

Teaching Among Aboriginal and Indigenous People

Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi

Original English



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Compilation

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Extracts from the Writings of Shoghi Effendi or from Letters Written on
His Behalf

— 1 —

Let anyone[pg 204] who feels the urge among the participators in this crusade, which embraces all the races, all the republics, classes and denominations of the entire Western Hemisphere, arise, and, circumstances permitting, direct in particular the attention, and win eventually the unqualified adherence, of the Negro, the Indian, the Eskimo, and Jewish races to his Faith.

No more laudable and meritorious service can be rendered the Cause of God, at the present hour, than a successful effort to enhance the diversity of the members of the American Bahá'í community by swelling the ranks of the Faith through the enrollment of the members of these races.

A blending of these highly differentiated elements of the human race, harmoniously interwoven into the fabric of an all-embracing Bahá'í fraternity, and assimilated through the dynamic processes of a divinely appointed Administrative Order, and contributing each its share to the enrichment and glory of Bahá'í community life, is surely an achievement the contemplation of which must warm and thrill every Bahá'í heart.



ORIGINAL



AUDIO

From a letter 25 December 1938 written by Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada,
"The Advent of Divine Justice", p. 54

— 2 —

Smallness of numbers, lack of skilled teachers, and modesty of means should not discourage or deter them. They must remember the glorious history of the Cause, which, both in East and West, was established by dedicated souls who, for the most part, were neither rich, famous, nor well educated, but whose devotion, zeal and self-sacrifice overcame every obstacle and won miraculous victories for the Faith of God.

Such spiritual victories can now be won for India and Burma by the friends. Let them dedicate themselves — young and old, men and women alike — and go forth and settle in new districts, travel, and teach in spite of lack of experience, and be assured that Bahá'u'lláh has promised to aid all those who arise in His Name. His strength will sustain them; their own weakness is unimportant.

From a letter 29 June 1941 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of India and Burma

— 3 —

Many are the souls who, in this Holy Cause, without either worldly means or knowledge, have set ablaze the hearts of others[pg 205] with the divine love and rendered the Faith imperishable services. The Guardian hopes that you will be able to do likewise.

From a letter 5 October 1941 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer

— 4 —

There is no doubt that the poorer classes should be taught the Cause and given every opportunity to embrace it. More especially in order to demonstrate to people our cardinal lack of prejudice — class prejudice as much as any other kind of prejudice. However, he feels that the great point is to confirm people of true capacity and ability — from whatever social stratum they may be — because the Cause needs now, and will ever increasingly need, souls of great ability who can bring it before the public at large, administer its ever-growing affairs, and contribute to its advancement in every field.

From a letter 30 October 1941 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer

— 5 —

That is perhaps what is most glorious about our present activities all over the world, that we, a band not large in numbers, not possessing financial backing or the prestige of great names, should, in the name of our beloved Faith, be forging ahead at such a pace, and demonstrating

to future and present generations that it is the God-given qualities of our religion that are raising it up and not the transient support of worldly fame and power. All that will come later, when it has been made clear beyond the shadow of a doubt that what raised aloft the banner of Bahá'u'lláh was the love, sacrifice and devotion of His humble followers and the change that His teachings wrought in their hearts and lives.

From a letter 20 June 1942 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of _____ the _____ British _____ Aisles
"Unfolding Destiny", p. 152

— 6 —

The initial contact already established, in the concluding years of the first Bahá'í century, in obedience to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Mandate, with the Cherokee and Oneida Indians in North Carolina and Wisconsin, with the Patagonian, the Mexican and the Inca Indians, and the Mayans in Argentina, Mexico, Peru and Yucatan, respectively, should, as the Latin American Bahá'í communities gain in stature and strength, be consolidated and extended.

A special effort should be exerted to secure the unqualified adherence of members of some of these tribes to the Faith, their subsequent election to its[pg 206] councils, and their unreserved support of the organized attempts that will have to be made in the future by the projected national assemblies for the large-scale conversion of Indian races to the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh....

Nor should any of the pioneers, at this early stage in the upbuilding of Bahá'í national communities, overlook the fundamental prerequisite for any successful teaching enterprise, which is to adapt the presentation of the fundamental principles of their Faith to the cultural and religious backgrounds, the ideologies, and the temperament of the divers races and nations whom they are called upon to enlighten and attract.

The susceptibilities of these races and nations, from both the northern and southern climes, springing from either the Germanic or Latin stock, belonging to either the Catholic or Protestant communion, some democratic, others totalitarian in outlook, some socialistic, others capitalistic in their tendencies, differing widely in their customs and standards of living, should at all times be carefully considered, and under no circumstances neglected.

