding than the obligations of those who have chosen them. Their function is not to dictate, but to consult, and consult not only among themselves, but as much as possible with the friends whom they represent. They must regard themselves in no other light but that of chosen instruments for a more efficient and dignified presentation of the Cause of God. They should never be led to suppose that they are the central ornaments of the body of the Cause, intrinsically superior to others in capacity or merit, and sole promoters of its teachings and principles. They should approach their task with extreme humility, and endeavour by their open-mindedness, their high sense of justice and duty, their candour, their modesty, their entire devotion to the welfare and interests of the friends, the Cause, and humanity, to win not only the confidence and the genuine support and respect of those whom they should serve, but also their esteem and real affection. They must at all times avoid the spirit of exclusiveness, the atmosphere of secrecy, free themselves from a domineering attitude, and banish all forms of prejudice and passion from their deliberations. They should, within the limits of wise discretion, take the friends into their confidence, acquaint them with their plans, share with them their problems and anxieties, and seek their advice and counsel. And when they are called upon to arrive at a certain decision, they should, after dispassionate, anxious, and cordial consultation, turn to God in prayer, and with earnestness and conviction and courage record their vote and abide by the voice of the majority, which we are told by our Master to be the voice of truth, never to be challenged, and always to be whole-heartedly enforced. To this voice the friends must heartily respond, and regard it as the only means that can ensure the protection and advancement of the Cause.

(From a letter dated 23 February 1924 written by Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'ís of America, published in "Bahá'í Administration: Selected Messages 1922-1932" pp.

63

-

64

)

1462. The News-Letter which you have lately initiated fulfils a very vital function and has been started admirably well. I would urge you to enlarge its scope, as much as your resources permit, that in time it may devote a special section to every phase of your activities, administrative, devotional,

humanitarian, financial, educational and otherwise. That it may attain its object it must combine the essential qualities of accuracy, reliability, thoroughness, dignity and wisdom. It should become a great factor in promoting understanding, providing information on Bahá'í activity both local and foreign, in stimulating interest, in combating evil influences, and in upholding and safeguarding the institutions of the Cause. It should be made as representative as possible, should be replete with news, up-to-date in its information, and should arouse the keenest interest among believers and admirers alike in every corner of the globe. I cherish great hopes for its immediate future, and I trust you will devote your special attention to its development, and by devising well-conceived and world-wide measures transform this News-Letter into what I hope will become the foremost Bahá'í Journal of the world.

(From a letter dated 10 April 1925 written by Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, published in "Bahá'í Administration: Selected Messages 1922-1932" p.

82

)

1463. Let it be made clear to every inquiring reader that among the most outstanding and sacred duties incumbent upon those who have been called upon to initiate, direct and co-ordinate the affairs of the Cause are those that require them to win by every means in their power the confidence and affection of those whom it is their privilege to serve. Theirs is the duty to investigate and acquaint themselves with the considered views, the prevailing sentiments, the personal convictions of those whose welfare it is their solemn obligation to promote. Theirs is the duty to purge once for all their deliberations and the general conduct of their affairs from that air of self-contained aloofness, from the suspicion of secrecy, the stifling atmosphere of dictatorial assertiveness, in short from every word and deed that might savour of partiality, self-centeredness and prejudice. Theirs is the duty, while retaining the sacred and exclusive right of final decision in their hands, to invite discussion, provide information, ventilate grievances, welcome advice from even the most humble and insignificant member of the Bahá'í Family, expose their motives, set forth their plans, justify their actions, revise if necessary their verdict, foster the spirit of individual initiative and enterprise, and fortify the sense of interdependence and co-partnership, of understanding and mutual confidence between them on one hand and all Local Assemblies and individual believers on the other.

(From a letter dated 18 October 1927 written by Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada)

1464. Regarding the proposed News-Letter ... this, the Guardian feels, is a splendid idea and can render a unique and much-needed help to your Assembly in its efforts for the establishment of the Administration, and the more effective functioning of its institutions throughout Australia and New Zealand. It has not only the great advantage of keeping the friends well informed about the

events and developments in the Cause, but in addition can help in consolidating the organic unity of the believers by bringing them within the full orbit of the National Spiritual Assembly's jurisdiction. It is hoped that this body will do its utmost to maintain the publication of this bulletin, and will make full use of this splendid medium for the further widening and consolidation of the foundations of the Local as well as National Assemblies.

(From a letter dated 23 September 1936 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Australia and New Zealand)

1465. This contact between the members of the National Assembly and the individual believers is certainly of immense value to the Cause, as it serves to promote, more than any other means, intelligent co-operation, fellowship and understanding among the friends. It is the National Spiritual Assembly's responsibility, therefore, to foster by every means in its power this growth, and thus help in further consolidating its authority and prestige in the community. There is nothing that can inflict upon it a greater harm than the attitude of aloofness, of isolation from the general body of the believers.

It is Shoghi Effendi's hope that the success that has attended this last session of the National Spiritual Assembly at San Francisco will stimulate the members to hold their meetings in as many different centres as possible. He is fervently praying for their guidance in this matter.

(From a letter dated 4 December 1936 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

1466. Before closing there is one suggestion in your letter which the Guardian wishes me to confirm, namely that it is one of the vital functions of the National Spiritual Assembly to be always in touch with local conditions in every community and to endeavour, through personal contacts and by means of regular correspondence, to guide the friends, individually and collectively, in all their activities.

(From a letter dated 30 June 1938 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

1467. Let every participator in the continent-wide campaign initiated by the American believers, and particularly those engaged in pioneer work in virgin territories, bear in mind the necessity of keeping in close and constant touch with those responsible agencies designed to direct, coordinate, and facilitate the teaching activities of the entire community. Whether it be the body of their elected national representatives, or its chief auxiliary institution, the National Teaching Committee, or its subsidiary organs, the regional teaching committees, or the local Spiritual Assemblies and their respective teaching committees, they who labor for the spread of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh should, through constant interchange of ideas, through letters, circulars, reports, bulletins and other means of communication with these established instruments designed for the propagation of the Faith, insure the smooth and speedy functioning of the teaching machinery of their Administrative Order. Confusion,

delay, duplication of efforts, dissipation of energy will, thereby, be completely avoided, and the mighty flood of the grace of Bahá'u'lláh, flowing abundantly and without the least obstruction through these essential channels will so inundate the hearts and souls of men as to enable them to bring forth the harvest repeatedly predicted by 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

(Shoghi Effendi, "The Advent of Divine Justice", pp.

