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Religion and Global Solidarity: Review of Toward a Global Civilization? The Contribution of Religions

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Religion and Global Solidarity: A Review Essay

Classics Revisited*: Toward a Global Civilization? The Contribution of Religions.* Pat Mische and Melissa Merkling, eds. New York, Peter Lang, 2001. paper, 427 pp. ISBN 0820451940

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This text is not just an interfaith collection of voices from representatives from major world religions in celebration of diversity. It is something quite more: a benchmark culmination of a series of research projects, conferences, conversations and publications going back to 1973 initiated by a big hearted, broad thinking visionary group called Global Education Associates. This volume reflects an agenda which is ambitious and daunting: to expand and deepen the Dialogue Among Civilizations in order to prevent a War of Civilizations that Samuel Huntington had warned of in his highly controversial *Clash of Civilizations* published in 1988. As of July 2023 War seems to be winning; but all the more reason to return to this classic of collaborative and constructive work for a revival of its spirit of optimism as well as its baseline scholarship.

When Global Education Associates was initially formed, their aim was to initiate a collaborative international process among scholars of the world's major religions that would assess global dynamics from a systems perspective, anticipate scenarios of change, and explore feasible ways to intervene conscientiously. Under the leadership of Pat and Gerald Mische, the group aimed to explore which scenarios, processes and technologies could generate outcomes for the greater well-being of humanity. This mission was clearly honored by the remarkable range of essays in this volume, the aspirations they share, as well as how the participants worked together to produce them.

The collection is based on papers presented at a GEA sponsored Symposium in 1997 on Religion and World Order. In advance, the organizers provided each participant with a set of questions to address, with freedom of approach and emphasis. (Appendix A.) Each was asked to include how they think their own religious values and traditions can contribute to the formation of a shared global ethic, to more just global governance, to more equitable global civic society, to an effective response to the environmental crisis, and to sustained collaboration through international and multi-faith initiatives. Three additional essays were also commissioned that address critical issues pertaining to interreligious dialogue and interfaith work.

At a personal level, "an aim of this project," wrote the organizer, "was to involve members from each major religion in a self-evaluation and a process of discovering elements of truth from each other, making each stronger, and thus more compassionate and more empowered to contribute to the development of a more humane world order." (p. 36)

After three days of conferencing, during which papers were thoroughly discussed and debated, the participants went home, revised their work and resubmitted for publication. During their time together, the participants also succeeded in composing the impressive Symposium Statement (in Appendix C.) which readers are encouraged to duplicate, share and sign. The editor thoughtfully

appended other valuable documents including: Toward a Global Ethic (Parliament of World Religions, 1993), Declaration on the Role of Religion in the promotion of a Culture of Peace (UNESCO, 1994) and The Earth Covenant: a Citizens' Treaty for Common Ecological Security (1989).

Counter to widespread attitudes of apathy, cynicism, and provincialism, the shared assumption behind this GEA Symposium was to cultivate *a collective moral conscience* that could guide the world toward more just and equitable solutions of global crises through collaboration across religious and cultural lines.

Details of this agenda is spelled out in the exceptionally insightful and absorbing Introductory essay by Dr. Patricia Mische, **"Toward a Civilization Worthy of the Human Person."** This substantial piece is a tour de force, establishing the historical and epistemological roots of the entire GEA project which is global in scope, stretching from ancient societies to the future of humanity. There are of course, reasons for this nearly limitless frame, which the author presents in detail.

Along the way Mische asks readers to step back, reflect and imagine: What kind of world order will likely emerge? Which kind do we want to see?

> Will it be a world order that oppresses and represses some for the sake of the many, or many for the sake of the few? One which two thirds of the people remain poor, hungry, and fearful, or a more equitable, humane, and less violent one for all peoples? One that opens the way to truer freedom, with shared responsibility for the common good in a global community? Will it be future where the life of the Earth is degraded, squandered, sold in the marketplace, and lost to future generations - or will it be built on new understandings of the integral relatedness we and our great-grandchildren have with one living Earth? (pp. 26-27)

As for the author's own answer to this existential question, influenced by positive signs she was seeing on the 1990's horizon, she could venture that:

> [W]e are moving toward a planetary civilization requiring…a far deeper, more globally inclusive spirituality and ethic, and new understandings and relationships to one another and the Earth…a shift away from competitiveness and toward more cooperative social models; away from the excessive individualism of Western capitalism and the excessive communalism of communism and toward a stronger embrace of unity and diversity within concentric circles of community at local, regional, and now global levels…toward an embrace of cultural and religious pluralism with mutual rights and responsibilities for all peoples…and partnership models in mutual service to the larger human and Earth communities." (pp. 24-25)

Having read the contributions of the other authors to this volume, I can attest that Pat's hopeful expectations are largely shared, even if the other contributors are coming to this conversation from different points or origin, belief and priority. They may not all agree on the meanings of the terms they use or on the metaphysical foundations of their worldviews, but their work as a whole do

present "a beautiful, intricate, rainbow-hued mosaic of human experience on Earth," in Mische's words. (p. 35)

Readers of *Toward a Global Civilization?* will encounter many issues and ideas, concerns and solutions, controversies and agreements, arguments and examples pertaining to how our highly diverse faith traditions can contribute constructively to global change in consciousness, commitment and involvement. The few words I can devote to each writer and chapter cannot do justice to the plenitude, originality and subtlety within each piece. But I do hope that my selective renditions overall give a fair a glimpse of the richness of this volume for readers today.

