

Preparing for the Future

Living through Challenging Times

Issues for Discourse with Youth

Bahá'í Discourse - Future

What will the future bring?

We cannot predict the future. Too many factors are interacting. Too many leaders are unpredictable. Too many vested interests are blocking change. We are impacting the natural systems of the planet with unknown consequences. Do we face war, economic collapse, environmental catastrophe, or all of these?

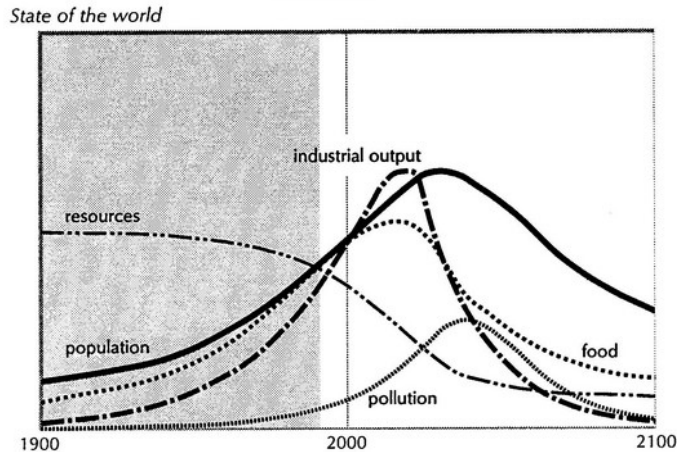
There are efforts to try to model the future or to create scenarios of possible futures.

Almost no-one considers a spiritual revolution in any possible future. So how can you prepare?

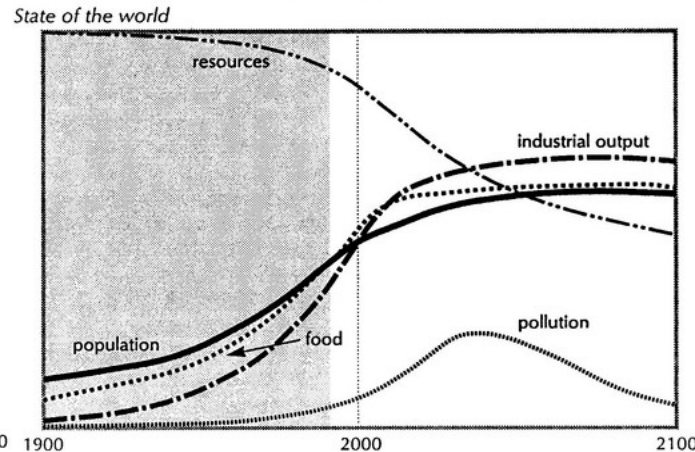
Prediction of catastrophe from Limits to Growth

Scenarios from *Limits to Growth – 1972* (Meadows et al. (1992) *Beyond the Limits*)

