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# **The Horizon**

*“A house divided against itself cannot stand”*

**Abraham Lincoln, quoting Mark 3:25**

THE DAWN OF THE THIRD MILLENNIUM PRESENTED HUMANKIND WITH a dilemma. Will the skill that has characterized our species and propelled its development continue to sustain us, or will competition for power and resources lead to escalating conflict and our eventual extinction?

The seriousness of the situation facing us is symbolized by the attack on the World Trade Center in 2001, carried out by a well-organized group trumpeting an extreme religious ideology. The event triggered a wave of conflict in which millions of adherents of one religious and cultural identity have been pitted against another. The calamitous events of 9/11 deepened a long history of intercultural and interreligious distrust, misunderstanding, and even outright hatred.

By the start of the second decade of the millennium, the global financial industry—absent any sense of accountability to the collective—capped an unsustainable cycle of greed and corruption, leaving the world’s economies close to financial collapse. Only the governments these commercial establishments appear to control prevented a disaster. The earnings of ordinary citizens were subsequently hijacked to bail out the perpetrators, none of whom were held accountable,

thus buying time instead of enacting substantial change, not to mention increasing the disparity of the world's haves and have-nots.

With the arrival of this Third Millennium, something else also began to crest. Throughout the Middle East, millions took to the streets—their only venue of enfranchisement in their cultures—demanding fundamental rights. By 2012 the demand for equitable sharing of resources had spread planet-wide. Forming a counterclaim on the world financial process, it sought to reverse consolidation of wealth in the hands of a few—a phenomenon that had been proceeding apace for at least a half century. The message was for everyone: what has been transpiring is simply unsustainable.

These eruptions parallel a wave that crested in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. After hundreds of years of unbridled monarchy and totalitarianism, there dawned a universal recognition of the self-evident rights of individuals. Sweeping through the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, this tide of realization either removed monarchies or rendered them principally ceremonial.

Today we are witnessing a fresh eruption of self-evident truths, this time centered on what sharing implies within a community, with implications for access to resources.

As disconcerting as the current wave of social eruptions may be, such eruptions are to be expected in the context of our longer history. By at least the 18<sup>th</sup> century, with the rise of an evolutionary view of the world, humans had come to realize that our level of consciousness, self-awareness, and intelligence distinguished us from other species—most notably our ability to problem-solve by identifying the relationship of cause and effect. This ability separated us from Earth's other creatures, allowing us to out-compete all our competitors and extend our civilization to nearly every corner of the planet.

As we face an array of new challenges, the same conscious potential that enabled us to fashion spears and arrowheads, master fire, and transform grunts and gestures into language stands ready to serve us as it did in primordial times.

## An Uptick in Consciousness

Until recently the insights that can enable us to remake ourselves in the face of our present challenges remained the domain of academics and think tanks. The other 7 billion of us on this planet continued to just “keep on living,” in extremes ranging from subsistence in poverty on the one hand to engaging in rampant consumerism and a culture of waste on the other. Overall, the masses had no reason to concern themselves with the planet’s larger problems. This is what has begun to change.

Some 13.75 billion years of development have followed the birth of the cosmos in the Big Bang. On our little way station in the Milky Way, planet Earth began its own journey some 4.45 billion years ago, with life arising around 3.8 billion years ago to challenge the eternal ticking down inherent in the universe’s physical properties.

At just the right distance from our star the Sun, with the ideal size and mass, and protected from most space debris by the gravity of the gas giant Jupiter, we have enjoyed 60 million unimpeded years of evolution since the last major asteroid collision that wiped out the dinosaurs and permitted the emergence of our species. However, only in the last 10,000 years have we witnessed the arising of what we call “civilization”—the crucible in which all of our present challenges are unfolding.

The uptick in consciousness on our planet at this moment is happening irrespective of station or calling. The masses are feeling things they can barely articulate. Two years ago, in the streets of first Tunisia, then Egypt, people were willing to die for a dream they had only begun to glimpse. In Cairo’s Tahrir Square, Christians and Moslems prayed together, using expressions such as “oneness” and “interconnectedness.”

While these uprisings didn’t miraculously remove the realities of the political and economic regimes under which people lived, the resonance was identical to that generated by expressions such as “freedom” and “human dignity” during the Renaissance of the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries—and again when much of the world turned from centuries of monarchy to experiments in democracy a few centuries later.

