

NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY OF THE BAHÁ'ÍS OF CANADA

15 LOLA ROAD, TORONTO 7, ONTARIO

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To: The Participants in the Canadian Conference on Human Rights

Dear Friends:

THE RIGHT TO IDENTITY

Under this cover, we enclose a copy of a statement which the Canadian Baha'i Community has just presented to the Federal Government. Its central theme is a human right which, despite the great progress which has been made in the field of social justice by the people and government of Canada, still remains unrecognized even in principle. This right is the inalienable claim which every human being has to a sense of his own identity.

As you will note, the brief concerns itself particularly with the situation of Canada's Indian and Eskimo population. It is the contention of the Baha'i Community that the most serious disability under which these original Canadians today suffer is the deprivation of the sense of their unique spiritual worth. Identity arises not merely from individual heredity, but from the consciousness of a history, a culture, and a body of spiritual values. It is precisely these latter elements which have been consistently suppressed and distorted during the past three centuries of Indian-white encounter. Until this condition is corrected, the native Canadian will continue to be the victim, and the European Canadian the responsible party in a spiritual injustice whose effects may be seen in every other area of life.

THE NUTURING OF IDENTITY

At the conclusion of the enclosed statement are to be found a number of recommendations on the subject of the development and protection of human dignity, which the Canadian Baha'i Community is making to the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. It is our fervent hope, however, that the central theme of these statements will emerge as a conclusion of the Canadian Conference on Human Rights and will be incorporated in that body's recommendations to its own membership. For the Baha'i Community feels that the most serious challenge facing the Conference is the recognition that the right to personal identity and human dignity is not one that can be secured primarily by legislative action. To a far greater extent than any of man's other rights, this great right demands the commitment of the Canadian public to the ideal of unity in diversity. Volunteer associations, professional groups, public information media, educational agencies, and other organizations which have responded to the appeal of the United Nations' proclamation have it in their power profoundly to influence the public mind in this country of these vital issues. It is our firm conviction that this influence will be significant only if it provides the people of Canada with a vision which reaches beyond tolerance and compromise to the unification of mankind.

## THE ROLE OF THE CHURCHES

On no other kind of private organization does the right of all men to a sense of identity make such heavy, even agonizing demands as it does on those which speak in the name of God. It was no doubt for this reason, as well as because of their great influence, that Baha'u'llah, the Founder of the Baha'i Faith, addressed Himself to the religious leaders of the world a century ago at the same time that He appealed to the monarchs of both East and West. In holding up to religious leaders the ideal of unity and social justice which He had earlier outlined to the Heads of State, Baha'u'llah warned that God required the abandonment, once, for all, of those doctrinal pressures and exclusive claims which have so tragically divided mankind:

"O leaders of religion! ... lay aside the things ye possess, and take fast hold of the Tablet of God by His sovereign power... the divers communions of the earth, and the manifold systems of religious belief should never be allowed to foster the feelings of animosity among men... these principles and laws, these firmly established and mighty systems, have proceeded from one Source and are the rays of one Light..."

Although the power of traditional religious institutions everywhere has sharply declined since Baha'u'llah wrote, a unique opportunity still remains to these bodies. In Canada today there are hundreds of thousands of persons who regard the Christian religion as the one true Revelation of God to mankind. Among these people are many whose recognition of divine truth extends no further than the tenets of their own church or sect within Christianity. To the extent that such views survive they fatally inhibit the capacity of those who entertain them to give due respect to moral and cultural values which come from other sources. Indeed, they continue unconsciously to colour the attitudes of many persons who have abandoned formal church membership. There is not in Canada today another influence so harmful to the individual's right to dignity and identity.

The only agency which has the power to correct this unhappy condition is the leadership of Canada's religious organizations. Efforts which churches may exert on behalf of human rights in other areas are essentially secondary because, in the final analysis, such efforts depend on action by other bodies. In this one area alone the Christian churches have unfettered power in their own hands. A democratic, secular state has left it uncompromised, and no other agency has attempted to usurp it. The time has come when it must be exercised, however great the effort, however severe the intellectual and emotional strain which may be involved. The Baha'i Community feels that an essential element in securing to all Canadian citizens the right to a sense of personal identity is a clear, unequivocal statement from the major Christian churches that salvation does not lie solely in their faith; that God has spoken in other ages, in other ways, to all mankind.

THE BAHAI CONTRIBUTION

Although a very high percentage of the Baha'is in Canada are of Indian or Eskimo background, the Canadian Baha'i Community does not presume to speak in the name of the native peoples of this country. We feel emphatically that the only agencies so qualified are those which these minority groups themselves have created. Our concern and our responsibility lie, rather, in the area of spiritual principle. The Revelation of Baha'u'llah represents, we believe, the Will of God at this critical juncture in the evolution of mankind; there is no subject with which that Revelation deals more fully and explicitly than it does with the question of social justice. In their current efforts to draw these spiritual principles to the attention of leaders of thought in every land, the Baha'is of the world are attempting to respond to the responsibility which that same Revelation lays on them to carry the Message of God to the mass of their fellowmen to whom, together with them, it is addressed.