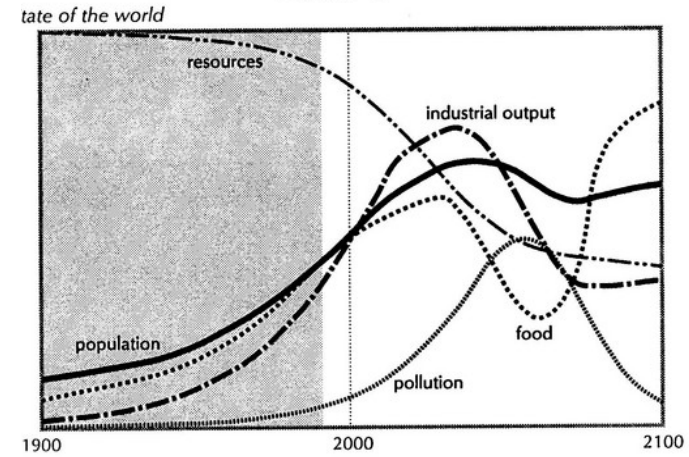
SCENARIO 1



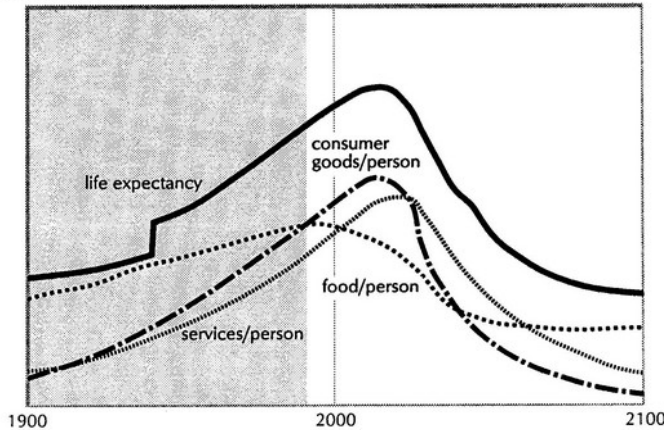
SCENARIO 10



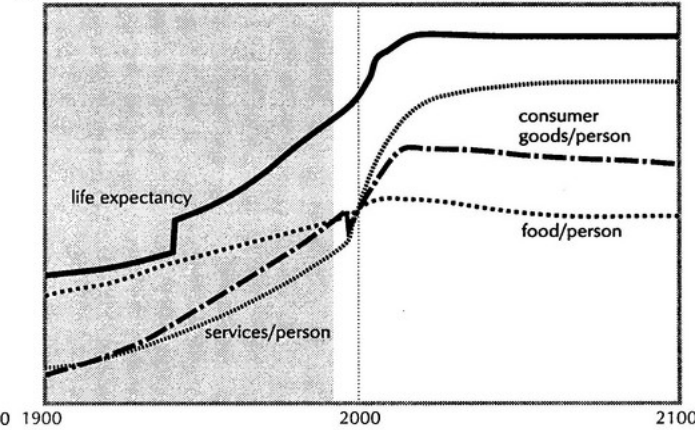
SCENARIO 12



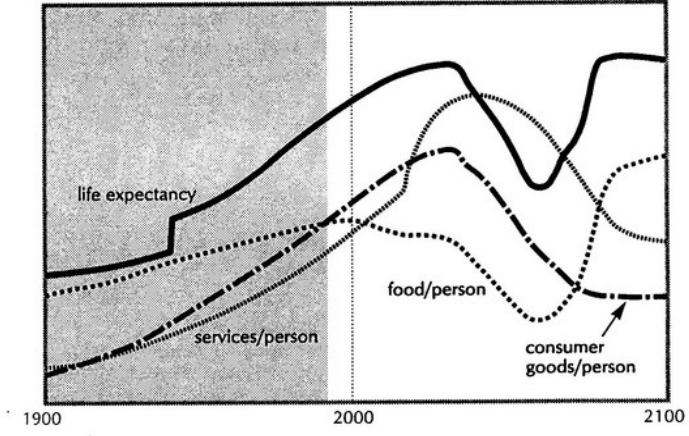
Material standard of living



Material standard of living



Material standard of living



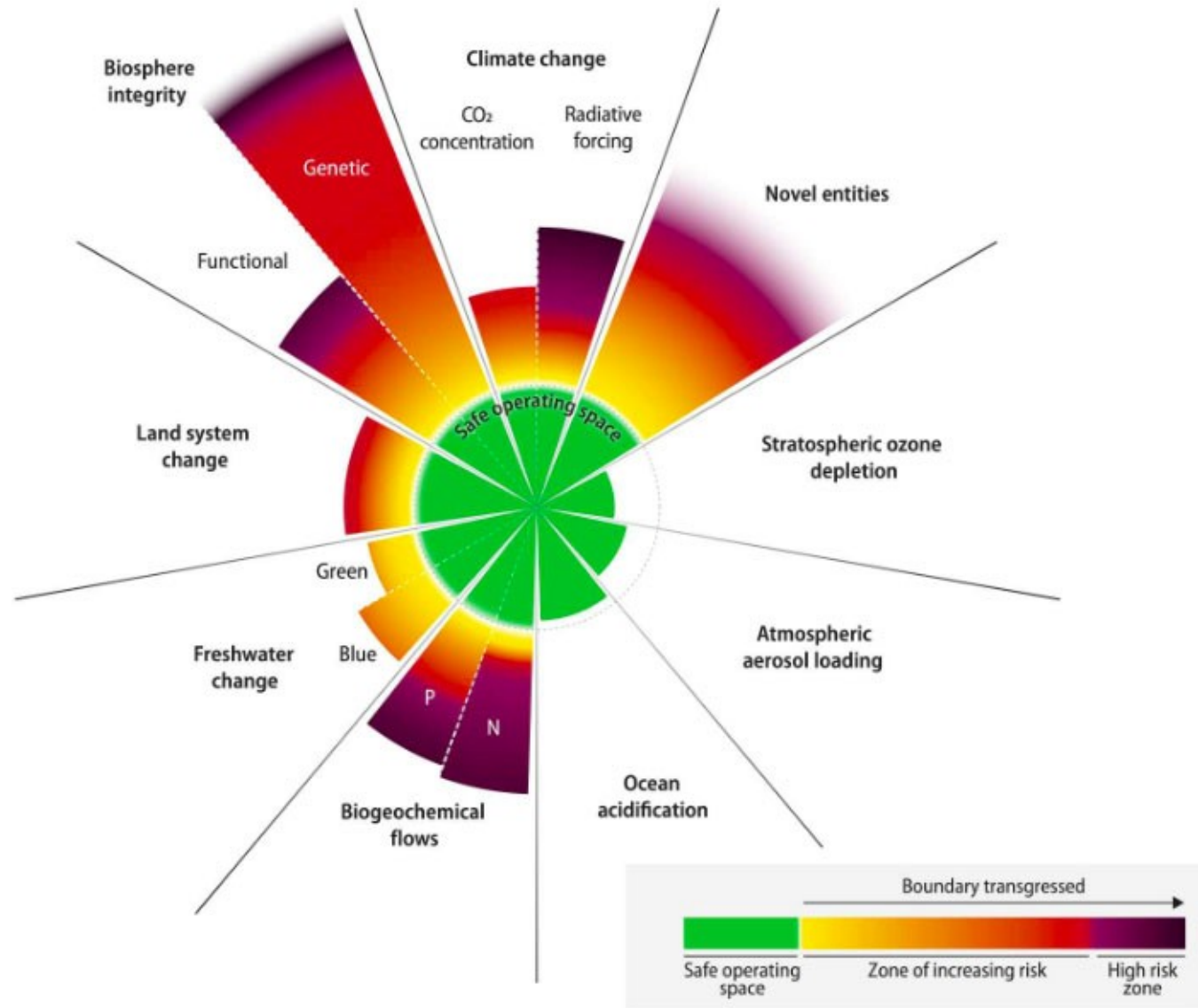
Business as usual

Transition 1995

Transition 2015

PLANETARY BOUNDARIES

We have overshot seven of the planetary boundaries. The green zone is the safe operating space, and the red is a high-risk zone.



Warnings of Catastrophe

Bahá'u'lláh, to Napoleon III of France (1870):

For what thou hast done, thy kingdom shall be thrown into confusion, and thine empire shall pass from thine hands, as a punishment for that which thou hast wrought. Then wilt thou know how thou hast plainly erred. Commotions shall seize all the people in that land....

(The Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh,)

Warnings of Catastrophe

Bahá'u'lláh, to Kaiser Wilhelm I of Prussia (now Germany) 1873:

O banks of the Rhine! We have seen you covered with gore, inasmuch as the swords of retribution were drawn against you; and you shall have another turn. And We hear the lamentations of Berlin, though she be today in conspicuous glory.

(The Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh; Kitáb-i-Aqdas)

Warnings of Catastrophe 1912

...enmity and strife will increase day by day, and the differences and divergences of nations will be woefully augmented. Continual additions to the armies and navies of the world will be made, and the fear and certainty of the great pandemic war—the war unparalleled in history—will be intensified; for armament, heretofore limited, is now being increased upon a colossal scale. Conditions are becoming acute, drawing nigh unto the degree of men warring upon the seas, warring upon the plains, warring in the very atmosphere with a violence unknown in former centuries. With the growth of armament and preparation the dangers are increasingly great.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 16 September 1912, §104)



Shoghi Effendi's Vision

In 1954, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, Shoghi Effendi, wrote to the American Bahá'í community about the catastrophe to come, and urging them to move away from the cities.