From a letter 5 June 1947 written by Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'ís of the West *"Citadel of Faith"*, p. 16, 25

— 7 —

The primary reason for anyone becoming a Bahá'í must of course be because he has come to believe the doctrines, the teachings and the Order of Bahá'u'llah are the correct thing for this stage in the world's evolution. The Bahá'ís themselves as a body have one great advantage: They are sincerely convinced Bahá'u'lláh is right; they have a plan; and they are trying to follow it. But to pretend they are perfect, that the Bahá'ís of the future will not be a hundred times more mature, better balanced, more exemplary in their conduct, would be foolish.

From a letter 5 July 1947 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer

— 8 —

The news of the very successful Congress held in Santiago pleased him very much. Now that more of the Latin believers are active and beginning to assume responsibilities, the work will go forward on a more permanent foundation, as pioneers from a foreign land can never take the place of native believers who must always constitute the bedrock of any future development of the Faith in their country.

From a letter 30 January 1948 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer

— 9 —

...great patience must be used in dealing with the childlike[pg 207] members of some of these primitive races. They are innocent in heart and have certainly had a very bad example, in many Christians, of a purely mercenary approach to religion, but if their hearts and minds once become illumined with the Faith they could make very fine believers.

From a letter 29 April 1948 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles
"Unfolding Destiny", p. 213

— 10 —

We can truly say that this Cause is a cause that enables people to achieve the impossible! For the Bahá'ís, everywhere, for the most part, are people with no great distinguishments of either wealth or fame, and yet once they make the effort and go forth in the name of Bahá'u'lláh to spread His Faith, they become, each one, as efficacious as a host! Witness what Mustafa Roumie accomplished in Burma, and a handful of pioneers achieved, in a decade, in Latin America! It is the quality of devotion and self-sacrifice that brings rewards in the service of this Faith rather than means, ability or financial backing.

From a letter 11 May 1948 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Australia and New Zealand
"Letters to Australia and New Zealand", p. 70

— 11 —

The work being done by various Bahá'ís, including our dear Indian believer who returned from the United States in order to pioneer amongst his own people, in teaching the Canadian Indians, is one of the most important fields of activity under your jurisdiction. The Guardian hopes that ere long many of these original Canadians will take an active part in Bahá'í affairs and arise to redeem their brethren from the obscurity and despondency into which they have fallen.

From a letter 23 June 1950 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada *"Messages to Canada"*, p. 16

— 12 —

Bahá'í institutions, must be paralleled by a deeper thrust of the roots which sustain the spiritual life of the community and ensure its sound development. From this vital, this ever-present need, attention must at no time be diverted; nor must it be, under any circumstances, neglected, or subordinated to the no less vital and urgent task of ensuring the outer expansion of Bahá'í administrative institutions. That this community ... may maintain a proper balance between these two essential aspects of its development, and march forward with rapid strides and along sound lines toward the goal of the Plan it has adopted, is the ardent hope[pg 208] of my heart...

From a letter 30 December 1948 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Australia and New Zealand *"Letters to Australia and New Zealand"*, p. 76

— 13 —

Shoghi Effendi is also most anxious for the Message to reach the aboriginal inhabitants of the Americas. These people, for the most part downtrodden and ignorant, should receive from the Bahá'ís a special measure of love, and every effort be made to teach them. Their enrollment in the Faith will enrich them and us and demonstrate our principle of the Oneness of Man far better than words or the wide conversion of the ruling races ever can.

From a letter 11 July 1951 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Meso-America and the Antilles

— 14 —

Your Assembly is called upon to direct and safeguard the activities of our Faith in a truly vast and impressive area. But the very newness of the work, the room for spiritual conquest, the great need of the people, both aboriginal and European in origin, to hear of Bahá'u'lláh, is stimulating and challenging, and must call forth the best in every believer. The Guardian feels that special efforts must be made to enrol the primitive peoples of South America in the Cause. These souls, often so exploited and despised, deserve to hear of the Faith, and will become a great asset to it once their hearts are enlightened.

From a letter 11 July 1951 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of South America

— 15 —

He was very pleased to hear of initial steps you have taken to teach the Indians. He adds one suggestion (he does not know if it is practicable or not): can contact not be made with Indians who have become more or less absorbed into the life of the white element of the country and

live in or visit the big cities? These people, finding Bahá'ís sincerely lacking in either prejudice — or that even worse attitude, condescension — might not only take interest in our Teachings, but also help us to reach their people in the proper way.

It is a great mistake to believe that because people are illiterate or live primitive lives, they are lacking in either intelligence or sensibility. On the contrary, they may well look on us, with the evils of our civilization, with its moral corruption, its ruinous wars, its hypocrisy and conceit, as people who merit watching[pg 209] with both suspicion and contempt. We should meet them as equals, well-wishers, people who admire and respect their ancient descent, and who feel that they will be interested, as we are, in a living religion and not in the dead forms of present-day churches.