As per format, I indicate the title of each chapter and the author along with one of their titles at time of publication. Throughout I have incorporated occasional comments *in italics* shaped a combination of my impressions of how the world has changed during the turbulent years since 2000 and what I think our priorities now need to be. Inevitably, these comments reflect my peculiar blend of personal/professional experiences, obsessions and opinions. But whether in insight or error I hope the renditions and comments spark the readers own thinking on the many matters involved and lead them to read the book and judge for themselves.

Comments
Writing in 2023 I believe that Mische's analysis in this Introductory chapter remains sound. Her alarm rings even more sharply today. Her idealism is ever more compelling given the scale of what's at stake. However the horizon I observe at the moment reveals many ominous clouds with intermittent rays of sunshine.

Some General Perspectives
These next three chapters in the collection introduce cross-cutting themes that pertain to the objectives of the rest of the essays that take off from the perspective of particular faith traditions. We will proceed to address each chapter in the order of its appearance in the book, the sections subtitled here as in the book.

The first of these perspectives is by Dr. Richard Falk, then professor of International Law and Practice at Princeton University, **"The Religious Foundations of Humane Governance."** Falk's essay guides readers through the evolution of the role of religion in world affairs from a period of its predominance to its virtual exclusion during this past century. Falk notes that recent history reveals that exclusively secular approaches to national and world governance have seriously failed due to the surpassing power and influence of multinational corporations that are unsympathetic to human suffering, environmental destruction, public goods and spiritual ideals.

Critical to Falk's analysis is the confrontation he witnessed throughout the 1990's between the dynamics of what he calls "globalization-from-above (transnational corporations/banks/states)" and "globalization-from-below (transnational civic initiatives/women/indigenous peoples/human rights/environmental activists)." Through various means, the forces from above have effectively beaten back the uprisings from below. This pattern leads him to the bitter prediction that "the third millennium will witness the fashioning of a durable form of inhumane governance that poses severe risks of ecological and social catastrophe." (p. 52)

Falk sees the current supremacy of "market forces" as the latest iteration of that "continuous stream of technological innovations adapted to secularized political space to achieve the greatest material advantage for the owners of capital goods." 52 In face of the horrors that might lie ahead, the only alternatives Falk sees beyond sporadic progressive resistance, are international movements "strengthened by religious commitments…sectors of the organized religious community."

This is the "only possibility," he warns, that "gives hope that humane global governance can become a reality sometime early in the twenty-first century." (p. 52)

Comments
Dr. Falk is highly informed, ethically driven and hard hitting, as always. Looking back, I wonder how many of our religious organizations and communities have risen to this challenge, recognized their strength, and campaigned for change. Unquestionably, the shock of 9/11 and the wars that followed dominated the news scape throughout the first years of the new millennium.

We have seen the expansion of militarism and wars with the predictable profits for some few and losses for many more. The high tech global arms bazaar is in high gear and the UN is obstructed by The Veto like never before. For evidence, see Round-Up Release Security Council for2022 (United Nations, 2023)

To achieve the humane governance, peace and justice that Dr. Falk advocates, the GEA and other spiritual and academic organizations must work harder - and together - to terminate the destructive processes that are currently undermining coordinated global efforts to address environmental destruction, climate change, refugee crises, economic inequality, the rights of women and minorities, and the plague of war.

In fact, many positive developments since 9/11 deserve to be credited for their ethically minded social action and political influence in line with Falk's aspiration. I can briefly name a few.

In 2010 The World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth took place in Cochabamba, Bolivia. The delegates of many nations produced a Universal Declaration of Rights of Mother Earth centered on reverence for our common home spelled out in ten "inherent rights" and for which human beings are assigned twelve vital "obligations," The process as well as Declaration has a spiritual as well as political and economic dimensions.

The organizers of the Faith for Rights group composed of interfaith-based religious leaders collaborated with the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to contest religiously driven violence and promote peace and justice, freedom and equality. Their 22-point Beirut Declaration upholds "the dignity and equal worth of all human beings," defends the "whole spectrum of inalienable human entitlements…" and promotes education and activism to further their agenda by every means possible down to the grassroots level. Heavy responsibility is laid upon religious leaders. Faith for Rights has also produced an excellent 127 page Toolkit for use in education settings: https://www.iti-worldwide.org/pdfs/faith4rights-toolkitNewsletter.pdf

A "Multi-Religious Consensus on the Ethics of Sustainable Development" initiative is currently underway. Its aim is to conceptualize and pursue the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals

(SDG's) with an approach explicitly grounded in "the values of the world's major religious traditions designed to "better orient the global economy toward the common good. It defines "the common good" as "the shared vision of the world's great religions and secular ethical traditions developed and honed over the past 2,500 years…that puts the dignity of the human being at the center…that puts the golden rule…as the guiding moral precept…[and] enjoins us to help the poor, hungry, and the suffering…" (Annett, Sachs, Sanchez Coronado & Vendley, 2017)

At the level of individual religious leaders, special mention should be made of two robust encyclicals by Pope Francis:"Climate Change and Inequality: Care for Our Common Home" (Laudato Si', 2015) and "Fraternity and Social Friendship" (Fratelli Tutti, 2020) that aims to "turn the incivility of confrontation into a Culture of Encounter." According to the critic Pankaj Mishra, Fratelli Tutti "includes a racial critique of society that expands the parameter of what can be said."