He said the same thing to pilgrims to the Bahá'í World Centre at that time, but when asked when this might happen, he said that he did not know, it was up to God.

The following is what he wrote:

American Bahá'ís in the time of World Peril

[America] is passing through a crisis which, in its spiritual, moral, social and political aspects, is of extreme seriousness—a seriousness which to a superficial observer is liable to be dangerously underestimated.

(Shoghi Effendi, “American Bahá'ís in the Time of World Peril”, 28 July 1954, *Citadel of Faith*)

World Peril

The steady and alarming deterioration in the standard of morality as exemplified by the appalling increase of crime, by political corruption in ever widening and ever higher circles, by the loosening of the sacred ties of marriage, by the inordinate craving for pleasure and diversion, and by the marked and progressive slackening of parental control, is no doubt the most arresting and distressing aspect of the decline that has set in, and can be clearly perceived, in the fortunes of the entire nation.

(Shoghi Effendi, "American Bahá'ís in the Time of World Peril", 28 July 1954, Citadel of Faith)

World Peril

Parallel with this, and pervading all departments of life—an evil which the nation, and indeed all those within the capitalist system, though to a lesser degree, share with that state and its satellites regarded as the sworn enemies of that system—is the crass materialism, which lays excessive and ever-increasing emphasis on material well-being, forgetful of those things of the spirit on which alone a sure and stable foundation can be laid for human society.

(Shoghi Effendi, “American Bahá’ís in the Time of World Peril”, 28 July 1954, *Citadel of Faith*)

World Peril

It is this same cancerous materialism, born originally in Europe, carried to excess in the North American continent, contaminating the Asiatic peoples and nations, spreading its ominous tentacles to the borders of Africa, and now invading its very heart, which Bahá'u'lláh in unequivocal and emphatic language denounced in His Writings, comparing it to a devouring flame and regarding it as the chief factor in precipitating the dire ordeals and world-shaking crises that must necessarily involve the burning of cities and the spread of terror and consternation in the hearts of men.

(Shoghi Effendi, "American Bahá'ís in the Time of World Peril", 28 July 1954, *Citadel of Faith*)

World Peril

Indeed a foretaste of the devastation which this consuming fire will wreak upon the world, and with which it will lay waste the cities of the nations participating in this tragic world-engulfing contest, has been afforded by the last World War, marking the second stage in the global havoc which humanity, forgetful of its God and heedless of the clear warnings uttered by His appointed Messenger for this day, must, alas, inevitably experience.

(Shoghi Effendi, "American Bahá'ís in the Time of World Peril", 28 July 1954, Citadel of Faith)

World Peril

It is this same all-pervasive, pernicious materialism against which the voice of the Center of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant was raised, with pathetic persistence, from platform and pulpit, in His addresses to the heedless multitudes, which, on the morrow of His fateful visit to both Europe and America, found themselves suddenly swept into the vortex of a tempest which in its range and severity was unsurpassed in the world's history.

(Shoghi Effendi, "American Bahá'ís in the Time of World Peril", 28 July 1954, *Citadel of Faith*)

World Peril

Collateral with this ominous laxity in morals, and this progressive stress laid on man's material pursuits and well-being, is the darkening of the political horizon, as witnessed by the widening of the gulf separating the protagonists of two antagonistic schools of thought which, however divergent in their ideologies, are to be commonly condemned by the upholders of the standard of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh for their materialistic philosophies and their neglect of those spiritual values and eternal verities on which alone a stable and flourishing civilization can be ultimately established.