From a letter 21 September 1951 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the Comité Nacional de Enseñanza Bahá'í #los indigenas

— 16 —

The Guardian was most happy to hear of the excellent work some of the Bahá'ís are doing with the Eskimos and the Indians, and considers their spirit most exemplary. They are rendering a far greater service than they, themselves, are aware of, the fruits of which will be seen, not only in Canada, but because of their repercussions, in other countries where primitive populations must be taught.

From a letter 8 June 1952 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada *"Messages to Canada"*, p. 28

— 17 —

He was particularly pleased to see that members of your Assembly have been out travelling and contacting the friends in an effort to deepen their understanding of the workings of the administration and also their knowledge of the Faith in general. He feels that particularly at present in Latin America this intimate, loving and friendly approach will do more to further the work than anything else.

Indeed, he would go so far as to advise your Assembly to avoid deluging the friends with circulars and unnecessary bulletins. You must always bear in mind the genuine difference between the peoples of the south and the peoples of the north; to use the same techniques as those adopted in the United States would be disastrous because the mentality and background of life are quite different. Much as the friends need administration, it must be brought to them in a palatable form, otherwise they will not be able to assimilate it and instead of consolidating the work you will find some of the believers become estranged from it.

Whenever you feel at all discouraged you should remember how many years it took for the administration to get as well established as it is at present in North America. Problems repeat themselves and in the earlier stages in the U.S.A. the body of the believers was very loosely knit together, many of the friends were, as they now are in Latin America, affiliated[pg 210] with various more or less progressive cults from which they had come to the Faith and from which

they could not be suddenly cut off; they had to be weaned and educated; the same thing you must now do. He urges you therefore to be very patient with the believers, and, through loving consultation and education, gradually insist that the old allegiances must give way to the great and all-satisfying bond they have now found with Bahá'u'lláh and His Faith.

Mature teachers are the greatest need of the Faith everywhere, and no doubt in your area too. One wise and dedicated soul can so often give life to an inactive community, bring in new people and inspire to greater sacrifice. He hopes that whatever else you are able to do during the coming months, you will be able to keep in circulation a few really good Bahá'í teachers.

From a letter 30 June 1952 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Central America

— 18 —

He fully appreciates the fact that the believers are still somewhat attached to the different cults from which they have come; this is a problem which always faces the Faith in a new region; it existed a long time in America, and seems part of the growth of the Cause. He feels your Assembly can afford to be patient with the friends, while at the same time educating them into a deeper understanding of the Cause. As their awareness of the true significance of Bahá'u'lláh grows, they will become weaned from the old ideas and give full allegiance to His teachings.

From a letter 30 June 1952 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of South America

— 19 —

REJOICE SHARE BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITIES EAST WEST THRILLING REPORTS FEATS ACHIEVED
HEROIC BAND BAHÁ'Í PIONEERS LABOURING DIVERS WIDELY-SCATTERED AFRICAN
TERRITORIES ... REMINISCENT ALIKE EPISODES RELATED BOOK ACTS RAPID DRAMATIC
PROPAGATION FAITH INSTRUMENTALITY DAWN-BREAKERS HEROIC AGE BAHÁ'Í
DISPENSATION MARVELLOUS ACCOMPLISHMENTS SIGNALISING RISE ESTABLISHMENT
ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER FAITH LATIN AMERICA ECLIPSED.

EXPLOITS IMMORTALIZING[pg 211] RECENTLY LAUNCHED CRUSADE EUROPEAN CONTINENT
SURPASSED NUMBER AFRICANS CONVERTED COURSE LAST FIFTEEN MONTHS ...
PROTESTANT CATHOLIC PAGAN BACKGROUNDS LETTERED UNLETTERED BOTH SEXES
REPRESENTATIVE NO LESS SIXTEEN TRIBES PASSED TWO HUNDRED MARK

EFFULGENT RAYS GOD'S TRIUMPHANT CAUSE ... FAST AWAKENING CONTINENT
PENETRATING ACCELERATING RATE ISOLATED REGIONS UNFREQUENTED WHITE MEN
ENVELOPING THEIR RADIANCE SOULS HITHERTO INDIFFERENT PERSISTENT HUMANITARIAN
ACTIVITIES CHRISTIAN MISSIONS CIVILISING INFLUENCE CIVIL AUTHORITIES...

From a cable 5 January 1953 by Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States

I hail with a joyous heart the convocation in the heart of the African continent of the first of the four Intercontinental Teaching Conferences constituting the highlights of the world-wide celebrations of the Holy Year which commemorates the hundredth anniversary of the birth of the Mission of the Founder of our Faith.

I welcome with open arms the unexpectedly large number of the representatives of the pure-hearted and the spiritually receptive Negro race, so dearly loved by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, for whose conversion to His Father's Faith He so deeply yearned and whose interests He so ardently championed in the course of His memorable visit to the North American continent.

