

Why Do We Need a New Faith?

Deep in our souls we know that there is more to life than running the rat race, that there must be another race: for spiritual advancement, for an enduring hope and purpose. Deep in our souls we also know that while on earth we have a special mission, that we matter more than we think, and that we must accomplish something that will outlive our lives.

We all have dreams...We all want to believe deep down in our souls that we have a special gift, that we can make a difference, that we can touch others in a special way, and that we can make the world a better place. At one time in our lives, we all had a vision for the quality of life that we desire and deserve. Yet, for many of us, those dreams have become so shrouded in the frustrations and routines of daily life that we no longer even make an effort to accomplish them. For far too many, the dream has dissipated—and with it, so has the will to shape our destinies. Many have lost that sense of certainty that creates the winner's edge.¹

That dreaming and dormant longing in the soul can come to life only by the light of the knowledge of God, as

reflected in His latest Mirror or Messenger. That knowledge transforms the soul just as a fire transforms wax into light. When the knowledge is allowed to reach the soul, the light shines and despair vanishes. Today, we see a lot of wax but little light in the heart of humanity. The evidences of despair and darkness are all around us.

The family is the basis of society. Like dominoes, when the family falls, everything falls. Today, the family is in grave danger. A teenager told his mother, "I am tired of living in this house. I want to go where there is love, peace, joy, and excitement." His mother rose and started walking towards him. The teenager yelled, "Don't try to stop me! I have made up my mind!" His mother said, "Stop you? I want to join you!"

William Bennett, former U.S. Secretary of Education, issued a report on "the index of leading cultural indicators,"² in which he compared some vital statistics about family life in America. He found that during the last 30 years:

- Divorces increased 400 percent.
- Out-of-wedlock births increased 400 percent.
- The number of children living in single-parent homes increased 300 percent.
- Reports of child abuse increased 340 percent...³

In the United States, domestic violence is the leading cause of injury to married couples aged 15 to 45, more than all injuries caused by muggings and car accidents combined. President Clinton cited this fact, and added that in recent years domestic violence has increased three times faster than crime. In a U.N. conference on social development, it was announced that 30 percent of girls throughout the world are sexually abused, and once they are married, 50 percent are abused by their husbands.

A comedian once said, "Keep your houses unlocked, so that in times of danger you can escape quickly." The comedian may have a point; statistics indicate that one's home is the most dangerous place. More people are killed, beaten, and abused in their home than anywhere else!

The suicide rate is perhaps the best concrete index of the psychological and spiritual health of a nation. Suicide has increased in most nations, especially among young people. In the last thirty years, the percentage of young Americans who attempt suicide has increased 500 percent.⁴ In many other countries such as Canada, Finland, France, Israel, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Spain, Switzerland, and Thailand, suicide rates among young people have also increased dramatically.⁵

A recent "Who's Who?" survey of 2,000 outstanding students in America showed that 30 percent of them had

considered attempting suicide. These are individuals at the prime of their lives, when they should be the happiest. "In the summer of 1990, a special commission issued a report on the health of today's adolescent. This team of prominent experts wrote, 'Never before has one generation of American teenagers been less healthy, less cared for or less prepared for life.'"⁶ In still another study, "More than half of young Americans between the ages 16 and 24 said they had thought about killing themselves."⁷

A Christian association recently studied the attitudes of nearly 4,000 young people aged 11-18. Of every one hundred of these youths, 80 attended an evangelical church weekly, and 86 said they had made a commitment to trust Christ as their Savior and Lord.⁸ Here are some of their findings:

- 66 percent of those surveyed said they had lied to their parents or another adult in the last three months. Almost that many (59 percent) had lied to their peers.
- 55 percent said they were confused.
- 50 percent said they were suffering from stress.
- 46 percent said they were always tired.
- Many others said they were cheating, smoking, gambling, watching X-rated movies and engaging in premarital sex.⁹

The researchers ask, "What is happening to our kids? Why aren't they adopting our values? And what can we do about it?"¹⁰ Confidence in organized religion has been falling. In 1993:

The PPRC Index, a figure that provides an overall assessment of the state of American religion, was 649, the lowest ever...The index reflects belief in God, church membership/attendance and confidence in the clergy, the church and religion itself.¹¹

Sexual abuse of children is the most evident and alarming sign of spiritual starvation. What are the statistics?