The International Year for Human Rights provides a particularly welcome and appropriate opportunity for us to discharge this responsibility. Our earnest hope, however, is that Human Rights Year in Canada will prove to have been only the beginning of a sustained and intensive campaign which will end only when all men enjoy to the full all of those rights conferred on them by their Creator.

Faithfully,

NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY  
OF THE BAHAI'S OF CANADA

## PART I

ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO, a prisoner in a Turkish fortress at Akka on the coast of Palestine addressed a series of letters to the political and religious leaders of the world. This handful of letters are, by any standard, among the most remarkable documents in man's spiritual history. Their message was the announcement that the age of justice had dawned for all mankind. Their Author declared Himself to be that universal Messenger of God awaited by the followers of all the religions of man:

"O Kings of the earth! The Most Great Law has been revealed in this Spot, this Scene of transcendent splendour... God hath committed into your hands the reins of the government of the people that ye may rule with justice over them... Your people are your treasures. Beware lest your rule violate the commandments of God, and ye deliver your wards into the hands of the robber. Bestir yourselves in anticipation of the days of Divine Justice, for the promised hour is now come."

In specific communications to Czar Alexander II, the Emperors of France and Austria, Kaiser Wilhelm I, and several others of their contemporaries, Baha'u'llah outlined the principles which He declared to be the Will of God for a united mankind: racial integration; economic justice; collective security; disarmament; and the abolition of religious exclusiveness. In the past, the Word of God had been concerned chiefly with the spiritual and moral life of the individual. Now, Baha'u'llah asserted, God had revealed laws and teachings for the spiritualization not only of the individual, but of society itself.

### Human Rights

One of the most challenging of Baha'u'llah's statements on social justice concerns the foundation of human rights. Neither force, nor political theory, nor even, in the final analysis, legislation alone can secure to men the common rights they seek. The only power that can accomplish this end, Baha'u'llah states, is one which can transform conscience itself. This power is the Revelation of God. Ultimately, human rights are God-given, and Baha'u'llah's mission contained the clear mandate for their realization in this age. Indeed, the letters to the kings declared that forces had been released in the world more powerful and far reaching than any that man could then conceive. It was these forces whose ultimate effect would be to make possible a global order based on unity and justice:

"A new life is, in this age, stirring within the souls of all mankind... The whole earth is now in a state of pregnancy... This is the Day in which God's most excellent favours have been poured out upon men, the Day in which His most mighty grace hath been infused into all created things."

On the leaders of mankind, Baha'u'llah declared, God had conferred the priceless privilege of sharing in the realization of this new social order, the age-old goal of seers and statesmen. The kings could seize this opportunity only by detaching themselves from the divisive goals of the past, and dedicating themselves wholeheartedly to the ideal of a united world. Speaking to the rulers of

the nineteenth century who were the initial recipients of His message, Baha'u'llah demanded for all men:

Equality before the law:

"Beware not to deal unjustly with anyone that appealeth to you."

Economic security:

"Know ye that the poor in your midst are God's trust... Ye will most certainly be called upon to answer for His trust."

The right to work:

"It is made incumbent on everyone to engage in some occupation ... We have made this, your occupation, identical with the worship of God."

The protection of minorities:

"Safeguard the rights of the down-trodden and punish the wrongdoers."

Universal education:

"The day is approaching when all the peoples of the world will have adopted one universal language and one common script... These things are obligatory... To acquire knowledge is incumbent upon all."

Yet other passages of Baha'u'llah's writings deal with the equality of women, with democratic political processes, with the abolition of all forms of enforced servitude, and with the creation of international agencies to secure these benefits equally to all people.

### The Judgment of History

The letters to the kings also contained ominous warnings that the Will of God cannot be frustrated by any human agency "however mighty its battalions, however vast its wealth, however profound its influence." God, Baha'u'llah asserted, has pledged Himself to establish justice among men, "though no king be found on earth" willing to assist. The monarchs were warned that the same forces which were impelling mankind on to the unification of the race would burst apart any institution which set itself against the needs of humanity:

"O kings of the earth!... If ye pay no heed unto the counsels which in peerless and unequivocal language, We have revealed in this Tablet, Divine chastisement shall assail you from every direction, and the sentence of His justice will be pronounced against you. On that day ye shall have no power to resist Him... Have mercy on yourselves and on those beneath you."

### A New Leadership

The kings and emperors of the nineteenth century, almost without exception, ignored the significance both of Baha'u'llah's appeal and of the tides of social and economic revolution already rising about them. The universal upheaval of the past century has now forever removed the opportunity from the hands of those few of their heirs whose thrones still survive. In their place, elected governments of various kinds and philosophies now struggle with the problems which the monarchs neglected. An even greater

difference between that age and our own, however, is the fact that the universal cry for justice threatens the survival, not only of political institutions, but of civilization itself. It was, therefore, to mankind's emerging egalitarian leadership that Baha'u'llah addressed Himself when it became evident that the kings had placed national, imperial, and materialistic goals above the welfare of humanity:

"O ye, the elected representatives of the people in every land! Take counsel together, and let your concern be only for that which profiteth mankind... Regard the world as the human body which, though at its creation whole and perfect, hath been afflicted through various causes with grave disorders and maladies... We behold it today at the mercy of rulers so drunk with pride that they cannot discern their own best advantage... Soon will the present day order be rolled up, and a new one spread out in its stead."