I am reminded, on this historic occasion, of the significant words uttered by Bahá'u'lláh Himself, Who as attested by the Center of the Covenant, in His Writings, "compared the colored people to the black pupil of the eye," through which "the light of the spirit shineth forth."

I feel particularly gratified by the substantial participation in this epoch-making conference of the members of a race dwelling in a continent which for the most part has retained its primitive simplicity and remained uncontaminated by the evils of a gross, a rampant and cancerous materialism undermining the fabric of human society alike in the East and in the West, eating into the vitals of the conflicting peoples and races inhabiting the American, the European and the Asiatic continents, and alas threatening to engulf in one common catastrophic convulsion the generality of mankind.

I acclaim the preponderance of the members of this same race at so significant a conference, a phenomenon unprecedented in the [pg 212] annals of Bahá'í conferences held during over a century, and auguring well for a corresponding multiplication in the number of the representatives of the yellow, the red and brown races of mankind dwelling respectively in the Far East, in the Far West and in the islands of the South Pacific Ocean, a multiplication designed ultimately to bring to a proper equipoise the divers ethnic elements comprised within the highly diversified world-embracing Bahá'í fellowship.

From a February 1953 to the African Intercontinental Teaching Conference — Shoghi Effendi, *"Messages to the Bahá'í World"*, p. 135

He hopes that, during this coming year, you ... will devote yourselves as much as you can to consolidating the new Assemblies, and assisting the new believers to gradually understand better the Administration, and its application in Bahá'í Community life. Tact, love and patience will no doubt be needed, and one cannot expect these new believers to do everything in the same way that old and tried Communities do. Indeed, individuality of expression, within the framework of the Administrative Order, is preferable to too great a uniformity.

From a letter 26 April 1953 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer

He was very happy to know that Charlottetown not only achieved Assembly status, but that the believers there are mostly self-supporting, as this is a sound basis for the expansion of the work in any place, especially in such a difficult one.

From a letter 20 June 1953 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada *"Messages to Canada"*, p. 39

He feels that a great potential strength lies in these new African believers. No doubt your committee will be faced with problems, due to the inexperience of some of these people in administrative matters, but, through loving guidance, and the wisdom of those who are associated with them on the spot, these minor things can be satisfactorily taken care of, and the main thing, the establishment of assemblies and groups, be[pg 213] carried out successfully.

From a letter 4 June 1953 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of he British Isles Africa Committee
"Unfolding Destiny", p. 301

When enrolling new believers, we must be wise and gentle, and not place so many obstacles in their way that they feel it impossible to accept the Faith. On the other hand, once accorded membership in the community of the followers of Bahá'u'lláh, it must be brought home to them that they are expected to live up to His teachings, and to show forth the signs of a noble character in conformity with His laws. This can often be done gradually, after the new believer is enrolled.

From a letter 25 June 1953 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles
"Unfolding Destiny", p. 308

It must, as it gathers momentum, awaken the select and gather the spiritually hungry amongst the peoples of the world, as well as create an awareness of the Faith not only among the political leaders of present-day society but also among the thoughtful, the erudite in other spheres of human activity.

It must, as it approaches its climax, carry the torch of the Faith to regions so remote, so backward, so inhospitable that neither the light of Christianity or Islám has, after the revolution of centuries, as yet penetrated. It must, as it approaches its conclusion, pave the way for the laying, on an unassailable foundation, of the structural basis of an Administrative Order whose fabric must, in the course of successive crusades, be laboriously erected throughout the entire

globe and which must assemble beneath its sheltering shadow peoples of every race, tongue, creed, color and nation ... winning to the Faith fresh recruits to the slowly yet steadily advancing army of the Lord of Hosts, whose reinforcing strength is so essential to the safeguarding of the victories which the band of heroic Bahá'í conquerors are winning in the course of their several campaigns in all the continents of the globe.

Such a steady flow of reinforcements is absolutely vital and is of extreme urgency, for nothing short of the vitalizing influx of new blood that will reanimate the world Bahá'í community can safeguard the prizes which, at so great a sacrifice involving the expenditure of so much time, effort and treasure, are now being won in virgin territories by Bahá'u'lláh's valiant Knights, whose privilege is to constitute the spearhead of the onrushing battalions which, in diverse theaters and in circumstances often adverse and extremely challenging, are vying with each other for the spiritual conquest of the unsundered territories and islands on the surface of the globe.

This flow, moreover, will presage and hasten the advent of the day which, as prophesied by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, will witness the entry by troops of peoples of divers nations and races into the Bahá'í world — a day which, viewed in its proper perspective, will be the prelude to that long-awaited hour when a mass conversion on the part of these same nations and races, and as a direct result of a chain of events, momentous and possibly catastrophic in nature, and which cannot as yet be even dimly visualized, will suddenly revolutionize the fortunes of the Faith, derange the equilibrium of the world, and reinforce a thousandfold the numerical strength as well as the material power and the spiritual authority of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh.