52

-

53

)

1468. The Guardian is, doubtless, well aware of the existing imperfections in the administrative machinery of the Cause, but these, he strongly feels, should be attributed not to the administrative system itself, but to the administrators of the Faith, who by reason of their human limitations and imperfections can never hope to entirely fulfil those ideal conditions set forth in the Teachings. Many of the existing defects in the present-day activities of the believers, however, will as the Community develops and gains in experience be gradually removed, and healthier and more progressive condition prevail. And it is towards the realization of this high aim that the friends should earnestly and unitedly strive.

The Guardian feels certain that no matter how much your heart may be afflicted at the sight of the difficulties now confronting the American Community, and however revolting may appear to you the attitude and the shortcomings of certain of its members, you will far from being discouraged be stimulated to exert every effort in your power to remedy such unhealthy conditions, confident that in your earnest and sincere attempt to do so, you will be assisted and guided by the unfailing confirmations of Bahá'u'lláh.

(From a letter dated 14 May 1939 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

1469. 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.

The Guardian would advise you to abide by the decisions of the National Spiritual Assembly in all matters. If they, knowing the requirements of the Faith all over India, do not feel it the time or advisable to publish your writings, you should accept their decision. Also you should not seek to publish any books or pamphlets without their sanction. Concentrate on teaching the Holy Faith, and put your trust in Bahá'u'lláh. The Guardian will pray for you and all the dear friends there.

(From a letter dated 26 October 1943 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

1470. 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 whole-heartedly accept the advice or decision of the Assembly, according to the principles already laid down for such matters in Bahá'í administration.

He always has the right to step in and countermand the decisions of a National Assembly; if he did not possess this right he would be absolutely impotent to protect the Faith, just as the National Spiritual Assembly, if it were divested of the right to countermand the decisions of a Local Assembly, would be incapable of watching over and guiding the national welfare of the Bahá'í Community.

It is the duty of the National Spiritual Assembly to exercise the greatest wisdom, forbearance and tact in handling the affairs of the Cause. Many of the differences which arise between the believers are due to their immaturity, their extreme zeal and sincerity.

(From a letter dated 13 May 1945 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Australia and New Zealand, published in "Letters from the Guardian to Australia and New Zealand, 1923-1957", pp.

55

-

57

)

1471. The N.S.A.s the world over, owing to the spiritual immaturity of the believers, must at the present time exert the greatest patience in dealing with the friends; otherwise, as seems to be rapidly becoming the case in Australia, the friends will take sides, bitterness will increase and what started out as a small thing (however unjustified and regrettable a departure from the Bahá'í spirit) will become a menace to the progress of the Faith and definitely retard its progress.

(From a letter dated 8 August 1945 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Australia and New Zealand, published in "Letters from the Guardian to Australia and New Zealand, 1923-1957", p.

58

)

1472. Over and over, in going through the correspondence he received from your Assembly, he was struck by the fact that the friends acted so unadministratively. Instead of taking up their accusations and problems and unhappy feelings with their Local Assembly, or the National Assembly, they referred to individuals or individual members of the Assembly, or they refused to meet with the Assembly. The first thing a believer should do is to turn to an Assembly--that is why we have Assemblies! He feels this trouble would never have arisen if the Bahá'ís utilized their Assemblies as they should....

(From a letter dated 30 June 1949 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Germany and Austria)

1473. The question of your budget, which you have raised in your letter, is one of great importance. In spite of the numbers which you represent and the enthusiasm of the Bahá'ís, your Assembly must face the fact that it represents a very poor community, financially. Any over-ambitious budget, which would place an oppressive financial burden on the friends, would be highly unwise, because, unless it is met, it will give them a feeling at the end of the year of intense frustration.

He thinks that what you have outlined is too much. Your Assembly will have to, particularly during this first year of its existence, be less ambitious as regards projects involving money, and devote itself particularly to encouraging the friends, reinforcing the foundations of the Local Assemblies, assisting the groups to attain Assembly status, and deepening in every way it can the education of the African friends in the Faith. The other National Spiritual Assemblies, as you know, are having their own problems financially; and, although there is no objection to appealing to them to give you some help, the Guardian doubts very much whether they will be in a position to add very substantially to your funds at this time.

(From a letter dated 6 July 1956 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Central and East Africa)

1474. He appreciates your spirit of devotion to the Faith, but he feels that you, your husband and ... should comply with the instructions of the National

Spiritual Assembly. There can be no protection for the Faith unless the friends are willing to submit to their administrative bodies, especially when these are acting in good faith; and the individual believers are not in a position to judge their National Body. If any wrong has been done, we must leave it in the hands of God, knowing, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá said, that He will right it, and in the mean time not disrupt the Cause of God by constantly harping on these matters.

(From a letter dated 3 February 1957 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

1475. He feels that your Assembly must keep before its eyes the balance specified by Bahá'u'lláh, Himself, in other words, justice, reward and retribution. Although the Cause is still young and tender, and many of the believers inexperienced, and therefore loving forbearance is often called for in the place of harsh measures, this does not mean that a National Spiritual Assembly can under any circumstances tolerate disgraceful conduct, flagrantly contrary to our Teachings, on the part of any of its members, whoever they may be and from wherever they may come. You should vigilantly watch over and protect the interests of the Bahá'í Community, and the moment you see that any of the Persian residents in Germany, or, for that matter, German Bahá'ís themselves, are acting in a way to bring disgrace upon the name of the Faith, warn them, and, if necessary, deprive them immediately of their voting rights if they refuse to change their ways. Only in this way can the purity of the Faith be preserved. Compromise and weak measures will obscure the vision of its followers, sap its strength, lower it in the eyes of the public and prevent it from making any progress.