At the local level, citizens of my neighboring city of Springfield Ohio, came together soon after 9/11 and decided to create a "Global Education and Peace Network" that labored for nineteen years to build bridges between the diversity of faith traditions and racial identities, promote collaborative community building, and inspire peace, harmony and personal transformation. The organizers employed study circles, cultural sharing, interreligious dialogue, visits to places of worship, a topical speaker series, and an annual summer "Culture Fest" that draws lots of participants. This has been an exemplary grass-roots response first to the violence of 9/11 and then to the widespread revenge attacks taking place against Muslims across the nation, police violence against Black Americans, the ongoing wars, and other occurrences of public concern.

Hope is also provided by the continual efforts of countless members of diverse religious communities that have both spoken out, written op eds, participated in non-violent demonstrations, contributed to funding drives for refugees, and victims of war and climate disasters not to mention the generous hosting of refugees in their communities. This compassionate and generous work needs to be known, honored, and emulated. But, of course, the many roots of these crisis need to be understood and effectively addressed.

The second Perspective is by William Vendley, then Secretary General of the World Conference on Religion and Peace. He perceives a **"Need for Bilingualism" in "the Multireligious Engagement of Civil Society,"** as the title goes. Vendley agrees that religious leaders and organizations need to cooperate far more effectively than at present if we are to effectively address our global problems. However, he believes that such efforts are inherently uncomfortable because each religious community possesses a tradition-grown and emotionally resonant "primary language" that is shared by the faithful and a "secondary language" that has gradually evolved for use with people outside the community.

The primary language conveys each religion's "originating experience" or sacred history and its constituent doctrines, values and norms. Particular words, sounds and sense convey the authentic spiritual power of people's religious experience. However, a "secondary language" is necessary for communication in interfaith conversations and in secular contexts of moral concern precisely because the primary language lacks sufficient currency in these outside contexts.

In spite of the encumbrance of trying to figure our when and how to use these languages, there are religious leaders who have found a way to convey the spiritual power of their convictions in a secular context. Vendley mentions Martin Luther King who mastered this art. His speeches can still inspire people of highly diverse backgrounds, secular as well as religious. (p. 69)

Comments
Other public figures who may be said to share this skill include Desmond Tutu, Vaclav Havel, Pope Francis, and Cornel West.

Robert Traer, Secretary of the International Association for Religious Freedom, composed the third essay in this section with a slightly contrarian spirit. In his essay titled **"Religion and…"** Traer deals with the same phenomenon addressed by Dr. Vendley, however, he takes issue with one of the concepts frequently used in World Order work, "religion as a resource." He argues that this utilitarian attitude to religion - albeit for the sake of a good cause - diminishes the distinctiveness of each religion, its coherence as a sacred heritage, and its multiple meanings in the daily lives of religious communities.

The search for a universal Global Ethic, according to Traer, skims off the imagined universal principles and values of the religions of the world only to leave behind the more endearing and inspiring dimensions of scripture, tradition and devotion. Far better, Traer counsels, is to focus on dialogues between real people, sharing the meaning of their beliefs and lives. Traer believes that intimate dialogue will better prepare people to become aware of their common humanity than wordsmithing abstract formulations.

Comments
Although I think both kinds of endeavors have their place, it is wise to remain mindful of the dignity of each individual person and beauty of each faith tradition. Religious experiences, ideas, and activities have had a significant role in peoples lives. Each person has had his and her own life experiences, reflections, and aspirations. But to come to know others respectfully and reverently, no matter how wide the differences that good dialogue may disclose, will surely enrich each party of the interchange to the extent they come with open hearts and minds.

For an valuable analysis of the dynamics of interreligious dialogue and how to avoid the pitfalls, consider the work Catherine Cornille: The Impossibility of Interreligious Dialogue (Cornille, 2008) and the Wiley Blackwell Companion to Interreligious Dialogue (Corneille ed., 2013).

Eastern Traditions
K.R. Sundararajan, professor of Theology at St. Bonaventure University, writes about **"Hinduism and Global Society."** He outlines fundamental concepts of the Hindu worldview and its relevance for the future of civilization. Hinduism is known for its long historic accommodation of a wide variety of spiritual beliefs, faith traditions and religious practices. According to Prof Sundararajan, freedom of religion in India goes back to the earliest scriptures of Hindu theology. Many Hindu prayers frequently reaffirm this spirit. He quotes these lovely lines from the *Artharvaveda* that convey how rewarding diversity can be:

> May the earth that bears people speaking in varied languages

> With various rites according to the places of abode,
> Enrich me with wealth in a thousand streams
> Like mulch-cow that never fails… (p. 92)

The core of the *Upanishads* upholds this affirmation of diversity, he says, while conveying awareness of an invisible but "all-pervasive reality, *Brahman* - not as a transcendental creator, observer or judge, but as an immanent as well as transcendent force. (p. 93)

As for the religion's special contribution to global civilization, Dr. Sundararajan advances the Hindu cosmological conception of the universe and its realization in practice: to see all beings as one with each other and to live according to virtues such as truthfulness, kindness, tolerance, wisdom, forbearance, humility and peacefulness (p. 95).

Comments
Although serious intercommunal violence has occurred in India since 2000, especially coincident with the rule of the Hindu nationalist party, the more normative Hindu endorsement of religious freedom and tolerance will hopefully return to prominence in India - and become foundational in our new Millennium.

