

1 After her visit to the United States in 1960, Hand of the Cause of God
2 ‘Amatu’l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánúm addressed her observations to the
3 National Spiritual Assemblies of Canada and the United States. A slightly
4 abridged version of her letter (printed in Baha’i News U.S. Supplement No.
5 40, June 1961) is reprinted here in response to the many recent requests
6 for its republication and because of the timeliness of her statements.

7 **Challenging Observations on Teaching in North America National**
8 **Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States and National**
9 **Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Canada**

10 Dearly loved Friends:

11 This is certainly a very late date at which to write the letters to you I
12 assured you I would be sending you after my wonderful trip last Spring,
13 through the U.S.A. and Canada! I had planned to write you properly,
14 separately, and touching on points connected with the two different
15 countries but fatigue and the work at the World Center engulfed me before I
16 got around to it. I think this is all to the good for the ideas I wanted to
17 express then are very much clearer now, after my trip through East Africa,
18 and as they are applicable to both Canada and the U.S.A., I am sure you
19 will not mind my sending you a joint letter.

20
21 Whatever my trips amongst the friends have produced of good, they could
22 not possibly have had as great an effect on anyone as on me. I have
23 learned so much, had such new thoughts come to me, that I feel as if I was
24 living in a different mental world from before. My perspective has changed
25 very radically and I feel the best way I can be of help to your two
26 Assemblies— shouldering such great responsibility as the primary
27 promoters of the Divine Plan—is to just share my new thoughts with you. I
28 have not got time for composition so will just think out loud.

29 It seems to me if we Bahá’ís, and especially the teachers and assembly
30 members, do not ponder more deeply what lies ahead in the next stages of
31 our development we are not going to be properly oriented towards the work
32 we are carrying on.

33
34 Bahá’u’lláh warned us against the evils of civilization when carried to
35 extremes, the Master and particularly the Guardian, elaborated on this

36 theme until at the end of his life Shoghi Effendi fairly thundered against our
37 civilization—particularly the American variety of it. The future culture and
38 civilization is therefore scarcely likely to be patterned on it. It occurs to me
39 (speaking for myself) that we have confused the things so highly praised in
40 our Teachings, such as freedom of speech, the democratic method of
41 election, the ideal of justice for all and integrity in administrative affairs, with
42 our materialistic civilization which the Guardian stigmatized as corrosive
43 and corrupt in Western civilization, and against the dangers of which he
44 constantly warned us. It is these inherent weaknesses that may lead to the
45 greatest catastrophe in history. These thoughts have formed the
46 background in my mind, against which other thoughts are beginning to
47 stand out more clearly.

48
49 I remember when we had the first Japanese pilgrim here, Shoghi Effendi
50 said to him that the majority of the human race was not white and that the
51 majority of Bahá'ís would not be white in the future. As up until very
52 recently the Bahá'ís of the world were almost exclusively white, it is only
53 natural that their virtues and their faults should have colored the Faith and
54 its community life.

55 It is illogical to suppose that what we have now is either mature or right; it is
56 a phase in the development of the Cause; when peoples of different races
57 are incorporated in the world-wide community (and in local communities),
58 who can doubt that it will possess far greater power and perfection and be
59 something quite different from what we have now? And yet let us ask
60 ourselves frankly if we do not believe that what we North American Bahá'ís
61 have, is the real thing, practically a finished product, and it is up to the rest
62 of the world to accept it?

63 I think this is our mentality; it was mine up until a few years ago. It seems to
64 me we are confusing the fact that North America is the cradle of the
65 Administrative Order with the old order that already exists there. Perhaps
66 we forget sometimes that just as Baha'u'llah appeared in Persia because it
67 was the worst country in the world, the Administrative Order was given to
68 America to develop because she was politically the most corrupt.

69 I remember when the Guardian was writing *The Advent of Divine Justice*
70 and elaborated on this theme how astonished I was. I thought we had the

71 best democratic system in the world and were therefore best qualified to
72 elaborate it!

73
74 We all know what great emphasis the beloved Guardian put on mass
75 conversion during the last five years of the Crusade and how urgently he
76 appealed to the Bahá'ís to press forward in teaching the people of Africa
77 and the Pacific region. He likewise repeatedly stressed teaching the
78 American Negro and the Indian people. It has been borne in on me, at least
79 to a limited degree, during my trips in America and Africa, the vast
80 significance of two statements in our Writings.