(From a letter dated 14 August 1957 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Germany and Austria)

IV. Relation to the Outside World:

1476. ...as the Movement grows in strength and power the National Spiritual Assemblies should be encouraged, if circumstances permit and the means at their disposal justify, to resort to the twofold method of directly and indirectly winning the enlightened public to the unqualified acceptance of the Bahá'í Faith. The one method would assume an open, decisive and challenging tone. The other, without implying in any manner the slightest departure from strict loyalty to the Cause of God, would be progressive and cautious. Experience will reveal the fact that each of the methods in its own special way might suit a particular temperament and class of people, and that each, in the present state of a constantly fluctuating society, should be judiciously attempted and utilized.

It is I feel for the national representatives of the believers in every land to utilize and combine both methods, the outspoken as well as the gradual, in such a manner as to secure the greatest benefit and the fullest advantage for this steadily-growing Cause....

...

As the Movement extends the bounds of its influence and its opportunities for fuller recognition multiply, the twofold character of the obligations imposed on its national elected representatives should, I feel, be increasingly emphasized. Whilst chiefly engaged in the pursuit of their major task, consisting chiefly in the formation and the consolidation of Bahá'í administrative institutions, they should endeavour to participate, within recognized limits, in the work of institutions which, though unaware of the claim of the Bahá'í Cause, are prompted by a sincere desire to promote the spirit that animates the Faith. In the pursuit of their major task their function is to preserve the identity of the Cause and the purity of the mission of Bahá'u'lláh. In their minor undertaking their purpose should be to imbue with the spirit of power and strength such movements as in their restricted scope are endeavouring to achieve what is near and dear to the heart of every true Bahá'í. It would even appear at times to be advisable and helpful as a supplement to their work for the Bahá'ís to initiate any undertaking not specifically designated as Bahá'í, provided that they have ascertained that such an undertaking would constitute the best way of approach to those whose minds and hearts are as yet unprepared for a full acceptance of the claim of Bahá'u'lláh. These twofold obligations devolving upon organized Bahá'í communities, far from neutralizing the effects of one another or of appearing antagonistic in their aims, should be regarded as complementary and fulfilling, each in its way, a vital and necessary function.

It is for the national representatives of the Bahá'í Cause to observe the conditions under which they labour, to estimate the forces that are at work in their own surroundings, to weigh carefully and prayerfully the merits of either procedure, and to form a correct judgement as to the degree of emphasis that should be placed upon these twofold methods. Then and only then will they be enabled to protect and stimulate on one hand the independent growth of the Bahá'í Faith, and on the other vindicate the claim of its universal Principles to the doubtful and unbelieving.

(From a letter dated 20 February 1927 written by Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, published in "Bahá'í Administration: Selected Messages 1922-1932" pp.

124

-

127

)

1477. The Guardian feels that it is a pity that, through the over-enthusiasm of the official concerned, a school building was placed at the disposal of the Bahá'ís before any official decision had been made as to whether it was possible for them to send a teacher there. We must be very careful in our dealings with the public, particularly officials, lest we create situations which cause us embarrassment, and may belittle our prestige in non-Bahá'í eyes.

The Guardian attaches the greatest importance to your work; and is delighted to

see that you are carrying on your various projects with so much enthusiasm and devotion. It would be ideal if an offer, such as that made, could be accepted; but as the Cause has so many burdens to bear at this time, we are forced to do as 'Abdu'l-Bahá said--give up the important for the most important.

(From a letter dated 29 December 1951 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the Comite Nacional de Ensenanza Bahá'í para los indigenas)

V. Function of Officer:

1478. All donations and contributions should be offered to the Treasurer of the Assembly, for the express purpose of promoting the interests of the Cause, throughout that locality or country. It is the sacred obligation of every conscientious and faithful servant of Bahá'u'lláh, who desires to see His Cause advance, to contribute freely and generously for the increase of that Fund. The members of the Spiritual Assembly will at their own discretion expend it to promote the Teaching Campaign, to help the needy, to establish educational Bahá'í institutions, to extend in every way possible their sphere of service....

(From a letter dated 12 March 1923 written by Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of America, Australasia, France, Germany, British Isles, Italy, Japan and Switzerland, published in "Bahá'í Administration: Selected Messages 1922-1932" pp.

41

-

42

)

1479. By now the election of the new National Spiritual Assembly and of its office-bearers will probably be completed. The office of Secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly is most important and the smooth and efficient working of the Bahá'í organization in India and Burma will depend to a large extent on him....

It is obvious that to carry out these manifold duties efficiently, thoroughly and tactfully is no easy task and Shoghi Effendi greatly hopes that someone may be found who will be able to devote the necessary ability, time and energy to carry them out satisfactorily.

(From a letter dated 12 May 1925 written by Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of India and Burma)

1480. As regards your question whether the president of the National Spiritual Assembly is entitled to give any ruling during the period of his tenure, the Guardian wishes me to state that no such ruling can be valid unless approved by the other members of the National Assembly. The president has no special legislative capacity, except as a member of the Assembly.

(From a letter dated 28 February 1937 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of India and Burma)

1481. In connection with resolution No. 15 recorded in the minutes of your National Spiritual Assembly: the Guardian wishes you to make clear to all the believers that membership in a Bahá'í Assembly or Committee is a sacred obligation which should be gladly and confidently accepted by every loyal and conscientious member of the Community, no matter how humble and inexperienced. Once elected to serve in a given Assembly a believer's duty is to do his utmost to attend all Assembly meetings, and co-operate with his fellow-members, unless, however, he is prevented from doing so by some major reason such as illness, and even then he should notify the Assembly to this effect. The National Spiritual Assembly's duty is to urge, and also facilitate attendance at Assembly meetings. If a member has no valid reason to justify his repeated absence from Assembly meetings, he should be advised, and even warned, and if such warning is deliberately ignored by him, the Assembly will then have the right to suspend his rights as a voting member of the Community. Such administrative sanction would seem to be absolutely imperative and necessary, and while not tantamount to a complete expulsion of such [a] member from the Cause, deprives him of any real participation in its administrative functions and affairs, and is thus a most effective corrective measure which the Assembly can use against all such half-hearted and irresponsible individuals in the Community.