A second chapter deriving from the Hindu tradition is by M. Aram, President of the World Conference on Religion and Peace. In **"Gandhi Values, a Global Ethic, and Global Governance"** he asks what particular Gandhian values can help shape our global conscience and inform our global ethic. According to Dr. Aram, Gandhi's greatest achievement was powerfully expressed in his demonstrations of how religious values can be put to practice in situations of pervasive injustice; namely, the method of s*atyagraha, a*ctive non-violence.

The movements led by Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela and Badshah Khan, are among many of such leaders inspired by Gandhi throughout the world.

Based on his long service in international and inter-religious activity, Dr. Aram raises a number of ambitious suggestions inspired by Gandhian values. Notably, he advocates: "a vast commonwealth of powerful local communities;" decentralized democratic global governance; a new People's Assembly or World Parliament; a Common Security System for all countries; renewed campaign for Demilitarization; and Free and Open National Borders. In his essay he expands on these goals.

Comments
I was impressed by the author's ideas to improve the functioning of international governance. Since his untimely decease in 1997, I wonder if any organizations are continuing to pursue Dr. Aram's international agenda.

The next chapter follows nicely on the preceding since Mahatma Gandhi credits the Jains with his commitment to *ahimsa*, nonviolence. Thus P.N. (Baha) Jain's essay is entitled, **"Toward a Culture of Nonviolence: The Jain Way of Life."** For Jains, nonviolence applies across the entire range of creation, from the lowest to the most proud among creatures. "For humanity to survive," Jain maintains, "we have to ensure the preservation and nurturing of an environment for all forms of life to coexist peacefully and harmoniously." (p. 113)

But that's not all from this religion that he prefers to term "a way of life." Several other principles of Jain thought are also of great potency: *aparigraha*, which means "we are all one, all interdependent;" *naya*, that requires attention to *all* causes behind every occurrence; and *syadvada,* "relativity of perspectives," which P.N. Jain considers "Jainism's greatest contribution to the thinking process of humankind."(p. 116) So I feel obliged to reveal more.

The theory of *syadvada* propounds that every judgment is relatively true, because its truth value depends on its relation to other objects: known and unknown circumstances, modes expression and reception, and many other facts." (p. 116) This technique, Jain says "leads to the development of tolerance of every viewpoint, however contrary it may be to the current and traditional view." He boldly claims that: "If *naya* and *syadvada* were extended to every sphere of human activity, individual and social life of the planet would be completely revolutionized." When developed and applied with *ahimsa,* he adds, "[A]ll hatred and cruelty automatically stops." (p. 119)

Comments
Jain philosophy has a great deal to offer when it comes to deepening our thinking, overcoming of our preconceived ideas and prejudices, humbly knowing our limits, not harming any one for any reason, listening to all beings with respect, and treasuring the harmony that can as a result of ending blind arrogance and aggression. I think these Jain principles, though originating long ago, are of increasing value in our fast-forward age that drives so many people to rash judgments, violent reactions, and reckless disregard for the consequences of their behavior.

This anthology includes two contributions from Buddhists. The first is by Sulak Sivaraksa, Founder of the Network of Engaged Buddhists, **"Religion and World Order from a Buddhist Perspective."** Regarding his religion's contribution to global civilization, Dr. Sivaraksa indicates that as a Buddhist he is obliged "to evaluate a system of social organization in terms of its capacity address human suffering, promote distributive justice, an allow for individuals within the society to realize their full potential." (p. 133)

Therefore he foregrounds the efforts to revive small scale communities in Thailand that, he claims, have been victims of international capitalism and transnational corporations. (p.133) Sivaraksa describes examples of the ways small communities following Buddhist teachings are transforming their modes of production, commerce, and sharing to achieve a more equitable and sustainable life for the people. 138. A prominent abbot in one case and engaged monk in another are the leaders these remarkable initiatives.

Engaged Buddhism takes seriously the principles of inherent interdependency and compassion for all beings and mindful practice at every level - including at the UN where Dr Sivaraksa has campaigned for better regulation of transnational corporations, protection of workers' rights, and more effective environmental protection. (pp. 138-39)

Comments
I found this essay particularly rousing as well as enlightening - something of a holistic paradigm that can be adapted in other small scale contexts in other parts of the world. The examples

demonstrate how religious/philosophic values and practices are inspirational in the process of community building and sustainable living.

The more academic Buddhist contribution is by Dr. Pataraporn Sirikanchana, Associate Professor, Department of Philosophy, Thammasat University in Bangkok. Writing on **"Buddhism and Global Governance,"** Dr. Sirikanchana begins by acknowledging how Buddhist philosophy is interwoven with Thai cultural values such as hospitality, kindness and friendliness. (p. 140) He believes that the main Buddhist principles, if practiced with spiritual purification, can contribute to peace and happiness in the world. Suffering can be overcome "by self-discipline, wisdom, meditation, and enlightenment." (p.141) Additionally, the "Buddhist doctrine of goodwill toward all beings, and tolerance toward other religions can balance the tension between different cultures." (p.144)

Dr. Sirikanchana ventures the idea that good citizenship in a global civil society should, minimally, require: "cultivation of loving kindness, non-violence, altruism and wisdom." (p. 145) He persuasively explains how each of these virtues is necessary for both self-cultivation and the well being of the world. And concludes with this: "Today the world's religions can no longer retain narrow-minded dogmas and transcendental aspects: they need to be socially engaged and globally supportive." (p. 151)

Comments
This pair of essays by Thai Buddhists complement one another handsomely. Reader of all religions would likely agree that the qualities central to Buddhism mentioned here can be endorsed more broadly. A humane global civilization will require as much.

