

'ABDU'L-BAHA: TABLETS

Now the people of France are submerged in the pleasures of the senses. Haply, through the efforts of the friends and guidance of God, a breeze from the Abhá Paradise may waft over them and bestow upon them spiritual senses. If, through the endeavours of the friends, such a bestowal be obtained, the people of France will advance rapidly in heavenly perfections, will find new life through the breaths of the Holy Spirit and will seek a new bestowal. Strive thou that the banner of the oneness of the world of humanity may be raised and wave above Paris. Day and night, my thought is ever of this. (From a Tablet to an individual believer - translated from the Persian)

We have reached Paris and cherish the hope that through the aid and loving-kindness of Bahá'u'lláh a lamp may be lit in this deep darkness. The people of Paris are drowned in a sea of materialism and know nothing of the World of God. Like the birds, they know naught save water, seed, and nest. Let us see what God will do! Perhaps some shock will shake these hard rocks. Thence a spark will be struck, and the power of God will flow through all things! (From a Tablet to an individual believer - translated from the Persian)

<http://bahai-library.com/compilations/central.europe.html>

Likewise didst thou ask whether, in this Bahá'í Dispensation, the spiritual will ultimately prevail. It is certain that spirituality will defeat materialism, that the heavenly will subdue the human, and that through divine education the masses of mankind generally will take great steps forward in all degrees of life--except for those who are blind and deaf and mute and dead. How can such as they understand the light? Though the sun's rays illumine every darkest corner of the globe, still the blind can have no share in the glory, and though the rain of heavenly mercy come down in torrents over all the earth, no shrub or flower will bloom from a barren land. <http://www.bahai-library.com/writings/abdulbaha/swab/160.html>

'ABDU'L-BAHA: ADDRESSES

All the Prophets have come to promote divine bestowals, to found the spiritual civilization and teach the principles of morality. Therefore, we must strive with all our powers so that spiritual influences may gain the victory. For material forces have attacked mankind. The world of humanity is submerged in a sea of materialism. The rays of the Sun of Reality are seen but dimly and darkly through opaque glasses. The penetrative power of the divine bounty is not fully manifest. <http://www.bahai-library.com/writings/abdulbaha/pup/2/sec-6.html>

A few days ago I arrived in New York, coming direct from Alexandria. On a former trip I traveled to Europe, visiting Paris and London. Paris is most beautiful in outward appearance. The evidences of material civilization there are very great, but the spiritual civilization is far behind. I found the people of that city submerged and drowning in a sea of materialism. Their conversations and discussions were limited to natural and physical phenomena, without mention of God. I was greatly astonished. Most of the scholars, professors and learned men proved to be materialists. I said to them, "I am surprised and astonished that men of such perceptive caliber and evident knowledge should still be captives of nature, not recognizing the self-evident Reality." <http://www.bahai-library.com/writings/abdulbaha/pup/2/sec-8.html>

Material civilization is likened to the body, whereas divine civilization is the spirit in that body. A body not manifesting the spirit is dead; a fruitless tree is worthless. Jesus declares that there is spiritual capacity in some people, for all are not submerged in the sea of materialism. They seek the Divine Spirit; they turn to God; they long for the Kingdom. It is my hope that these revered people present may attain both material and spiritual progress. As they have advanced wonderfully in material degrees, so may they, likewise, advance in spiritual development until the body shall become refined and beautiful through the wealth of spiritual potentiality and efficiency. <http://www.bahai-library.com/writings/abdulbaha/pup/5/sec-3.html>

