

# The Expanding Spiritual-Moral Role of World Religions in the New Millenium

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## Abstract

The problems and challenges of the twenty-first century will force world religions to play a more meaningful role in society and civilization. By subjecting human reason to transcendental truths and spiritual guidance, religion serves as a powerful molder of wholesome, balanced and coherent personality, culture and civilization. Legislation alone is inadequate to combat the serious moral corruption in institutions and systems. The state will also have to make room for the expansion of religion-based ethics and spiritual values into business, international trade, media, judiciary and politics. The continued separation of spiritual values from worldly affairs is not only untenable from a holistic perspective of man but would ultimately be disastrous to human civilization. A pervasive ethical consciousness, engendered by a tawhidic worldview, is greatly needed as a panacea to the crisis of contemporary society.

“Does God Have a Future?” is the last chapter of Karen Armstrong’s book, *A History of God*, which traces the history of how men and women have perceived God from the time of Abraham (a.s.) to the present. She does not provide a direct and simple answer. However, she concludes the intellectually challenging book with the following remarks:

Human beings cannot endure emptiness and desolation; they will fill the vacuum by creating a new focus of meaning. The idols of fundamentalism are not good substitutes for God; if we are to create a vibrant new faith for the twenty-first century, we should, perhaps, ponder the history of God for some lessons and warnings.<sup>1</sup>

Implicit in her conclusion is that mankind needs God because human beings are not only *Homo sapiens* but also *Homo religiosus* and religion fulfills that need. It is the present author's contention that religion will be called upon to play a bigger role in the twenty-first century, as the world and mankind presumably continue to face serious moral, social, environmental, economic and political crises. At the dawn of the new millennium, a new world order seems to be emerging with triumphant capitalist globalization and the I.C.T. revolution forging a borderless world, while the alarming increase in global warming portends a grim prospect of unprecedented ecological disaster. Much of contemporary modern life is characterized by permissiveness, hedonism, aimlessness, alienation, anomic and hideous violence, while great progress is being made in science, medicine and technology.

The Cold War may have ended, but the new world order seems no less frightening than the old. We are facing the possibility of ecological disaster. The AIDS virus threatens to bring a plague of unmanageable proportions. Within two or three generations, the population will become too great for the planet to support. Thousands are dying of famine and drought.<sup>2</sup>

Many people believed that modernity and "progress" would make mankind less and less dependent upon religion or faith in God. If religion is to survive at all in the world of modernity and scientific progress, it has to be marginalized to the private realm only, while autonomous human reason reigns supreme in the public sector. This was, in fact, the solution that modern European society chose after the period of Enlightenment and the Age of Reason, to overcome the problems posed by dominant Christian authority, church dogmas and bloody inter-religious conflict. The problem with this solution, which became a characteristic of the worldview of secularism, was that the western imperialist nations wanted the colonized Muslim countries and the post-independent Muslim states to adopt it as their very own, since it has served its purpose in Europe and North America. This is, of course, part of the old agenda of western imperialism and a manifestation of the tendency of absolutizing western ideas and values.

The rationalism and scepticism of the age of Enlightenment of seventeenth and eighteenth century Europe paved the way for the dethronement of European religion, and scientism replaced the belief in God. Thus:

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, atheism was definitely on the agenda. The advances in science and technology were creating a new spirit of autonomy and independence which led some to declare their

independence of God. This was the century in which Ludwig Feuerbach, Karl Marx, Charles Darwin, Friedrich Nietzsche and Sigmund Freud forged philosophies and scientific interpretations of reality which had no place for God. Indeed, by the end of the century, a significant number of people were beginning to feel that if God was not yet dead, it was the duty of rational, emancipated human beings to kill him.<sup>3</sup>

Thus religion was rejected by Karl Marx (1818-1883) as "the sigh of the oppressed creature ... the opium of the people, which made this suffering bearable."<sup>4</sup> In 1882 Nietzsche declared that God was dead and Freud (1856-1939) "certainly regarded belief in God as an illusion that mature men and women should lay aside."<sup>5</sup> In his view:

The idea of God was not a lie but a device of the unconscious which needed to be decoded by psychology. A personal god was nothing more than an exalted father-figure: desire for such a deity sprang from infantile yearnings for a powerful, protective father .... God is simply a projection of these desires, feared and worshipped by human beings out of an abiding sense of helplessness. Religion belonged to the infancy of the human race; it had been a necessary stage in the transition from childhood to maturity. It had promoted ethical values which were essential to society. Now that humanity had come of age, however, it should be left behind. Science, the new logos, could take God's place. It could provide a new basis for morality and help us to face our fears.<sup>6</sup>