Dr. Julia Ching is Professor of Chinese Thought and Culture at Toronto University. In her essay on **"Confucianism and World Order"** she presents a philosophical discussion of the distinguishing concepts and principles of Confucianism. The author classifies it as a form of "ethical humanism" rather than a "religion" as such. Historically, Confucian emphasis on morality in family relations served as a paradigm for "benevolent and humane government," Ching writes, even though some governments obviously did not excel in this direction.

What if anything does "Chinese humanism" have to offer the world today? Ching promotes the Confucian ethic of humaneness in self-cultivation, in social relations and for harmony in the nation. Evidence is that virtually all Confucian countries in East and Southeast Asian societies stand out as noticeably more conflict averse and harmonious in functioning than the comparatively combative and violent regions elsewhere in the world.

A most interesting part of her essay characterizes Chinese Confucian and Taoist views of the cosmos (or Heaven) and Nature as having likely roots in ancient shamanic practices and the experiences of mystics across the ages. Ching regards this articulation of human harmony with the cosmos as "the very heart of Chinese wisdom."

The author concludes with an admirable legend of the ancient sage-king, who, when tempted by the possibility for an easy war of conquest, declared: "I would not shed the blood of one innocent human being even if that could gain me the world."

Comments
Like other observers, I am struck by the formal similarities between the assumptions and principles of (Neo) Confucian philosophy and Western Systems Theory. The Chinese do not expect to be saved by divine intervention - with exception of converts of Abrahamic persuasion.

Given the continuing American militarism that Martin Luther King railed against in his Vietnam speech, the intensification of American militarism since 9/11, and current senseless wars going on today, how refreshing to imagine our current world leaders speaking like the sage-king and uniting the world for disarmament and climate justice!

Dr. Evelyn Tucker is Professor of Religion and East Asian Studies at Bucknell University in Pennsylvania. In **"Working Toward a Shared Global Ethic"**, she starts with some of the cultural obstacles in the West. The author claims that our Enlightenment-inspired devotion to rationality, individualism, science and technology have proved insufficient to the task of formulating a universally valid Global Ethic. (p. 178)

Instead of deepening the devotion to these obsessions in years ahead, she argues that "the broader principles and aspirations of the world's religions…need to be brought to bear on the constructive formation of a global ethics undergirding an equitable system of global governance." (p. 183) What does this have to do with Confucianism?

For Tucker, everything. A Confucian "anthropo-cosmic" perspective is just what is needed, she argues, referencing Tu Weiming, the well-known specialist on this subject. 178 "Confucian cosmology situates the human within the dynamic, organic processes of nature, not above or controlling those processes. The aim of Confucian self-cultivation and socio-political philosophy is to achieve harmony of humans with themselves, with one another, and with the cosmos itself." (p. 189)

Confucianism does not presuppose "a metaphysics of radical transcendence," unlike the Abrahamic Tradition. Rather, from the time of Confucius and Mencius through the Neo-Confucian revival inspired by Chu Hsi, Chinese philosophy has always expressed a view of the universe that is based on the principles of self-generation, inherent interconnectedness and ceaseless change. Moreover, this kind of philosophy "is essential for the effective formation of an environmental ethics," Tucker concludes. (p. 192)

Comments
With patience, readers of this chapter will be rewarded with a better understanding of a profound worldview that may well have a large role to play in building a peaceful sustainable global civilization. Although neither Ching nor Tucker place their greatest stress on religious tolerance in China, like India, historically tolerated religious diversity. Chinese folk religion blended with Taoism which combined with Confucianism and later accomodated Buddhism in spite of occasional periods of discord. Even Christianity was accepted for a period until its association with western imperialism chilled the hospitality.

Abrahamic Traditions

Rabbi Bentley is President of the Jewish Peace Fellowship and Rabbi of Temple Shalom in Queens, NY. In this chapter entitled **"Our Place in Creation: a View from the Jewish Tradition,"** he carefully summarizes the saga of the Hebrew people, showing how their early history shaped their literature and how this literature continues to guide the ongoing legacy of the Jews the world over. As most know, many stories and themes of the Hebrew Bible were carried over in Christianity and Islam in critically important ways. This way the Abrahamic Tradition went global.

In reference to the decisive split between the sons of Abraham, Isaac and Ishmael, Bentley adds that the offspring of the latter would become known as Arabs. He wryly comments: "The idea of shared identity with all human beings, even those we have reason to hate, must be the basis of any hope for a world united." Bentley later goes on to discuss the painful dilemmas posed by the birth and growth of the state of Israel in Arab Palestine. One formulation reads: "Should the Jewish state try to live up to the prophetic and messianic idealism of her Declaration of Independence, or should it act in accordance with the rules of the "rough neighborhood?" (p. 212)

The Rabbi closes with a discussion the long awaited Messianic Age in which "there are no wars… humanity is at peace not only with itself but with nature; justice is perfect; people live without fear; no one is hungry, naked or homeless. All the peoples of the earth will recognize that God is One and that humanity is, in turn, one." (p. 214)