- One out of every four American women is sexually abused before she reaches 18.
- Girls are twice more likely to be sexually abused than boys.
- Family members—fathers, stepfathers, uncles, grandfathers, and brothers—are the most frequent abusers of children under age 11.¹²

The statistics on mental illness, depression, alcoholism, drug addiction, violence, and crime are equally alarming. Our youths are the most vulnerable. One third of all crime is committed by children and youths 10 to 17 years old. Among the top killers of our youths are homicide, suicide, and AIDS.

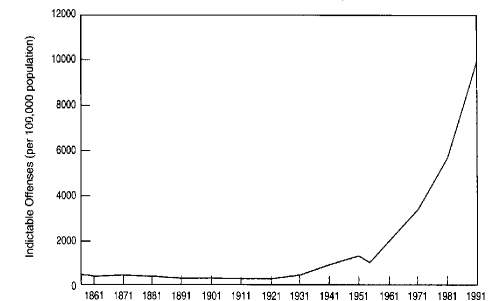
According to a highly respected textbook in abnormal psychology, about

one fifth of the American population suffers from mental disorders or drug addiction.¹³

Consider the increase in crime in England and Wales per 100,000 population:

1955	1,000	
1961	1,750	
1971	3,400	
1981	5,600	
1991	10,000	—ten times the rate of 1955 and forty times that of 1901. ¹⁴

CRIME IN ENGLAND AND WALES, 1857-1991



Source: For 1857-1980: B.R. Mitchell, *British Historical Statistics* (Cambridge, England, 1988), pp. 776-778; for 1981-1991: Home Office *Criminal Statistics*.¹⁵

What caused the decline of the Roman Empire? About two centuries ago, Edward Gibbon, the author of the classic *The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire*, listed these reasons, which look disturbingly familiar:

- Loss of dignity and sanctity of the home, and an increased divorce rate

- Higher taxes and spending of public moneys
- A craze for pleasure and brutal sports
- The building of gigantic armaments when the real enemy was within
- The decay of religion and the impotence of religious leaders¹⁶

As historians tell us, if we fail to learn the lessons of history, we will have to repeat them. What happens to a woman who forgets her past? She becomes a child. What happens to a child who fails to benefit from his experience? His body grows, but not his mind. The same happens to nations and the world. The mid-19th Century marked a turning point in human history. The spiritual state of the world had declined so much that it required revival. The following statement by Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War shows the world trends up to his time:

We have been preserved these many years in peace and prosperity...we have grown in wealth and power as no other nation has ever grown. But we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace... and we have vainly imagined that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace.

Too proud to pray to the God who made us.¹⁷

Today people have forgotten who they are and how great they are. A young man named John went to a big city. The sight of crowds frightened him. He said to himself, "What if I went to sleep, woke up, but could not find myself in the crowd!" He talked to a man named Joe about his fears. Joe told him to put a tag with his name around his ankle. John liked the idea and followed it. When he went to sleep, Joe took the tag from John's ankle and put it on his own. When John woke up, he saw the tag and thought Joe was him. Seized with fear, he exclaimed, "Joe, if you are me, then, for heaven's sake, who and where am I?"

Not only have people forgotten who they are, they have also lost track of where they are going. A driver got lost on a country road. He stopped and asked a little girl, "Do you know which way is south?" "No!" "Do you know Highway 20?" "No!" "Do you know a gas station around here?" "No!" In desperation, the driver asked, "Do you know anything?" The little girl said, "I know one thing. I ain't lost!"