The spirit of scientism and the faith in it was no less religious in its intensity when Freud declared: "No, our science is not an illusion! An illusion it would be to suppose that what science cannot give we can get elsewhere."<sup>7</sup>

It is important to mention, at this juncture, that as Karen Armstrong points out, the European scholars' and philosophers' rejection of God or religion was in respect of a particular notion of God and a particular type of religion. She says:

The philosophers of the Enlightenment did not reject the idea of God, however. They rejected the cruel God of the orthodox who threatened mankind with eternal fire. They rejected mysterious doctrines about Him that were abhorrent to reason.<sup>8</sup>

Voltaire, in his *Philosophical Dictionary*, argued "that faith in one God was more rational and natural to humanity than beliefs in numerous deities."<sup>9</sup> Similarly Spinoza (1632-77), a Dutch Jew, came out with ideas which were very different from mainstream Judaism and which had been influenced by scientific thinkers. Spinoza, though regarded as an atheist, "did have a belief in

a God, even though this was not a God of the Bible."<sup>10</sup> As explained by Karen Armstrong,

The new atheists of the nineteenth century were inveighing against the particular conception of God current in the West rather than other notions of the divine....[God] had often been used by the establishment to approve a social order in which the rich man sat in his palace while the poor man sat at its gage. This was not true of the whole of monotheistic religion, however. A God who condoned social injustice would have appalled Amos, Isaiah or Muhammad ...<sup>11</sup>

When Nietzsche declared that God was dead because man had killed him, he was rejecting the notion of God prevalent in European culture and society. Armstrong is of the view that:

The Christian God, Nietzsche taught, was pitiable, absurd and 'a crime against life'. He encouraged people to fear their bodies, their passions and their sexuality and had promoted a pueling morality of compassion which had made us weak.... Again it must be said that the western God was vulnerable to this critique. He had been used to alienate people from their humanity and from sexual passion by means of a life-denying asceticism. He had also been made into a facile panacea and an alternative to life here below.<sup>12</sup>

The "Death of God" movement together with the modern philosophies of secular humanism, positivism and materialism in the twentieth century led some Christian theologians such as Harvey Cox to endorse the reality of the "secular city" as though it was the will of God that man, having "come of age," should conduct all public affairs without any reference to God, for He is no longer present.

While natural science celebrated its achievements and successes independent of God or religion, the emerging social sciences in Europe and America saw religion generally and non-western religions in particular as impediments to human progress. Modernization in the western conception was promoted as the path that the so-called Third World countries had to follow. To the western social scientists such as Max Weber, Talcott Parsons, Daniel Lerner, Samuel Huntington and many others, modernization necessitates rationalization and secularization or the diffusion of secular norms. This is to be expected, as: "Both in Western Europe and the United States, the first half of the twentieth century was perceived as a steady triumph of secularism."<sup>13</sup> As such, the religionalist leaders of Afro-Asia were "downplayed by the colonial powers and largely ignored by western scholars ... [They were] characterized as 'fanatics' or 'traditionalists'."<sup>14</sup> Western social scientists of the fifties and

sixties were too preoccupied with prescribing secular modernization and economic development for the so-called "underdeveloped" or "developing" world to foresee the dramatic resurgence of Islam in the seventies or the rise of other religious movements in different parts of the world. "Modernization literature, particularly of the fifties and sixties," says Fred von der Mehden, "pictured a decline in religious values, attitudes and practices, and legitimacy as modernization proceeded in its inevitable forward progress."<sup>15</sup> Its model of development and expectations "fit an evolutionary developmental model patterned after what was perceived to be the character of the predominantly secular West."<sup>16</sup> For Max Weber, the popular religions of Asia generalized as "the world-accommodation of Confucianism," "the world-rejection of Buddhism," and "the world-conquest of Islam" could not provide any path towards a "rational methodical control of life."<sup>17</sup>

The "development" paradigm adopted by the technological developing countries in Africa and Asia in the sixties and the seventies was, to a large extent, a continuation of the western economic prescription for their former colonies. The paradigm calls for the containment or manipulation of religions by the nation-state for the sake of economic development and national integration.