For the present leadership of human affairs, the Message of Baha'u'llah is as relevant and far more urgent than it was a century ago. Social justice represents the Will of God for mankind. The unique privilege of those who hold authority, whether that authority be political, intellectual, or moral, is to serve the achievement of this goal. Implicit in the history of the past century, and explicit in the writings of the Messenger of God, is the warning that power used for lesser goals will recoil terribly on those who wield it.



Human rights are, therefore, not concessions to be parcelled out by governments, or justified by political and social philosophies. Rather they represent the unconditioned gift of God to all mankind.

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TODAY, a century after the dispatch of the initial message to the kings, three million followers of Baha'u'llah around the world are exerting every effort to bring His teachings and warnings to the attention of all mankind. Presentations to heads of state of copies of Baha'u'llah's writings, and a mass proclamation program aimed at the general public in every land and utilizing all forms of information media are among the means being employed. In addition, the International Baha'i Community is seeking to acquaint statesmen, academics, jurists, civil servants, educators, clergymen, and other leaders of thought with those elements of Baha'u'llah's message of divine justice which directly concern their areas of social responsibility.

PART II

THE BAHAI'S OF CANADA are profoundly aware of the fact that the cause of human rights has nowhere made greater strides than it has in this country. In this development we see the fulfillment of some of the remarkable prophecies about our land which are to be found in the Baha'i Scriptures: "The future of Canada, whether from the standpoint of civilization or the virtues of the Kingdom, is very great. Day by day civilization and freedom shall increase." Moreover, Canadian Baha'is are convinced that this development, if consciously and energetically pursued by government and public alike, can exert an influence on the welfare of the rest of mankind far beyond anyone's present capacity to imagine.

A Pluralistic Society

One of the reasons for this latter opportunity is the pluralistic nature of Canadian society. Unlike the United States, which is similarly composed of many ethnic and cultural groups, Canada has never become a "melting-pot" for its constituent elements. In this one sense, it is far more representative of the general condition of the world than is its southern neighbour. This fact lends all the more significance to the achievements which Canadian society has made in the field of human rights. It is the firm conviction of the Baha'i Community that this creative tension must be maintained if

Canada is to make the unique contribution to the social evolution of mankind for which history and nature have remarkably fitted it. At so critical a juncture, two principles enunciated by Baha'u'llah appear to be especially relevant.

### The First Priority

One of the most challenging assertions in Baha'u'llah's message of social justice, so far as the immediate condition of mankind is concerned, is the order of priorities He proclaimed. Among modern social thinkers it is believed that the really pressing social needs are matters of reform. Opinions vary widely as to the relative urgency of the different areas of need and even more widely as to the means by which change should be accomplished, but there is general agreement in giving priority to programs of social improvement. The unification of mankind, where it is discussed seriously, is regarded as a distant, even doubtful outcome of these less radical reformations.

Such a view is in sharp conflict with Baha'u'llah's prescription for the ills of our world. It is His challenging assertion that no enduring social reformation is possible until the oneness of mankind has been accepted and given meaningful expression by the governments of the world and the leaders of thought:

"He who is your Lord, the All-Merciful cherisheth in His heart the desire of beholding the entire human race as one soul and one body... Whatsoever is raised on this foundation, the changes and chances of this world can never impair... The well-being of mankind, its peace and security, are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established."

### Unity In Diversity

Collaterally with this call for the recognition of the oneness of the human race, Baha'u'llah proclaimed the validity of all of mankind's cultural heritage. The Baha'i Writings refer specifically not only to the spiritual resources of such major civilizations as the West, Islam, China and India, but also to those of the native peoples of every continent. "Human rights", therefore, include a fundamental right which is at once more subtle and more important than any other. This is the individual's right to an identity which is recognized and respected by the generality of his fellow men as the work of the Spirit of God. Such an identity arises not only from simple heredity but represents the influence of a history, a culture, and a body of spiritual values. It is the essential foundation of self-respect. The ideal which Baha'u'llah holds up to the leaders of mankind, therefore, is the principle of unity in diversity. Attempts to establish social justice on any lesser basis can only end in frustration, conflict, and eventual failure:

"O contending peoples of the earth! Set your faces toward unity... There can be no doubt that the people of the world of whatever race or religion, derive their

inspiration from one heavenly Source. The favours vouchsafed by Him (God) unto mankind have been, and will ever remain, limitless in their range... Every one of these gifts is an undoubted evidence of the majesty, the power, the ascendancy, the all-embracing knowledge of the one true God. Consort with the followers of all religions with joy and harmony."

It is in the area marked out by these two complementary principles that the Canadian Baha'i Community feels it can best contribute to the progress of the movement for human rights in this country.