81 Bahá'u'lláh said the black people are like the pupil of the eye and sight is in
82 the pupil: The Master said when we converted the American Indians to the
83 Faith they would be like the original inhabitants of Arabia. The Words of
84 these Divine Beings, we know, are the very essence of Truth.

85 When Bahá'u'lláh likens the Negro race to the faculty of sight in the human
86 body—the act of perception with all it implies—it is a pretty terrific
87 statement. He never said this of anyone else. I thought the American
88 Negro's humility, his kindness, friendliness, courtesy and hospitableness
89 were something to do with his oppression and the background of slavery.

90 But after spending weeks, day after day in the villages of Africa, seeing
91 literally thousands of Bahá'ís and non-Bahá'ís, I have wakened up to the
92 fact that the American Negro has these beautiful qualities not because he
93 was enslaved but because he has the characteristics of his race. I learned
94 why the Guardian so constantly spoke of the “pure-hearted” Africans.

95 The emphasis on the “heart” in our teachings is overwhelming. “My first
96 counsel is this: possess a pure, kindly and radiant heart.” “Thy heart is My
97 habitation.” — “All in heaven and on earth have I ordained for thee except
98 the human heart which I have made the habitation of My Beauty and
99 Glory—” etc. It is the spiritual quality defined as “Heart” in our teachings
100 which I think is one of the priceless gifts the Negro race is going to share
101 with others in the community of the Most Great Name.

102 I can truthfully say my association with the Africans humiliated me deeply. I
103 felt unworthy. I felt my race unworthy. I have not said anything about

104 intelligence because I firmly believe it is a common characteristic of all
105 human beings, the more primitive they are the sharper their wits!

106 What about Abdu'l-Bahá's words concerning the American Indians? When I
107 had the experience of being with them I kept asking myself what did the
108 Master mean? Then I reviewed in my mind what had been the effect of the
109 conversion of the original inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula to Islam; the
110 spread of the Faith from China to the gates of Vienna, the rise of Islamic
111 culture and civilization which was responsible for the renaissance in Europe
112 which in turn became the cradle of Western Civilization which has given
113 rise to so many good things that Bahá'u'lláh Himself praised. This is what
114 the conversion of the early Arabs meant. And Abdu'l-Bahá says the
115 conversion of the American Indians will be like that other conversion. It
116 certainly gives one food for thought!

117 The non-white world is stirring. Africa is awakening, our civilization is
118 beginning to crumble. I believe the responsibility we Bahá'ís (most of us still
119 white) have at this time is tremendous. We must make haste to obey the
120 instructions of the Master and the Guardian and teach in active, determined
121 campaigns by every means in our power, the American Negroes and
122 Indians.

123 In the first place it is a duty placed upon us in writing, in the second place
124 we need them in our communities for their characteristics of mind and heart
125 can greatly enrich our Bahá'í community life, and in the third place we
126 cannot estimate at this time how far-flung will be the repercussions of
127 bringing these two races in North America into the Faith. I am convinced
128 that if we start mass conversion of the Indians and Negroes, mass
129 conversions of the whites will follow.

130 The people of the world are tired of words, words, words. They don't really
131 pay any attention to what we say about "oneness, unity, world brotherhood"
132 although many of them agree with this. What they need is to see deeds, to
133 see Bahá'í communities, local and national, full of people of different races
134 working together, in love, for their common belief. Then the spiritual force
135 such a reality will release (as opposed to words) and will bring an inwardly
136 hungry, sad and disillusioned white race into the Faith in larger numbers. It
137 is all there in the writings of Shoghi Effendi; we just don't think about it
138 enough.

139 Nero fiddled while Rome burned. God forbid we Bahá'ís should ever be like
140 that! A terrible sense of urgency had come over me.

141 Take Africa alone: her nations are coming into independence rapidly —
142 which surely is the plan of God — but they are in danger internally and
143 externally from immature, calculating political forces. What a difference it
144 would make if there were at least ballast in their new ships launching on the
145 world's turbulent sea, if there were a strong Bahá'í minority with their good
146 will and vision of the future world, and the non-political quality of a Bahá'í
147 community! And if these new and often turbulent African nations, being
148 taught racial tensions in a world filled with hatred and ambition, could look
149 across the seas and see that in America and Canada there is a community
150 truly representative of the different races, where the Indian and the Negro
151 Bahá'ís march abreast with those of European descent in serving mankind
152 and promulgating Baha'u'llah's redeeming Faith; think what a force for
153 stability in the whole world this might be!