(From a letter dated 2 July 1939 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of India and Burma)

1482. As regards the question of what procedure the Bahá'í Assemblies should adopt when dissatisfied with the services of any of their officers: Should such dissatisfaction involve the loyalty of an Assembly officer to the Faith, he should, following a majority vote, be dismissed. But in case the dissatisfaction is due to the incompetence of a member, or simply to a neglect on his part to discharge his duties, this does not constitute sufficient justification to force his resignation or dismissal from the Assembly. He should be kept in office until new elections are held.

(From a letter dated 22 November 1940 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles)

1483. Regarding your question concerning the secretary of the

National Spiritual Assembly: There cannot be any permanently elected secretary who would year after year hold office, as this would be contrary to the principles of the administration; however, the Guardian feels that the National Spiritual Assembly should supply the secretary with a paid helper in order to enable him to carry on his duties properly and at the same time pursue his own profession, if that is necessary for him. In other words the secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly can have a full-time secretary under him if the work requires it.

(From a letter dated 22 June 1943 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of India and Burma)

1484. Generally speaking the secretary of an Assembly must be careful to convey exactly what the majority decision or advice of the body was. There can surely be no objection to his putting it in proper terms and clarifying the matter according to the decision or instruction of the Assembly. But he should of course not introduce his personal views unless endorsed by the Assembly.

(From a letter dated 19 October 1947 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

1485. He was sorry that he felt it necessary to insist that the secretary of your Assembly must be located in Buenos Aires, so that the Secretariat can be located in the Headquarters of this region; this is a general principle which he has insisted the friends adhere to everywhere. A situation similar to yours arose in Scandinavia, where the secretary was in Oslo instead of Stockholm, and a change was necessary there also. As the Ten Year Crusade unfolds it is increasingly important for the work to go forward in a uniform manner and according to general principles applicable to all.

(From a letter dated 29 July 1957 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Paraguay and Bolivia)

VI. Assembly Meetings:

1486. I always eagerly await detailed and frequent reports from the National Assembly and desire strongly its members to meet as often as possible and actively, efficiently and constantly direct, co-ordinate and reinforce the activities of the individuals and Local Assemblies throughout India and Burma. I thirst for more specific information and urge its secretary to ensure that every communication from the Holy Land or from any other Bahá'í centre is promptly and widely distributed. I assure you of my loving prayers.

(From a letter dated 5 March 1925 written by Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of India and Burma)

1487. Another factor which, in the Guardian's opinion, is essential to the development of your National Spiritual Assembly is the holding of frequent meetings. Although the members are stationed at great distances from one another yet they can communicate through correspondence. It is not necessary that all the members should be present in all the sessions. Those who, for some reason or another, are unable to attend in person the meetings of the National Spiritual Assembly can express their views in a written form and send them to the Assembly. The main point is that your national activities should not be let to suffer in any way, and its work be retarded and postponed because of such necessarily unimportant and secondary considerations.

(From a letter dated 2 January 1934 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of India and Burma)

1488. The Guardian welcomes the step taken by your Assembly to increasingly devote its meetings to the consideration of major policies and plans, and to dwell less on matters of detail and of mere secondary administrative character.

He would, however, urge that all decisions, unless of a trivial and insignificant nature dealing purely with routine work, should be reached after careful and conscientious deliberation by all the nine members. Any tendencies towards decentralization, or the delegation of authority to any person or body to make decisions on matters which directly and solely concern the National Spiritual Assembly itself, would be harmful and should be checked at the very outset. It is for this very reason, namely to enable the National Spiritual Assembly to properly and fully discharge its functions of consultation and deliberation on issues that concern the national community under its jurisdiction, that its membership has been limited to nine, so that it may not be too unwieldy for making decisions that would often require quick action and mature deliberation by all the members. In order to safeguard the distinctive character of such a central and authoritative institution more frequent gatherings would seem imperative, particularly as the problems which it will be called upon to deal with are destined to increase in number and importance with the steady expansion of the Faith in North America.

(From a letter dated 28 January 1939 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada)

1489. Likewise, he feels that the National Spiritual Assembly should meet more often, even if all members cannot always be present. Decisions by correspondence lack the vitality of those that arise out of active consultation, and now the Faith is progressing so well there, and has a sound administrative foundation, more vigorous and systematic action is required.

(From a letter dated 16 July 1946 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Australia and New Zealand)

VII. National Committees:

1490. Large issues in such spiritual activities that affect the Cause in general in that land,... far from being under the exclusive jurisdiction of any Local Assembly or group of friends, must each be minutely and fully directed by a special board, elected by the National Body, constituted as a committee thereof, responsible to it and upon which the National Body shall exercise constant and general supervision.

(From a letter dated 5 March 1922 written by Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada, published in "Bahá'í Administration: Selected Messages 1922-1932, p.

24

)

1491. I very highly approve of the arrangements you have made for centralizing the work in your hands and of distributing it to the various committees, who, each in its own sphere, have so efficiently and thoroughly undertaken the management of their own affairs.

(From a letter dated 23 December 1922 written by Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, published in "Bahá'í

Administration: Selected Messages 1922-1932", p.

28

)

1492. Vital issues, affecting the interests of the Cause in that country, such as the matter of translation and publication, the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, the Teaching Work, and other similar matters that stand distinct from strictly local affairs

must be under the full jurisdiction of the National Assembly.

It will have to refer each of these questions, even as the local Assemblies, to a special Committee, to be elected by the members of the National Spiritual Assembly from among all the friends in that country, which will bear to it the same relation as the local committees bear to their respective local Assemblies.

(From a letter dated 12 March 1923 written by Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of America, Australasia, France, Germany, British Isles, Italy, Japan and Switzerland, published in "Bahá'í Administration: Selected Messages 1922-1932", p.