The material world is subject to change and transformation. The Cause of the Kingdom is eternal; therefore, it is the most important. But, alas, day by day the power of the Kingdom in human hearts is weakened, and material forces gain the ascendancy. The divine signs are becoming less and less, and human evidences grow stronger. They have reached such a degree that materialists are advancing and aggressive while divine forces are waning and vanishing. Irreligion has conquered religion. The cause of the chaotic condition lies in the differences among the religions and finds its origin in the animosity and hatred existing between sects and denominations. The materialists have availed themselves of this dissension amongst the religions and are constantly attacking them, intending to uproot the tree of divine planting. Owing to strife and contention among themselves, the religions are being weakened and vanquished. If a commander is at variance with his army in the execution of military tactics, there is no doubt he will be defeated by the enemy. Today the religions are at variance; enmity, strife and recrimination prevail among them; they refuse to associate; nay, rather, if necessary they shed each other's blood. Read history and record to see what dreadful events have happened in the name of religion. For instance, the Hebrew prophets were sent to announce Christ, but unfortunately the Talmud and its superstitions veiled Him so completely that they crucified their promised Messiah. Had they renounced the talmudic traditions and investigated the reality of the religion of Moses, they would have become believers in Christ. Blind adherence to forms and imitations of ancestral beliefs deprived them of their messianic bounty. They were not refreshed by the downpouring rain of mercy, nor were they illumined by the rays of the Sun of Truth.

Imitation destroys the foundation of religion, extinguishes the spirituality of the human world, transforms heavenly illumination into darkness and deprives man of the knowledge of God. It is the cause of the victory of materialism and infidelity over religion; it is the denial of Divinity and the law of revelation; it refuses Prophethood and rejects the Kingdom of God. When materialists subject imitations to the intellectual analysis of reason, they find them to be mere superstitions; therefore, they deny religion. For instance, the Jews have ideas as to the purity and impurity of religion, but when you subject these ideas to scientific scrutiny, they are found to be without foundation. <http://www.bahai-library.com/writings/abdulbaha/pup/9/sec-6.html>

Consider to what a remarkable extent the spirituality of people has been overcome by materialism so that spiritual susceptibility seems to have vanished, divine civilization become decadent, and guidance and knowledge of God no longer remain. All are submerged in the sea of materialism. Although some attend churches and temples of worship and devotion, it is in accordance with the traditions and imitations of their fathers and not for the investigation of reality. For it is evident they have not found reality and are not engaged in its adoration. They are holding to certain imitations which have descended to them from their fathers and ancestors. They have become accustomed to passing a certain length of time in temple worship and conforming to imitations and ceremonies. The proof of this is that the son of every Jewish father becomes a Jew and not a Christian; the son of every Muslim becomes a follower of Islam; the son of every Christian proves to be a Christian; the son of every Zoroastrian is a Zoroastrian, etc. Therefore, religious faith and belief is merely a remnant of blind imitations which have descended through fathers and ancestors. Because this man's father was a Jew, he considers himself a Jew. Not that he has investigated reality and proved satisfactorily to himself that Judaism is right--nay, rather, he is aware that his forefathers have followed this course; therefore, he has held to it himself.

The purpose of this is to explain that the darkness of imitations encompasses the world. Every nation is holding to its traditional religious forms. The light of reality is obscured. Were these various nations to investigate reality, there is no doubt they would attain to it. As reality is one, all nations would then become as one nation. So long as they adhere to various imitations and are deprived of reality, strife and warfare will continue and rancor and sedition prevail. If they investigate reality, neither enmity nor rancor will remain, and they will attain to the utmost concord among themselves.

During the years when the darkness of heedlessness was most intense in the Orient and the people were so submerged in imitations that nations were thirsting for the blood of each other, considering each other as contaminated and refusing to associate--at such a time as this Bahá'u'lláh appeared. He arose in the Orient, uprooting the very foundations of imitations, and brought the dawn of the light of reality. Through Him various nations became united because all desired reality. Inasmuch as they investigated reality in religion,

they found that all men are the servants of God, the posterity of Adam, children of one household and that the foundations of all the Prophets are one. For inasmuch as the teachings of the Prophets are reality, Their foundations are one. The enmity and strife of nations, therefore, are due to religious imitations and not to the reality which underlies the teachings of the Prophets. Through Bahá'u'lláh the nations and peoples grew to understand and comprehend this. Therefore, hearts became united, and lives were cemented together. After centuries of hatred and bitterness the Christian, Jew, Zoroastrian, Muslim and Buddhist met in fellowship, all of them in the utmost love and unity. They became welded and cemented because they had perceived reality. <http://www.bahai-library.com/writings/abdulbaha/pup/13/sec-5.html>

