

AFRICAN-AMERICAN BAHÁ'ÍS -- ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Extracts from the Communications of Shoghi Effendi

The Guardian feels very strongly that the Negro Bahá'ís have great responsibilities, both towards their own race and towards their fellow-believers. They must not only arise to teach the Cause to the members of their own race, but must do all in their power to ensure that within their Bahá'í Community itself the Negro and white believers understand and love each other and are truly as one soul in different bodies. Our allegiance as believers is to Bahá'u'lláh; we must fix our attention and devotion on Him, and His Will, and, heedless of the shortcomings of our fellow-Bahá'ís, act as He would have us toward them.

(23 November 1941, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

The Guardian always feels that the Negro Bahá'ís have a great contribution to make to the Faith, because, having as a race suffered so much themselves, they are in a better position to know how precious and how greatly needed are love, sympathy and tolerance, than those who have not passed through the same hard school of experience.

(8 November 1942, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

The Negroes, though they themselves may not realize it, have a contribution to make to the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh. His teachings and the society He has come to establish are for every race and every nation, and each one of them has his own part to play and the gift of his own qualities and talents to give to the whole.

(10 December 1942, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to two believers)

The Negro believers must be just as active as their white brothers and sisters in spreading the Faith, both among their own race and members of other races. It has been a great step forward in the Cause's development in America to have Negro pioneers go forth, and their work has been of the greatest help and very productive of results.

(19 March 1944, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to two believers)

FEEL MOVED APPEAL GALLANT GREAT-HEARTED AMERICAN BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY ARISE EVEN
LAUNCHING FAR-REACHING HISTORIC CAMPAIGN BY SISTER COMMUNITY BRITISH ISLES LEND
VALUED ASSISTANCE MERITORIOUS ENTERPRISE UNDERTAKEN PRIMARILY ILLUMINATION
TRIBES EAST WEST AFRICA ENVISAGED TABLETS CENTRE COVENANT REVEALED DARKEST HOUR
HIS MINISTRY. APPEAL PARTICULARLY ITS DEARLY BELOVED MEMBERS BELONGING NEGRO
RACE PARTICIPATE CONTEMPLATED PROJECT MARKING SIGNIFICANT MILESTONE WORLD
UNFOLDMENT FAITH SUPPLEMENTING WORK INITIATED FIFTY YEARS AGO NORTH AMERICAN
CONTINENT FORGING FRESH LINKS BINDING AMERICAN BRITISH EGYPTIAN COMMUNITIES
PROVIDING PRELUDE FULL SCALE OPERATIONS DESTINED BE LAUNCHED LATER PERIOD
UNFOLDMENT DIVINE PLAN AIMING CONVERSION BACKWARD OPPRESSED MASSES SWIFTLY
AWAKENING CONTINENT. THOUGH SUCH PARTICIPATION OUTSIDE SCOPE SECOND SEVEN YEAR
PLAN FEEL STRONGLY ASSUMPTION THIS ADDED RESPONSIBILITY DISTANT VITAL FIELD

THIS CRUCIAL CHALLENGING HOUR WHEN WORLD EVENTS MOVING STEADILY TOWARDS CLIMAX AND CENTENARY BIRTH BAHÁ'U'LLÁH'S MISSION FAST APPROACHING WILL FURTHER ENNOBLE RECORD WORLD-EMBRACING TASKS VALIANTLY UNDERTAKEN AMERICAN BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY CONSTITUTE WORTHY RESPONSE 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ'S INSISTENT CALL RAISED BEHALF RACE HE REPEATEDLY BLESSED LOVED SO DEARLY FOR WHOSE ILLUMINATION HE ARDENTLY PRAYED FOR WHOSE FUTURE HE CHERISHED BRIGHTEST HOPES.

(4 August 1950, cable from Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, published in *Citadel of Faith: Messages to America 1947-1957* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1965), pp. 87-88)

The decision you have taken to go to Africa and teach the Cause is momentous and is worthy of the great race you belong to. The Guardian has been eagerly awaiting a Negro pioneer, and feels that Bahá'u'lláh will surely bless your enterprise and assist you in this work you are planning for His Faith.

You are fortunate to have a wife by your side kindled with the same enthusiasm and determination, and your joint labours will be a tremendous asset to the new campaign in Africa....

He will ardently pray that the way may speedily open for you to go to your goal country in Africa, and he urges you to persevere in your efforts. We all have weak points, but when we arise to serve Bahá'u'lláh He helps us overcome them in a truly miraculous way!