40

)

1493. Touching the recent decision of the National Spiritual Assembly to place as much as possible of the current details of the work in the hands of its national Committees, I feel I should point out that this raises a fundamental issue of paramount importance, as it involves a unique principle in the administration of the Cause, governing the relations that should be maintained between the central administrative Body and its assisting organs of executive and legislative action. As it has been observed already, the role of these committees set up by the National Spiritual Assembly, the renewal, the membership and functions of which should be reconsidered separately each year by the incoming National Assembly, is chiefly to make thorough and expert study of the issue entrusted to their charge, advise by their reports, and assist in the execution of the decisions which in vital matters are to be exclusively and directly rendered by the National Assembly. The utmost vigilance, the most strenuous exertion is required by them if they wish to fulfil, as befits their high and responsible calling, the functions which it is theirs to discharge. They should, within the limits imposed upon them by present-day circumstances, endeavour to maintain the balance in such a manner that the evils of over-centralization which clog, confuse and in the long run depreciate the value of Bahá'í services rendered shall on one hand be entirely avoided, and on the other the perils of utter decentralization with the consequent lapse of governing authority from the hands of the national representatives of the believers definitely averted.

The absorption of the petty details of Bahá'í administration by the personnel of the National Spiritual Assembly is manifestly injurious to efficiency and an expert discharge of Bahá'í duties, whilst the granting of undue discretion to

bodies that should be regarded in no other light than that of expert advisers and executive assistants would jeopardize the very vital and pervading powers that are the sacred prerogatives of bodies that in time will evolve into Bahá'í National Houses of Justice. I am fully aware of the strain and sacrifice which a loyal adherence to such an essential principle of Bahá'í administration--a principle that will at once ennoble and distinguish the Bahá'í method of administration from the prevailing systems of the world--demands from the national representatives of the believers at this early stage of our evolution. Yet I feel I cannot refrain from stressing the broad lines along which the affairs of the Cause should be increasingly conducted, the knowledge of which is so essential at this formative period of Bahá'í administrative institutions.

(From a letter dated 18 October 1927 written by Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, published in "Bahá'í Administration: Selected Messages 1922-1932", pp.

141

-

142

)

1494. Aided by national committees responsible to and chosen by them, without discrimination, from among the entire body of the believers within their jurisdiction, and to each of which a particular sphere of Bahá'í service is allocated, these Bahá'í National Assemblies have, as the scope of their activities steadily enlarged, proved themselves, through the spirit of discipline which they have inculcated and through their uncompromising adherence to principles which have enabled them to rise above all prejudices of race, nation, class and color, capable of administering, in a remarkable fashion, the multiplying activities of a newly-consolidated Faith.

Nor have the national committees themselves been less energetic and devoted in the discharge of their respective functions. In the defense of the Faith's vital interests, in the exposition of its doctrine; in the dissemination of its literature; in the consolidation of its finances; in the organization of its teaching force; in the furtherance of the solidarity of its component parts; in the purchase of its historic sites; in the preservation of its sacred records, treasures and relics; in its contacts with the various institutions of the society of which it forms a part; in the education of its youth; in the training of its children; in the improvement of the status of its women adherents in the East; the members of these diversified agencies, operating under the aegis of the elected national representatives of the Bahá'í community, have amply demonstrated their capacity to promote effectively its vital and manifold interests....

("God Passes By", p.

333

)

1495. He feels that the Local Assemblies should be encouraged to realize that National Committees are constituted to serve their needs, not to dictate arbitrarily to them, and to unify the work of the Cause which is now spreading so rapidly in the British Isles. The Committees in question should be very tactful in dealing with a young Assembly which is beginning to "feel its oats", as this spirit of independence, if properly handled, can lead it to be strong and independent rather than weak and always relying on other bodies to carry it forward! Assemblies, however, should certainly co-operate with National Committees and not refuse their assistance.

(From a letter dated 5 November 1948 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles)

VIII. Flexibility in Secondary Matters:

1496. In regard to your criticism of the Article VIII of the By-Laws of the N.S.A., the Guardian wishes you to know that since this is a secondary matter arising out of the general principles he has already laid down in one of his latest communications addressed to you and to the N.S.A. concerning the power of the delegates and the relation of these to the National Assembly, he does not think it is necessary for him to enter into these details which by their very nature fall within the jurisdiction of the N.S.A. It is to that body which you should submit any criticism, whether in regard to the provisions of the Constitution, or in connection with any other phase of the administrative work of the Cause. It is not for the Guardian to enter into matters of detail. His overwhelming and pressing duties, and the very nature of his position as the supreme Guardian of the Faith, make it impossible for him to interfere in affairs of a local character, and of a relatively secondary importance. It is for you, as one of the distinguished members of the highest administrative body of the Cause in the States, to remind your fellow-members of what is their duty to consider and to act upon. The Guardian lays down the general principle, and it is for the National Assembly to direct all local assemblies and groups as to the best way they can apply it to their local conditions.

(From a letter dated 11 November 1933 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

1497. In connection with his cablegram sent in July urging your Assembly to cease issuing any more statements on various administrative matters, the Guardian wishes me again to reiterate and confirm the directions and explanations already conveyed in one of his recent communications to the National Spiritual Assembly to the effect that the publication of such statements no longer fills an urgent need, and that their multiplication would only result in making the administration of the Cause too rigid. The various rulings and regulations recorded in the "Bahá'í Administration" and the supplementary statements already issued by the National Assembly, he feels, are for the present sufficiently detailed to guide the friends in their present-day activities. He himself has in recent years deliberately refrained

from adding any more administrative regulations, or from even elucidating and elaborating those already enforced. All the more reason that your Assembly should, likewise, desist from multiplying the administrative regulations which, as their number increases, must necessarily fetter and confuse those who are called upon to carry them out. It is not necessary for your Assembly to anticipate situations which have not arisen, and to lay down general rules and regulations to meet them. It would be wiser to consider every case individually as it arises, and then to resolve the problem connected with it in the most suitable and practical manner. The American believers, as well as their national representatives, must henceforth direct their attention to the greater and vital issues which an already established Administration is called upon to face and handle, rather than allow their energies to be expended in the consideration of purely secondary administrative matters. The Guardian wishes your Assembly to refer again to the communication already referred to bearing on this subject.

(From a letter dated 25 November 1937 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada)

1498. In reading your annual Convention report the Guardian has noted the request made that the National Spiritual Assembly should lay down certain rules of procedure. He has already informed the American N.S.A. that they should henceforth refrain from laying down any further rules and regulations, as these would tend to rigidity the affairs of the Cause and ultimately obscure its spirit and retard its growth. He feels that your Assembly should exercise the same care, and avoid introducing any rules of procedure not already in existence.