As we have already indicated, Baha'u'llah's call to the leaders of the world dealt with rights in a wide range of human concern, economic, legal, political, social, and educational. In Canada, at least, there is already a remarkable degree of agreement in principle on these subjects. Moreover, there is an impressive record of achievement, both by government and by private agencies. What is required is a very great expansion of resources, a refinement of method, and an intensification of the effort to apply accepted principles. The advice which the Federal Government needs in the specific areas mentioned can best be supplied, therefore, by representatives of the minority groups themselves, and by professionally trained experts. For a religious organization, whether our own or another, to press further arguments of principle in these specialized fields would be to betray a serious lack of appreciation of the sincerity, goodwill, and competence which have increasingly characterized public and government response.

### The Right to Identity

The situation, unhappily, is very different in the case of the most truly spiritual of all men's rights: the individual's right to his own identity. The dominant culture in Canada is one which emerged from the theological, moral, social, economic, and political experience of the Anglo-Saxon people. It is hardly necessary to note the unique and incalculable blessings which this culture has bestowed on Canada. Its evidences are everywhere around us. Our concern, rather, must lie in assuring that Canadian society gives full freedom of expression to spiritual and cultural values which derive from very different sources than Great Britain. Only as this goal is accepted and worked for will Canada assure to all its citizens the human dignity which God wills for them and which is the mainspring of all motivation.

### The Context of Change

Such a task demands an enormous effort of mind and heart. At the very beginning, it demands that Canadians accept the truth, enunciated by Baha'u'llah in the very year that Canada itself became a nation, that a world civilization is struggling to be born, a civilization which will be neither Western nor Oriental, neither socialist nor capitalist, neither purely democratic nor rigidly authoritarian. Neither, for that matter, will it be Christian, Islamic, or agnostic. Far less will it be British and Protestant. Rather, the civilization

of man's future will represent the gradual and harmonious blending of all the race's spiritual and social achievements. Only in such a context can Canada's own remarkable experiment in social justice have any meaning or achieve any lasting success.

To the precise extent that Canadians grasp this vision will we begin to appreciate the values of the minority groups within our nation. The dominant culture of Canada (or indeed of any other nation on earth) does not possess the spiritual capacity to "integrate" minorities. It can only denature or suppress those who are too weak to resist, and alienate the remainder. If we examine honestly the evidence of our own experience, we are overwhelmed by the historical proofs of this assertion.

This is not to suggest that pressure to conformity is either the will of the majority group or the policy of the Canadian Government. Rather, where such pressure exists, it represents the blind, haphazard influence of a body of erroneous assumptions of ethnic, religious and cultural superiority. Admitted excellence in many areas of achievement is unconsciously taken as a guarantee of superiority in all of man's social concerns. Set in the context of nineteenth century North America, such errors passed relatively unchallenged. Set in the context of a world of three billion persons rooted in an infinite variety of cultures, these assumptions must quickly dissolve. In the view of the Baha'i Community, it is imperative that the Canadian Government make every effort to establish this new context as rapidly and fully as possible in the thinking of every Canadian, because it alone corresponds to the reality of the modern situation.

The Nurturing of Identity

At the conclusion of this statement are to be found a number of recommendations on this subject which the Canadian Baha'i Community is making to the Federal Government. In submitting these proposals, we are fully aware that the right to personal identity and dignity is not one which can be secured primarily by legislative or administrative action. To a far greater extent than is the case with man's other rights, this great right rests on the commitment of the Canadian public to the Ideal of unity in diversity. Churches, public information media, professional groups, and volunteer associations have it in their power profoundly to influence the public mind on such an issue. For this reason, we are very encouraged to note the expressions of support which the great majority of these groups have given to the United Nations' proclamation of the "International Year for Human Rights". As part of our own efforts in this direction, the Canadian Baha'i Community will make every effort to encourage its fellow members in Canada's I.Y.H.R. Council to give practical support to whatever action is taken by the Federal Government. In this connection, we are presenting a copy of the present brief to the Council's national conference in Ottawa on December 1 - 3, and will also distribute it to the Council's membership at national, provincial and local levels.



PART III

CANADA'S NATIVE PEOPLES

As has already been indicated, the Baha'i Community's world-wide effort to proclaim the truths of Baha'u'llah's Message is not limited to Human Rights Year. The present program began in October of 1967 on the hundredth anniversary of the dispatch of the first of the "Tablets to the Kings"; it will cover the entire centenary period of the revelation of these Tablets, concluding in April of 1973. During the course of this period, the Baha'is of Canada will be undertaking further projects concerned with the specific theme of human rights. It is our hope that we will be able to give attention to the needs of all Canadians.

There is, however, one area of the human rights problem in this country which is so serious and pressing as to be quite literally desperate. This is the situation of Canada's native people. It is with this area of need that this brief is specifically concerned. Although the principles enunciated by Baha'u'llah, and outlined in the foregoing pages, apply to all of the citizens of this country, as indeed they do to all of mankind, there are very special applications to the condition of the Indians and Eskimos. Further, the Canadian Baha'i Community has a direct involvement in this situation which is in one way unique; fully a quarter of the Baha'is of this country are of Indian or Eskimo origin; one in every six of our elected local administrative bodies is

established on an Indian reservation; and finally, native Canadians are active at every level of the Baha'i administration, whether elective or appointive, not excluding our national board of directors.

