

## My Fellow Christians: We Are Challenged to Make the Case for Faith Itself

Robert Duffy  
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Dear Christians,

Let me clearly state I have the greatest respect for Jesus, my Savior and Messiah. And I have great respect for the church universal that Jesus established after his death and resurrection, and which has served, however imperfectly, to care for our Heavenly Parent and to further God's providence of salvation.

But it seems to me there are many in our culture who are philosophically Christian, but not church-goers -- would-be Christians who have become

discouraged as I had in my teenage years.

In my current experience, churches today can deliver a somewhat satisfying experience on the spiritual and emotional level, but without a more credible philosophical substrate, lack the capacity to support a moral or ethical context on which further societal development can be built.

More modern referents are called for -- those of technology, film, popular culture, science, art, and social media -- in telling the story of salvation, promoting the predominant need for moral transformation and spiritual growth rather than a rescue from sinful depravity, although that approach is sometimes appropriate. Many consider social salvation more important than mere personal salvation, though the causal relationship should be clear.



*Robert Duffy*

The world today is experiencing some of the worst convulsions from the widest possible number of sources in history -- wars, extreme climate change, ideological and cultural conflict, dysfunctional social systems, family and societal breakdown, to name a few.

One of the factors holding a society together, historically, has been the acceptance of similar values among its citizens, values which most of the population held in common.

In our age -- with peoples and their cultures, languages and customs interacting in sometimes competitive and combative ways, sharing space with each other through the relative ease of migration and travel -- societies, particularly in the developed world, have experienced unprecedented levels of social confusion as the demographic complexion of nations changes, and with it, the political and spiritual environments.

And so, dear Christians, although we may feel that our religion is the greatest (and final) one, our witness to Christ in our time must take on an interreligious character. Indeed, we are challenged not to convert people of other faiths to ours, as much as to make the case for faith itself, allowing God to move in us in our ways of thinking and acting in the world. The real object of our evangelical efforts is the modern cynic, agnostic or atheist, devoid of faith and unable to realize the omnipresence of our Creator God in their midst in everyday life.

But to reach said cynics, it will be important to have an intellectually sound basis for advocating a perspective of faith. A common value system, based on biblically-rooted first principles, would be interesting if and only if it was able to encapsulate the essentials of both a spiritual and physical view of life. In other words, it would have to embrace both religion and science.

Spiritual growth need not depend solely on references to ancient cultures and peoples of distant past ages. New ideas arising from modern archeological, technical, historical, literary, and general scientific scholarship in the more recent past, including developments in physics, biology and astronomy, provide a treasure trove for the exploration of our Heavenly Parent's purpose for his creation and our human role in it.

Foundational dogmas, the basics of the faith -- the Trinity, the Virgin Birth, Jesus' miracles -- the core of which is the divinity of Jesus, have proven no match for the tsunami of intellectual fervor surrounding the steady stream of discoveries in physics, medicine and other disciplines that has swept into the center of public imagination in the past century or so, promising new avenues to a better life, a virtual physical

salvation.

It is possible that the church has stumbled, after a long and glorious history, at the prospect of a physical salvation that has become available through other agencies beyond its control -- the industrial revolution, technological advances and the popularly received, if not entirely scientific, ideas of Darwin and Freud that we humans are simply clever animals whose physical instincts and other qualities, if explored and understood well, will enable us to perfect our lives on earth free from religious agency.

Why did the church find it so challenging to embrace, if not its early conclusions, at least the scientific enterprise itself which held promise of a better life for humanity? Did the church, representing the Father, think that almighty God would lose control of humanity if it entertained science as a legitimate path to augment the spiritual truth it championed? Was science an unwanted competitor for worldview supremacy? Science, after all, is a child of the Christian mind.



The Enlightenment movement prepared the intellectual environment for the obviation of God as a central referent to moral reasoning. Deism quietly consigned God to ancient history, while more strident philosophical positions ignored God altogether.

I have seen the transformative effect of the Enlightenment take place like a history lesson in compressed form, in my place of residence for the past 30 years -- Quebec, the Canadian province in which the largely French-speaking, Catholic

population experienced a "Quiet Revolution" in the 1960s.