Faith gives meaning and purpose to everything we do and is the only thing that remains when everything else is gone. "Once when a precocious six-year-old displayed her aversion to a proper diet, her father exasperatedly

asked, 'Child, you don't care for vegetables, salad, fruits, or fish—what do you like?' Turning her wide brown eyes on him, she demurely answered, 'Why, I like you, Daddy!'"

Noted historian Arnold Toynbee stated, "Of the twenty-two civilizations that appear in history, nineteen of them collapsed when they reached the moral state the United States is in now."¹⁸ Eminent historian Will Durant indicated there is no example in history to show that we can have morality without religion. We find many political leaders in former communist countries who were trained to be atheists and yet today they acknowledge the human need for spirituality. According to Vladimir Shlapntokh, who has conducted public opinion polls for *Pravda*:

Soviet leaders are looking for help in the form of the restoration of old religious norms...compassion, grace, forgiveness, charity, and other virtues previously presented as elements of bourgeois decadence. Leaders [see] religion as a means of halting Soviet society's accelerating demoralization.¹⁹

As Jesus said, "Man cannot live by bread alone" (Matthew 4:4). The Word of God is the heavenly food that satisfies the spirit. A beggar asked a woman for money. She offered to buy him lunch. He said, "I've had three lunches while trying to get a dime!" He could not live by food alone.

Spirituality is the yeast that elevates our attitude. Without it, we remain stagnant, like a heavy lump of dough. Adler, the noted psychologist, tells about “a group of people who were crowded together, trying to sleep on the floor of a great auditorium during the war, but one woman kept them awake with her pitiful cries, ‘Oh, God, I’m so thirsty!’ Finally, someone got up in the dark and brought her a glass of water. They could hear the woman gurgle the water down, but suddenly, they heard her again moaning, ‘Oh God, how thirsty I was!’”

According to a CNN report, some experts believe that if people paid their taxes honestly, the yearly deficit in the U.S. budget would be wiped out. The IRS is the most feared agency in the United States, yet that strong fear does not overcome greed. Only inner auditing before God can prevent people from cheating.

Most of the problems we face in the world are caused by a loss of identity, a lack of purpose, and a loss of faith. Historically, when human life has descended to a critical point, God has sent a new Teacher or Messenger to lift our spirits and enrich our lives. We have already passed that low point.

Chuck Colson, an eloquent and enlightened writer and spokesman for Christianity, gave the following message on a Christian radio station:

Pollster George Gallup compared the ethical behavior of Americans

who attend church regularly and those who never attend. He compiled candid admissions from people who call in sick when they are not, who puff their resumes, who cheat on income taxes. Astonishingly, Gallup reported “little difference in the ethical views and behavior of the churched and the unchurched.”

In a similar vein, religion reporter Terry Mattingly recently cited surveys showing that students at Christian colleges cheat on exams at the same rates as students at secular colleges.

What does all this tell us? That many Christians are guilty of compartmentalizing our lives into separate boxes so that our faith never influences our everyday attitudes and opinions. Many of us are as fragmented in our minds as any double agent.²⁰

In his book *The Body*, Mr. Colson wrote:

The roots of the church’s identity crisis are found in the consumer mentality so pervasive in our culture...People flit about in search of what suits their taste at the moment. It’s what some have called the ‘McChurch’ mentality...Thus, the church becomes just another retail outlet, faith just another commodity.²¹

Today, religion has lost its grip on the spiritual life of the world. “A minister glared down at Sam and roared, ‘And

are you, my son, a soldier in the army of the Lord?’ Surprised at being singled out, Sam replied anxiously, ‘Y-yes sir, I am.’ ‘Then why,’ pressed the minister, ‘do we see you here only at Christmas?’ Thinking quickly, Sam replied, ‘Would you believe, sir, I’m in the secret service?’” In this age, many of the faithful have gone from active service to secret service.

