



impaired and moral issues confused. In the crisis of our time, members of the Bahá'í Faith go on record as firmly upholding the principle of loyalty to government.

Bahá'u'lláh, the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, laid upon His followers this sacred obligation: `

In every country where any of this people

(Bahá'ís)

reside, they must behave towards the government of that country with loyalty, honesty and truthfulness.

,

1

The Bahá'í Writings state further, `

The essence of the Bahá'í spirit is that in order to establish a better social order and economic condition, there must be allegiance to the laws and principles of government

,

2

Should a Bahá'í act contrary to the laws of the government his conduct would be considered reprehensible before God, for members of this community ` should at all times manifest

...

truthfulness and sincerity

' and `

be constant in

...

faithfulness and trustworthiness.

,

3

In elucidation of this cardinal spiritual and social principle `Abdu'l-Bahá, the authorized Interpreter of the Faith, has written: `

According to the direct and sacred command of God we

(the Bahá'ís)

are forbidden to utter slander, are commanded to show forth peace and amity,

are exhorted to rectitude of conduct, straightforwardness and harmony with all

the kindreds and peoples of the world. We must obey and be the well-wishers of the governments of the land

...

,

4

The followers of Bahá'u'lláh are exhorted to be `good citizens'.

5

The Bahá'í teachings foster in the individual adherent an appreciation of authority and an intelligent and balanced patriotism. The Bahá'í is encouraged to `serve in an unselfish, unostentatious and patriotic fashion, the highest interests of the country to which he belongs, and in a way that would entail no departure from the high standards of integrity and truthfulness associated with the teachings of his Faith.'

6

Alliance to government, far from being a concept to which the Bahá'í gives lip service, is a spiritual obligation reinforced by and inseparable from those teachings of Bahá'u'lláh's on which His followers pattern their individual spiritual development. `

Let integrity and uprightness distinguish all thine acts,

,

7

Bahá'u'lláh enjoins.

Without integrity of character in its citizens and without loyalty to government, a nation will find itself torn asunder and unable to function as an organic society. Not only do the Bahá'í teachings obligate members to be loyal to their government--they also specifically forbid them from taking part in subversive political and social movements.

1

Bahá'u'lláh: Bi

sh

árát,

Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas

, p. 22-13.

2

`Abdu'l-Bahá:

The Promulgation of Universal Peace

, p. 233.

3

`Abdu'l-Bahá:

Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá

, p. 294.

4

`Abdu'l-Bahá:

The Will and Testament of `Abdu'l-Bahá

p. 8.

5

`Abdu'l-Bahá:

Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá

, p. 319.

6

Shoghi Effendi:

The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh

, p. 65.

7

Bahá'u'lláh:

Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

, p. 285.

page 596

## 2. THE BAHÁ'Í VIEW OF PACIFISM

I

N

a letter published in U.S.

Bahá'í

News, January 1938, Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith wrote through his secretary: 'With reference to the absolute pacifists or conscientious objectors to war: their attitude, judged from the Bahá'í standpoint, is quite anti-social and due to its exaltation of the individual conscience is leads inevitably to disorder and chaos in society. Extreme pacifists are thus very close to anarchists, in the sense that both of these groups lay an undue emphasis on the rights and merits of the individual. The Bahá'í conception of social life is essentially based on the subordination of the individual will to that of society. It neither suppresses the individual nor does it exalt him to the point of making him an anti-social creature, a menace to society. As in everything, it follows the "golden mean." The only way society can function is for the minority to follow the will of the majority.

'The other main objection to the conscientious objectors is that their method of establishing peace is too negative. Noncooperation is too passive a philosophy to become an effective way for social reconstruction. Their refusal to bear arms can never establish peace. There should first be a spiritual revitalization which nothing, except the Cause of God, can effectively bring to every man's heart.'