In the Muslim world this has led to the emergence of the holistic consciousness of Islam and world-wide movements against secularism and secularization strategies. The Islamist struggle against secular modernization resulted in the Iranian revolution of 1979, the recent bloody conflicts in Algeria, the continued suppression of political Islamic movements in Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Tunisia, Turkey and Indonesia under Sukarno's and Suharto's rule. This aspect of contemporary Islam is being studied, analyzed and labelled by Western scholars under the name of "fundamentalism".

In 1988, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences initiated and sponsored the Fundamentalism Project, which analyzes organized religious reaction to secular modernity in the twentieth century. The first volume in the series, *Fundamentalisms Observed*, includes detailed studies of movements within Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism and Confucianism. The second volume, *Fundamentalisms and Society*, examines fundamentalist worldviews in Islam, Christianity and Judaism and describes their impact on science, technology, family, women and education in several countries. The third volume, entitled *Fundamentalisms and the State*, analyzes the impact of various "fundamentalist" movements – Muslim, Jewish, Christian, Hindu, Sikh and Buddhist – on law, economics and violence in their respective countries. The fourth volume, *Accounting for Fundamentalisms*,

examines the relationship between the organizational characteristics of "fundamentalist" movements and their changing worldviews, ideologies and programs such that they become either violent or integrationists, or accommodationists, or passivists, or separatists in relation to the surrounding communities or cultures. The fifth volume, *Fundamentalisms Compared*, attempts to construct an explanatory model of the global, antiseccular religious resurgence. The appropriateness or otherwise of the use of the controversial term "fundamentalism" is also debated and scrutinized.

It has to be admitted that these scholarly works provide valuable insights into various religious responses to secular modernity, but a more complete and balanced picture of the phenomenon would also have to address what John Esposito calls the "secular fundamentalists" in the contemporary world who resort to systematic violence, torture, oppression, misinformation, deceit and corruption to preserve the status quo. The tendency of the world print and electronic media and leaders of western powers to highlight the militancy of religious groups or movements – particularly the so-called Muslim "fundamentalists" – is understandable as part of the strategy of influential lobby groups in the U.S.A. and Israel which perceive the Islamic resurgence phenomenon as a serious threat to western hegemony and civilization. After the fall of Communism, assertive Islam is seen as "the new enemy", and therefore has to be subjected to systematic demonization and the politics of exclusionism.<sup>18</sup> To counter the negative stereotyping of Islam, responsible Muslim scholars have tried to promote the peaceful and non-violent nature of Islam and its abhorrence of extremism or radicalism.<sup>19</sup>

Like morally-concerned Muslim scholars or intellectuals everywhere, there have been and still are many western minds which feel that the moral, social or political crises in contemporary technological society call for a greater role of spiritual or religious perspectives in public life. They may not be in the majority, but their voices represent the moral conscience that traditional wisdom and world religions nurture. It would be instructive for the Muslim intelligentsia to recognize the common and universal yearnings for decency and moral integrity in contemporary American state and society manifested in the writings of those thinkers. One such thinker is Robert H. Bork, a former professor of public law at Yale, judge of the U.S. Court of Appeals and Acting Attorney General of the United States. In his book *Slouching Towards Gomorrah*, Bork offers a profound analysis of the new social ills and moral decay in American culture and society. He examines the vulgarity and decadence of popular culture "sinking into barbarism", and observes:

The obscenity of thought and word is staggering . . . . In keeping with the progress of liberalism, popular entertainment generally – and the worst of it in particular – celebrates the unconstrained self, and savages those who would constrain.<sup>20</sup>

He calls for stronger censorship “against the most violent and sexually explicit material now on offer, starting with the obscene prose and pictures available on the Internet, motion pictures that are mere rhapsodies to violence, and the more degenerate lyrics of rap music,”<sup>21</sup> knowing full well that “the ethos of modern liberalism has made any interference with the individual’s self-gratification seem shamefully reactionary.”<sup>22</sup> He discusses the rise in the incidence of crime, illegitimacy, abortion, assisted suicide and radical feminism’s assault on American culture. The root of American decline, Bork argues, is the pervasive influence of modern liberalism. As a result, religion and morality “have been so weakened that individualism is breaking loose and becoming radical and destructive.”<sup>23</sup> In his view, the extremists of modern liberalism are hostile to religious conservatism in any denomination and will seek – to destroy religious institutions and traditions if they can.<sup>24</sup> He believes that when religion has lapsed in a Western society in which Christianity has been dominant, such a society would not be able to sustain its virtue.<sup>25</sup> The gradual decline of established religion and morality, coupled with the removal of religion from public recognition and debate, caused by the liberal elites, account for the society’s wholesale defection from the standards of decency, civility and self-restraint.<sup>26</sup>