Today, religion has been turned into a talk show. “Adlai Stevenson told the story of a backsliding man who was so inspired by an eloquent preacher that he leaped out of his seat and yelled, ‘Lord God, take me and use me—in an advisory capacity.’” The talking and avoiding must be changed into doing:

The essence of faith is fewness of words and abundance of deeds; he whose words exceed his deeds, know verily his death is better than his life.²² Bahá’u’lláh

“A rabbi and a soap maker went for a walk together. The soap maker said, ‘What good is religion? Look at all the trouble and misery of the world, after thousands of years of teaching about goodness and truth and peace. If religion is good and true, why should this be?’ The rabbi said nothing. They continued walking until he noticed a child playing in the gutter. Then the rabbi said, ‘Look at that child. You make soap and say that it makes people clean, but see the dirt on that youngster. Of what good is soap?’

With all the soap in the world, over all these years, that child is still filthy. I wonder how effective soap is, after all!' The soap maker protested. 'But, Rabbi, soap cannot do any good unless it is used!' 'Exactly,' replied the Rabbi. 'Exactly!'"

What is the most significant source of moral values? Religion. How can moral values be strengthened? By making religion rational and relevant. Suppose you have a suit. You either gain or lose weight, or you simply grow up. What happens to the suit? It loses its suitability. The same thing happens to old ideas and institutions. Bahá'u'lláh makes religion suitable to our time and to our needs and increased capacity.

To survive and prosper, we must acquire these assets and virtues:

- a sense of dignity and nobility
- a cosmic and global perspective; a feeling of being connected to all the universe and all humanity
- knowledge of an undying and eternal purpose; a new vision about who we are, what on earth we are doing, and where we are going
- a rational understanding of religion
- a new renaissance of morality and a strong commitment to ethical values
- an intimate relationship with God, who is the source of our noblest hope and our most profound and enduring happiness

Without the new vision and new perspective, we operate on a level of narrow self-interest and confusion. Hedonism becomes our hope, and pleasure our prime purpose in life.

"William Barker tells about a machinist with the Ford motor company in Detroit who had, over a period of years, 'borrowed' various tools from the company but never bothered to return them. While this practice was not condoned, it was more or less accepted by management, and nothing was done about it. The machinist, however, experienced a religious conversion. He was baptized and became a devout believer. Even more importantly, he took his baptism seriously. The very next morning he arrived at work loaded down with tools he had taken from the company during the years. The foreman was so astonished and impressed by his action, that he cabled Mr. Ford, who was visiting a European plant, and explained the entire story in detail. Immediately Mr. Ford cabled back: 'Dam up the Detroit River, and baptize the entire city!'" Not only the residents of Detroit but all the citizens of the planet need a "baptism of the spirit."

Like everything else that comes in touch with human beings, religion gradually becomes polluted with hypocrisy, fanaticism, dogmatism, prejudice, irrationality, emotionalism, divisiveness, worldliness, complacency, and pride. When the pollution reaches a critical point, God in His Wisdom sends a

new Redeemer or Messenger with a new outpouring of knowledge, love, and wisdom. But by then people have become fully addicted to the age-old pollutants. They draw comfort from their prejudices, superstitions, and illusions. Abandoning them causes withdrawal symptoms. Sometimes, some of the addicted recognize the danger of being exposed to the pollutants and try to install a few filters. But the pollutants are so strong, and the state of sickness so severe, that filters make no difference.

True faith elevates the human spirit to peace and ecstasy, it inspires an unshakable hope and happiness. It is a heavenly wine that intoxicates the soul. Today its powers are diluted, its influence diminished. It is in desperate need of reviving. "A young man announced during the children's sermon, 'I'm against liquor-by-the drink.' 'That's good,' said his pastor. 'But why are you against it?' 'I'm against it because my mother's against it,' the boy said. The pastor should have stopped while he was ahead, but he didn't 'Why is your mother against it?' 'She's against it,' the young man said 'because she says they water those drinks down too much.'"