According to Bently, although most Jews believe that "humanity is working its way toward a perfected world," Jews give different answers to the question, "Should we wait passively wait for the Messiah or actively work toward the coming?" Or, will it happen that, quoting Kafta, "'The Messiah will arrive only when he is no longer necessary.'" (p. 213)

Rabbi Zlotowitz is Senior Scholar at the Union of American Hebrew Congregations in Fair Lawn New Jersey. In **"A Jewish Perspective on Global Issues,"** he deploys excerpts from the Hebrew Scriptures and Rabbinic commentaries to demonstrate the longstanding yearning for peace by Jewish people over the ages. The Prophetic literature in particular conveys many eloquent pleas for peace and exhortations to work toward it: "…seek peace wherever you happen to be and pursue it if it is elsewhere." (p. 219)

Some Rabbis even defended the telling of an untruth, if it improved the prospects for peace. (p. 220) Ultimately, "We must never cease to strive for peace…People of all religions and faiths must join in the effort to achieve this noble goal for our own sake and for future generations" (p. 221)

On ecological sustainability, Rabbi Zlotowitz returns to Genesis, quoting from Midrash. After God created the first man, He declares: "'Behold my works, how beautiful and commendable they are! All that I have created, for your sake I created it. Pay heed that you do not corrupt and destroy My universe; for if you corrupt it there is no repair after you…'" (p. 222)

Moreover, according to the Rabbis, "Everything was created for a purpose. Each…working to maintain the ecological balance." But humanity should not be prideful, they counsel: "'We humans came late. Even the tiniest fleas preceded you in creation." (p. 223)

Comments
Having lived and worked five years in Beirut 1979-1984, I especially appreciate the Prophetic and Rabbinic writings devoted to peace that both authors discuss. Jews, Christian and Muslims must come together in good faith to find the path to peace with justice, for without justice, really, how can there be peace? Remarkable examples of activist rabbis in Israel/Palestine" seeking peace where you live" include Rabbi David Shulman and Rabbi Arik Ascherman among other Israelis who alongside Palestinians have striven for peace and justice in the most challenging of circumstances.

Reverend Eileen Lindner is Associate General Secretary for Christian Unity at the National Council of Churches of Christ. She begins her **"Christian Perspective on World Order"** by acknowledging two different ways in which Christians view the future: one is that the future will unfold through the will of God, and the other, that the life of Jesus teaches Christians how to conduct their lives. It is to the second of these influences, she says, that the world should look for inspiration.

As for contributions of Christianity generally, Lindner underlines the importance of the concept of community (*koinonia*) at local levels, and that of world community by extension (*oikumene*) "through which the Christian community is joined both to God and to one another." (p. 231) To guide the world community in unity, she advocates the values of "peace, justice, kindliness, mercy, and unity" which are amply endorsed in Christian scripture and legacy. (p. 232) Lindner then gives examples of followers of Jesus who were actively involved in human rights movements over this past century.

In conclusion Lindner tells a clever little story that goes like this: the god of the universe dispatches an angel to a man who had led the most exemplary life, presenting him with the proposition: you must choose whatever you like for your reward, with one condition: that whatever you chose will also be given twofold to your enemy…(p. 242)

Comments
This is a wonderful story to test one's own moral mettle in private; but also ideal for interfaith group reflection and conversation.

Dr. John Cobb Jr is Professor Emeritus at Claremont School of Theology in California. In his essay, "Some Protestant Reflections on Religion and World Order," he starts off with a series of profound questions well worth considering about just what we mean and how we can best do inter religious dialogue. Obviously, his extensive experience on the front lines of this work has been instructive.

The author makes the point that the distinctive contribution of the Protestant denominations to the world is "witnessing to the primacy of faith and love over structure and law." Cobb highlights a particular application of the this theme in the context of what he calls "Jesus' most unique contribution:"i.e., his admonition in Matthew 5: 43-45 to" love your enemy." (p. 246)

Undeniably, this principle goes against both our natural instincts and our national pastime. But Professor Cobb's line of reasoning merits attention: "The distinctive Protestant witness must be that those against whom we secure ourselves are equally loved by God and have an equal right to security. When we secure ourselves by means that threaten them, we profoundly violate Christian teaching as we understand it. Therefore, we must advocate policies that lead to peace based on the equal security of all. It means we should emphasize those means of insuring our own security that do not constitute a threat to others." (p. 246-247)

Throughout his essay Professor Cobb shows his awareness of the wisdom of balance between pairs of contrary-complementary values, which I noticed to consist of individualism and communalism, freedom and regulation, rights and responsibilities, economic and environmental imperatives. This implies there are risks when societies or movements pursue one term of a pair to the exclusion of the other.

For example, on the subject of economic and social justice, "the key element is his emphasis on "'the least of these'" (Matt 20:40-45). (p. 247) The reference is to those who have least power and status for whom we should care more than those well off. But Cobb fears that individualism has so exceeded our sense of Christian responsibility to others that it "has thus become a demonic force in the world." He proposes that Christians go back to the concept of "person in community" because it is "more biblical and promising." (p. 248)

Comments
I liked the way Professor Cobb tests our religious values in thorny circumstances. For ethics to matter more in the public sphere, religious and lay leaders can play a valuable role by standing up for those values which reflect our most enduring ethical principles especially when convenience or the crowd suggest we do otherwise. In addition to the field of foreign policy, the criminal justice system is a sector where religious leaders could take a more revolutionary role than by just administering religious services and pastoral solace to the inmates.