## 3. SUMMARY OF THE GUARDIAN'S INSTRUCTIONS ON THE OBLIGATIONS OF BAHÁ'ÍS IN CONNECTION WITH MILITARY SERVICE

I

MMEDIATELY

prior to World War II the Bahá'í position on military training and service and the obligation of individual Bahá'ís to apply for and maintain a non-combatant status when this is possible under the laws of their country, were clearly stated by the Guardian of the Faith. On 27 November 1938 he instructed his secretary to write to the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles: 'He has noted your Assembly's request for his advice as to

what forms of national service the friends may volunteer for in times of emergency. While the believers, he feels, should exert every effort to obtain from the authorities a permit exempting them from active military service in a combatant capacity, it is their duty at the same time, as loyal and devoted citizens, to offer their services to their country in any field of national service which is not specifically aggressive or directly military. Such forms of national work as air raid precaution service, ambulance corps, and other humanitarian work or activity of a non-combatant nature, are the most suitable types of service the friends can render, and which they should gladly volunteer for, since in addition to the fact that they do not involve any violation of the spirit or principle of the Teachings they constitute a form of social and humanitarian service which the Cause holds sacred and emphatically enjoins.'

A further query from that National Spiritual Assembly dated 9 May 1939 evoked the following reply on 4 June 1939, in amplification of the above principles:

`His instructions on this matter, conveyed in a letter addressed to your Assembly during last

page 597

November, were not intended for that particular occasion, but were meant for present conditions, and for any such emergencies as may arise in the immediate future.

`It is still his firm conviction that the believers, while expressing their readiness to unreservedly obey any directions that the authorities may issue concerning national service in time of war, should also, and while there is yet no outbreak of hostilities, appeal to the government for exemption from active military service in a combatant capacity, stressing the fact that in doing so they are not prompted by any selfish considerations, but by the sole and supreme motive of upholding the Teachings of their Faith, which make it a moral obligation for them to desist from any act that would involve them in direct warfare with their fellow humans of any other race or nation.

`The Bahá'í Teachings, indeed, condemn, emphatically and unequivocally, any form of physical violence, and warfare in the battlefield is obviously a form, and perhaps the worst form which such violence can assume.

`There are many other avenues through which the believers can assist in times of war by enlisting in services of a non-combatant nature--services that do not involve the direct shedding of blood--such as ambulance work, anti-air raid precaution service, office and administrative works, and it is for such types of national service that they should volunteer.

`It is immaterial whether such activities would still expose them to dangers, either at home or in the front, since their desire is not to protect their lives, but to desist from any acts of wilful murder.

`The friends should consider it their conscientious duty, as loyal members of the Faith, to apply for such exemption, even though there may be slight

prospect of their obtaining the consent and approval of the authorities to their petition.'

After the war, on 20 July 1946, the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States enquired of the Guardian whether the existence of the United Nations in its present form changed the attitude of the Bahá'ís toward military duties which might require the taking of human life. The Guardian's reply, written by his secretary, was:

'As there is neither an International Police Force nor any immediate prospect of one coming into being, the Bahá'ís should continue to apply, under all circumstances, for exemption from any military duty that necessitates the taking of life. There is no justification for any change of attitude on our part at the present time.'

The Guardian therefore has made it clear that it is obligatory and not an optional matter for all Bahá'ís to apply for and maintain a non-combatant status if this is possible under the law. Where such a law exists, Bahá'ís cannot voluntarily enlist in any branch of the armed forces in which they would be subject to orders to engage in the taking of human life.

The Universal House of Justice amplified this later statement:

'There is no objection to a Bahá'í enlisting voluntarily in the armed forces of a country in order to obtain a training in some trade or profession, provided that he can do so without making himself liable to undertake combatant service.

'There is likewise no objection to a Bahá'í seeking or continuing a career in the armed forces, provided that he can do so without making himself liable to undertake combatant service.'

back to

[Bahá'í World](#)

[volume 18](#)

[table of contents](#)

**METADATA**

**Views**

10204 views since posted 2013-06-14; last edit 2024-12-23 00:55

UTC

;

[previous at  
archive.org](#)

...

[/relationship\\_government\\_bw\\_18](#)

**Language**

English

Permission

&copy; BIC, public sharing permitted. See sources

1

,

2

, and

3

.

History

Typed 2000 by Dianne Bradford; Formatted 2013-06-12 by Jonah Winters.

Share

Shortlink:

[bahai-library.com/4189](http://bahai-library.com/4189)

Citation

:

[ris/4189](http://bahai-library.com/4189)

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](#)

— Relationship to Government (Used by permission of the curator)