It is, therefore, evident and proved that an effort must be put forward to complete the purpose and plan of the teachings of God in order that in this great Day of days the world may be reformed, souls resuscitated, a new spirit of life found, hearts become illumined, mankind rescued from the bondage of nature, saved from the baseness of materialism and attain spirituality and radiance in attraction toward the divine Kingdom. This is necessary; this is needful. Mere reading of the Holy Books and texts will not suffice. <http://www.bahai-library.com/writings/abdulbaha/pup/15/sec-3.html>

In cities like New York the people are submerged in the sea of materialism. Their sensibilities are attuned to material forces, their perceptions purely physical. The animal energies predominate in their activities; all their thoughts are directed to material things; day and night they are devoted to the attractions of this world, without aspiration beyond the life that is vanishing and mortal. In schools and temples of learning knowledge of the sciences acquired is based upon material observations only; there is no realization of Divinity in their methods and conclusions--all have reference to the world of matter. They are not interested in attaining knowledge of the mysteries of God or understanding the secrets of the heavenly Kingdom; what they acquire is based altogether upon visible and tangible evidences. Beyond these evidences they are without susceptibilities; they have no idea of the world of inner significances and are utterly out of touch with God, considering this an indication of reasonable attitude and philosophical judgement whereof they are self-sufficient and proud.

As a matter of fact, this supposed excellence is possessed in its superlative degree by the animals. The animals are without knowledge of God; so to speak, they are deniers of Divinity and understand nothing of the Kingdom and its heavenly mysteries. As deniers of the Kingdom, they are utterly ignorant of spiritual things and uninformed of the supernatural world. Therefore, if it be a perfection and virtue to be without knowledge of God and His Kingdom, the animals have attained the highest degree of excellence and proficiency. Then the donkey is the greatest scientist and the cow an accomplished naturalist, for they have obtained what they know without schooling and years of laborious study in colleges, trusting implicitly to the evidence of the senses and relying solely upon intuitive virtues. The cow, for instance, is a lover of the visible and a believer in the tangible, contented and happy when pasture is plenty, perfectly serene, a blissful exponent of the transcendental school of philosophy. Such is the status of the material philosophers, who glory in sharing the condition of the cow, imagining themselves in a lofty station. Reflect upon their ignorance and blindness. <http://www.bahai-library.com/writings/abdulbaha/pup/16/sec-3.html>

For this reason Jesus Christ said, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." By this Christ meant that unless man is released from the material world, freed from the captivity of materialism and receiving a portion of the bounties of the spiritual world, he shall be deprived of the bestowals and favors of the Kingdom of God, and the utmost we can say of him is that he is a perfect animal. No one can rightly call him a man. In another place He said, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." The meaning of this is that if man is a captive of nature, he is like unto an animal because he is only a body physically born--that is, he belongs to the world of matter and remains subject to the law and control of nature. But if he is baptized with the Holy Spirit, if he is freed from the bondage of nature, released from animalistic tendencies and advanced in the human realm, he is fitted to enter into the divine Kingdom. The world of the Kingdom is the realm of divine bestowals and the bounties of God...The majority of people are captives in the matrix of nature, submerged in the sea of materiality. We must pray that they may be reborn, that they may attain insight and spiritual hearing, that they may receive the gift of another heart, a new transcendent power, and in the eternal world the unending bestowal of divine bounties. <http://www.bahai-library.com/writings/abdulbaha/pup/18/sec-3.html>

Souls shall be educated, vice be dispelled, the virtues of the world of humanity prevail, materialism pass away, religion be strengthened and prove to be the bond which shall cement together the hearts of men. <http://www.bahai-library.com/writings/abdulbaha/pup/19/>

