

The following article on spirituality for the new millennium was published in Spanish only, in ALTERNATIVAS, Revista de analisis y reflexion teologica, year 6/n. 14 (Managua, Nicaragua: Editorial Lascasiana, 2000): 107-22.

SPIRITUALITY:THE CHALLENGES FOR A NEW MILLENNIUM

by Donald Goergen, O.P.

As we approach another millennium in Christian history, we are called upon to give an accounting of Christian life and to acknowledge the challenges of the future. Where will Christian spirituality go? What are the tasks at hand? What will it mean to be Christian in the century that lies before us? Whether the world is more Christian at the end of the next millennium is not a question of whether there are more Christians but rather a question of how deeply those who are Christian live the Christian life. It is not a question of whether there will be "more Christians," but of whether we will be more Christian.

We ought not dismiss the great challenges that Christianity faced in the previous two millennia and what our ancestors in the faith accomplished: the survival of the Christian faith in a hostile world and the great company of witnesses to that faith, the consolidation of Christian beliefs accompanied by a strong intellectual foundation for them, survival once again as the world around the church collapsed and the church's contribution to an emerging Christian civilization, the evangelization of the West in particular with a strong sense of mission, sustaining a Christian Europe in spite of the emerging divisions within Christianity, the incredible capacity to keep re-thinking itself in the face of challenges from rationalism, modern sciences, and secularism so that Christian life could find its place in 'the modern world,' a tremendous capacity for both mysticism and prophecy as well as a growing ecumenical spirit, and we could go on.

Nor can we ignore mistakes made as Catholicism struggled with the challenges. At times we were narrow minded, intolerant, and arrogant. We contributed to wars and prejudice and almost had to be forced to accept some basic human freedoms. We cannot be proud of everything in the past, and yet can also say to our ancestors in the faith: well done. May the future do as well. But what are these challenges that lie ahead of us as we cross the threshold into a new millennium? Perhaps the most critical challenge is that we live what we say we believe. although new contexts will force continuing clarification of what we do believe as well. If one of the challenges of the first centuries of the Christian Era was the development of an orthodoxy, certainly the challenge of the next centuries will be that of orthopraxis. In a religiously plural world, which in itself is a great challenge to Christianity, an authenticity and integrity will be asked of us. It will not be enough to believe, the gospel will have to be lived. Evangelization will not mean more Christians, but rather being more Christian. The traditional Christian faith will continue to be challenged, and doctrine will continue to develop, but the greater challenge will be whether we live what we say we believe.

One of the major contributions of the theology and spirituality that emerged within Latin America in the past thirty years, preparing us for a new millennium in Christianity, is its emphasis on liberation, praxis, and solidarity with the poor. This challenge that has not yet been met. The Holy Spirit has been preparing us for the work ahead. A comparable challenge coming from within North American theology is that of equality for women in world and church. These challenges have just recently entered our consciousnesses. They have been with us for less than a century. They are the emerging agenda for centuries to come.

But just as the economic, political, social and human liberation of peoples as integral to Christian life was placed in the center of the stage by Latin America, so Africans and African theology in the confrontation between their own theologies of liberation and theologies of inculturation have made us aware that there is ultimately no integral liberation without a liberation of cultures. There is an anthropological poverty, to use an expression of Englebert Mveng, an impoverishment of peoples that comes from a destruction of cultures, a lack of respect for indigenous traditions, a peoples' loss of self-respect and identity. Africa has taught us, also at the threshold of this next millennium, that there is no liberation apart from inculturation and a respect for cultures, as well as no inculturation or true evangelization of cultures apart from socio-economic liberation. The theologies of liberation and inculturation need not be enemies but can be friends. We cannot have one without the other.

Asia, with its religiously diverse as well as deeply religious peoples, has contributed to the agenda for the new millennium as well. Liberation yes, and desperately so, inculturation yes, necessarily so, but there is a complexity when these are called for in a religiously plural context. There can be neither liberation nor inculturation apart from dialogue and a genuine commitment to the value of other religious traditions. Not only are we asked: do we respect those whom society has socially and economically marginalized and dismissed? Not only are we asked: do we respect peoples, their traditions, their cultures, and do we value, see God's work, in cultural pluralism? But also Asia asks: do we respect religions other than our own and see them as God's work as well? For cultures as deeply religious as Asia's cultures, there can be no dialog with cultures that is not also inevitably a dialog with religions. We cannot say, cultures, yes, religions, no, for religion is at the heart of a culture. How do we understand religious pluralism as contained within God's providence for creation?