Every case coming before the Assembly should be judged on its own merits, and be decided individually without any recourse to new rulings.

(From a letter dated 29 June 1941 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of India and Burma)

1499. Now that your Assembly is formed, and is embarking on its independent existence as a National Body, he wishes to emphasize a point which he is constantly stressing to other National Bodies: you must avoid issuing rules and regulations. The fundamentals laid down in the Bahá'í Administration must, of course, be adhered to, but there is a tendency for Assemblies to constantly issue detailed procedures and rules to the friends, and he considers this hampers the work of the Cause, and is entirely premature. As far as is possible cases which come up should be dealt with and settled as they arise, and not a blanket ruling be laid down to cover all possible similar cases. This preserves the elasticity of the Administrative Order and prevents red tape from developing and hampering the work of the Cause. You must likewise bear in mind that you are now a wholly independent National Body, and must consider the administration of the affairs of the Faith within your jurisdiction as your separate problem. There is no more need for you to follow every single rule laid down by the American N.S.A., than there is for the British or the

Australian and New Zealand N.S.A.s to do this. Uniformity in fundamentals is essential, but not in every detail. On the contrary, diversity, the solving of the local situation in the right way, is important.

(From a letter dated 4 November 1948 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada)

1500. He was particularly pleased to see that members of your Assembly have been out travelling and contacting the friends in an effort to deepen their understanding of the workings of the administration and also their knowledge of the Faith in general. He feels that particularly at present in Latin America this intimate, loving and friendly approach will do more to further the work than anything else. Indeed, he would go so far as to advise your Assembly to avoid deluging the friends with circulars and unnecessary bulletins. You must always bear in mind the genuine difference between the peoples of the south and the peoples of the north; to use the same techniques as those adopted in the United States would be disastrous because the mentality and background of life are quite different. Much as the friends need administration, it must be brought to them in a palatable form, otherwise they will not be able to assimilate it and instead of consolidating the work you will find some of the believers become estranged from it.

(From a letter dated 30 June 1952 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Central America)

1501. As regards the "Administrative Manual": he urges you to not add to the rules and regulations, but try to cut down on these and decide cases as they arise; there is a natural tendency to codify the teachings and produce handbooks of procedure, there are not enough Bahá'ís in the whole world to justify this, and he continuously urges the various National Spiritual Assemblies to beware of this tendency. He has no time, at all, to go over such things himself; indeed, your Assembly, and all the others, will have to assume increasing responsibility for your work in order to relieve him. He is worn out with all his work and added material to read.

(From a letter dated 19 June 1953 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Central America)

1502. He hopes your Assembly will devote special, constant attention to encouraging the friends in their teaching work, and facilitate their tasks. As the new National Assemblies are being formed, he feels it incumbent upon him to issue a word of warning to avoid rules and regulations and tying the believers' work up in red tape. Over-administration can be even worse for the Faith at this time than under-administration. The believers are, for the most part, young in the Cause, and if they make mistakes it is not half as important as if their spirit is crushed by being told all the time --do this and don't do that! The new National Body should be like a loving parent, watching over and helping its children, and not like a stern judge, waiting for an opportunity to display his judicial powers. The reason he points this out to you is that constantly, for the past twenty years and more, he has been pointing this out to the old

and tried National Assemblies, and he does not want the younger bodies to make the same mistakes. Individual cases should be dealt with as they arise, according to the Teachings, of which the believers have quite sufficient available to handle all of their problems at this time, and no more additional rules and regulations need be introduced.

(From a letter dated 30 June 1957 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Alaska)

1503. The whole purpose of the Bahá'í administrative bodies at this time is to teach, to increase the membership, to increase the Assemblies and to increase the groups, not to create rules and regulations and impede the work through unnecessary red tape, but to ensure that a great breath of spiritual vitality and inspiration goes out to the friends from their new National Body. Your Assembly should constantly bear this in mind, encourage and stimulate the friends in the teaching field, smooth out difficulties and misunderstandings and hurt feelings through love, understanding and wisdom, refrain from harsh measures, and, above all, from over-organization of the affairs of the Communities. There is a definite tendency of people everywhere to try and over-administer, so to speak, and the beloved Guardian points this out to your Assembly during the very first year of its existence in order to put it on its guard against this danger, which will stifle the spiritual life of the Community. You may be sure that many, many times he has issued this same warning to such old and tried National Bodies as that of America, Germany, England, etc.

(From a letter dated 5 July 1957 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Benelux countries)

1504. Your Assembly must be very careful not to overload the Bahá'ís with rules and regulations, circulars and directions. The purpose of the administration at this time is to blow on the fire newly kindled in the hearts of these people who have accepted the Faith, to create in them the desire and capacity to teach, to facilitate the pioneer and teaching work, and help deepen the knowledge and understanding of the friends. The beloved Guardian issues this word of warning, as long experience has shown that it is a tendency on the part of all N.S.A.s to over-administer. In their enthusiasm they forget that they only have a handful of inexperienced souls to guide, and attempt to deal with their work as if they had a large population to regulate! This then stifles the spirit of the friends and the teaching work suffers.

(From a letter dated 15 July 1957 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of North East Asia)

IX. Appeals

1505. To facilitate matters and avoid misunderstandings he prefers to refer you and the individual friends to them. He is sure that you will obtain full satisfaction by putting the question to them. The purpose of the Guardian in this is not to avoid the issue but only to facilitate matters and eliminate

misunderstandings. In all such matters the friends should first approach the Local, then the National Assembly and only in case they can obtain no satisfaction should they approach the Guardian on these matters. This way many difficulties will be avoided.

(From a letter dated 14 November 1932 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, published in "Bahá'í News" 71 (February 1933), p. 2)

1506. Anything whatsoever affecting the interests of the Cause and in which the National Assembly as a body is involved should, if regarded as unsatisfactory by Local Assemblies or individual believers, be immediately referred to the National Assembly itself. Neither the general body of the believers, nor any Local Assembly, nor even the delegates to the Annual Convention should be regarded as having any authority to entertain appeals against the decision of the National Assembly. Should the matter be referred to the Guardian it will be his duty to consider it with the utmost care and to decide whether the issues involved justify him to consider it in person, or to leave it entirely to the discretion of the National Assembly.