Mankind is submerged in the sea of materialism and occupied with the affairs of this world. They have no thought beyond earthly possessions and manifest no desire save the passions of this fleeting, mortal existence. Their utmost purpose is the attainment of material livelihood, physical comforts and worldly enjoyments such as constitute the happiness of the animal world rather than the world of man. <http://www.bahai-library.com/writings/abdulbaha/pup/22/sec-2.html>

Humanity is submerged in materialism; occupied in everything save the mention of God; speaking of everything save the heavenly kingdom ; hearing everything save the call of God. As far acknowledge of things divine is concerned, it is as though some of the people were interred in the earth, going more and more into the blind darkness, completely buried from the knowledge of things above.

I hope the few gathered here will make a great effort, working day and night, that some result may be accomplished. Perhaps Europe may become weary of the dull materiality of the world and seek refreshment in a share of the heavenly glory. Europe has made extra-ordinary material progress, but if the qualities partake of the dust, what lasting result can accrue? The ideal to strive for is that which is in the supreme horizon – that is eternal! The underground is for worms and moles. That which is a cause for joy is a nest on the highest branch.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá on Divine Philosophy (Boston: Tudor Press, 1918), p. 56: <http://bahai-library.com/compilations/europe.html>

For a long time the religious world had been weakened and materialism had advanced; the spiritual forces of life were waning, moralities were becoming degraded, composure and peace had vanished from souls and satanic qualities were dominating hearts; strife and hatred overshadowed humanity, bloodshed and violence prevailed. God was neglected; the Sun of Reality seemed to have gone completely; deprivation of the bounties of heaven was a fact; and so the season of winter fell upon mankind. But in the generosity of God a new springtime dawned, the lights of God shone forth, the effulgent Sun of Reality returned and became manifest, the realm of thoughts and kingdom of hearts became exhilarated, a new spirit of life breathed into the body of the world and continuous advancement became apparent. <http://www.bahai-library.com/writings/abdulbaha/fwu/sec-2.html>

The sea of materialism is at flood tide and all the nations of the world are immersed in it. It is my hope that the fish will rise to the surface, so that they may behold other wondrous aspects of creation; for the people are like unto the fish swimming in the deep — ignorant of the rest of the universe. May they be transformed into birds of the air and soar in the nether atmosphere! May they break all bonds of limitation, so that they can observe from the height the lordly processions of infinite creatures; they will see the blue heavens studded with luminous stars, rivers flowing with salubrious water, gardens bedecked with fragrant flowers, trees adorned with blossoms and fruits, birds singing songs of light, humanity ever striving forward, every atom of existence breathing life and force — the universe of God a wonderful theatre upon the stage of which every created thing plays its part.

If you strive unceasingly, if you make a great effort, if you put forward extraordinary exertion, then these people will be awakened, their eyes will be opened and their ears unstopped, so that they can hear the melodious music which streams down from the supreme concourse, the notes and strains of which have been played from all eternity and will be played through all eternity ever enrapturing with the thousand harmonious accompaniments the pure in heart.

It is my hope that you may be the means of changing this wild jungle of materialism into a fruitful orchard, this thorny thicket into a rose garden. May Europe become the divine university wherein heavenly sciences and divine arts are taught and learned! (‘Abdu’l-Baha on Divine Philosophy, pp. 138-139: http://bahai-library.com/?file=abdulbaha_divine_philosophy.html&chapter=3

So, at last, when Bahá'u'lláh arose in Persia, this was His most ardent desire, to rekindle the waning light of truth in all lands. All the holy ones of God have tried with heart and soul to spread the light of love and unity throughout the world, so that the darkness of materiality might disappear and the light of spirituality might shine forth among the children of men. Then would hate, slander and murder disappear, and in their stead love, unity and peace would reign...