Father Luis Dolan, Emeritus UN Representative for the Temple of Understanding, is a Catholic priest whose career spans decades of work with UN agencies and on many international programs. In his essay entitled **"Development and Spirituality: Personal Reflections of a Catholic,"** he describes ways in which the Church has broadened its perspective over the years as a result of interactions with other faith traditions and social movements. Though couched in legal terms, to Dolan UN declarations genuinely express "the voices of the people" and are 'signs of the times' for all who believe that God is continuing to speak to us today." (p. 269)

As for the Catholic contribution to future Global Civilization Father Dolan identifies these five areas: key Church Documents; translation of spiritual and moral values into economic terms; the new posture of the Church; "dealing with other religions as equals; not as an owner of the truth, but as a seeker of the mystery of God on earth, together with believers of other religions." (pp. 275-277)

Most provocative of his ideas, Father Dolan promotes creation of interfaith congresses on syncretism and irenicism during the new Millennium. Common folk as well as scholars and leaders would be invited. Dolan raises searching questions about this subject; but, anticipating skepticism,

he counsels: "Let no one fear the supernatural power of such a conference on syncretism: it will deepen each one's faith and allow all to enter more deeply into the heart of "the other"; above all it will give an essential element to the future world order that only religions can give." (pp. 278-279)

Comments
Having benefitted from strict Sisters of Charity in elementary school of the '50's and open-minded Marianist Brothers at high school in the'60's, I am pleased to see Father Dolan's broadened awareness and generosity of spirit regarding these sensitive subjects. Clearly his openness to discussion of syncretism is partly the result of his extensive experience working in over eighty countries around the world where syncretism may be widespread among indigenous converts who often feel compelled to sustain their cherished native traditions and practices. This said, I am aware that syncretism, though widespread in the world, is distasteful for many Christian theologians, Jewish rabbis or Muslim imams and their followers. Even GEA seems to have a position, with the editor warning that: "we do not advocate syncretism." (p. 36)

Dr. Mahmood -Abedin is Director of the Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. He begins **"Islam and Global Governance"** with a summary of the cardinal beliefs and values revealed to the Prophet Muhammad, employing quotes from the Holy Qur'an that show strong emphasis on peace, equality and justice.

In this Revelation, he claims, "All matters of this world, from the most complex to the most mundane, are subject to religious concerns which is why there is not the same secular/sacred divide we see in Christianity. (p. 285) These teachings engender "social harmony and solidarity" grounded in Islamic law concerning: the equality of all cultures, races and nationalities; obligations of justice in economic transactions; rights for women; rights of minorities living in Islamic societies; protection of the environment, etc. (pp. 291-299)

On Global Governance, Mahmood-Abedin suggests that the Islamic concept of *ummah* (community of believers) can easily be stretched to accommodate the notion of a "global community who should respect one another as equals before God." From the beginning, he says, "Islam taught universal values and principles that are applicable to all people at all times." (p. 300)

Comments
Readers of this book will likely note the parallel between the Christian concept of koinonia and the Islamic concepts of ummah. Both extend with ease to embrace the entire world community. Neither religion is tied to a particular place or particular people - which explains perhaps why they are the two largest religions worldwide.

Abdul-Aziz Said is Professor of Islamic Peace and Nathan C. Funk and Adjunct faculty member, both at the American University in Washington, DC. Their essay on **"Islamic Revivalism"** is a valuable complement to the preceding contribution on Governance. They go into depth about the tragic experience of the Islamic world's asymmetrical encounter with Western imperialism during the past two centuries. The "Islamic Revival, "as they aptly term it, has emerged with vigor in

recent decades subsequent to the failed secular governments of newly independent Muslim countries.

Said and Funk deftly explain the underlying dynamics across different regions that have led to alternative versions of this Resurgence (as some prefer) whereby Muslims have aim to break free from Western secular (neo)colonial domination in order to chart a new course in alignment with their interrupted historical legacy.

In place of the history of interventions, tensions and suspicions between the Islamic World and the West, the authors urge the active cultivation of empathy, reciprocal respect and understanding, and recognition of "complementarities" between civilizations that can lead to a spirit of cooperation, consensus building and conciliation.

Comments
Said and Funk's recommendations are still valid even though a lot more blood has flowed under the bridge since their essay was written. The aim of the GEA is to bring forward the eternal spiritual values of truth, justice, peace and brother/sisterhood in place of the destructive projects that have occurred in the context of imperialism, colonialism and proxy wars, all of which are, otherwise, antithetical to the essence of each of these spiritual traditions!

I believe S*aid and Funk are surely right is what they advocate; but that advocacy is up against a centuries-old inertia of Western hubris and prejudice and decades of failed American geo-political gambits in the Middle East, with embittering aftereffects on both sides. There is, indeed, much restorative work to do preliminary to achieving a mutually respectful relationship.*

Dr. John Woodall is a psychiatrist and Research Fellow of the Judge Baker Children's Center of Harvard Medical School. His chapter is entitled **"Humanity's Coming of Age: the Baha'i Faith and World Order. "**According to author, the Baha'i Faith appeared in the mid 19th century following centuries of interreligious and international disputes and wars. Revelations of God came to the Persian mystic, Baha'u'llah beginning in 1844.