There is in many people a need for a belief in the transcendent to give meaning to their lives. By removing religion from the public space, we marginalize it, we deny its importance to society and relegate it to the private sphere. But if men need a transcendence that can be brought to bear on public affairs, and if religion is denied that role, other forms of transcendence, some of them quite ugly and threatening, may move in to occupy the empty space. . . . There is also a splintering of morality when religion no longer provides a common set of moral assumptions.<sup>27</sup>

Robert H. Bork argues that morality requires a stronger foundation than reason. The realization that human reason cannot provide the necessary major premises for morality is beginning to sink in. As Irving Kristol puts it:

Secular rationalism has been unable to produce a compelling, self-justifying moral code. Philosophy can analyze moral codes in interesting ways, but it cannot create them. And with this failure, the whole enterprise of secular humanism – the idea that man can define his humanity and shape the human future by reason and will alone – begins to lose its

legitimacy. Over the past 30 years, all the major philosophical as well as cultural trends began to repudiate secular rationalism in favor of an intellectual and moral relativism and/or nihilism.<sup>28</sup>

Bork is convinced that "only religion can accomplish for a modern society what tradition, reason, and empirical observation cannot."<sup>29</sup> Religion tells human beings what the ends of life should be and thus provides a strong basis for moral conduct. Philosophy, on the other hand, cannot agree on what the proper ends should be and hence is unable to supply the necessary premises for moral certainty. It has been regularly asserted that "Americans are the most religious people among the industrial democracies; 90 percent of Americans say that they believe in God..."<sup>30</sup> But Bork maintains that: "The truth is that, despite the statistics on churchgoing, etc., the United States is a very secular nation that, for the most part, does not take religion seriously."<sup>31</sup> This statement may be challenged by proponents of the "New Religious Right" in American politics, Christian Fundamentalism, Evangelical, Messianic and Millennialistic movements in American society who expect rejuvenated Christianity to play a new global role in the Third Millennium.<sup>32</sup>

Shifting the focus from the U.S.A. to the continent of Asia, it has been observed that "spirituality is on the increase and religious faith is flourishing."<sup>33</sup> John Naisbitt mentions that in Asia, "Christianity is emerging as one somewhat surprising religious option."<sup>34</sup> It is estimated by the editor of *World Christian Encyclopedia* that around eight per cent of Asia's population is Christian and around 25,000 Chinese join the Protestant faith each day with three new churches being opened every two days.<sup>35</sup> A more accurate picture of religious affiliation in East Asia can be gleaned from the following table:<sup>36</sup>

Religious Affiliation in East Asia (Year of Study in Parentheses)

Country	Folk Religion (%)	Buddhism (%)	Christianity (%)	Others (%)	None (%)
Japan (1985)	4	39	1	2	53
South Korea		20	21	2	57
Singapore <sup>a</sup> (1990)	68		14		18
Taiwan <sup>b</sup> (1984)	65	15	4	1	15

<sup>a</sup> Chinese population only.

<sup>b</sup> Other research found that "nones" were 33% of the population in 1983 (Swanson 1986); Mitchell (1974) reported that 47% of the urban Hong Kong population was religiously nonaffiliated.

SOURCES: Hastings and Hastings 1986; Republic of China 1990; Singapore Department of Statistics 1991; United Nations 1991.



Christianity is fast spreading in the East Asia region, with forty-one percent of the people of South Korea being Christians, and millions in China have converted to either Protestantism or Catholicism. In the Philippines, Asia's only predominantly Catholic country, with eighty-five percent of the population being Catholic, Christianity is enjoying a resurgence, while in Thailand, Buddhism seems to be riding the wave of economic prosperity.<sup>37</sup>

The advent of the new millenium brings with it the new challenges of the negative aspects of globalization and environmental crises which, if unchecked, would put the whole planet earth in peril, in addition to the old threat of nuclear war, unresolved international conflicts in the Middle East and Eastern Europe, tribal warfare in Africa, the AIDS scourge, increasing crime of all forms, breaking of the family institution, drug abuse, urban decay, obscenity and a host of social ills. Religions which preach the goals of peace, justice, holistic wellbeing and righteous living have to address the above issues while they continue to oppose social injustices, oppression, corruption, abuse of power, greed, materialism, racism, sexism, hedonism and nihilism.