The world for the most part is sunk in materialism, and the blessings of the Holy Spirit are ignored. There is so little real spiritual feeling, and the progress of the world is for the most part merely material. Men are becoming like unto beasts that perish, for we know that they have no spiritual feeling--they do not turn to God, they have no religion! These things belong to man alone, and if he is without them he is a prisoner of nature, and no whit better than an animal.

How can man be content to lead only an animal existence when God has made him so high a creature? All creation is made subject to the laws of nature, but man has been able to conquer these laws. The sun, in spite of its power and glory, is bound by the laws of nature, and cannot change its course by so much as a hair's breadth. The great and mighty ocean is powerless to change the ebb and flow of its tides--nothing can stand against nature's laws but man! <http://bahai-library.com/writings/abdulbaha/pt/2/sec-38.html>

Now, all questions of morality contained in the spiritual, immutable law of every religion are logically right. If religion were contrary to logical reason then it would cease to be a religion and be merely a tradition. Religion and science are the two wings upon which man's intelligence can soar into the heights, with which the human soul can progress. It is not possible to fly with one wing alone! Should a man try to fly with the wing of religion alone he would quickly fall into the quagmire of superstition, whilst on the other hand, with the wing of science alone he would also make no progress, but fall into the despairing slough of materialism. All religions of the present day have fallen into superstitious practices, out of harmony alike with the true principles of the teaching they represent and with the scientific discoveries of the time. Many religious leaders have grown to think that the importance of religion lies mainly in the adherence to a collection of certain dogmas and the practice of rites and ceremonies! Those whose souls they profess to cure are taught to believe likewise, and these cling tenaciously to the outward forms, confusing them with the inward truth. <http://bahai-library.com/writings/abdulbaha/pt/3/sec-6.html>

SHOGHI EFFENDI: WRITINGS

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. <http://www.bahai-library.com/writings/shoghieffendi/mbw/sec-68.html>

A world, dimmed by the steadily dying-out light of religion, heaving with the explosive forces of a blind and triumphant nationalism; scorched with the fires of pitiless persecution, whether racial or religious; deluded by the false theories and doctrines that threaten to supplant the worship of God and the sanctification of His laws; enervated by **a rampant and brutal materialism**; disintegrating through the corrosive influence of moral and spiritual decadence; and enmeshed in the coils of economic anarchy and strife--such is the spectacle presented to men's eyes, as a result of the sweeping changes which this revolutionizing Force, as yet in the initial stage of its operation, is now producing in the life of the entire planet. <http://bahai-library.com/writings/shoghieffendi/adj/3.html>

To a lesser degree this principle must of necessity apply to the country which has vindicated its right to be regarded as the cradle of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh. So great a function, so noble a role, can be regarded as no less inferior to the part played by those immortal souls who, through their sublime renunciation and unparalleled deeds, have been responsible for the birth of the Faith itself. Let not,

therefore, those who are to participate so predominantly in the birth of that world civilization, which is the direct offspring of their Faith, imagine for a moment that for some mysterious purpose or by any reason of inherent excellence or special merit Bahá'u'lláh has chosen to confer upon their country and people so great and lasting a distinction. It is precisely by reason of the patent evils which, notwithstanding its other admittedly great characteristics and achievements, **an excessive and binding materialism** has unfortunately engendered within it that the Author of their Faith and the Center of His Covenant have singled it out to become the standard-bearer of the New World Order envisaged in their writings. It is by such means as this that Bahá'u'lláh can best demonstrate to a heedless generation His almighty power to raise up from the very midst of a people, immersed in a sea of materialism, a prey to one of the most virulent and long-standing forms of racial prejudice, and notorious for its political corruption, lawlessness and laxity in moral standards, men and women who, as time goes by, will increasingly exemplify those essential virtues of self-renunciation, of moral rectitude, of chastity, of indiscriminating fellowship, of holy discipline, and of spiritual insight that will fit them for the preponderating share they will have in calling into being that World Order and that World Civilization of which their country, no less than the entire human race, stands in desperate need. <http://bahai-library.com/writings/shoghiEFFendi/adj/2.html>

The gross materialism that engulfs the entire nation at the present hour; the attachment to worldly things that enshrouds the souls of men; the fears and anxieties that distract their minds; the pleasure and dissipations that fill their time, the prejudices and animosities that darken their outlook, the apathy and lethargy that paralyze their spiritual faculties--these are among the formidable obstacles that stand in the path of every would-be warrior in the service of Bahá'u'lláh, obstacles which he must battle against and surmount in his crusade for the redemption of his own countrymen.