By 2011, beginning in New York and spreading globally, a new banner had been planted in the streets proclaiming “Occupy.” Other street signs were emblazoned with terms such as “we,” “us,” “ours,” and “collective.” Again, this didn’t immediately lessen the grip of institutions over the common person, but it points toward the arising of a new consciousness at the street level. That the Occupy movement racked up over half a billion entries on Google within a month of its inception is a reflection of this powerful current.

Let’s not forget that we mammals, which today dominate the world, once were small, barely noticeable creatures scurrying around at the feet of the ruling dinosaurs. When realizations permeate the street, change is afoot, even if it may still be long coming. A new unity consciousness, a sense of the collective, of “we,” is arising on the planet. What its structures and cultures will be is as yet anyone’s guess.

## **The Arising Globalization and Multiculturalism**

In tandem with the move toward the democratization of the world, we are witnessing a trend toward globalization and multiculturalism. Of the world’s 7 billion people, at least 70% believe globalization is inevitable. Worldwide, more than 60% believe that mutual understanding and multiculturalism will be important to making this transition a smooth one for our planet.

The big question is whether the global era that’s dawning will be kind to the world’s masses or take the form of an economic tyranny, extending the unsustainable runaway consumerism that propels the wealth of just a few. Will it foster a climate of caring for the world’s resources, or of profiteering under the rubric of “grow, grow, grow”? Unless there is a sense that we are a single people, we will undoubtedly end with a catastrophe in which not even the elite will be safe.

The issue is how to create a sense of identity larger than “my interests,” “my nation,” “my religion,” “my ethnic group.” A holistic world-centric view would be a tall order for much of the world. Yet terms such as “transnational,” “transcultural,” and “trans-traditional” are becoming the clarion calls of our generation.

Movements of oneness—of unity consciousness—are afoot in nearly every arena, from the protests in the streets to the emergence of a new science and technology. The quantum world, string theory, and now M-theory in physics are introducing us to a “vibratory” view of reality. A cosmology of potential multiverses and additional dimensions is also being proposed. With the heralded discovery of the universal Higgs-Boson energy field announced by physicists in 2012, science may be closer to understanding how “things” manifest “out of nothing.” New frontiers open before us that are immensely creative and promising, offering a vision of a world in which humanity’s capacity for self-consciousness is explored for the benefit of all, including the planet itself.

## **Religion and Spirituality**

Although many of us tend to think of religion and spirituality in terms of what we know of churches, synagogues, temples, mosques, and ashrams, anthropologically the panorama of religion and spirituality represents the accumulated narratives of our species’ long epochs of development.

That one or another of these narratives is regarded by many as uniquely true is to be expected and perfectly natural, given that such narratives are subjective to the populations in which they have been handed down through millennia. This accounts for the self-satisfying feeling of possessing absolute truth as in the case, for instance, of the 9/11 suicide pilots as they plunged their hundreds of hapless victims into their targets.

Such narratives are anchored in a lens through which we all to some degree look, which we will refer to as magic-mythic. Having been part of who we are from the time of our hunter-gathering era, this lens originates in a world forgotten but still very much alive in our subconscious. The mindset of primeval peoples who communed with nature spirits and ancestors still compels us, which is part of the attraction of stories such as Harry Potter, Star Wars, Star Trek, Lord of the Rings, and Narnia.

Today this lens abuts and impinges upon a different lens, one that emerged some six centuries ago: the scientific lens of the rational, testable, and verifiable. This more recent lens, which is the world of science and technology, has served us well, in many cases affording us improved health and wellbeing, not to mention greater comfort.

Simultaneously, the scientific lens has sometimes robbed us of the deeper world of wonder, including a sense of the magical, instead of skillfully integrating the two worlds so that both might enrich us, since each is fundamental to our makeup and hence to our potential.

It's also important to recognize that spirituality and religion, often confused, aren't the same. Spirituality differs from religion in its sense of unconditional value that's unaffected by circumstances. In spirituality, seen through the heart's unconditional lens, God is one.

Although historically the offspring of spirituality, religion is more focused on whose view of reality is correct. In religion, God isn't one. This is the antithesis of a prescription for a world that is both good and concerned for the interests and wellbeing of every creature.