The native Canadian has been generally regarded by the non-Indian community as a second-class citizen. The challenge confronting both the native peoples of the country and the remainder of the population is to recognize that the Indian or Eskimo is not merely a brown-faced white man nor should he be expected to conform in toto to white cultural patterns in order fully to participate in society. The white Canadian must recognize the fact that the Indian and Eskimo have valid and unique cultural heritages dating back to pre-European contact times. Understanding of Canada's present day native population will, in part, derive from a knowledge and appreciation of traditional Indian and Eskimo cultures - of their organization, values, patterns of social, political and religious life, which vary in many respects from both 17th century European culture and 20th century Canadian society.

#### TWO SOURCES OF INJUSTICE

Throughout the historical period, two sources have given rise to injustice against the native Canadian. On the one hand, unjust behaviour has resulted from a basic ignorance of traditional aboriginal culture on the part of fundamentally well-motivated whites. On the other hand, more deliberate acts of injustice have resulted from white men's efforts to exploit the Indian economically, to impose alien

European religion on the traditional native way of life, and from a persistent refusal to recognize the value of Indian and Eskimo achievement.

In the comments which follow, our concern is solely to note some of the cultural differences between Indians and non-Indians, and the serious social damage which has occurred during the period of historical interaction between these two cultures. The two purposes of such a review are to focus attention on the central human right now denied to Canada's native peoples - the right to identity and self-respect, and to introduce a number of recommendations to the Federal Government.

Although much of this comment applies in some degree to the Eskimo population, its focus is on the situation of the Canadian Indians who are both far more numerous and have been far longer and more directly exposed to the influences of European civilization.

#### MISUNDERSTANDING

The Canadian Indians traditionally did not (nor do they today) constitute a single homogeneous cultural group. The original North Americans were divided into hundreds of population units loosely organized into tribes. These groups displayed a great diversity in language, modes of subsistence, complexity of social organization, patterns of religious, ceremonial and artistic expression. Therefore, it would be simplistic to assume a uniformity of traditional Indian culture. Nevertheless, several fundamental cultural elements were

characteristic of all the indigenous tribes. Unfortunately the majority of white Canadians are unaware even of these common cultural patterns among the native population.

When the first Europeans discovered the vast land now called Canada, it was already inhabited by some 220,000 peoples. These peoples were loosely organized into groups or tribes, most of which were more or less migratory, moving their settlements and temporary dwellings as the seasonal fluctuations in food supply required. The tribes spoke different languages and dialects which corresponded closely with the geographical regions they inhabited. In all cases, however, the fundamental social unit was the biological family, and often included the extended kin group.

#### I. Manners and Ethics

The quality of interpersonal relationships in the traditional family and band characterizes the Indian to the present day. Each kin group member soon learns, as a small child, his place and function within the group, and the various patterns of behaviour expected towards his relatives. For example, he may learn he must behave differently towards one young cousin who is a skilled hunter than towards another who is an untried boy. To a white man, both youths would simply be regarded as young Indians to be treated in a similar fashion.

Seniority generally brings with it respect and authority. Indeed, Indians show much respect for other individuals in general,

and do not engage in aggressive behaviour patterns commonly characteristic of white men, such as advice-giving, suggesting, asking personal, probing questions, all of which they regard as intrusions and serious violations of an individual's rights. In unfamiliar situations the Indian tends to be silent and to observe until he knows precisely what is expected of him, while the non-Indian generally attempts to cope with the situation by initiating conversation or activity in order to find his bearings. In intercultural meetings between Indian and non-Indian, therefore, misunderstandings frequently arise. The white man observes the Indian's silence and withdrawal, and concludes that he is ignorant, hostile or apathetic. The Indian, on the other hand, regards the aggressive (however well motivated) overtures of the white man as both confusing and disrespectful.

## 2. Communication

Much communication in traditional and contemporary Indian culture is non-verbal. Indians tend to "know intuitively" the feelings and moods of their fellows. From an early age, the child is trained to be highly sensitive in inter-personal relationships. The white man is relatively insensitive to these subtle levels of communication. He emphasizes verbal communication. When he is confronted by the "silence" characteristic of the Indian, he feels awkward and embarrassed and seems driven to fill the void with conversation, or at least with sound. He remains unaware that

Indians share much on the silent, non-verbal level. Similarly, the Indian may well feel frustrated, annoyed or perplexed at the constant, apparently meaningless activity, noise and conversation characteristic of the white man.

### 3. Government

With some exceptions, leadership in the traditional Indian family, band or tribe was practically nominal: some member who, because of his courage, excellence of character, or success in hunting, would gain temporary pre-eminence. In theory all band members were equal, and the leader was granted few privileges.

Some tribes manifested a democratic form of government through the election of a council, one of whose members acted as chief. The council's decisions, arrived at through communal consultation, affected the activities of the entire group in such areas of concern as hunting and warfare. In tribes lacking chiefs or an executive council, law and order was maintained by the force of public opinion. No written legal codes existed; rather, the tribal rules and taboos were passed down from generation to generation by word of mouth and were taught to the young boy by both direct and more subtle means of socialization. Total ostracism from such a closely knit and vital group was a particularly serious deterrent to the individual. Less serious breaches of taboo or mores were dealt with by the immediate kin group.