To the degree that the home front crusader is himself cleansed of these impurities, liberated from these petty preoccupations and gnawing anxieties, delivered from these prejudices and antagonisms, emptied of self, and filled by the healing and the sustaining power of God, will he be able to combat the forces arrayed against him, magnetize the souls of those whom he seeks to convert, and win their unreserved, their enthusiastic and enduring allegiance to the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh.

Delicate and strenuous though the task may be, however arduous and prolonged the effort required, whatsoever the nature of the perils and pitfalls that beset the path of whoever arises to revive the fortunes of a Faith struggling against the **rising forces of materialism, nationalism, secularism, racialism, ecclesiasticism**, the all-conquering potency of the grace of God, vouchsafed through the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, will, undoubtedly, mysteriously and surprisingly, enable whosoever arises to champion His Cause to win complete and total victory.

The history of a century-old Faith eloquently bears witness to similar unnumbered successes won, in both the Apostolic and Formative Ages of the Bahá'í Dispensation, in circumstances even more challenging than those in which the American Bahá'í Community now finds itself. <http://www.bahai-library.com/writings/shoghiEFFendi/cf/2/sec-80.html>

The spirit that sent forth, not so long ago, in such rapid succession, so many pioneers to such remote areas of the globe, must at all costs and above everything else, be recaptured, for the twofold purpose of swelling the number, and of ensuring the continual flow, of pioneers, so essential for the safeguarding of the prizes won in the course of the several campaigns of a world-girdling Crusade, and of combatting the evil forces which **a relentless and all-pervasive materialism**, the cancerous growth of militant racialism, political corruption, unbridled capitalism, wide-spread lawlessness and gross immorality, are, alas, unleashing, with ominous swiftness, amongst various classes of the society to which the members of this community belong. <http://www.bahai-library.com/writings/shoghiEFFendi/cf/2/sec-83.html>

Persia, the cradle of an unfolding world civilization, is still bereft of her freedom, sunk in ignorance, a prey to contending policies and factions, beset on one hand by the powers of orthodoxy and sectarian fanaticism and assailed on the other by the forces of materialism and unbelief. <http://bahai-library.com/writings/shoghiEFFendi/ba/3/sec-28.html>

SHOGHI EFFENDI: LETTERS WRITTEN ON BEHALF OF

Entirely aside from this, he has urged the Baha'is, for the sake of serving the Faith, to go out from these centers of intense materialism, where life nowadays is so hurried and grinding and, dispersing to towns and villages, carry the Message far and wide throughout the cities of the American Union. He strongly believes that the field outside the big cities is more fertile, that the Baha'is in the end will be happier for having made this move, and that, in case of an outbreak of war, it stands to reason they will be safer, just the way any other person living in the country, or away from the big industrial areas, is safer.

It is remarks such as these that the pilgrims have carried back in their notes. He sees no cause for alarm, but he certainly believes that the Baha'is should weigh these thoughts, and take action for the sake of spreading the Faith of Baha'u'llah, and for their own ultimate happiness as well. Indeed the two things go together.

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, 20 June 1954: <http://bahai-library.com/uhj/calamity.p-notes.html>)

SHOGHI EFFENDI: PILGRIM NOTES

He is very unhappy with the American believers because they do not respond. 'They are all tainted with materialism. We should study more because we work the administration backwards. We all want to be captains in America and that proves our immaturity.'