Postscript in the handwriting of Shoghi Effendi

May the Almighty bless, guide and sustain you always, enable you to fulfil your heart's desire, set a noble example to the Negro believers, and win great and memorable victories in that promising continent,

(4 June 1951, from a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

PROFOUNDLY DEPLORE GRIEVOUS LOSS DEARLY BELOVED NOBLE-MINDED GOLDEN-HEARTED LOUIS GREGORY PRIDE EXAMPLE NEGRO ADHERENTS FAITH KEENLY FEEL LOSS ONE SO LOVED ADMIRER TRUSTED 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ. DESERVES RANK FIRST HAND CAUSE HIS RACE. RISING BAHÁ'Í GENERATION AFRICAN CONTINENT WILL GLORY HIS MEMORY EMULATE HIS EXAMPLE. ADVISE HOLD MEMORIAL GATHERING TEMPLE TOKEN RECOGNITION UNIQUE POSITION OUTSTANDING SERVICES.

(5 August 1951, cable from Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States)

Nothing could demonstrate more clearly the crying need of Africa to be given this Faith than the attitude of the authorities in most territories towards American Negroes desiring to go there. It is a clear symptom of the cancer of race prejudice eating at the fibre of many societies.

(7 September 1951, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the Africa Committee of the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States)

He was very pleased to have the first pioneer from America go forth under this organized African campaign; he was doubly happy that it should have been an American Negro who went. This is highly appropriate and surely has delighted the heart of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Who watched over that race with particular love, tenderness and understanding. The ever-increasing part the coloured friends are taking in the work of the Cause, and especially of late years in the pioneer work, gratifies the Guardian immensely. And now, to add further to the record of their services, they can count a member of their race a Hand of the Cause. When we read in the Will and Testament how great is the function of the Hands, we appreciate to what an exalted station our dear brother Louis Gregory attained.

The Guardian hopes that now the American Bahá'is have arisen and started on their pioneer work in Africa they will go on with it at an accelerated pace.
(23 November 1951, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States)

He has been most cheered to hear of the arrival of Mrs. Stephens in Africa, and more recently, of Mr. Foster. It is truly remarkable that both of these devoted souls should belong to the Negro race; and we cannot but believe that it is the will of God that has raised up from this race the two first official pioneers from the United States.

(27 January 1952, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the Africa Teaching Committee of the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States)

The beloved Guardian has asked me to send you the attached copy of extracts from letter dated October 9th, which he received from the Africa Committee of the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles; also copy of letter attached thereto, ... dated September 21st, having to do with the most unusual teaching activities in Uganda.

There are now over 100 Bahá'is in Uganda, and the success of the teaching efforts is astonishing. The Guardian feels it may even be a replica of the wonderful success of the time of the Dawn-breakers. They are coming into the Faith in Uganda, almost in groups.

The beloved Guardian feels both of these letters should be published in the "Bahá'í News" at an early date, as a stimulus to the Friends, particularly the Friends in the South, and especially the Negro Bahá'is. He likewise feels it should be a means of stimulating the sending of pioneers from America to the most important area of our present pioneering effort.

(2 November 1952, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States)

Of all the places in the world where the Bahá'í Faith exists and is spreading, the Guardian is definitely most pleased with Africa, and most proud of Uganda. He feels that the spirit shown by white and negro pioneers alike in that continent, presents a challenge to the Bahá'is everywhere in the world, and that old and staid communities may well learn from, and emulate the example of, the believers of Africa, many of them scarcely a year old in the Cause of God!...

He would like your Committee to convey to all the pioneers, most particularly the negro ones, the expression of his deep admiration of the wonderful spirit that animates them, his feeling of affection for them, and the assurance of his ardent prayers for their success.

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.

(4 June 1954, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the Africa Committee of the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles)

The Guardian would like you in your communications to the pioneers, particularly the African pioneers who have left their homes and families and shown such an exemplary spirit, to assure them of how proud he is of their accomplishments, their victories, and above all, their spirit. He hopes that all over the world the believers will follow the wonderful example set in Africa, and particularly that the American negro Bahá'ís will be inspired to carry on much more actively their own teaching work as a result of the example set in Africa.

(9 May 1955, written by the Hands of the Cause of God residing in the Holy Land at the instruction of Shoghi Effendi to the Hand of the Cause of God Músá Banání)