From a letter 25 June 1953 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States
"Citadel of Faith", p. 114

— 26 —

The beloved Guardian was greatly delighted to learn of the success of the institute for teaching the Indian children. He feels this is a very fine method of implanting the teachings of the Faith in the hearts and the minds of the young children, so that they may grow and develop into strong and virile men and women who will serve the Cause. Likewise through this effort, he hopes you will be able to attract some of the parents.

From a letter 18 February 1954 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer

— 27 —

The spirit of the African believers is very touching, very noble, and indeed presents a challenge to their fellow Bahá'ís all over the world. It seems that God has endowed these races, living in the so-called "dark" continent, with great spiritual faculties, and also with mental faculties, which, as they mature in the Faith, will contribute immensely to the whole, throughout the Bahá'í world. In your communications to the Bahá'ís of Uganda please assure them of the Guardian's prayers, of his deep affection for them, and tell them that he is proud of them, of their spirit and [pg 215] of their achievements.

From a letter 11 May 1954 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the Uganda Teaching Committee

— 28 —

...the whole object of the pioneers in going forth to Africa, is to teach the coloured people, and not the white people. This does not mean that they must refuse to teach the white people, which would be a foolish attitude. It does, however, mean that they should constantly bear in mind that it is to the native African that they are now carrying the Message of Bahá'u'lláh, in his own country, and not to people from abroad who have migrated there permanently or temporarily and are a minority, and many of them, judging by their acts, a very unsavoury minority....

Africa is truly awakening and finding herself, and she undoubtedly has a great message to give, and a great contribution to make to the advancement of world civilization. To the degree to which her peoples accept Bahá'u'lláh, will they be blessed, strengthened and protected.

From a letter 4 June 1954 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles Africa Committee
"Unfolding Destiny", p. 330

— 29 —

In connection with the teaching work throughout the Pacific area, he fully believes that in many cases the white society is difficult to interest in anything but its own superficial activities. The Bahá'ís must identify themselves on the one hand, as much as they reasonably can, with the life of the white people, so as not to become ostracized, criticized and eventually ousted from their hard-won pioneer posts. On the other hand, they must bear in mind that the primary object of their living there is to teach the native population the Faith. This they must do with tact and discretion, in order not to forfeit their foot-hold in these islands which are often so difficult of access. Sound judgment, a great deal of patience and forbearance, faith and nobility of conduct, must distinguish the pioneers, and be their helpers in accomplishing the object of their journey to these far places.

From a letter 16 June 1954 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Australia and New Zealand
"Letters to Australia and New Zealand", p. 118

— 30 —

In dealing with people who are still backward in relation to our civilized standards, and in many cases guided by a tribal system which has strong orders of its own, he feels that you[pg 216] should be both tactful and forbearing. There is no specific minimum age mentioned in the Bahá'í teachings at which girls may marry. In the future, this and other questions unspecified will be dealt with by the International House of Justice. In the meantime, we must not be too strict in enforcing our opinions on peoples still living in primitive social orders.

From a letter 17 June 1954 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly
of the British Isles
“*Unfolding Destiny*”, p. 334

— 31 —

Above all, the utmost endeavour should be exerted by your Assembly to familiarize the newly enrolled believers with the fundamental and spiritual verities of the Faith, and with the origins, the aims and purposes, as well as the processes of a divinely appointed Administrative Order, to acquaint them more fully with the history of the Faith, to instil in them a deeper understanding of the Covenants of both Bahá'u'lláh and of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, to enrich their spiritual life, to rouse them to a greater effort and a closer participation in both the teaching of the Faith and the administration of its activities, and to inspire them to make the necessary sacrifices for the furtherance of its vital interests.

For as the body of the avowed supporters of the Faith is enlarged, and the basis of the structure of its Administrative Order is broadened, and the fame of the rising community spreads far and wide, a parallel progress must be achieved, if the fruits already garnered are to endure, in the spiritual quickening of its members and the deepening of their inner life.

From a letter 26 June 1956 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada “*Messages to Canada*”, p. 61

— 32 —

Some of the territories are practically exclusively Arab with a European minority, with a Muslim background and an advanced civilization and culture of their own. They must be approached with teaching methods suitable to the mentality of the people.

On the other hand, many of the other countries represent a backward people, from the standpoint of modern civilization, but people much more receptive in heart and soul to the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, much more sensitive to spiritual values, much readier indeed to embrace the Message of Bahá'u'lláh and arise in its service, as we have seen so wonderfully demonstrated during the last four years in the[pg 217] history of the Cause in Africa. These people must also be taught in a way that will attract them to the Cause.