The communal nature of traditional Indian life suggested above stands in sharp contrast to the European tradition of individualism

with its emphasis on private ownership, personal initiative and individual conscience as a prime guide to moral behaviour. Inevitably, serious misunderstandings have resulted from the meeting of two such diverse cultural patterns.

#### 4. The Indian and Nature

The early settlers did not comprehend the attitude and relationship of the Indian to his natural environment. To the European, increasingly, nature has been a thing to be conquered and controlled. The Indian, on the other hand, felt at one with nature and with its inhabitants. He had no concept of private ownership of land and resources. Tribes inhabited large territories and took care not to encroach on the hunting grounds of neighbouring tribes. If the land "belonged" to anyone, in some sense, then it belonged to the entire band, whose members shared in its fishing places, game, life and plant resources. An Indian no more believed he had a private personal claim to the land and its resources, than a white man today feels he has a right to own the air he breathes.

The Indian fished, hunted, gathered, and in some cases, cultivated, primarily for subsistence. He rarely killed more game than was necessary to supply immediate needs and such future requirements as the lean winter months. Some inter-tribal exchange existed to supply groups with resources they lacked in their own area, but little surplus was purposely cultivated for commercial trade. The

European, on the other hand, oriented to a monetary system of economic exchange, concluded that the Indian either lacked some basic drive for acquisition, or was merely lazy by nature.

The Indian adjusted his economic and social life to the seasonal cycles of nature - the fruition of flora and the prime seasons for fur trapping, hunting or fishing. He did not lack a sense of time as has commonly been supposed; he merely operated on a different concept of time from the white urban system necessary to the functioning of a highly commercial or industrial economy. Here again, through ignorance of Indian cultural patterns, the Indians' behaviour has been condemned as irresponsible, lazy, and unreliable when judged by white standards of punctuality.

##### 5. Indian Religion

For the Indian, religion formed an integral part of daily existence. In the entire universe that surrounded him and supplied his needs, he sensed power, beyond the control of human agents. Such an individual had a rich spiritual life. Through prayers, fasting and particularly through the vision quests, he sought to commune with the spirit world which he sensed surrounded him. The Indian's religion was more concerned with the intuitive capacities of the individual than with his analytical faculties. When he spoke of his relationship to the spirit world, he tended to rely on concrete images rather than on abstract theological concepts.



The native community had a ceremonial life which varied from tribe to tribe. Ceremonies were performed to invoke good fortune in hunting, and other endeavours. Prohibitions such as forbidding hunting or fishing in certain seasons were rigorously observed, and often functioned to enable various species to reach maturity and reproduce before their numbers were depleted by human agents.

Baha'u'llah emphatically declares that native religion was inspired by the same Divine Source as other forms of religion. Familiarity with Indian culture provides countless evidences of the existence of a moral order which regulated interpersonal relationships as well as man's relationship to the natural and spiritual realm. It was a culture which also found expression in music, dance, art and an abundant oral tradition.

The traditional beliefs underwent considerable re-interpretation under the impact of white civilization. Some Christian elements were incorporated into the Indian belief system. Generally, however, Indian religious practices were judged and rejected by the European missionaries. Traders and trappers similarly scorned and disregarded the ancient hunting taboos observed by Indians for centuries. The early settlers derided the native vision experience as foolish illusion or traffic with the devil. Conditions radically changed for the Indian. The white man, who controlled fire-arms, and other material elements of Western Civilization seemed now to wield more control over the Indians' world than the ancient spiritual forces of the universe.

## EXPLOITATION

The types of misunderstandings discussed above resulted from ignorance. Unfortunately, there has also been a long history of deliberate violation of the basic rights of the Indian peoples:

### I. Economic Exploitation

In general, the original colonizers were hospitably greeted and assisted by the native people of this continent. As the Europeans came in increasing numbers, they introduced their own system of agriculture, and attempted to acquire more and more land from the Indians for their own private use. The Indians placed no monetary value on land, and, therefore, conceived of the exchange more in terms of sharing or trading rather than purchase. The Europeans, however, legalized these transactions in the form of the "treaty", the intent and nature of which initially was not at all understood by the Indians. By the time the latter became aware of their losses, they had been ruled off of lands which they had forcibly or willingly ceded to the invaders. In later years, Indians resisted ceding their land, but by this time, the immigrants had sufficient military power to compel submission.

The great increase in hunting, trapping fishing (stimulated by European trade and no longer subject to traditional restrictions) rapidly depleted the rich natural resources. The demand for beaver pelts made the Indian rich for a brief period of time, but by 1797 the northland was denuded of beaver and the Indian faced poverty.