And this last question leads to another area that requires dialog which Christians in the new millennium will need to address: the dialog with the earth, with creation itself. It too cries out for liberation. What is the proper relationship between the human being and all God's creation? Just as our ancestors in the faith of the previous 2000 years had their challenges to face, so likewise we and our descendants have their challenges as well. I would like to address each of these four challenges briefly, those of the dialog with religions, which I shall call the challenge of contemplation; the dialog with cultures, which I shall call the challenge of "the other"; the dialog with the poor, or the challenge of solidarity; and the dialog with creation or the challenge of a cosmic vision, God's dream for the universe.

The Challenge of Contemplation

The increased interaction between the religions of the East and those of the West has indicated the need for further integration between interiority and exteriority. While clearly present in the mystical traditions of the West, the interior journey into the depths of one's soul, the silence within, is a strength of the East. In fact, the East has enabled us to acknowledge and realize how strongly present that search for the soul of one's soul is within the mysticism of the West, something that we had almost forgotten as we moved more and more into the modern world. The East challenges us to retrieve the contemplative dimension of human life, and this will be a challenge for spirituality in the new millennium.

Early in the twentieth century, Teilhard de Chardin had already spoken about all of matter as having two sides: a "within" and a "without." They go together. There is no "within" without a "without," and no "without" without a "within." In some ways Teilhard can be seen as foreshadowing the spirituality still to come. For him, the "depths" of the person are a sacred adventure, but likewise incumbent upon us is our commitment to building the earth. The outer world and the inner world must move together in harmony. What difference does it make if we change the face of the earth, if the world loses its "soul"? In fact, is that not what we are on the verge of doing as we come to the close of the twentieth century, creating a technological world that has no soul? The modern West has an overdeveloped "without" and an underdeveloped "within". We have lost our center, our purpose, our meaning.

Many speak about the crisis of meaning, but the world of matter, materiality, science, and technology, although all of them are good in themselves, they do not have meaning in and of themselves. They are not ends in themselves. We are fools if we think that they contain the secret to life. Only as embodying soul, expressing human values do they acquire meaning. The earth has no future separated from the contemplative's quest. Each of us is called to that contemplative venture, the journey to truth, the uprooting of egoism, from which all true compassion emanates. We don't love the world if we hate ourselves. Nor can we love ourselves if we don't know the truth about ourselves. Social transformation will always require the continuing spiritual evolution of the soul.

This interior journey, genuinely a mystical journey although we are hesitant to call it that since we do not think of ourselves as mystics, will only blossom as the dialogue among all the religions of the world deepens. We need not enter that dialog fearful, nor with a sense of superiority. We need not leave behind any conviction we hold dear. But we do have to enter it with the desire to learn, with the conviction that others have something to offer us, to teach us, that we learn more about the world of the spirit by sharing our gifts rather than by hoarding them or refusing to receive wisdom from others. The goal of dialog is not to evaluate the various religious traditions, not even to compare them, although that may happen along the way, but the goal is simply that we might learn from one another. Christianity may contribute to the quest for a more socially engaged Buddhism, and Eastern forms of meditation may lead us into the depths of our own tradition.

The religions divide humanity. Religion in the future must unite us. True religion brings about unity while respecting the diversity. When the diversity is divisive, it is no longer true religion. Speaking here as a Christian, the Holy Spirit is present and active in all the religious traditions of the world. The Holy Spirit is the source of unity and diversity in the world. Which is more important, unity or diversity, interiority or exteriority, the "within" or the "without"? Which is more important, inhaling or exhaling? We cannot have one without the other. God seems to have willed diverse religious traditions, but also seems to dream of their working together in harmony. This is something that we have not yet learned.