The African Bahá'ís already enrolled will require deepening in the Administration during the coming years, in order to better fit them for the day which must inevitably come when each protectorate, country and island will possess its own National Spiritual Assembly. To the degree to which your Assembly succeeds in laying a firm foundation at the present time, will depend the rapidity of the unfoldment of the Faith in these different countries and the readiness of the believers to shoulder independently their national Bahá'í work.

As he has mentioned many times to pilgrims and in his communications to the friends in North Africa, he wishes special attention paid there to the Berbers. Indeed every effort should be made to enrol as many Berber minorities in the Faith as possible, as well as the other races among the inhabitants of the country.

From a letter 2 July 1956 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of North West Africa

— 33 —

The most important work of all is to train the African believers as teachers and administrators, so that they can carry the Message to their own people, and be in a position to lay firm and enduring foundations for the future Assemblies throughout all these vast territories. Every other activity falls into insignificance compared to this one.

It is only natural that the help and advice of the pioneers should be required for some time to come, owing to their long experience in the Faith and their deeper knowledge of its Teachings, due to, not only the length of time they have been Bahá'ís and able to study them, but to the fact that so many of the Teachings are in English and they could study them.

The translation of ever more literature into African tongues is likewise very important, as the new believers are ready and eager to learn, and must have the facilities placed at their disposal. He hopes that your Assembly will be able to see that a stream of itinerant teachers and pioneers constantly goes out to the [pg 218] weak centres in the new territories, to consolidate the Faith and establish new Assemblies, to teach and encourage the people, and carry to them both the light and the love of Bahá'u'lláh.

From a letter 4 July 1956 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of South and West Africa

— 34 —

I feel confident that your Assembly, now standing on the threshold of a period of unparalleled expansion, will, through its high endeavours, lend a tremendous impetus to the historic process which has been set in motion in recent years, and will, through its achievements, attract the manifold blessings of Bahá'u'lláh.

The path you are now called upon to tread is long, steep and thorny. As the work in which you are engaged develops, and is steadily consolidated, individuals and institutions inimical to the Faith, and jealous of its rising prestige, will exert their utmost to undermine the foundations you are now laying and to extinguish the light which has been so brilliantly kindled by pioneers, settlers and newly enrolled believers throughout the territories now included within your jurisdiction.

In the handwriting of Shoghi Effendi, appended to a letter 6 July 1956 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Central and East Africa

— 35 —

The question of your budget, which you have raised in your letter, is one of great importance. In spite of the numbers which you represent and the enthusiasm of the Bahá'ís, your Assembly must face the fact that it represents a very poor community, financially. Any over-ambitious

budget, which would place an oppressive financial burden on the friends, would be highly unwise, because, unless it is met, it will give them a feeling at the end of the year of intense frustration.

He thinks that what you have outlined is too much. Your Assembly will have to, particularly during this first year of its existence, be less ambitious as regards projects involving money, and devote itself particularly to encouraging the friends, reinforcing the foundations of the Local Assemblies, assisting the groups to attain Assembly status, and deepening in every way it can the education of the African friends[pg 219] in the Faith.

The other National Spiritual Assemblies, as you know, are having their own problems financially; and, although there is no objection to appealing to them to give you some help, the Guardian doubts very much whether they will be in a position to add very substantially to your funds at this time.

From a letter 6 July 1956 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Central and East Africa

— 36 —

The beloved Guardian was very happy to review the map, with your notations thereon, showing the number of Indian Bahá'ís. He feels this is a real victory for the Faith, as the Master has spoken so often of the strength of character and latent capacity of the original peoples of the American continent. Thus, the quickening of some of them is a historic turning-point in the activity of the Faith, as well as the life of these people.

From a letter 31 July 1956 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer

— 37 —

He feels the Persians can render the utmost assistance to the teaching work, wherever they settle; but they must go on the basis of pioneers, and take up residence where they can render the best service to the Cause of God. It does little good for the Faith to have large groups of Persians settled in a city, and thus constitute an Assembly. When they move the Assembly falls. What we need in all areas is native believers. The pioneers should be in the minority, and aid the natives to shoulder the responsibilities of the Faith.

From a letter 17 February 1957 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer

— 38 —

...to stimulate the process of the conversion of both the Negroes and the American Indians, and ensure their active participation in the administration of the affairs of Bahá'í communities...

From a April 1957 written by Shoghi Effendi to the Conventions of Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Paraguay and Bolivia; of Brazil, Peru, Columbia, Ecuador and Venezuela; of Central America and Mexico; and of the Greater Antilles

As you formulate your plans and carry them out for the work entrusted to you during the next six years, he wishes you to particularly bear in mind the need of teaching the Maoris. These original discoverers of New Zealand are of a very fine race, and they are a people long admired for their noble qualities; and[pg 220] special effort should be made, not only to contact the Maoris in the cities and draw them into the Faith, but to go to their towns and live amongst them and establish Assemblies in which at least the majority of the believers will be Maoris, if not all. This would be indeed a worthy achievement.

