

## How Fast Is America Losing Faith?

# Americans are losing their faith at unprecedented rates. How are we to interpret such news?

Tue, Mar. 17, 2009 Posted: 04:45 PM EDT

The most viewed and arguably the most controversial article published in The Christian Science Monitor this past week? An analysis of the massive economic tsunami waves hitting billions around the world? Instead, it's a deeply troubling must-read article on "The coming evangelical collapse" (<http://www.csmonitor.com/2009/0310/p09s01-coop.html>).

On top of that comes a brand-new report from the American Religious Identification Survey from Trinity College in Hartford, Conn., that religion in America is declining rapidly. Americans are losing their faith at unprecedented rates.

How are we to interpret such news? It's important to remember that everyone has or will face crises of life and faith. That fact alone shouldn't alarm us. Instead, we need to see these pivotal times as a necessary part of each person's spiritual journey.

No Christian is exempt. Not even Billy Graham, who suffered a profound faith struggle in the late 1940s, shortly before his evangelistic ministry captured worldwide media attention. This largely unknown part of his early life story is an integral part of the movie Billy, which ran in select theatres across America during the fall of 2008.

Again, no Christian is exempt. Not even Mother Teresa, who had a close, vital relationship with God until she started fulfilling her calling in Calcutta, India. Suddenly, prayer, Scripture, music, meditation, and other spiritual disciplines felt dry. Except for a marvelous five-week reprieve in 1959, that remained true to her dying day. Yet she obeyed God's calling.

In biography after biography, in interview after interview, I see the same pattern. God allows us to go through a deeply troubling, faith-testing period that can last for weeks, months, years, even decades. The question is always the same: Will we remain true to God no matter what?

If we persevere, God does something remarkable. He blesses our life's work and impact to an extent we never could have imagined. That certainly is true in my own life and experience. And I find the same thing true through history-and around the globe.

In my new book, *If God Disappears: 9 Faith Wreckers and What to Do about Them* (SaltRiver, Tyndale House Publishers), I mention that my wife and I have had the privilege of trekking through the Amazon jungles, hiking through the Andes and Alps, and traversing the Sahara desert. The most daunting and memorable of all those travels, of course, was traveling across the Sahara desert.

The sub-Saharan desert west of Sudan and south of Libya is no-man's land. Travel nine hours by truck due east from N'Djamena, capital of Chad, and you'll come to the tiny village of Korbo. There you'll meet Tchere Ouday.

Tchere Ouday is dressed in a long white robe. His face is weathered and his mostly bald head sports some white stubble. He sits cross-legged on a mat inside his mud hut.

More than 40 years ago Tchere became the first Christian among his people, the Dangaleats in the Guera region of Chad. For many decades he worked as a mason. He is more than 70 years old now and has reduced his activities-yet he still continues to serve as an elder of the Korbo church.

In the past two years drought and caterpillar infestations have substantially reduced the amount of food the Dangaleat people have been able to raise. Typically Tchere would offer guests a meal. But on this day he offers a small cup of sweet tea, a bowl of peanuts, some washed lettuce, and a few slices of tomato dipped in salt and ground red pepper.

"How can we pray for you, brother?" you ask him.

Usually Dangaleat Muslims and Christians say the same thing: Please pray that God will give us more food. That is on Tchere's mind too. But it's not the first thing. Instead he says, "Pray that we might remain firm in our faith in our old age."

Who could be more faithful than Tchere? Even against threat of death he refused to recant his faith during the horrific Chadian civil war that

raged through the Guera in the late 1970s. He's served the Lord steadfastly ever since. Still, Tthere knows better than to take his Christian faith for granted.

Although Tthere doesn't have the complete Bible in his language yet, he knows that one of the greatest temptations you and I will ever face in this life is to spiritually drift away from the Lord. No one is immune-no matter how long and faithfully they have walked with God.

So, let's take the news about the decline of religious faith in America personally.

Is your faith growing stronger? If so, great! If not, let's talk. You'll find my e-mail address on my [www.IfGodDisappears.com](http://www.IfGodDisappears.com) website.

<http://christianpost.com/Opinion/Opinions/2009/03/how-fast-is-america-losing-faith-17/print.html>