The introduction of guns and horses had a similar effect on the Plains. Jenness reports that by 1897 the once plenteous herds of buffalo had disappeared and the Indians, dying of starvation, had to accept unreservedly the conditions laid down by the white man. Indian life, therefore, became entangled with the European economic system. The Indian was confined to increasingly narrower reserves. The natural food supply was no longer adequate to maintain his traditional pattern of subsistence. He acquired the desire for many elements of white material culture and his former self-subsistency was replaced by dependence on European trading stores to provide the necessities of life.

Many of the traders' economic dealings with the Indian consisted of deliberate exploitation of the latter's hunting abilities, his knowledge of the natural resources and his ignorance of European culture. Treaties, whose full implications were never fully understood by the Indian, were agreed to, solemnized and finalized, only to be subsequently dishonored and broken by the white man. Throughout history, the trust of the Indian has been so often breached that it is small wonder he now regards white policies and proposals with suspicion and resistance.

White settlers brought with them two plagues. The first was forms of disease to which the Indian totally lacked immunity. The deadliest, small-pox, greatly reduced the native population, and typhus and other ills took a further toll. The second plague was

alcohol, a force almost equally destructive to Indian culture. Alcohol was unknown to Indians in prehistoric times and they had developed neither control nor resistance.

## 2. Religious Exploitation

The missionaries also viewed the customs, and beliefs of the Indian as uncivilized and contemptible. Because the European evangelists misunderstood the spiritual life of the Indians, they condemned native practices as "pagan superstitions". Traditional faith was crushed under the highly organized, proselytizing onslaught of ecclesiastical Christianity. In varying degrees, the motivation of the white missionary was good. Nevertheless, the Indian was rejected as a spiritual being. He required conversion to some sect of Christianity in order to be accepted as a child of God. Ironically, many of these same missionaries recognized that, in many cases, the moral social behaviour of the pagan Indians was superior to that prevalent in contemporary Christian Europe.

"In 1701... a Jesuit priest, working with the Hurons had this comment: 'These people seek a reputation for liberality and generosity. They give away their property freely and very seldom ask any return. If they suspect anyone seeks to accomplish an evil deed, they do not restrain him with threats, but with gifts. From the same desire for harmony comes the ready assent to whatever one teaches them. Nevertheless, they hold tenaciously to their native beliefs or superstitions and on that account are more difficult to instruct'."

The denial of the validity of the Indian religion and culture, and the blind passion to "save the heathen" constitutes one of the grossest injustices committed by the European invader against the native Canadian's right to a sense of identity and self-respect.

George Catlin, an artist who travelled extensively among the Indians in the 1830's made this declaration:

"I have heard it said by some very good men, and some who have been preaching the Christian religion amongst the Indians that they have no religion... I fearlessly assert to the world (and I defy contradiction) that the North American Indian is everywhere in his native state, a highly moral and religious being, endowed by his Maker with an intuitive knowledge of some great Author of his being, and the Universe; in dread of whose displeasure he constantly lives, with the apprehension before him, of a future state, where he expects to be rewarded or punished according to the merits he has gained or forfeited in this world. Of their extraordinary modes and sincerity of worship, I speak with equal confidence; and although I am compelled to pity them for their ignorance, I am bound to say that I never saw any other people of any colour, who spend so much of their lives in humbling themselves before, and worshipping the Great Spirit, as some of these tribes do, nor any whom I would not as soon suspect of insincerity and hypocrisy". (Jack D. Forbes, *The Indian in America's Past* : p. 27).

In 1805, in the Niagara area, Red Jacket made the following reply to a missionary's attempts at conversion:

"Brother, we do not understand these things; we are told that your religion was given to your forefathers, and has been handed down from father to son. We also have a religion which was given to our forefathers and has been handed down to us, their children. We worship that way. It teaches us to be thankful for all the favours we receive, and to be united; we never quarrel about religion... Brother, we do not wish to destroy your religion, or take it from you. We want only to enjoy our own".

### 3. Cultural Exploitation

The final point which cannot be avoided is the deliberate misrepresentation of both Indian culture and the role of the Indian in North American history. Until recently, most mass media portrayed the Indian as the arch-enemy of the settlers, who lurked behind the hills waiting to attack defenseless wagon trains of pioneers, to scalp the men and abduct the women and children. In its crudest form, Hollywood productions have advanced the stereotype of the ruthless, cunning, war-like savage, clad in feathers, brandishing tomahawks, and engaging in frenzied war dances.

The more subtle and insidious falsifications of the Indian's role in history have been perpetuated in both elementary and sophisticated history test books which portray the historical interaction between the two peoples from an ethnocentric and biased viewpoint. These accounts tend to stress negative facts of Indian life and, generally, to ignore the positive contributions of the Indian to the development of this country.

The early settlers were welcomed by the natives of this land. Only Indian tutelage enabled the European pioneers to adapt and exist in the new and harsh environment. The settler, accustomed to a mild climate, roadways and wheeled vehicles, was able to penetrate this land by adopting the methods of travel developed by the Indian - the toboggan, canoe and dog-sled in the Arctic. It was the Indian, Jenness reports, who "taught the settlers woodcraft and the habits of the strange game with which the forests abounded. They manned the canoes

of the explorers and fur traders, served as guides and hunters through the wilderness and showed them the trails and the canoe routes. Many of our highways in Ontario follow the routes of ancient trails, and our railroads cross the mountains over passes first used and pointed out by the Indians. They and their half-breed descendants have always been the mainstay of the Dominion, led to the discovery of fertile lands and mineral wealth, with subsequent colonization and development. We may safely say that large tracts of the Dominion would either be little known today, or entirely unknown, if the country had not been inhabited at the time of its discovery."