From a letter 27 June 1957 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of New Zealand “*Arohanui*”, p. 73

He hopes there will be a great deal more teaching activity during the present year, and that the Latin American Bahá'ís will increasingly feel that this is their Faith, and consequently their obligation, primarily, to spread it amongst their own people. Great as are the services rendered by pioneers, and unforgettable as are the deeds they accomplish, they cannot take the place of the indigenous element which must constitute the bedrock of the Community, carry on its own affairs, build its own institutions, support its own funds, publish its own literature, etc.

A mother gives birth to a child, but the child then has to grow for itself. The older it gets, the more responsible it is for its own acts. The Latin American friends are rapidly coming of age, and they are showing this by the manner in which they are arising to serve the Faith, to demonstrate it, to sacrifice for it, to protect it and consolidate.

From a letter 3 July 1957 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Brazil, Peru, Columbia, Ecuador and Venezuela

As the situation in the world, and in your part of it is steadily worsening, no time can be lost by the friends in rising to higher levels of devotion and service, and particularly of spiritual awareness. It is our duty to redeem as many of our fellow men as we possibly can, whose hearts are enlightened, before some great catastrophe overtakes them, in which they will either be hopelessly swallowed up or come out purified and strengthened, and ready to serve. The more believers there are to stand forth as beacons in the darkness whenever that time does come, the better; hence the supreme importance of the teaching work at this time.

As he has written the Central and East Africa Assembly, he feels that the friends should be very careful not to place[pg 221] hindrances in the way of those who wish to accept the Faith. If we make the requirements too rigorous, we will cool off the initial enthusiasm, rebuff the hearts and cease to expand rapidly. The essential thing is that the candidate for enrollment should believe in his heart in the truth of Bahá'u'lláh. Whether he is literate or illiterate, informed of all Teachings or not, is beside the point entirely. When the spark of faith exists the essential Message is there, and gradually everything else can be added unto it.

The process of educating people of different customs and backgrounds must be done with the greatest patience and understanding, and rules and regulations not imposed upon them, except where a rock-bottom essential is in question. He feels sure that your Assembly is capable of carrying on its work in this spirit, and of fanning the hearts to flame through the fire of the love of God, rather than putting out the first sparks with buckets, full of administrative information and regulations.

From a letter 9 July 1957 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of South and West Africa

— 42 —

He feels that the goals you have set yourself for your Seven Year Plan are excellent. The most important work of all of course is to confirm as many new believers as possible, wherever and whoever they may be, with special attention given to the Africans, who are the very purpose of the pioneers' presence in that Continent.

From a letter 14 July 1957 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of North West Africa

— 43 —

It is not enough to bring people into the Faith, one must educate them and deepen their love for it and their knowledge of its teachings, after they declare themselves. As the Bahá'ís are few in number, especially the active teachers, and there is a great deal of work to be done, the education of these new believers is often sadly neglected, and then results are seen such as the resignations you have had recently.

From a letter 18 July 1957 written on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada

— 44 —

The paramount task is, of course, the teaching work; at every session your Assembly should give it close attention, considering everything else of secondary importance. Not only must many new Assemblies be developed, as well as groups[pg 222] and isolated centres, but special attention must be focused on the work of converting the Indians to the Faith. The goal should be all-Indian Assemblies, so that these much exploited and suppressed original inhabitants of the land may realize that they are equals, and partners in the affairs of the Cause of God, and that Bahá'u'lláh is the Manifestation of God for them.

From a letter 28 July 1957 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Central America and Mexico

The all-important enterprise, aimed at winning the whole-hearted allegiance of the members of various tribes of American Indians to the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh, and at ensuring their active and sustained participation in the conduct of its administrative affairs, must likewise be seriously considered and strenuously pursued.

In the handwriting of Shoghi Effendi, appended to a letter 28 July 1957 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Central America and Mexico

As you formulate the goals which must receive your undivided attention during the coming years he urges you to bear in mind the most important one of all, namely the multiplication of the Spiritual Assemblies, the groups and the isolated centres; this will ensure both breadth and depth in the foundations you are laying for the future independent national bodies.

The believers should be urged to consider individually the needs in their immediate region, and to go forth to pioneer in near and distant cities and towns. They must be encouraged by your Assembly to remember that small people, often poor and obscure people, have changed the course of human destiny more than people who started out with wealth, fame and security. It was the Sifter of Wheat who, in the early days of our Faith, arose and became a hero and martyr, not the learned priests of his city!

He was particularly happy to see that some of the Indian believers were present at the Convention. He attaches the greatest importance to teaching the original inhabitants of the Americas the Faith. 'Abdu'l-Bahá Himself has stated how great are their potentialities, and it is their right, and the duty of the non-Indian Bahá'ís, to see that they receive the Message of God for this day.