The thrust of Baha'u'llah's message opposes the roots of these wars (in sectarianism and nationalism), as a cure promotes the concept of "the oneness of humanity," as a means to achieve "the unity of the human race." Woodall's essay conveys how this principle is translated into a Baha'i conception of world governance "equal to the task of embodying that unity." (p. 333)

Baha'u'llah's vision also includes the more radical belief that all religions, are essentially one in essence and origin and of equal merit. Their remarkable differences, he claims, are regarded as an inevitable product of divine guidance tailored to particular times and places. Although Baha'u'llah regards his Revelation as divine guidance for modern times, he admonishes his followers to "*Consort with the followers of all religions with friendliness and kindness*." Other core teachings of the Baha'i Faith include race unity and the equality of men and women.

Baha'is commend to the world their particular method of "consultation." Woodall describes how this technique works, proposing that the method is "far superior to the act of compromise between contending views or opponents." He believes that "consultation" is vital for building a world

government that will eventually end prejudice and injustice and establish peace in the world. 349 He reports beneficial results of such in the work of NGOs and at the UN. (pp. 352-356)

Comments
The revelation of Baha'u'llah offers what may be an original metaphysical meta-view of religion - that, in effect serves as a conceptual basis for neutralizing prejudice, doctrinal disputation and religiously motivated conflict.

Of course, followers of other religions hold dissimilar views about the origin and meaning of religious diversity some of which continue to cause to strife. Given the result may lead to further dissipation at that level, I believe that our future global civilization will be all the brighter the extent to which adherents of our diverse cultures and faith traditions can, less ambitiously, come to regard the others with genuine wonder and appreciation for their distinctive gifts as well as for our common values and aspirations beneath our cultural differences.

In the meantime, for recent evidence of the injuriousness of religious prejudice worldwide, along with efforts to reduce it, see Regicide: Confronting the Roots of Anti-Religious Violence *(Bennett & White, 2022). GEA along with Faith for Rights and Religions for Peace and other religious organizations should remain vigilant and proactive in defense of freedom of religious expression and all that this entails. The Faith for Rights framework (on their website) lists 18 useful measures to assess the degree to which citizens have the religious rights we all deserve.*

African Traditions
Finally, this volume ends with two essays on African Traditions from two different parts of the continent. The first is by John Mbiti. Kenyan by birth, he is a Christian theologian who taught at Makerere University in Uganda and authored several books on the African religions. In response to the theme, **"African Religion and World Order"** he was given a most difficult task since Africa is home to hundreds of distinctly different indigenous languages and religions.

However, Professor Mbiti believes that there are elements of the African worldview that can be shared with the world: such as their emphasis on the unity of humankind, community approach to health and wholeness, ways of celebrating life, and respect for nature. (p. 370) Traditional African religions give praise and thanks to God, but also engage a spirit world parallel to the earthly living. (p. 363) African peoples are focused on this present life and have adapted to environments that help insure their subsistence as well as afford many of the materials, symbols and meanings in their religious lives. (pp. 368-369)

Each community has evolved religious traditions devoted to the well being of the community best summed up, he says, in the expression: "'I am because we are and since we are, therefore I am….'" (p. 362) This principle is activated through virtues they most value, such as, "hospitality, truthfulness, respect for others (of older or higher rank), justice, protection (toward the younger and weaker) and sharing." (p. 364) The vitality of African communities is visible in its many rituals and celebrations across the seasons and throughout the life cycles of its members, (pp. 364-366)

Mary Mwingira is president of the Pax Romana International /Catholic Movement for Intellectual and Cultural Affairs in Dar-es-Salam, Tanzania. The title of her essay is **"Toward a Shared**

Global Ethic: the Contribution of African Culture." Among the greatest values of African societies, says Mwingira, are harmony, peaceful coexistence, cooperation and sharing of tasks. (p. 371). It is the "joint responsibility" of all "to protect God-given life and nature."

However, since the independence of African nations from colonial rule, the international pressure on them to modernize, westernize, as well as industrialize, has led to widespread deterioration of traditional village customs and lifestyles that had already begun during colonization.

Mwingira expresses neither nostalgia nor resentment over the deterioration of native African religions that have become superseded by Christianity and undermined by capitalism. At her Pastoral Research Center the mission is "to integrate African heritage and values within a Christian ethos." This includes advancing the rights of women who were often subordinated in the traditional patriarchal societies.

Comments
To varying degrees, many of the societies in Africa that John Mbiti and Mary Mwingira represent are struggling to find their way between the divergent demands of tradition and post-modernity. However, as they suggest, traditional religions long contributed largely sustainable means of community building, conviviality and continuity.

For the most part these cultures/religions revered, utilized and protected their ecological environments in ways that were conducive to what we lack most perilously at this moment in time: an environmentally sustainable and regenerative economic system. Subsistence economies operate in harmony with environmental rhythms, whereas market economies seek to achieve maximum yields and profits, often through the employ of toxic chemicals on a massive scale that have deleterious consequences for the people and the planet.

Conclusion
Reading the essays of these distinguished authors written a quarter century ago from the standpoint of today, has been an enormously interesting exercise. The issues the authors raised and the insights they shared have not lost any of their timeliness. More broadly, the book also stuck me over and again by the awesome diversity and fecundity of human spiritual experience and expression and its continuity over the ages. We remain in need of the shared wisdom, generosity and compassion of our worldwide spiritual heritage to guide us through the immense challenges and crises that will be facing humanity during the rest of this century. Our future survival may depend upon the strength of our solidarity.

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