(Shoghi Effendi, "American Bahá'ís in the Time of World Peril", 28 July 1954, Citadel of Faith)

World Peril

The multiplication, the diversity and the increasing destructive power of armaments to which both sides, in this world contest, caught in a whirlpool of fear, suspicion and hatred, are rapidly contributing; the outbreak of two successive bloody conflicts, entangling still further the American nation in the affairs of a distracted world, entailing a considerable loss in blood and treasure, swelling the national budget and progressively depreciating the currency of the state; the confusion, the vacillation, the suspicions besetting the European and Asiatic nations in their attitude to the American nation; the overwhelming accretion of strength to the arch enemy of the system championed by the American Union in consequence of the re-alignment of the powers in the Asiatic continent and particularly in the Far East—these have, moreover, contributed their share, in recent years, to the deterioration of a situation which, if not remedied, is bound to involve the American nation in a catastrophe of undreamed-of dimensions and of untold consequences to the social structure, the standard and conception of the American people and government.

(Shoghi Effendi, “American Bahá’ís in the Time of World Peril”, 28 July 1954, Citadel of Faith)

World Peril

No less serious is the stress and strain imposed on the fabric of American society through the fundamental and persistent neglect, by the governed and governors alike, of the supreme, the inescapable and urgent duty... of remedying, while there is yet time, through a revolutionary change in the concept and attitude of the average white American toward his Negro fellow citizen, a situation which, if allowed to drift, will, in the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, cause the streets of American cities to run with blood, aggravating thereby the havoc which the fearful weapons of destruction, raining from the air, and amassed by a ruthless, a vigilant, a powerful and inveterate enemy, will wreak upon those same cities.

(Shoghi Effendi, "American Bahá'ís in the Time of World Peril", 28 July 1954, Citadel of Faith)



World Peril

The American nation, of which the community of the Most Great Name forms as yet a negligible and infinitesimal part, stands, indeed, from whichever angle one observes its immediate fortunes, in grave peril. The woes and tribulations which threaten it are partly avoidable, but mostly inevitable and God-sent, for by reason of them a government and people clinging tenaciously to the obsolescent doctrine of absolute sovereignty and upholding a political system, manifestly at variance with the needs of a world already contracted into a neighborhood and crying out for unity, will find itself purged of its anachronistic conceptions, and prepared to play a preponderating role, as foretold by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in the hoisting of the standard of the Lesser Peace, in the unification of mankind, and in the establishment of a world federal government on this planet.

(Shoghi Effendi, "American Bahá'ís in the Time of World Peril", 28 July 1954, Citadel of Faith)

World Peril

These same fiery tribulations will not only firmly weld the American nation to its sister nations in both hemispheres, but will through their cleansing effect, purge it thoroughly of the accumulated dross which ingrained racial prejudice, rampant materialism, widespread ungodliness and moral laxity have combined, in the course of successive generations, to produce, and which have prevented her thus far from assuming the role of world spiritual leadership forecast by 'Abdu'l-Bahá's unerring pen—a role which she is bound to fulfill through travail and sorrow.

(Shoghi Effendi, "American Bahá'ís in the Time of World Peril", 28 July 1954, Citadel of Faith)

The warnings have continued

In 2023, the Universal House of Justice wrote:

Violent Convulsions

None can anticipate precisely what course the forces of disintegration are destined to take, what violent convulsions will yet assail humanity in this travailing age, or what obstacles and opportunities may arise, until the process reaches its culmination in the appearance of that Great Peace that will signalize the arrival of the stage when, recognizing the unity and wholeness of humankind, the nations will “put away the weapons of war, and turn to the instruments of universal reconstruction”.

(Reflections on the First Century of the Formative Age, Universal House of Justice, To the Bahá'ís of the World, 28 November 2023)

A Most Perilous Period

... the unfailing divine protection that encompasses the House of Justice will ensure that, as the Bahá'í world navigates the turmoil of a most perilous period in humanity's social evolution, it will follow undeviatingly the course set by Providence.

(Reflections on the First Century of the Formative Age, Universal House of Justice, To the Bahá'ís of the World, 28 November 2023)



Advice on how to respond

So, how do we respond to these warnings and predictions? Do we try to go and hide? Do we look for some safer place?

The Bahá'í Faith has often passed through perilous times, with warnings and guidance from its leaders. Some examples follow.