This disruptive social convulsion had a similar effect to the French Revolution (minus the bloodshed) in that the former political and religious elites were swept away in a sudden rush to modernity that had been avoided until then due to the relative isolation of the territory, linguistically, socially and religiously, from its vast and largely English-speaking and Protestant neighbors, the rest of Canada and the United States.

As the Enlightenment movement displaced the church in Europe and contributed to modern secular society, so the *Quiet Revolution* replaced the Catholic church in Quebec with the modern secular state. Pre-Enlightenment and ultramontanist Quebec had by 1991, when I arrived here, "thrown the baby out with the bathwater."

Discouraged as a teenager in my own spiritual journey, I was reluctant to try to support my Christian faith in the face of modernity if it could not support itself. By age 18, my spiritual pain drove me, like the biblical Abraham, to leave my country and my father's house, and travel to a far-off land. I thought of the Middle East, the cradle of civilization as I understood it, and vowed to travel to Israel and on to Iraq to experience first-hand the atmosphere, culture and geography there. I suppose I was hoping to acquire insights into the ancient origins of humanity and its early development which might have revealed why the world seemed bent on its own destruction. My experience in the late 1960s did feel to my teenage self like these were the last days of humankind upon the earth.

I took a job in England while preparing to continue to Europe and beyond. While working at London's premier department store, I encountered two Unificationist missionaries -- two of only four in the entire United Kingdom at the time. It was late November 1967. I was still at this time seeking the "origin of things," a kind of origin story of humanity that would shed light on the current state of the world and give my life meaning. I had reached the unsettling conclusion that God had withdrawn from the world he created and was preparing to unveil a new plan for a new direction for humanity. As to me, I was searching for the root of meaning. Responding to that first invitation from a Unification missionary to visit the church center, I listened to the Divine Principle, gradually hearing all chapters over the month of December.

I remember well the feeling of clarity that accompanied the lectures on the Principle of Creation, the Fall of Man and the Mission of Jesus. Here were answers to the questions that had driven me to want to travel to the Middle East! Here were solutions to the questions of credibility I had had about Christianity and its role in the world. With this interpretation of the human Fall, the Cross as a secondary course and the ontology/Christology of the Divine Principle, I could finally see how my Christianity, if structured around it and liberated from its credal death grip, could not only survive the present age of reason and science, but indeed prosper, becoming the inevitable core of a global culture embracing all religions and cultures of history.

The only question remaining for me was, "Could this fledgling group carry this incredible, mainly Christian concept forward into a social/cultural and eventual political force that would reflect its full

power?" Whereas I had not been able to convince myself to defend Christianity in its traditional interpretive framework at my spiritual crossroad earlier, with the Divine Principle, I now felt I had the tools I needed not only to defend, but to conquer with this new Christianity! I had now in front of me a means of agency that, if used successfully would change the world not in small ways, but thoroughly Christianize, in terms of values, the entire world and all cultures.

This clarity ultimately brought me to Unificationism and brings me to want to express the pain in my heart regarding what was for me the loss of the Christian Church and even its virtual decommissioning not only in my personal life but in the larger world around me.

A dynamic community of believers is one in which passion for the spiritual life and the will of God is evident. Passion arises from a full engagement of the mind and emotions -- and it generates action. I am convinced that spiritual growth need not depend solely on references to ancient cultures and peoples of distant past ages.

New ideas arising from modern archeological, technical, historical, literary, and general scientific scholarship in the past century or so, including developments in physics, biology and astronomy that paint reality in a manner that would have been considered magical in a prior age, provide a treasure trove for the exploration of our Heavenly Parent's purposes and scope of his creation and our human role in it.

Without a shift of emphasis from "staying the course" to "advancing to a new stage," the decline of Christianity in the Western world, especially among the young, is inevitable -- and likely irreversible. Without development, a comfortable "club-ism" tends to set in, where the price of membership is the acceptance of prevailing dogma -- believed or not, understood or not.

My message, then, dear Christians, is, "Let us get the theological irrelevance out of the way and give ourselves room for new breath from God -- a new spiritual growth spurt to a closer walk with our Heavenly Parent."

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