This is one of the great challenges facing us in the next millennium. Can the religions get along with each other? Can they talk to each other? Just as it took the Christian Church centuries to forge a language for expressing its faith and truth about the triune God, so likewise it will take a long time before we find the best or even an adequate way to state our conviction about the salvation present in all religious traditions while at the same time remain faithful to our belief in the pre-eminence of Christ. But we do not come together in order to agree, or to convert one another, but rather in order to understand each other, and love one another. God is present in the diversity. Spirituality in the future will need to make this manifest. It is from within the contemplative core of each religious tradition that dialog can most easily take place, harmony happen, and fear be set aside. The externalities of the religions, their "withouts", are valuable, but we do not come together on the basis of those, nor with the intention that there might be only one religion. We come together at the level of the "within" wherein souls can touch each other without losing their identities.

Christian spirituality in the new millennium will need to be deeply contemplative in order to meet the challenges which we will face. The dialog with the East, the dialog among the religions, the intrareligious dialog (to use an expression of Raimon Panikkar) within the person have just begun.

The Challenge of "The Other"

We have already met this challenge as we faced the challenge of "the other religions." In one way, this challenge lies at the heart of each of the challenges. What are we to do with others who are different than I, radically different? But it is not only a question of other religions that make people different, strange, other, but other cultures, customs, and traditions as well. Is there space in our world for more than one culture?

Here we face the issue of globalization as well. In one sense we can say that the common feature which we will face, which challenges us, as we move into a new millennium, is that we are more globally conscious than ever before. We have become one, and yet remain many, and the ever present challenge is how to be one without destroying the many, or vice-versa, how to be many and at the same time become one in harmony. How do we incorporate the other, the genuinely different, into our vision of the universe, for the globe?

On the one hand, we have to admit that the world is rapidly and irreversibly becoming Westernized. I had the opportunity to teach for one semester in Nairobi, Kenya, East

Africa, where there are many distinct and beautiful indigenous African cultures, ethnic communities, and religious traditions. Yet everyone was admitting and it was apparent, with the growth of urbanization, that Westernization was happening. Likewise at many places in Asia. I have given retreats in India, which resists losing its native cultures, but fears that this is what is happening within its character as a secular state. The value of secularism in Africa and Asia is that it brings religious freedom. But it can also emphasize non-religious, materialistic values. The major drive behind Westernization, however, is that of a global economy wherein the world is seen simply as a market. The "others" are not people but markets.

And lest we be naive, we must admit that this is one of the great spiritual challenges facing us as we move into the new millennium. Can we see the other, the stranger, as partner, as potential friend, in their otherness, or must we re-create them in our image? Are they not God's image as well? Can we see the other in his or her humanity and not simply as a consumer? And this creates a challenge for Christianity as well, which was in its origins able to respect Hellenistic and Roman cultures at the same time that it evangelized them. Does the spread of Christianity, or evangelization, necessitate Westernization? Are we one of the forces that helps to pave the way for one global economy, and thus market place, by being unable to inculturate without that inculturation being a Westernization? This is a great challenge facing the church which on the one hand speaks on behalf of inculturation but on the other has curtailed it. Can Christianity itself become "'other' than it presently is? Can it exist in other forms? Inculturation is one of the challenges the church faces, the challenge of how we relate to the other. A global economy addresses this challenge by reducing us all to consumers in the market place. We are thus 'one,' one economic system intolerant of any others.

While globalization at the economic level will proceed forward with force, spirituality needs to challenge the reductionism it promotes and the superficial unity it bespeaks. St. Paul's image (1 Corinthians 12) of one body and yet many members speaks rather of a respect for both unity and diversity. Teilhard de Chardin pointed out as well that true union differentiates. We cannot lose our identities if we enter into groups or syntheses larger than ourselves if those are genuine comings together at the level of the "within" and not superficial enforced groupings at the level of the "without." A global economy does not acknowledge that we all have a "within" as well as a "without." We are simply there to serve the market.