154 Are we Bahá'ís thinking about those things? Or are we for the most part
155 absorbed in playing with the Administrative Order, criticizing, judging and
156 disputing with each other? Do we constantly bear in mind that as early as
157 the start of the first Seven Year Plan the Guardian told us that now that we
158 had built up the Administrative machinery we must put it into operation for
159 teaching the Cause?...

160

161 I would like to make an observation about teaching the Indians and the
162 Negroes. It is the result of as much analysis as I am capable of. When we
163 Bahá'ís go to teach these people, our first act, I firmly believe, should be to
164 try and give them back their self-respect.

165 Probably the greatest crime of the white man is that in his folly and conceit
166 in the great power of his money- civilization, he has made other men feel
167 inferior; 2nd, 3rd and 4th class passengers on the boat of life. How deep
168 this acid has bitten into the souls of other men I suppose we white people
169 can never know. But I was startled and moved by something I saw during
170 my African trip. Invariably, whenever I mentioned this injustice of ours and
171 denounced it as such, there was a spontaneous burst of applause from my
172 listeners whether at the Teaching Conference in Kampala where the cream
173 of the African Bahá'í teachers were present or an illiterate audience way

174 out in the Bush seated under a tree! The arrow is far deeper in the hearts
175 than we dream and we Bahá'ís should draw out this arrow in the name of
176 Bahá'u'lláh and pour the healing salve of His Praises and love into the
177 wound.

178 I could see the American Indians straighten their shoulders when I asked
179 their forgiveness for the injustices my race had done them and when I
180 praised their great past. The Africans in their wilderness have not, thank
181 God, suffered this humiliation of soul the Indian has because they have
182 been too far away, for the most part, from white people. But they look
183 wistfully at our world and wonder why they have no part. This touched me
184 deeply and I tried to tell them as much as I could about the history of Africa.

185 **Again the need to reestablish self-respect. Both the Africans and the**
186 **Indians should be encouraged to retain their tribal characteristics, their**
187 **language, their music, their folklore, their crafts. What a people is has**
188 **grown up in its setting of tribal customs and qualities. If you destroy this**
189 **through criticism you also, I believe, weaken and destroy all the fine**
190 **qualities of the race too.** It's a large subject and this is not the place to go
191 into it, but all one has to do is to study primitive people in their own lives —
192 and in our cities or after close contact with us — to see the truth.

193 There is one other subject I would like to share with you some of my
194 thoughts on, and that is education. One of the products of our Western
195 Civilization is a worship of education. From the Bahá'í standpoint what is
196 the purpose of education? To enable man to acquire a deeper knowledge
197 of God, His ways and His plan for His creatures, to enable him to better
198 carry forward an ever-advancing civilization whose aim is to realize the
199 Kingdom of God on earth. In other words, education should bring man
200 closer to God and help him serve his fellow man. Our education does not
201 do this nowadays...

202 We must guard ourselves against the dry and dead intellectualism of the
203 world in which we live! Over and over again the Guardian told the Bahá'ís
204 to study the talks of Abdu'l-Bahá and teach by His methods, simple
205 language, parables, stories, examples. It is teaching through this method
206 that is bringing about mass conversion in Africa and Indonesia, and can do
207 the same, I believe, not only amongst the red Indians and the Negroes, but
208 amongst the white people as well.

209 Another thing I found in Africa was love. Considering it is the reason God
210 created us and His first law to us is to love Him and one another, to find not
211 just talk about it but the feeling of it was too wonderful for words! If we will
212 bring into the Faith more of these people— these black people and brown
213 people — who have the spiritual qualities so greatly needed in our
214 communities, I think we will infuse a new life into the Cause in North
215 America and this will directly assist us in accomplishing our great destiny
216 as outlined by the Master and the Guardian...

217 I must really stop.
218 ...We have the promises of the Guardian, the instructions he gave us, the
219 loyalty and devotion of the Bahá'ís. What more do we need but self-
220 sacrificing and inspired leadership, and that is surely what your two
221 Assemblies can and must provide.
222 With warmest love to you all,
223 In the service of the beloved Guardian,
224 (signed) Ruhyyih
225 Haifa Israel
226 March 9, 1961

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