<http://bahai-library.com/pilgrims/beasley.notes.html>

The stronghold of materialism is in America. We must avoid total concentration of teaching in the cities. There the people are immersed in their own surroundings - are distracted - disinterested in things pertaining to the spirit. The more primitive the people are - the nearer they are to the spirit - to the Faith. People speak of the so-called civilized world. The more primitive the nearer they are - the more civilized - the father away... The old order is dying - the New Order is not yet born. The Administrative Order is not the World Order - one is the embryo of the other. Now we have the embryo. The world must be organized and spiritualized - a spiritualization of mankind. Now the world suffers from organization and materialism.

<http://bahai-library.com/pilgrims/levy.html>

Material civilization is doomed and will be destroyed. Mankind cannot be cleansed and purified without its going... Large cities are the centers of materialism. Those believers who remain there will be caught in a trap... The friends should be less intellectual and more spiritual, less materialistic and more spiritual. There is so much Godlessness and it is increasing.

Someone said so many people were going to church now in America. He said they go in fear. An ordeal will shake them.

He said the homefront is and absolute failure. There is too much organization but no spirit.

The friends read superficially. People say "I have read the Iqan" like some tourists who say 'I have done Paris, or I have done London! They have too many preoccupations. They read many magazines which are full of nothing. They should throw them in the waste paper basket. There is great danger in them...

For 50 years the fortunes of men have been declining. There are two reasons. (1) Mankind did not heed the Master. (2) Materialism. <http://bahai-library.com/pilgrims/kenny.html>

Baha'is are working to build up a Divine Civilization to go hand in hand with material civilization, not materialistic civilization. One day Shoghi Effendi said that materialistic civilization implies the negation of Divine Civilization. Material Civilization is not harmful but it is insufficient, it has to be linked with Divine Civilization. He said that the Master (Abdu'l-Baha) was always attacking materialistic civilization. Matter is not a bad thing but materialistic matter is bad, nationhood is a good thing, but nationalism is a bad thing and politics is the nerve center of materialistic civilization. (letter from Jessie E. Revell, 9 July 1952: <http://bahai-library.com/pilgrims/revell.html>)

For America, the best medicine is shock medicine. America is exposed to great dangers. It will be the storm center of the future. Americans do not have enough belief in God - not enough detachment; they must be more spiritual, disencumber themselves from things, have Baha'i standards, not American standards. Americans are too materialistic, too mechanized, too attached to family, health and death. There must be less materialism, less intellectualism, and more spirit. America has become isolated. anything can happen at anytime. America is the most disturbed nation, politically, on earth. The people are living in a fool's paradise. <http://bahai-library.com/pilgrims/brown.html>

Two ills afflict the American society, the Guardian asserted — materialism and racialism. Reviewing the history of materialism, the Guardian showed where Western Europe had developed materialism and now America was carrying it to the extreme. With a glint of sarcasm in his voice he denounced the so-called American security of giant skyscrapers and colossal edifices. With a swift movement of his hand, he demonstrated how quickly these institutions could be swept away in seconds. How foolish of the Americans, he stated, for them to regard their security in these "towers of Babel". Indeed, he carried this symbology one step further and called New York, Chicago, and San Francisco "Triple Babels".

In a grave voice the Beloved Guardian uttered a strong warning to the American friends to disassociate themselves from these rampant evils (materialism and racialism) or be swept away with the rest of the American society which must be held accountable. http://bahai-library.com/?file=allison_pilgrims_notes

The U.S. would suffer the most because it was the most materialistic. Europe was the cradle of materialism but the U.S. was the stronghold of materialism. Russia would also suffer greatly. He said there was no difference between Russia and the U.S. in their systems because both were materialistic - capitalism which is purely materialistic and communism which controls the proletariat. <http://bahai-library.com/pilgrims/dudley.parallel.html>

SO MUCH ORGANIZATION and they have NO SPIRIT. They MUST BE FIRED WITH THE SPIRIT. They feel an urge for a second, then it evaporates. They read superficially. People say, "I have read the Iqan", like a tourist who says: "I have done Paris, I have done London in 2 hours and know all about it." They have too many material preoccupations, they read so many magazines, which are absolutely trivial; they should throw them away - into the wastebasket. THIS IS WHAT IS CALLED MATERIALISTIC CIVILIZATION. There is no progress in this suffocating atmosphere, there is great !!!DANGER!!!