One of the most worthy objectives of your Assembly must be the establishment of all-Indian Spiritual[pg 223] Assemblies. Other minorities should likewise be especially sought out and taught. The friends should bear in mind that in our Faith, unlike every other society, the minority, to compensate for what might be treated as an inferior status, receives special attention, love and consideration.

From a letter 29 July 1957 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Paraguay and Bolivia

He feels that those responsible for accepting new believers should consider that the most important and fundamental qualification for acceptance is the recognition of the station of Bahá'u'lláh in this day on the part of the applicant. We cannot expect people who are illiterate (which is no reflection on their mental abilities or capacities) to have studied the Teachings, especially when so little literature is available in their own language in the first place, and grasp

all their ramifications, the way an African, say in London, is expected to. The spirit of the person is the important thing, the recognition of Bahá'u'lláh and His position in the world in this day.

The friends therefore must not be too strict, or they will find that the great wave of loving enthusiasm with which the African people have turned to the Faith, many of them already accepting it, cools off; and being very sensitive, they will feel in some subtle way that they are rebuffed, and the work will suffer.

The purpose of the new National Assemblies in Africa, and the purpose of any administrative body, is to carry the Message to the people and enlist the sincere under the banner of this Faith. Your Assembly must never lose sight of this for a moment, and must go on courageously expanding the membership of the communities under your jurisdiction, and gradually educating the friends in both the Teachings and the Administration.

Nothing could be more tragic than if the establishment of these great administrative bodies should stifle or bog down the teaching work. The early believers in both the East and the West, we must always remember, knew practically nothing compared to what the average Bahá'í knows about his Faith nowadays; yet they were the ones who shed their blood, the ones who arose and said: "I believe", requiring no proof, and often never having read a single word of the Teachings.

Therefore, those responsible for accepting new enrollments must just be sure of one thing — that the heart of the applicant has been touched with the spirit of the Faith. Everything else can be built on this foundation gradually. He hopes that during the coming year it will be increasingly possible for the African Bahá'í teachers to circulate amongst the newly-enrolled Bahá'ís and deepen their knowledge and understanding of the Teachings.

First and foremost, the vital process of the conversion of the Africans must acquire a momentum which will surpass any hitherto witnessed in African Bahá'í history. Any barrier impeding the discharge of this pre-eminent duty must be determinedly swept aside. Simultaneously, the emergence of new centres, the conversion of groups into Assemblies and the multiplication of the Assemblies themselves, must be accelerated to an unprecedented extent.

Nor must the pressing obligation to consolidate the firmly grounded local institutions of the Faith through their incorporation be, for a moment, neglected. The historic work, so laboriously initiated in the newly opened territories, and particularly in those where the Faith has not yet driven deep roots, must, likewise, be rapidly and systematically reinforced.

The establishment of Bahá'í endowments, the founding of local Ḥaḏíratu'l-Quds, the translation and dissemination of Bahá'í literature, must, moreover, receive the close and continued attention of the individual believers and particularly, their elected representatives.

The institution of the National Fund, so vital and essential for the uninterrupted progress of these activities must, in particular, be assured of the whole-hearted, the ever-increasing and universal support of the mass of believers, for whose welfare, and in whose name, these

beneficent activities have been initiated and have been conducted. All, no matter how modest their resources, must participate.

Upon the degree of self-sacrifice involved in these individual contributions will directly depend the efficacy and the spiritual influence which these nascent administrative institutions, called into being through the power of Bahá'u'lláh, and by virtue of the Design conceived by the Centre of His Covenant, will exert. A sustained and strenuous effort must henceforth be made by the rank and file of the avowed upholders of the Faith, whose number far surpasses that of their brethren residing in the areas administered by the three other Regional Spiritual Assemblies, to enable the communities under your jurisdiction to become self-supporting and ensure a steady flow of funds to the Treasury which now stands in dire need of substantial financial support.

From a letter 8 August 1957 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Central and East Africa

— 48 —

The Master has likened the Indians in your Countries to the early Arabian Nomads at the time of the appearance of Muḥammad. Within a short period of time they became the outstanding examples of education, of culture and of civilization for the entire world. The Master feels that similar wonders will occur today if the Indians are properly taught and if the power of the Spirit properly enters into their living.

From a letter 22 August 1957 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Central America and Mexico

— 49 —

He was very happy indeed to learn of the very active manner in which the Canadian Bahá'ís have taken hold of this most important subject of teaching the Indians.

He attaches the greatest importance to this matter as the Master has spoken of the latent strength of character of these people and feels that when the Spirit of the Faith has a chance to work in their midst, it will produce remarkable results.

From a letter 19 October 1957 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada *"Messages to Canada"*, p. 65