Realizing the profound impact of globalization by which the global market, labor, high technology, information, media, knowledge, skills, ideas and values become borderless at incredible speed, with far reaching consequences on local culture, personality, society and the holistic quality of life, several intellectuals and social activists of different religions in the Asia-Pacific region together examined the unprecedented phenomenon from the religious perspectives in a conference held in Malaysia in July 1997. They discovered that in spite of overwhelming differences between them,

there are certain common perspectives that they share in regard to environmental protection, ethical economic behaviour, moderate consumption patterns, principled political conduct, community welfare, the integrity of the family, and the dignity of the human person. It is these shared moral values, transcending religious and cultural boundaries, that can help check the negative consequences of globalization, while strengthening its positive aspects.<sup>38</sup>

They also shared the following vision:

More than any other cultural force, religion will become the singular most important force resisting the tendency towards uniformity. It is religion that will become the moral armor against the battery of sensate culture and ensure that we remain faithful to our own primordial nature and ethical roots. It is religion that will ensure that the world remains multi-cultural, rather than being dominated by a single Colossus. But global-

ization has set the stage for an encounter of religions on an unprecedented scale....[which] entails a coexistence among believers of different creeds founded upon tolerance and mutual respect.<sup>39</sup>

Discussing the relevance of Confucianism to globalization, Tan Chee-Beng, a professor of anthropology in Hong Kong, maintains that the moral basis of mainland Chinese society requires the contribution of Confucian ethics and a transcendental view of life provided by both Confucian and Taoist teachings. Increasing consumerism and materialism, in his view, could be moderated by a renewal of spiritual living provided by Confucian teachings (not Confucian state ideology and bureaucracy) which stress self cultivation without the intervention of religious authorities or the state. He believes that spiritual Confucianism, not being a dogmatic or institutional religion, will be "increasingly relevant to the identities of China and other East Asian societies" in the era of globalization.<sup>40</sup>

For Sangjin Han, a professor of sociology in South Korea, the disturbing consequences of modernization and industrial globalization – all-out expansion of materialistic values and an exacerbation of a number of social pathologies – expose societies to the evils ("highly structured risks") of corruption, atrocious crimes and abuse of power. This requires the reactivation of civil society to "serve as an immune system against cultural decay."<sup>41</sup> One of the tasks confronting NGOs in East Asia "is the construction of a more humane society, capable of overcoming societal risks that derive from the rush to development."<sup>42</sup> In this context, Sangjin Han finds great normative potential in "Reformed Confucianism [which] is neither simply traditional nor bureaucratic, but reciprocally oriented and reflexive,"<sup>43</sup> to overcome the pathologies of modernization.

Discussing "Globalization from a Hindu Perspective," Gedong Bagoes Oka, a university lecturer in Bali, Indonesia, is of the view that "contemporary globalization is the antithesis of the spiritual globalization intended by Gandhi: a globalisation that should make the winds of a true democratic, just, non-exploitative future world blow unimpeded in all our countries."<sup>44</sup> She maintains that "the main function of religion is to help human beings overcome their lower self so they can live in peace and harmony with fellow humans and with Nature." The principle of *Ahimsa* ("harm to none") in Hinduism as practised by Mahatma Gandhi, in her view, could be implemented to counter the ruthless and manipulative impulses in globalization. In analysing the impact of globalization, it would be useful to reflect on "the seven social sins" stated by Gandhi as: (1) politics without principles, (2) wealth without work, (3) edu-

cation without character, (4) commerce without morality, (5) pleasure without conscience, (6) science without humanity and (7) worship without sacrifice.<sup>45</sup>