Challenges to Youth 1931

The prevailing distress in America and Europe should awaken the youth to the futility of concentrating their whole life on purely material pursuits. They should learn the lesson that spiritual considerations should be the dominating factors of our life, that our guiding purpose should be to enhance our moral life and seek what is eternal and abiding. Should the different nations continue to go wrong and be guided by the selfish desire of personal aggrandizement, you will be the group that will suffer most. Our present policies bear their fruits only in the future and it is the youth of the present that are the men and women of the future.

(on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 1931, quoted in *Youth*, compiled by the Research Department of UHJ, §16)

Challenges to Youth 1932

The present condition of the world—its economic instability, social dissensions, political dissatisfaction and international distrust—should awaken the youth from their slumber and make them inquire what the future is going to bring. It is surely they who will suffer most if some calamity sweep over the world.

(on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 1932, quoted in *Youth*, compiled by the Research Department of UHJ, §20)

Challenges to Youth 1932

They should therefore open their eyes to the existing conditions, study the evil forces that are at play and then with a concerted effort arise and bring about the necessary reforms—reforms that shall contain within their scope the spiritual as well as social and political phases of human life.

(on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 1932, quoted in *Youth*, compiled by the Research Department of UHJ, §20)

Challenges to Youth 1932

Surely in this very critical period of human history when old institutions are beginning to crumble down or being considerably modified, there is a certain amount of maladjustments and unfortunate happenings; but such a condition is not permanent. The Cause and its institutions will gradually take their place and with its virile spirit secure the full obedience of its followers and of the people of the world as a whole. So we need not be too pessimistic as to the future or take passing conditions too seriously.

(on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 1932, quoted in *Youth*, compiled by the Research Department of UHJ, §22)

Challenges to Youth 1932

The young people who are living between these two eras, and seeing the destruction of old institutions are therefore apt to discard all respect for them and in fact view with contempt any person that may still cherish the old. Hence we see the loose morality prevalent among them. This condition is not true only of America and Europe but also of the East, and I dare say in the East more than in the West.

(on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 1932, quoted in *Youth*, compiled by the Research Department of UHJ, §22)

Challenges to Youth 1932

Even though the Bahá'í Youth should feel with the condition in which they see their non-Bahá'í friends and not indict them for it, they should not let themselves be carried by the wave of world events as they are being carried. Whereas they see before them only a world that is crumbling down we are also seeing a new world being built up. Whereas they experience the destruction of old institutions that commanded their respect, we are beholding the dawn of a new era with its strict commands and new social bonds. Their materialistic outlook shows them the futility of all things while our faith in a regenerated and spiritualized man makes us look to the future and build for it.

(on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 1932, quoted in *Youth*, compiled by the Research Department of UHJ,

§22)

Challenges to Youth 1932

To make them follow our ways we should sympathize with their plight but should not follow their ways. We should take our stand on a higher plane of moral and spiritual life and, setting for them the true example, urge them up to our level. The young people should read what Bahá'u'lláh and the Master say on such matters and follow them conscientiously. That is if they desire to be true to the teachings and establish them throughout the world.

(on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 1932, quoted in *Youth*, compiled by the Research Department of UHJ, §22)

Lack of Spirituality 1936

The problem with which you are faced is one which concerns and seriously puzzles many of our present-day youth. How to attain spirituality is, indeed, a question to which every young man and woman must sooner or later try to find a satisfactory answer. It is precisely because no such satisfactory reply has been given or found, that modern youth finds itself bewildered, and is being consequently carried away by the materialistic forces that are so powerfully undermining the foundation of man's moral and spiritual life.

(on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 1936, quoted in *Youth*, compiled by the Research Department of UHJ, §30)

Lack of Spirituality 1936

Indeed, the chief reason for the evils now rampant in society is a lack of spirituality. The materialistic civilization of our age has so much absorbed the energy and interest of mankind, that people in general no longer feel the necessity of raising themselves above the forces and conditions of their daily material existence.

(on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 1936, quoted in *Youth*, compiled by the Research Department of UHJ, §30)

Lack of Spirituality 1936

There is not sufficient demand for things that we should call spiritual to differentiate them from the needs and requirements of our physical existence. The universal crisis affecting mankind is, therefore, essentially spiritual its causes. The spirit of the age, taken on the whole, is irreligious. Man's outlook upon life is too crude and materialistic to enable him to elevate himself into the higher realms of the spirit.