This administrative principle which the Guardian is now restating and emphasizing is so clear, so comprehensive and simple that no misunderstanding as to its application, he feels, can possibly arise. There are no exceptions whatever to this rule, and the Guardian would deprecate any attempt to elaborate or dwell any further upon this fundamental and clearly-enunciated principle. The problems with which the Faith is now grappling, whether national or international, are so pressing and momentous that no one among its loyal adherents can afford to dissipate his precious energies on details

arising from the application of administrative principles, or even on the perfecting of the machinery of the administration itself. Purely secondary matters can be postponed until the primary tasks are performed.

(From a letter dated 10 September 1934 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada)

1507. As to your second question relative to the right of a committee to appeal to the National Spiritual Assembly against the Local Assembly by which it has been elected, the Guardian wishes me to inform you that this matter, being of a rather secondary character involving as it does the application of a minor administrative regulation, is one for your National Spiritual Assembly to consider and to decide upon. It is a matter that should be left to the discretion of your Assembly.

(From a letter dated 14 January 1935 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of India and Burma)

1508. When the Local Assembly has given its decision in the matter, you then have the right to appeal, if you wish, to the National Spiritual Assembly for further consideration of your case. But before taking such an action it is your duty as a loyal and steadfast believer to whole-heartedly and unreservedly accept the National Spiritual Assembly's request to enter into joint conference

with your Local Assembly. You should have confidence that in obeying the orders of your National Assembly you will not only succeed in solving your own personal problems with the friends, but will in addition set a noble example before them.

Shoghi Effendi hopes, therefore, that you will follow the advice and guidance of the National Spiritual Assembly, confident that the final outcome of all these questions will be full justice to you and to everybody concerned.

(From a letter dated 2 October 1935 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

1509. Regarding the matter you mentioned concerning the Chicago Spiritual Assembly and one of its members: Whenever there is any infringement of Bahá'í rights, or lapse in the proper procedure, the friends should take the matter up with the Assembly concerned, and, if not satisfied, then with the National Spiritual Assembly. This is both their privilege and their duty.

(From a letter dated 10 July 1942 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

1510. Committees should first take up their problems with the National Spiritual Assembly and seek to solve them satisfactorily; if they are dissatisfied they have the right to appeal to the Guardian himself. The Guardian will then decide whether it is a matter for him to pronounce upon, or if he will refer it back to the National body.

(From a letter dated 28 March 1943 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

1511. Appeal can be made from the Local Assembly's decision to the National Assembly, and from the National Assembly's decision to the Guardian. But the principle of authority invested in our elected bodies must be upheld. This is not something which can be learned without trial and test....

(From a letter dated 30 June 1949 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Germany and Austria)

1512. He suggests you let the entire matter of your appeal drop. Unless a very serious major issue is involved (which he does not feel is the case this time) to drive these subjects home is far more likely to do the Cause harm than good. There are many mistakes made, but they are, for the most part, not serious enough to warrant creating inharmony and raising issues which lead to endless argument and discussion, wasting time and energy better spent on creative action.

(From a letter dated 8 December 1950 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

1513. The friends have every right to appeal to the Australian National Assembly and express their views that ... be allowed to teach people of all races as she has been doing; but in the mean time she should comply with the

wishes of the National Assembly, because all Bahá'ís must learn to live according to the administrative principles of our Faith. If they don't, they only undermine the very institutions they are trying to create, and which we know, carry the solution to the world's problems. It is often difficult to follow this course, but it is the one 'Abdu'l-Bahá always asked the friends to follow; and obedience, even when we believe the instruction is not wise, brings in itself blessings from on high.

(From a letter dated 29 November 1952 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

X. The Spirit and Form of Bahá'í Administration:

1514. The time is indeed ripe for the manifold activities, wherein the servants and handmaids of Bahá'u'lláh are so devoutly and earnestly engaged, to be harmonized and conducted with unity, cooperation and efficiency, that the effect of such a combined and systematized effort, through which an All-powerful Spirit is steadily pouring, may transcend every other achievement of the past, however glorious it has been...

(Shoghi Effendi, "Bahá'í Administration: Selected Messages 1922-1932", p. 24)

1515. He is constantly yearning for happy news concerning the spread of the Message and this, he is firmly convinced, depends mainly on the united and combined efforts of the friends and the Assemblies. Without unity, co-operation and selfless service the friends will surely be unable to attain their goal. How can we possibly increase in number and in strength if we do not present a united front to those forces, both from without and within, which threaten to undermine the very edifice of the Cause? Unity is, therefore, the main key to success. And the best way to ensure and consolidate the organic unity of the Faith is to strengthen the authority of the Local Assemblies and to bring them within the full orbit of the National Assembly's jurisdiction. The National Assembly is the head, and the Local Assemblies are the various organs of the body of the Cause. To ensure full co-operation between these various parts is to safeguard the best interests of the Faith by enabling it to counteract the forces which threaten to create a breach within the ranks of the faithful....

(From a letter dated 20 September 1933 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

1516. Administrative efficiency and order should always be accompanied by an equal degree of love, of devotion and of spiritual development. Both of them are essential and to attempt to dissociate one from the other is to deaden the body of the Cause. In these days, when the Faith is still in its infancy, great care must be taken lest mere administrative routine stifles the spirit which must feed the body of the Administration itself. That spirit is its propelling force and the motivating power of its very life.

But as already emphasized, both the spirit and the form are essential to the

safe and speedy development of the Administration. To maintain full balance between them is the main and unique responsibility of the administrators of the Cause.

(From a letter dated 10 December 1933 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada)

1517. He fully appreciates the spirit which has prompted you to abide whole-heartedly and without any hesitation by the instructions of the National Assembly, and he strongly feels that your attitude in the whole matter constitutes an example which the friends will gladly learn to follow. You have [sacrificed], and must indeed continue to sacrifice, some of your personal opinions and views regarding the teaching work for the sake of upholding the authority of the National Spiritual Assembly. For such a sacrifice on your part does not involve submission to any individual, but has the effect of strengthening the authority of the community as a whole as expressed through the medium of its duly recognized representatives. We should, indeed, learn to curb our individualism when we are confronted with problems and issues affecting the general welfare of the Cause. For Bahá'í community life implies a consciousness of group solidarity strong enough to enable every individual believer to give up what is essentially personal for the sake of the common weal.