Just as Teilhard de Chardin spoke about interiority and exteriority as facets of all reality, so he spoke about the values of both "individuality" and "sociality." Again we cannot have one without the other. Which is more important, inhaling or exhaling? True individuality is never individualistic, for itself alone, but always socially conscious, a social individuality. Likewise a society is a society of persons; social organization must respect the person, personal growth. The person is always an individual-in-society, and society is always a complex organism of individual persons. Both the "personal" and the "social" need to be given their due. In a barbarous global capitalism, we end up with an individualism that ignores the social consequences of promoting profit as a motive for work. But we have also witnessed a Soviet system that paid no attention to the personal consequences of its false, coerced communitarianism. Both communalism and personalism need to be integrated if there is to be a human future.

Along with Teilhard de Chardin, Ken Wilber, a North American transpersonal psychologist, philosopher, and religious seeker has written extensively (especially in *Sex, Ecology, and Spirituality*) about four dimensions that any holistic development must consider. There is the "within" of things and their "without." Likewise there is the "individual" as well as the "social." If we bring these together, as Wilber so clearly does, there are (1) the sphere of the exterior-individual, the individual person looked at from the perspective of the "without." Here we have the complex evolution from atoms to molecules to cells followed by all the organic development that leads to the human brain, physiology, and human behavior. (2) The sphere of the interior-individual, the individual person seen from the perspective of his or her "within," with the evolution from sensation to emotion to mentality with an acknowledgement of the spiritual nature of the human person. In other words, neither an angelism nor a behaviorism is able to do justice to the spirituality of the future. (3) The sphere of the exterior-social, with the various grades of social life from families to tribes to villages to eventually nation states, but beyond as a more planetary consciousness develops. But just as an individual has an interiority or interior dimension, so does a society. Hence, (4) the interior-social, which is culture, the interiority of a society, and religions which are at the heart of cultures. Just as a person has a spirituality, so a society has its religion, its way of organizing its relationship to the transcendent.

Modern global market-conscious economies only acknowledge the exterior sides of life, individual behavior that can be controlled through advertising and marketing procedures, and social forms that are reduced to economic values like profit, wealth, comfort, efficiency as if society has no soul. Hence the market becomes inhumane; the human factor is left out of its consideration. The devastation of cultures is unimportant for peoples are not one of the market's values, even if it leaves gross poverty in its wake. This brings us to the next challenge, a continuation of the challenge of "the other," the challenge of solidarity.

The Challenge of Solidarity

One of Latin America's great and lasting contributions to theology and spirituality is the emphasis which it places on the option for the poor. There is no need to review the history of that theology here. Rather I present it as a challenge for the future. As long as there are poor in the world, as long as there are poor in Christian countries of the world, the world has not yet been evangelized. What stands out as so striking in the life and teachings of Jesus is his emphasis on both solidarity with God and solidarity with the poor, God's solidarity with the poor, with all the socially marginal or those who lack status in our societies. Jesus saw his mission as particularly addressed to them, as he saw them as not excluded from God's love: a message which manifested newness and was good news for the poor.

Explicit faith in Jesus Christ is not required for inclusion in God's reign; this is the teaching of the Catholic Church. The desire itself to do the good reflects the presence and action of the Holy Spirit in our lives. There is salvation outside the boundaries of the visible church. God's reign is inclusive. That which separates us from God is self-righteousness, according to the Gospels. God's love extends to all, but particularly to

those who are outsiders from social and economic points of view. Not that God loves the poor more (God loves each of us with an incomparable infinite love), but God loves the poor as much as he loves the rich, as much as he loves the educated, as much as he loves the healthy. But since God's love extends to all, it especially is inclusive of the most vulnerable because these are the ones that our social structures and economic patterns exclude from full participation in social and political life. God reaches out especially to those most in need, those most abandoned by their societies, those whom the structures of the world have cast out. These God especially includes.