A Buddhist perspective on transnational corporations as the main agent of globalization concludes that, while Buddhism teaches the principle of "non-self" (*anatman*), and that the primary cause of human problems is greed, corporations "cannot become enlightened in the spiritual sense".<sup>46</sup> Buddhist enlightenment implies the consciousness that suffering in the world is caused by the delusion of being a self apart from the world. Therefore, "the tragedy of economic globalization today" is that "increasingly, the destiny of the earth is in the hands of impersonal institutions...motivated not by concern for the well-being of the earth's inhabitants but by desire for their own growth and profit."<sup>47</sup> For Pracha Hutanuwatr, a Thai intellectual, the very core of the globalisation process which has produced a litany of social and ecological crises (poverty, powerlessness, destruction of community, depletion of natural resources and unendurable pollution) is the globalization of "craving" (*tanha*).<sup>48</sup> "Craving", from Buddhist analysis, is the root of suffering. As a result, a "pervasive consumerist monoculture" based on the "acquisitive gospel" has led many Buddhists in Thailand to worship money and "success". He says:

Many aspects of contemporary Siam are a frightening reminder of all that is wrong with modernization. As a value system, the underpinning capitalist monoculture seems almost totally at odds with traditional Buddhist philosophy based on interconnection, compassion and sensitivity to greed, hate and illusion.<sup>49</sup>

The carefully planned and orchestrated "globalization" of the world has vast implications and repercussions on the Muslim world, made up of the fifty-six countries of the O.I.C., from Morocco in the West to Mindanao in the East, and on Islam. As part of the G-17 (133 countries) which represents eighty per cent of the world's population, Muslim leaders have expressed their grave concern over the globalization of finance and the policies as well as the adverse advice of the International Monetary Fund. Many who attended the G-77 Summit in Havana in April 2000 expressed their desire to cooperate and work towards the reform of the international financial architecture, having suffered badly either from the devastating effects of currency attacks or the conditions set by I.M.F. to revive the ailing economies of the South.<sup>50</sup> In the face of the globalizing trend of homogenization of culture, the hegemony of western mass media and secularization, the solidarity of the Muslim Ummah is severely tested. There have been among the Muslims those who advocate the complete embrace of modernization and secularization in order to achieve "progress,"

while some would prefer to withdraw into spiritual or mystical quietism. For Taufik Abdullah, a professor of history in Indonesia, "the most appropriate model for responding to emerging structural and cultural challenges is, in fact, cultivation and revitalisation of the spirit of Islamic *tajdid*, reform."<sup>51</sup> He explains that the early notion of *tajdid* was related to the need to change a "lethargic social and cultural environment" based on blind adherence to traditional views or practices. For him *tajdid* refers to more fundamental issues.

While it may appeal to authentic Islamic doctrine, its main concern is to discover a proper social and political sphere where Islamic ethical values and doctrinal commitments can find affinities with contextual demands and structural necessities....Furthermore, reform means the willingness to know and understand changing reality both empirically and normatively. It is the continual and creative dialogue between empirical necessities and doctrinal imperatives that would enable Muslims to develop appropriate responses to unprecedented challenges.<sup>52</sup>

In his opinion, the most pressing agenda for Muslims is "the promotion, encouragement, dissemination, and advancement of a social ethic based on belief in the Oneness of God."<sup>53</sup> A *tawhidic* ethic would allow the Muslim community to cope with new challenges while remaining committed to the permanent values of Islam.

Other than globalization, the issue of ecological crises is predicted to become a major agenda of the twenty-first century as it concretizes the problematic effects of the global economy and society. In this respect, international Christian organizations, namely the World Council of Churches and the Vatican, have taken the lead since the sixties in articulating the issues from religious perspectives, pressurizing the guilty parties and criticizing the injustices of the global economic system. A threefold typology of religious environmentalism which reflects the Christian-centredness of most such activity is "creation spirituality," "eco-justice" and "stewardship".<sup>54</sup> The theology of eco-spirituality developed by the Christian organizations focuses on the compassion of God for life and the holistic continuity between the human and the natural worlds.<sup>55</sup> The eco-justice perspective that dominates in the W.C.C. is a marriage between liberation theology and creation spirituality. "Religious environmentalism," says Peter Beyer, "in spite of internal strains between more liberal and more conservative tendencies, is at the moment a predominantly liberal expression of religion."<sup>56</sup>