(From a letter dated 31 May 1934 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to two believers)

1518. It is indeed thrilling to note the rapidity and soundness with which the flourishing Bahá'í community in that far-off land is establishing the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, is fearlessly proclaiming its truths, upholding its verities and standards, multiplying its institutions, defending its interests, disseminating its literature, and exemplifying its invincible power and spirit. I rejoice, feel proud, and am eternally grateful. I cannot but pray, with redoubled fervour, to Him Who so manifestly guides and sustains you, to increase your numbers, to remove every barrier that obstructs your path, to safeguard your unity, to bless your undertakings and to enable you to demonstrate, afresh and with still greater force, the reality of the faith that animates you in the discharge of your sacred duties. Be assured and persevere.

(In the handwriting of Shoghi Effendi, appended to a letter dated 30 July 1941 written on his behalf to the National Spiritual Assembly of Australia and New Zealand)

1519. Excommunication is a spiritual thing and up until now the Guardian has always been the one who exerted this power, and he feels for the present he must continue to be. Only actual enemies of the Cause are excommunicated. On the other hand, those who conspicuously disgrace the Faith or refuse to abide by its laws can be deprived, as a punishment, of their voting rights; this in itself is a severe action, and he therefore always urges all National Assemblies (who can take such action) to first warn and repeatedly warn the evil-doer before taking the step of depriving him of his voting rights. He

feels your Assembly must act with the greatest wisdom in such matters, and only impose this sanction if a believer is seriously injuring the Faith in the eyes of the public through his conduct or flagrantly breaking the laws of God. If such a sanction were lightly used the friends would come to attach no importance to it, or to feel the N.S.A. used it every time they got angry with some individual's disobedience to them. We must always remember that, sad and often childish as it seems, some of those who make the worst nuisances of themselves to their National Bodies are often very loyal believers, who think they are protecting the true interests of their Faith by attacking N.S.A. decisions!

The Guardian feels very strongly that everywhere, throughout the entire Bahá'í world, the believers have got to master and follow the principles of their divinely laid down Administrative Order. They will never solve their problems by departing from the correct procedure.... The Bahá'ís have got to learn to live up to the laws of Bahá'u'lláh, which are infinitely higher, more exacting and more perfect than those the world is at present familiar with. Running away, fighting with each other, fostering dissension, is not going to advance the Indian or any other Community; all it is going to do is to bring Bahá'u'lláh's plans and work to a standstill until such time as the believers unite to serve Him, or new and more dedicated souls arise to take their place.

(From a letter dated 8 May 1948 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of India, Pakistan and Burma)

1520. It is very unfortunate that some of the believers do not seem to grasp the fact that the administrative order, the Local and National Assemblies, are the pattern for the future, however inadequate they may sometimes seem. We must obey and support these bodies, for this is the Bahá'í law. Until we learn to do this we cannot make real progress. Those friends who believe that the N.S.A. is doing wrong in some matters are, unconsciously, implying the Guardian does not know what is going on, which is not true. He watches very carefully over the various National Assemblies, and never hesitates to intervene when he considers it necessary. To undermine confidence in the National Body disrupts the Faith, confuses and alienates the friends, and prevents the thing the Master desired above all else, that the Bahá'ís be as one spirit in many bodies, united and loving.

The Bahá'ís are far from perfect, as individuals or when they serve on elected bodies, but the system of Bahá'u'lláh is perfect and gradually the believers will mature and the system will work better. The watchful eye of the Guardian prevents any serious errors, and the believers should know this and co-operate with their Assemblies fully.

(From a letter dated 1 November 1950 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

1521. The friends should be helped to overcome their problems, deepen in the Faith, and increase their unity and their love for each other. In this way you

will find that your work goes ahead speedily, and that the National Body is like the beating of a healthy heart in the midst of the Community, pumping spiritual love, energy and encouragement out to all the members.

(From a letter dated 30 June 1957 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Alaska)

1522. The National Assembly is the guardian of the welfare of the Faith, a most sacred and heavy responsibility and one which is inescapable. They must be ever vigilant, ever on the look-out, ever ready to take action, and, on all matters of fundamental principle, refuse to compromise for an instant.

Only in this way can the body of the Faith be free of disease.

(From a letter dated 14 August 1957 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Germany and Austria)

METADATA

Views

28946 views since posted 2000; last edit 2026-01-25 20:12

UTC

;

previous at
archive.org

...

/compilation_national_spiritual_assembly-1991

;

URLs changed in 2010, see
archive.org

...

/bahai-library.org

Language

English

Permission

© BIC, public sharing permitted. See sources

1

,

2

, and

3

.

History

Formatted 2000 by Ehsan Bayat; Proofread 2010-08 by Romane Takkenberg.

Share

Shortlink:

bahai-library.com/314

Citation

:

[ris/314](#)

select Collection:

[Archives](#)

[Articles](#)

[Articles-unpublished](#)

[Audio](#)

[Bibliographies](#)

[BIC](#)

[Biographies](#)

[Books](#)

[Chronologies](#)

[Compilations](#)

[Compilations-NSA](#)

[Compilations-personal](#)

[Documents](#)

[East-asia](#)

[Encyclopedia](#)

[Essays](#)

[Etc](#)

[Excerpts](#)

[Fiction](#)

[Glossaries](#)

[Guardian](#)

[Histories](#)

[Introductory](#)

[Letters](#)

[Maps](#)

[Music](#)

Newspapers
NSA-documents
NSA-letters
Personal
Pilgrims
Poetry
Presentations
Resources
Reviews
Scripts
Software
Statistics
Study
Talks
Theses
Transcripts
Translations
UHJ-documents
UHJ-letters
Video
Visual
Writings
home
sitemap
series
chronology
search
:
author
title
date
tags

[adv. search](#)

[languages](#)

[inventory](#)

[bibliography](#)

[abbreviations](#)

[links](#)

[about](#)

[contact](#)

[RSS](#)

[new](#)

— National Spiritual Assembly (Used by permission of the curator)