Indeed the criteria in the Gospel of Matthew for inclusion in God's eschatological reign has little to do with explicit faith even in God, but rather the criterion is love of neighbor: I was hungry and you gave me to eat. This is the most revolutionary dimension in the teaching of Jesus, and at the heart of what Christianity has to offer the world. It was no surprise when asked about the great commandment of the Law that Jesus responded, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart." Jesus indeed respected this commandment and it was the primary focus of his life and teaching. But what was revolutionary was Jesus' placing another commandment as equal to the great commandment, not as secondary to it, but as like it: Love your neighbor. For Jesus there is no love of God without love of neighbor, and vice-versa, no love of neighbor without love of God. There is no interiority without exteriority, no journey into the silence within that does not take us to the needy without, no love of God apart from the love of the poor. Don't tell me you love the one you don't see if you don't love those whom you do see. Lord, when did we see you hungry or naked? Whatever do to the LEAST of our brothers and sisters we do unto Christ. The challenging question raised centuries ago by the first Dominican preachers in a land new to Europe, the question which touched the conscience of Bartolome de las Casas, is perennial: are they not human too?

The challenge of the next millennium will not be completely different from the challenges of the previous millennia: the challenge of whether we will live the gospel or only proclaim it. What a difference it would make in our world if all Christians lived the gospel of Jesus Christ, even if not fully, just if that were our conscious aspiration. Indeed what a difference it would make if we simply all lived the ten commandments to say nothing of the teaching of Jesus. What would the world be like if there were no disrespect for the elderly, no killing, no adultery, no theft, no false witness? Jesus simply wanted to give witness to the God of Israel, a God who was concerned for the widow, the orphan, and the stranger.

Liberation theologies throughout the world have put us in touch with this core gospel truth: the centrality of the oppressed in the ministry of Jesus and his understanding of God as one who loves the poor. Thus they have already issued the challenge and call to solidarity. But we have barely begun. As this century draws to a close we are aware that there are more poor in the world than ever before, and that the gap between the rich and the poor is not lessening. Pope John Paul II has taken up this call to solidarity and speaks in his own social teaching about the virtue of solidarity. It remains for the next century to discover whether the solidarity Jesus envisioned, the solidarity that was God's dream for humanity, may come to pass.

But whether God's dream comes true will depend upon us. God has given us the dream but has placed it in our hands. Will we be able to move beyond the barriers that divide, the barriers of gender, of race, of class? God's dream is not that there be no diversity in creation. Creation is crowded with diversity. God's dream does not deny differences among the genders, races, ethnic communities, varied cultures, many religions or even exclude social and economic differences among us. But God's dream does demand a united human race where we are all one and none are excluded from their share in the fullness of life for which God creates us. Nationalism is not the direction of the future, which doesn't mean that nations need to disappear. It is simply that the nation is not the ultimate value; humanity comes first. But even humanity is not the only value. God envisions a future for all of creation.

The Challenge of a Cosmic Vision

We have spoken of the challenges raised by religious pluralism, the call to a dialog with the East and indeed among all the major religious traditions of the world, the challenge of contemplation whereby we go to the mystic's core both of oneself and of one's religion, where religion and spirituality are distinct and yet reinforce each other. We have spoken of the challenges raised by our increasing awareness, growth in consciousness, of the presence of "the other" in our midst, in our one world or global community, how otherness is already involved in the dialog among religions but extends to other forms of otherness as well, other cultures, other races, other sexualities and genders. How do we feel at home with those traditions or peoples who are strange because they are strangers to our ways? The dialog with the other religions is part of the dialog with "the other," and dialoging with "the other" will be part of our dialog with religions.

There are also those radically other, socially marginal and ostracised, the outcasts and outcastes and untouchables of our world, the poor. These are not only "other," although they ordinarily are to those in positions of power and leadership in our world as well as to those who make decisions that affect our global, international, and multi-national economies, but they are also the oppressed, the downtrodden, the vulnerable, those whom our social worlds discount as having significance -- the invisible and forgotten. Here we are actually concerned with a dialog with the majority of the world. This is the North-South dialog or that between the so-called first world and two-thirds of the world, the challenge of solidarity, of human solidarity, of the dignity of every human person. Jesus' challenge is that we love our neighbor as ourselves, to make solidarity with "others" as important as solidarity with God which is THE solidarity, the basis for a humane society. Our prayer is that God might truly reign on earth as in heaven, which God-talk brings us back to the dialog among religions. The various dialogs are all of one piece. We cannot proceed for long with one without taking up the challenge of the others. And so we come to another area for dialog in the future, that of the dialog with the earth. There is more to God's creation, God's dream, than human solidarity alone. There is a cosmic solidarity as well (Romans 8:18-25).

