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**ABSTRACT**

**The Customs of Clerical Students**

*آداب الطلاب*

This book is the first volume of three in Shakir Barkhurdar Farid’s *Seminary Topics* series. According to Barkhurdar, this is the first work specifically intended for the training of Shia seminary students, and as such, he considers it distinct from books such as Shahid Sani’s *Desire of the Seeker.* Regardless of the accuracy of his claim, *The Customs of Clerical Students* is an accessible example of a cleric writing for other clerics. With its clerical commentary, images, sayings, and life stories, it serves as a resource for “clerical ethics” and power relations among clerics. The book addresses how the clergy deal with “the people” in order to maximise the respect they are afforded, and provides examples of agreements among clerics about this. For example, clerics agree that occasionally it is preferable to arrive late to a gathering rather than on time, because arriving late means that a cleric will not have to stand in greeting, as others do.

Essentially, this book is a compendium of Ayatollah Ahmad Mojtahedi Tehrani’s ideas on ethics during the half century for which he was director of the seminary in Tehran. His ideas are collected from his speeches in the pulpit and classroom, and for this reason, the style of writing is closer to dialogue than to the exact language of theology. In addition to the many jokes throughout the text, he uses a number of slang terms and phrases specific to the clergy. Examples include *Seem Vasli* (someone who falsely claims spiritual authority), *zolfi* (someone who does not follow the rules a clerical student should follow), *Akhoond Khor* (frugal), and *Akhoond gar* (someone for whom the title of “cleric” is simply a source of money). The expected level of education of the book’s main audience is that of an ordinary cleric who is able to answer questions about jurisprudence. In accordance with its readership, the book is filled with extraordinary and sometimes inconceivable stories from the life of Shia clerics.

The book’s priority is to attract clerical students to the Tehran seminary, and the author pursues this goal throughout the work. The images consist mainly of views of the seminary and photographs of Ayatollah Mojtahedi.

Iraj Esmailpour Ghouchani

Translated by Niki Akhavan