The Indian diet also enabled the settler to survive in Canada; Indian maize grew where European wheat would not; beans, pumpkins and squash which were originally cultivated by the Indians, have become important foods of the non-Indian world.

The disregard and falsification of the cultural and spiritual legacy of the Indians, on the part of historians, educators and policy-makers has contributed to the impoverishment not only of the Indian people but of non-Indian civilization as well.

Ignorance of the cultural heritage of the Indian peoples has served to sever the Indian from his past. Since the arrival of the white man, the whole social and economic organization of his traditional culture has been radically altered, and replaced by a dominating, alien culture. The Indian has been confined to reserve lands, many of which have a substandard level of living. It is forgotten that the Indian is a product of a valid cultural heritage, however much it may differ from twentieth century Western urban life.

PART IV

THE OPPORTUNITY FOR LEGISLATIVE ACTION

The prevalence of a negative stereotype of the Indian perpetuates the white man's view of the Indian as a second-class citizen. Many whites, whether or not they have ever had direct contact with Indians, have a mental picture or stereotype of the "average Indian", which includes such attributes as laziness, sloth, drunkenness, irresponsibility, ignorance, lack of foresight, squalid living conditions, etc. Frederick D. G. Dallyn conducted a study of attitudes towards Indians and people of Indian descent in 1959 and 1960 in Portage la Prairie and Selkirk, Manitoba. His purpose was to find out to what extent prejudice existed in these towns and what stereotypes had been accepted. His results indicated the presence of prejudice but, more important, the presence of an enormous fund of goodwill among whites:

"In effect, the findings indicate that there is still a strong response to stereotypes about Indians; that they are dirty, lazy, unreliable, without skills and so on. But the positive thing about the survey is that the Indian has a right to equal education, equal job opportunities and a status in the community alongside non-Indians, and that the right is recognized". (Dallyn, 1959 and 60 : p. 20-21).

The Indian himself, after being told by the non-Indian world in words and action that he is unequal, accepts the stereotype, and begins to conform to the white man's expectations. He associates his own "Indianness" with shame rather than appreciation or pride.



Only recently have some individuals and groups (both Indians and non-Indians) attempted to break this vicious circle, to assert the nobility of Indian culture and to demand the rights which have been so long denied.

The acceptance of the Indian by Canadian society, for what he is as an individual, and for what he can become, is essential. Education toward a fundamental change in prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory behaviour is necessary to bring about this end, and to enable the Indian Canadian to enjoy one of the most precious of the rights conferred on him by God, the right to his own identity. It is with this goal in view, and mindful of the charge laid by God on us as Baha'is, on the governments of the world, and on all mankind, that the Canadian Baha'i Community makes the following recommendations to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development:

1. In federally operated Indian schools, the teaching language should initially be the mother tongue of the pupils, with provision for phasing into English or French in later grades, wherever such a language program is feasible and the numbers requesting it are sufficient. On the one hand, such a system would give Indian and Eskimo children the opportunity to begin their educational life with the same advantages as English and French-speaking children. On the other, it would end the present identification of "success" and "civilization" with English or French culture.

2. Textbooks, films, and other educational materials either used by federal agencies or subsidized in any way by federal funds

should be strictly reviewed and revised in accordance with the facts of indigenous culture and history. Qualified Indian and Eskimo representatives should be included in the membership of the bodies to which this responsibility is assigned.

3. Ample time should be made available in the regular curricula of federal schools for the study of native culture. In addition, the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, in its negotiations with provincial departments of education, should press for optional courses in the study of native culture in any provincial school serving substantial numbers of Indian or Eskimo people.

4. A concerted effort should be made to recruit and train Indian and Eskimo personnel both for elementary instruction in native languages and for courses in the native cultures.

5. One of the most urgent needs in all Canadian schools, but particularly those serving native Canadians, is for a form of spiritual and moral instruction which is not subordinated to the aims of denominationalism or evangelism of any kind. We urge the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development to create a course of study which will familiarize children in federally operated schools with the entire range of mankind's spiritual experience, including impartial and responsible treatment of all the major religions. It is particularly important that such a course deal thoroughly and sympathetically with the moral and religious life of Canada's indigenous peoples before and after the

arrival of Europeans. Such a program should begin in the primary grades and continue throughout the elementary and secondary schools. Advice and information should be drawn from authorities acceptable to the adherents of the various religions included in the program.

6. It is recommended that the federal government recruit and train young Indians and Eskimos to take part in overseas aid programs, particularly those amongst the native peoples of other nations. Such personnel would, if suitably trained, be more sensitive to the special needs imposed by the cultural differences of these natives, than would Canadians of other backgrounds. Moreover, they would return with skills that could be invaluable in the Canadian Government's programs amongst the underdeveloped segments of our society.