Teilhard de Chardin, Sri Aurobindo, and Ken Wilber are among some of the prophets of the this century who have been preparing the way for us into the next millennium. Their insights are keys. For all of them, an evolutionary perspective helps to make us aware of

the interconnectedness of all creation, and one of the great challenges is that of the dialog between humanity and the rest of creation, so much of which was there before humanity came on the scene and so much of which our human greed and misplaced technological strengths have destroyed. We together with all of creation form one eco-system. As St. Paul writes, "All of creation is groaning and in travail." For Teilhard de Chardin, Sri Aurobindo, and Ken Wilber, it is not a question of being anti-hierarchical. There is an order in the universe. Molecules are more advanced than atoms, cells more advanced than mega-molecular substances, multi-cellular organisms more advanced than single cells, the human nervous system and brain more complex than those of the pre-hominids, reflective intelligence an advance beyond sensation. But the fact that there is an order in the universe doesn't deny that there is a "right order" as well. Creation is not there for humankind "to use."

The dialog with the earth will force us to go painfully deep into an intrareligious dialog, just as the dialog with other religions does, for we will continue to find the sinfulness that is also a part of Christian history. The Book of Genesis has given many in the West a sense of license, of legitimacy to do as they please with the world. But the fact that God has given us dominion over the earth doesn't mean that we are entitled to domination of the earth. We are fellow-creatures; there needs to be a cosmic sense; good stewardship implies an accountability for the resources of nature. God's dream includes all of creation. As with the other dialogs, we can't have one without the other. So likewise here, we cannot presume to carry on the dialogs with other religions, with other cultures, with the poor and oppressed without being challenged to face what the modern post-industrial West is doing to our world. Here indigenous peoples have much to teach us and we are back to another strand of the interreligious dialogs.

Whose creation is this? Where does solidarity with the true God of Israel take us? Can Isaiah's visions be taken as agenda for the next millennium? What are the aspirations that God has planted in our human history to which we must give attention and not lip-service? What can we learn from the earth, from cosmic wisdom, from the stories, successes, and failures of a planetary and cosmic evolution? Where are we going? How do we get there? Who are we? What is our place in nature? These are the age-old religious questions that remain with us that the next millennium cannot ignore. They were not ignored by our ancestors, but they have been set aside as technological progress was given priority in the human quest. Technology is not evil; it is good and can be of great service to us. The question is whose needs it will serve.

We could return to the accomplishments and challenges of the first two millenia of Christian history, and more millennia than that of religious history, but at the close of the century we must remind ourselves realistically of the principalities and powers of this world that still reign in so many places and areas of life: human greed, false forms of power, human arrogance. Can we limit their effects and even uproot them? The new millennium calls for a renewal of spirituality, a renewed spirituality, and there are challenges to be faced which we cannot minimize. What is at stake is our very humanity. Can we remain humane?

In Conclusion

The Spirit has been present in every century and every part of the world. As we approach another thousand years of Christian life and mission, what is the Spirit asking of us? What has been asked of us has frequently been made clear: to act justly, to love tenderly, to walk humbly with God (Micah 6:8). What God and history ask of us will not change. But in order to respond to the challenges that are already clear at the end of this millennium, we must remain humble, seek hearts of flesh, and desire that God's dream may come true.

We must seek a solidarity for all humanity, and of humanity with all of creation, and say "no" to all those barriers which deprive so many of the full life God wills for all of us. The earth and our human societies must be home for all peoples and all people. The "other" can no longer be "an outsider." We must find ways to make friends of strangers. We are all strangers somewhere in the world, and the world is not ours, but God's, who welcomes all into God's reign. And this includes those whose path to God is different from our own. The other religions have a place in God's providential governance of creation. This is the contemplative wisdom we seek to put into practice. The challenge of the next millennium for spirituality is the same as for the previous: to think rightly, and to live what we believe.

Donald Goergen, O.P.
"Friends of God"
A Dominican Ashram
720 35th St.
Kenosha, Wisconsin, USA