<http://bahai-library.com/pilgrims/edge2.html>

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Inspiring these political, social and economic crises was the inexorable rise and consolidation of a disease of the human soul infinitely more destructive than any of its specific manifestations. Its triumph marked a new and ominous stage in the process of social and spiritual degeneration that Shoghi Effendi had identified. Fathered by nineteenth century European thought, acquiring enormous influence through the achievements of American capitalist culture, and endowed by Marxism with the counterfeit credibility peculiar to that system, materialism emerged full-blown in the second half of the twentieth century as a kind of universal religion claiming absolute authority in both the personal and social life of humankind. Its creed was simplicity itself. Reality — including human reality and the process by which it evolves — is essentially material in nature. The goal of human life is, or ought to be, the satisfaction of material needs and wants. Society exists to facilitate this quest, and the collective concern of humankind should be an ongoing refinement of the system, aimed at rendering it ever more efficient in carrying out its assigned task.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, impulses to devise and promote any formal materialistic belief system disappeared. Nor would any useful purpose have been served by such efforts, as materialism was soon facing no significant challenge in most parts of the world. Religion, where not simply driven back into fanaticism and unthinking rejection of progress, became progressively reduced to a kind of personal preference, a predilection, a pursuit designed to satisfy spiritual and emotional needs of the individual. The sense of historical mission that had defined the major Faiths learned to content itself with providing religious endorsement for campaigns of social change carried on by secular movements. The academic world, once the scene of great exploits of the mind and spirit, settled into the role of a kind of scholastic industry preoccupied with tending its machinery of dissertations, symposia, publication credits and grants.

Whether as world-view or simple appetite, materialism's effect is to leach out of human motivation — and even interest — the spiritual impulses that distinguish the rational soul. "For self-love," 'Abdu'l-Bahá has said, "is kneaded into the very clay of man, and it is not possible that, without any hope of a substantial reward, he should neglect his own present material good."^[109] In the absence of conviction about the spiritual nature of reality and the fulfilment it alone offers, it is not surprising to find at the very heart of the current crisis of civilization a cult of individualism that increasingly admits of no restraint and that elevates acquisition and personal advancement to the status of major cultural values. The resulting atomization of society has marked a new stage in the process of disintegration about which the writings of Shoghi Effendi speak so urgently. (Century of Light, pp. 89-90: <http://www.bahai-library.com/published.uhj/century.light/century8.html>)

Undoubtedly the fact that Bahá'í scholars of the history and teachings of the Faith believe in the Faith that they are studying will be a grave flaw in the eyes of many non-Bahá'í academics, whose own dogmatic materialism passes without comment because it is fashionable; but this difficulty is one that Bahá'í scholars share with their fellow believers in many fields of human endeavor. <http://bahai-library.com/uhj/scholarship.cambridge.html>

Europe has suffered so appallingly in past centuries from persecutions and conflicts inspired by religious differences and fanaticism that there has been a revulsion against religion. Many Europeans have become sceptical, scornful of religious practices, and reluctant either to discuss religious subjects or to give credence to the power of faith. This turning away from religion has been powerfully reinforced by the growth of materialism, and has produced a combination of physical wellbeing and spiritual aridity that is having catastrophic results, socially and psychologically, on the population. <http://bahai-library.com/uhj/spiritual.growth.html>

Denunciations of materialism or terrorism are of no real assistance in coping with the contemporary moral crisis if they do not begin by addressing candidly the failure of responsibility that has left believing masses exposed and vulnerable to these influences. <http://bahai-library.com/published.uhj/religious.leaders.html>