The problems and issues of the twenty-first century will force all world religions to search deep into their inner resources to provide answers or solutions

to new problems. For Seyyed Hossein Nasr, an internationally renowned scholar, those challenges are (1) environmental crisis, (2) the global order, (3) post-modernism, (4) the secularisation of life, (5) the crisis of science and technology, (6) penetration of non-Islamic values, (7) the image of Islam, (8) the attitude to other civilizations, (9) feminism, (10) human rights, and (11) internal challenges.<sup>57</sup> With regard to environmental issues, he feels sad that although he "was one of the very first people who predicted the environmental crisis in the West at a time when nobody spoke about it [in *Man and Nature*], the Islamic world is very silent. The Islamic thinkers have not as yet fully understood the challenge of the environment for the future of the globe, and for the future of the Islamic world."<sup>58</sup> For Sachiko Murata and William C. Chittick, two professors at the State University of New York, the remedy for the problems of human society – hunger, disease, oppression, pollution and a thousand other human produced ills – is, as Islam sees it, "to return to God through religion (*islam, iman and ihsan*)."<sup>59</sup>

There is no doubt that if religions are to play a more effective and expanded role in the new millennium, they have to have the spiritual, intellectual and ethical resources to provide the appropriate answers, solutions and responses to the issues of the day. If the established world religions fail to provide the proper guidance as well as holistic action plans for the continued wellbeing of man and nature in the more challenging years and decades ahead, then the spiritual and moral vacuum will be filled by new religions, occult movements, charismatic sects, deviant mysticism, religious fraud or doomsday cults.<sup>60</sup> The state will have to make room for the expansion of religious-based ethics and spiritual values into business, international trade, the professions, industry, educational institutions, the media, the judiciary, law enforcement, politics and international relations. The separation or compartmentalization of spiritual values from this-worldly affairs is untenable from a holistic religious perspective, and its continuation would only serve to aggravate the existing crises, sufferings, injustices and conflicts. For an effective synthesis or symbiosis to take place, proponents on both sides of the divide would have to understand each other well enough to appreciate the necessity of the synthesis.

It is important for the guardians of the worldly dimension of life to understand that mainstream religion, in general, provides a holistic meaning to human life and underscores the spiritual essence of man. For the Muslim, religion helps to define his true and lasting identity as the servant (*‘abd*) of Allah and the only creature entrusted with the trust of vicegerency (*khilafah*) on His earth. The primordial spiritual and moral nature of the human craves after

peace, goodness, virtue and submission to a transcendent power. It abhors evil, depravity, corruption, greed, injustice and falsehood as belonging to the Satanic realm, and these fruits of desire are the causes of man's misery and chaos in nature. By appealing to man's yearning for ultimate felicity and true happiness in life after death, and his fear of ultimate suffering and indignity, religion helps people to achieve the self-control and self-restraint needed to overcome the unending temptations of worldly and ephemeral objects such as power, affluence, status and influence. By subjecting human reason to the higher truths or spiritual knowledge, religion moulds a wholesome, balanced and coherent human personality as a basis for a wholesome society, culture and civilization.

The impact of serious moral failure, unethical practices and moral corruption in business, corporations, media, politics and government in the nation state will continue to undermine our quality of life, and some of this unethical conduct will have global consequences in the interdependent world economy and world systems of tomorrow. The specters of ozone depletion, currency speculation and cyber pranks are some of the new global threats. Legislation alone is inadequate to combat the moral corruption in the institutions and systems. A pervasive ethical consciousness which generates virtuous and righteous conduct among leaders and followers is needed to check further moral decay. This consciousness is best nurtured by religion and spiritual-moral education which, together, foster a deep sense of accountability to and love of the Supreme Being. This spiritual-moral conscience and consciousness, which transcends personal, racial, ethnic or national loyalties, is a more effective force than legislation in challenging the gods of selfish and unjust vested interest. As Robert Dickson Crane, former U.S. Ambassador to U.A.E. and personal advisor to U.S. presidents, put it:

The battle between good and evil in the world is a battle between those who submit to Allah and those who worship the false gods of power, prestige, and pleasure, or the false gods of any ideology or party that seeks other than the pleasure of Allah. This is in essence a spiritual battle between the traditionalists, who seek Allah in their personal and public lives, and the secular fundamentalists, who seek to exclude Allah from human consciousness and eliminate those who are conscious of Allah from public life.<sup>61</sup>

