

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

227