



The Religious Pulse of Modern America

By Caitlin Shayda Jones

Published: August 14, 2012 | Last modified: July 14, 2013

Permalink: <http://239days.com/2012/08/14/the-religious-pulse-of-modern-america/>

“LET ANY ONE OF us look around him, and talk to his neighbors, humble or prosperous, and see if he does not find a spiritual craving.”

These were the words of Winston Churchill, not the future British prime minister but a bestselling novelist in America at the turn of the twentieth century. Like many artists, Churchill frequented Dublin, staying most summers in nearby Cornish, on the border with the state of Vermont. He came for horse shows, and to attend Joseph Lindon Smith’s plays at *Teatro Bambino*.

In the January 1912 issue of the *Atlantic Monthly*, Churchill wrote an article entitled “Modern Government and Christianity.” It offered a window into the religious pulse of America.

“Think of the people we all may count among our acquaintances who are studying Buddhism and Sufism and Babism!” Churchill wrote. “All of this means something; it is surely a sign of the age.” He observed in his contemporaries “the emptiness of a life that does not include service,” yet noted a growing consciousness of “the glaring inequalities and injustices of our modern civilization.” He concluded: “If we have eyes to see, and ears to hear, we stand on the threshold of a greater religious era than the world has ever seen.”

The spiritual transformation of the modern world was one of the main themes ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had addressed in America. At Tiny May on August 6, 1912, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá saw several new faces in the crowd, and he decided to answer a few questions.

Someone asked if there was a difference between being a Christian and being a Bahá’í.

“The foundations of Christianity and the religion of Bahá’u’lláh are one,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said. “The foundations of all the divine Prophets and Holy Books are one.” The distinction between them, he said, is merely a distinction of when they appear: “For though the sun is one sun, its dawning points are many. We must not adore the dawning points but worship the sun.” Therefore, “We must

adore the reality of religion,” he said, “and not blindly cling to the appellation Christianity.”

“Does ‘Abdu’l-Bahá find Christianity is not lived up to and carried out in America?” another person asked.

“My meaning is that it should be completely carried out and lived up to,” he said. But simply knowing what Christian teachings are wouldn’t be enough to change society. “A house is not built by mere acquaintance with the plans,” he said.

He argued that the modern era required an entirely new level of collective action. “An effort must be put forward to complete the purpose and plan of the teachings of God,” he said, “in order that in this great Day of days the world may be reformed. . . . This is necessary; this is needful. Mere reading of the Holy Books and texts will not suffice.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá argued that the messengers of God, such as Jesus Christ and Bahá’u’lláh, were the indispensable “divine Physician[s]” who provided society with the necessary impetus to change: “It is possible for a man to hold to a book of medicine and say, ‘I have no need of a doctor; I will act according to the book; in it every disease is named, all symptoms are explained . . . and a prescription for each malady is furnished; therefore, why do I need a doctor?’” But, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explained, “This is sheer ignorance.”

“Ideas and principles are helpless without a divine power to put them into effect,” he said.

How to Cite this Article

The formatting below is from the *Chicago Manual of Style*, 17th Edition. For other academic citation styles, please adapt accordingly. Since the **239 Days** site and its contents may be updated from time to time, we recommend you include a “last modified” date, which is provided at the top of both the web and PDF versions of this article.

FOOTNOTE / ENDNOTE:

Caitlin Shayda Jones, “The Religious Pulse of Modern America,” *239 Days in America*, ed. Jonathan Menon and Robert Sockett, August 14, 2012, <http://239days.com/2012/08/14/the-religious-pulse-of-modern-america/>.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Jones, Caitlin Shayda. “The Religious Pulse of Modern America.” *239 Days in America*. Edited by Jonathan Menon and Robert Sockett. August 14, 2012. <http://239days.com/2012/08/14/the-religious-pulse-of-modern-america/>.

HOW TO CITE THE *239 Days in America* WEBSITE IN A BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Menon, Jonathan, and Robert Sockett, eds. *239 Days in America*. <http://239days.com/>.

Terms of Use

239 Days in America™ and the 239Days.com website is licensed under a Creative Commons 3.0 License as specified at this link: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>. **This PDF file** is shared with you with the following additional terms:

YOU MAY quote from this PDF file with proper attribution. Your citation must include the author's name and the **239 Days in America** project's name. You may download and print this PDF file, and you may share individual PDF files in print or electronic form.

Although we want to make our work easy to share, we also wish to maintain the unity and integrity of **239 Days in America** as a whole. Therefore,

YOU MAY NOT republish or rebroadcast our PDF files in a public forum—such as by uploading them to a blog, app, or other web property, publishing them in print form, or distributing them widely using electronic means—without our prior written consent. We invite you to discuss such opportunities with us by contacting the Editor-In-Chief at editor@239Days.com. Otherwise, please share the permalinks displayed at the top of each file.

YOU MAY NOT extract pages from this file, recombine this PDF file with other documents, assemble its contents into any free or paid product, app, ebook, collection, compilation, or archive, nor remove this page of Terms. The **Adobe PDF**™ security features employed in this document have been selected to prevent such use. You may not circumvent these security features in any way.