## Notes

1. Karen Armstrong, *A History of God* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1993), 399.
2. *Ibid.*, 377.

3. Ibid., 346.
4. Ibid., 354.
5. Ibid., 357.
6. Ibid., 357.
7. Ibid., 357.
8. Ibid., 310.
9. Ibid., 310.
10. Ibid., 311.
11. Ibid., 355.
12. Ibid., 357.
13. Fred R. von der Mehden, *Religion and Modernization in Southeast Asia* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1986), 18.
14. Ibid., 18. von der Mehden says that in 1964 a poll of sociologists found that 73 percent of them agreed that: "Most sociologists pay lip service to the idea of being value free in their work and are not value free." Ibid., 17.
15. Ibid., 12.
16. Ibid., 12.
17. Ibid., 12.
18. See Edward Said, "Bridge Across The Abyss," *Current Affairs* (Lahore), Book 62 (October 1999): 1–10; John L. Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?* (New York: O.U.P., 1995).
19. For example, see Yusuf al-Qaradawi, *Al-Islam baina al-juhud wa al-tatarruf* (Qatar: Shariah Courts and Islamic Affairs, 1402 AH).
20. Robert H. Bork, *Slouching Towards Gomorrah* (New York: Regan Books, 1996), 124–125.
21. Ibid., 140.
22. Ibid., 141.
23. Ibid., 332.
24. Ibid., 337.
25. Ibid., 338.
26. Ibid., 274.
27. Ibid., 276.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid., 278.
30. Ibid., 279.
31. Ibid.
32. See Richard H. Popkin and David S. Katz, *Messianic Revolution: Radical Religious Politics to the End of the Second Millennium* (Hill & Wang, 1999).
33. John Naisbitt, *Megatrends Asia: Eight Asian Megatrends That Are Shaping Our World* (New York: Simon & Shuster, 1996), 79.
34. Ibid., 79.
35. Ibid.
36. This table is taken from Joseph B. Tamney, "Religion in Capitalist East Asia" in *A Future for Religion? New Paradigms for Social Analysis*, ed. William H. Swatos (London: Sage Publications, 1993), 56.
37. Naisbitt, *Megatrends Asia*, 79–82.
38. Joseph A. Camilleri and Chandra Muzaffar (eds.), *Globalization: The Perspectives and Experiences of the Religious Traditions of Asia Pacific* (Selangor: Just World, 1998).
39. Ibid., 3.
40. Ibid., 24–28.
41. "A Confucianist Approach to Globalisation: The Case of the Middling Grassroots in Korea" in *Globalization: The Perspectives and Experiences of the Religious Traditions of Asia Pacific*, eds. Joseph A. Camilleri and Chandra Muzaffar (Selangor: Just World, 1998), 157.
42. Ibid., 159.

43. Ibid., p. 159. Cf. Ong Puay Liu, "Values that preserve humanity" in Sunday Star, 21 May 2000 in which he argues that the Confucian ideal of the virtuous being (*chun-tzu*) "can be used to develop humanity within the technologised and individualised selves of the millennium beings."
44. Ibid., 36.
45. Ibid., 33.
46. David R. Loy, "Can Corporations Become Enlightened? Buddhist Reflections on TNCs," in *ibid.*, 70.
47. Ibid., 70-71.
48. "Globalisation Seen from a Buddhist Perspective" in *ibid.*, 91.
49. Ibid., 96.
50. "It is estimated that currently 1.3 billion people are struggling to survive in circumstances which are classified as 'critical poverty'... As the developed world marches to the beat of 'globalization' and preaches 'increased liberalization' to developing countries, the parents of the 12 million children who will die this year from illnesses that are completely preventable, have every right to hope that the South Summit will defend the most important human right — the right to life." Hardev Kaur, "Globalisation marginalizing the developing countries." *New Straits Times*, May 2, 2000.
51. Camilleri and Muzaffar, *Globalization*, 60.
52. Ibid.
53. Ibid.
54. Peter Beyer, *Religion and Globalization* (London: Sage Publications, 1994), 217.
55. Ibid., 217.
56. Ibid., 219.
57. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islam and the Challenge of the 21st Century* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1993).
58. Ibid., 5.
59. Sachiko Murata and William C. Chittick, *The Vision of Islam* (New York: Paragon House, 1994), 292.
60. See Thomas Robbins, *Cults, Converts and Charisma* (London: Sage Publications, 1988) and William H. Swatos (ed.), *A Future for Religion? New Paradigms for Social Analysis* (London: Sage Publications, 1993).
61. Robert Dickson Crane, *Shaping the Future: Challenge and Response* (Massachusetts: Tapestry Press, 1997), 105.