

**National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and
National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada-
Letter to the United States and Canada on racism, 1961
by Ruhíyyih (Mary Maxwell) Khanum - 1961-03-09**

After her visit to the United States in 1960, Hand of the Cause of God 'Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánúm addressed her observations to the National Spiritual Assemblies of Canada and the United States. A slightly abridged version of her letter (printed in Bahá'í News U.S. Supplement No. 40, June 1961) is reprinted here

I think this is all to the good for the ideas I wanted to express then are very much clearer now, after my trip through East Africa, and as they are applicable to both Canada and the U.S.A., I am sure you will not mind my sending you a joint letter.

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

Bahá'u'lláh warned us against the evils of civilization when carried to extremes, the Master and particularly the Guardian, elaborated on this theme until at the end of his life Shoghi Effendi fairly thundered against our civilization--particularly the American variety of it. The future culture and civilization is therefore scarcely likely to be patterned on it. It occurs to me (speaking for myself) that we have confused the things so highly praised in our teachings, such as freedom of speech, the democratic method of election, the ideal of justice for all and integrity in administrative affairs, with our materialistic civilization which the Guardian stigmatized as corrosive and corrupt in western civilization and against the dangers of which he constantly warned us. It is these inherent weaknesses that may lead to the greatest catastrophe in history.

I remember when we had the first Japanese pilgrim here, Shoghi Effendi said to him that the majority of the human race was not white and that the majority of Bahá'ís would not be white in the future. As up until very recently the Bahá'ís of the world were almost exclusively white it is only natural that their virtues and their faults should have colored the Faith and its community life. **It is illogical to suppose that what we have now is either mature or right; it is a phase in the development of the Cause;** when peoples of different races are incorporated in the world-wide community (and in local communities) who can doubt that it will possess far greater power and perfection and be something quite different from what we have now? And yet let us ask ourselves frankly if we do not believe that what we North American Bahá'ís have, is the real thing, practically a finished product, and it is up to the rest of the world to accept it? I think this is our mentality; it was mine up until a few years ago.

Bahá'u'lláh said the black people are like the pupil of the eye and sight is in the pupil:

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

weeks, day after day in the villages of Africa, seeing literally thousands of Bahá'ís and non-Bahá'ís, I have wakened up to the fact that the American Negro has these beautiful qualities not because he was enslaved but because he has the characteristics of his race.

I am convinced that if we start mass conversion of the Indians and Negroes, mass conversions of the whites will follow. The people of the world are tired of words, words, words. **They don't really pay any attention to what we say about "oneness, unity world brotherhood" although many of them agree with this. What they need is to see deeds, to see Bahá'í communities, local and national, full of people of different races working together, in love, for their common belief.**

Then the spiritual force such a reality will release (as opposed to words) will bring an inwardly hungry, sad and disillusioned white race into the Faith in larger numbers. It is all there in the writings of Shoghi Effendi; we just don't think about it enough.

Or are we for the most part absorbed in playing with the Administrative Order, criticizing, judging and disputing with each other? Do we constantly bear in mind that as early as the start of the first Seven Year Plan the Guardian told us that now that we had built up the Administrative machinery we must put it into operation for teaching the Cause?...

I was startled and moved by something I saw during my African trip. Invariably, whenever I mentioned this injustice of ours and denounced it as such, there was a spontaneous burst of applause from my listeners whether at the Teaching Conference in Kampala where the cream of the African Bahá'í teachers was present or an illiterate audience way out in the Bush seated under a tree!

I could see the American Indians straighten their shoulders when I asked their forgiveness for the injustices my race had done them and when I praised their great past.

With warmest love to you all,
In the service of the beloved Guardian,

(signed) Rúhíyyih

Haifa Israel
March 9, 1961