(on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 1936, quoted in *Youth*, compiled by the Research Department of UHJ, §30)

Lack of Spirituality 1936

It is this condition, so sadly morbid, into which society has fallen, that religion seeks to improve and transform. For the core of religious faith is that mystic feeling that unites man with God. This state of spiritual communion can be brought about and maintained by means of meditation and prayer. And this is the reason why Bahá'u'lláh has so much stressed the importance of worship. It is not sufficient for a believer to merely accept and observe the teachings. He should, in addition, cultivate the sense of spirituality, which he can acquire chiefly by the means of prayer.

(on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 1936, quoted in *Youth*, compiled by the Research Department of UHJ, §30)

Lack of Spirituality 1936

The Bahá'í Faith, like all other Divine religions, is thus fundamentally mystic in character. Its chief goal is the development of the individual and society, through the acquisition of spiritual virtues and powers. It is the soul of man that has first to be fed. And this spiritual nourishment prayer can best provide. Laws and institutions, as viewed by Bahá'u'lláh, can become really effective only when our inner spiritual life has been perfected and transformed. Otherwise religion will degenerate into a mere organization, and become a dead thing.

(on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 1936, quoted in *Youth*, compiled by the Research Department of UHJ,

Lack of Spirituality 1936

The believers, particularly the young ones, should therefore fully realize the necessity of praying. For prayer is absolutely indispensable to their inner spiritual development, and this, already stated, is the very foundation and purpose of the Religion of God.

(on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 1936, quoted in *Youth*, compiled by the Research Department of UHJ, §30)

Lack of Spirituality 1941

The responsibility of young believers is very great, as they must not only fit themselves to inherit the work of the older Bahá'ís and carry on the affairs of the Cause in general, but the world which lies ahead of them—as promised by Bahá'u'lláh—will be a world chastened by its sufferings, ready to listen to His Divine Message at last, and consequently a very high character will be expected of the exponents of such a religion. To deepen their knowledge, to perfect themselves in the Bahá'í standards of virtue and upright conduct, should be the paramount duty of every young Bahá'í.

(on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 1941, quoted in *Youth*, compiled by the Research Department of UHJ, §38)

Challenges to Youth 1942

If ever it could be said that a religion belonged to the youth, then surely the Bahá'í Faith today is that religion. The whole world is suffering, it is sunk in misery, crushed beneath its heavy problems. The task of healing its ills and building up its future devolves mainly upon the youth. They are the generation who, after the war, will have to solve the terrible difficulties created by the war and all that brought it about. And they will not be able to upbuild the future except by the laws and principles laid down by Bahá'u'lláh. So their task is very great and their responsibility very grave.

(on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 1942, quoted in *Youth*, compiled by the Research Department of UHJ, §41)

Challenges to Youth 1944

Aside from teaching the Cause, the greatest service the Bahá'í Youth can render is to exemplify in their lives the teachings and especially to be promoters—within the Bahá'í communities and in the world at large— of love and harmony, qualities so sadly lacking in these days of hatred, suspicion, vindictiveness and prejudice.

(on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 1944, quoted in *Youth*, compiled by the Research Department of UHJ, §49)

Challenges to Youth 1945

The youth are indeed those to whom the Cause should perforce offer its greatest appeal, as it holds alone the promise for their future security. Without that which Bahá'u'lláh has given to humanity the outlook for the future of the world would appear truly hopeless, for the evil forces in men's nature seem to have gained the ascendancy, and only a spiritual force, direct from God, can enable the good side of human nature to again assume command of men's lives.

(on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 1945, quoted in *Youth*, compiled by the Research Department of UHJ, §50)

It is up to Youth

...young people have a crucial part to play in helping humanity navigate this tumultuous passage to maturity.... Young people have repeatedly proven their readiness to take on a significant measure of responsibility for the well-being of those around them and for the advancement of their societies. Numerous forces, destructive and distracting, can act as obstacles. But these are, at most, only able to obscure the phenomenal potential of youth, never destroy it.

(Bahá'í International Community, In the Vanguard: The Role of Youth in an Ever-Advancing Global Society, 2024)