Picture God as the most beautiful and majestic star veiled behind the clouds. In each age or dispensation, He removes a bit of the veil and allows His glory to become more visible. Without looking up, basking in His beauty,

and rejoicing in the knowledge of His presence, we are doomed to a life of quiet desperation. Without the light of His love, we can live only in the twilight of doubt, fear, and spiritual apathy:

True knowledge, therefore, is the knowledge of God, and this is none other than the recognition of His Manifestation in each Dispensation.²³ The Báb

Today, many search for their god in gold and for their well-being in wine and wealth. Many think the true remedy is to raise their standard of living. They set standards for poverty, so that the poor can be identified and uplifted. What we need to raise first is the *spiritual* standard of living. Spiritual poverty and starvation are threatening our very survival. The following are among the harshest words addressed to the people of our time, especially to those who seek their god in gold and search in vain for their well-being in wealth:

You say, "I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing." But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.

Christ (Rev. 3:17-18)

Left to ourselves, we are mere rocks and pebbles. Only by loving God and living by His laws can we turn the rocks into rubies and the pebbles into pearls.

No created thing shall ever attain its paradise unless it appeareth in its highest prescribed degree of perfection. For instance, this crystal representeth the paradise of the stone whereof its substance is composed. Likewise there are various stages in the paradise for the crystal itself...So long as it was stone it was worthless, but if it attaineth the excellence of ruby—a potentiality which is latent in it—how much a carat will it be worth? Consider likewise every created thing.

Man's highest station, however, is attained through faith in God in every Dispensation and by acceptance of what hath been revealed by Him...²⁴ The Báb

All the facts presented lead us to this conclusion: There is an overwhelming need for the renewal of religion, for a faith that can transform our lives, that can lift us from worldliness and apathy to spirituality and ecstasy.

1. Robbins, Anthony. *Awaken the Giant Within*, New York: Summit Books, 1991, p. 19
2. Bennett, William J. *The Index of Leading Cultural Indicators*, A Joint Publication of Empower America, The Heritage Foundation, and Free Congress Foundation, vol. 1, March 1993.

3. Bennett, William J. *The Index of Leading Cultural Indicators*, A Joint Publication of Empower America, The Heritage Foundation, and Free Congress Foundation, vol. 1, March 1993.
4. *Facts, Figures, and Quotes*, National Education Association.
5. *Awake!* April 8, 1994.
6. *Focus on the Family*, Newsletter, May 1993.
7. *NEA Newsletter*, 1994.
8. *Focus on the Family*, Newsletter, November 1994, p. 3.
9. *Focus on the Family*, Newsletter, November 1994, p. 3.
10. *Focus on the Family*, Newsletter, November 1994, p. 3.
11. *The Plain Truth*, November-December, 1994, p. 29.
12. *Obstetrics and Gynecology*, vol. 71, no. 4.
13. Carson, Robert C., James N. Butcher, and Susan Mineka, *Abnormal Psychology and Modern Life*, New York: Harper Collins College Publishers, 1996, p. 6.
14. *American Educator*, Winter 1994-95, p. 17.
15. *American Educator*, Winter 1994-95, p. 17.
16. Rawlings, Maurice S. M.D. *To Hell and Back*, Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1993, p. 228.
17. Rawlings, Maurice S. M.D. *To Hell and Back*, Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1993, pp. 227-228.
18. Prochnow Herbert V. *Speaker's & Toastmaster's Handbook*, Rocklin, CA: Prima Publishing, 1993, p. 241.
19. Colson, Charles. *The God of Stones and Spiders*, Wheaton, IL: Living Books, 1990, p. x.
20. *Breakpoint with Chuck Colson*, May 17, 1994, No. 40517.

21. *The Plain Truth*, November/December, 1994, p. 6.
22. *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 156.
23. *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, p. 89.
24. *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, pp. 88-89.



For further information, contact:

*For a list of other pamphlets on
the Bahá'í Faith, visit:
www.globalperspective.org*