However, as the millennium turned, a vision of *interspirituality* was emerging from within the world's religions. The result of the inner exploration of contemplatives, meditators, and mystics, along with those who seek to foster the advancement of their fellow humans, the vision draws on the commonality embedded in nearly all the world's Great Wisdom Traditions, both religious and spiritual.

As those who seeded the vision began talking to each other across continents and oceans, and between traditions and cultures, they discerned that their experience, though hugely diverse, was ultimately much the same. All shared a sense of profound interconnectedness, oneness, and a unity that transcended the boundaries of their theological traditions, cultural backgrounds, and historical narratives.

The commonality came as a surprise—and yet not a surprise, given that science and technology were also heading in the same direction. A new unity was emerging among the scientific disciplines, epitomized by the new physics and reflected in new modalities in the philosophy of science and the emerging integral theories of the interrelationship of *everything*.

As if serving as a harbinger of what was to come, the first book to clearly identify this trend and name it “interspirituality” appeared in 1999, at the cusp of the new millennium. As doors were opening worldwide and millions were stepping into the streets to imagine a new world, the stage had been set for a global dialogue.

## The Journey

The word “interspirituality” was nonexistent until it was coined in 1999 by a Roman Catholic lay monk and pioneer interfaith leader, Brother Wayne Teasdale, in a book aptly entitled *The Mystic Heart: Discovering a Universal Spirituality in the World’s Religions*. By 2004, when Brother Teasdale and colleagues introduced the perspective at the Parliament of the World’s Religions in Barcelona, Spain, the term was still hardly known. Yet today an internet search for “interspirituality” or “interspiritual” calls up over 100,000 hits.

It’s obvious to many that interspirituality—a more universal experience of the world’s religions, emphasizing shared experiences of heart and unity consciousness—represents part of the world’s ongoing movement toward globalization and multiculturalism. It can be seen as an inevitable response to globalization—be it welcomed, as in the case of advocates of an unfolding world culture and planetary economic system, or pushed back against by religious fundamentalists and parochialists of all kinds, including terrorists.<sup>1</sup>

Brother Teasdale predicted that interspirituality would become the global spiritual view of our era:

The real religion of humankind can be said to be spirituality itself, because mystical spirituality is the origin of all the world religions. If this is so, and we believe it is, we might also say that interspirituality—the sharing of ultimate experiences across traditions—is the religion of the third millennium.

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<sup>1</sup> Surveys show that it’s difficult to measure how many people worldwide hold uncompromising fundamentalist viewpoints. This is because about 50% of those polled believe in only one religion and think they are right, while the other 50% view dedication to one religion as a potential social danger (Gallup, Pew 2005/2007).

Interspirituality is the foundation that can prepare the way for a planet-wide enlightened culture, and a continuing community among the religions that is substantial, vital, and creative.<sup>2</sup>

Today there are parallel discussions concerning globalization in all fields of human discourse, whether governance, economics, science, or sociology. Since all are interrelated, it's important we share some basic understanding of the many threads that are part of this unfolding. All stem from the fundamental basis of consciousness itself: the ability to recognize the relationship of cause and effect. There is a rather universal perception that many things are not well with the planet right now, leading to the question of what actions—indeed, what major shifts—might set matters right.

One of the goals of this book is to examine the roles of religion and spirituality in the globalization process in light of this wider international discussion. Such a mandate requires attention to many fields simultaneously, encompassing our current knowledge of cosmology, the breadth of scientific knowledge and consciousness studies, the fields of sociology, politics, history, and economics, and even pertinent statistics about what the world's citizenry (the pivotal "person on the street") actually believes about the world in terms of why we are here and where we may be going.

Our hope is to place the vision of an emerging interspirituality in a wider international and cosmopolitan context for the first time. While such an understanding is important to the overall characterization of globalization and multiculturalism itself, it's also important to discerning whether the trend toward interspirituality is real and what it may imply for the future of religion and spirituality. Plus, it provides the first opportunity since 1999 to examine interspirituality, as identified by Brother Teasdale, as a phenomenon in itself.

We particularly wish to explore the experiential aspects of interspirituality. Not only may it change your life in a personal way; it may do so as part of the unfolding planetary trend toward globalization.

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<sup>2</sup> *The Mystic Heart* [hereafter, "MH"] p 26; quotations from the book *The Mystic Heart* (copyright 1999 by Wayne Teasdale) reprinted with permission of New World Library, Novato, CA. [www.newworldlibrary.com](http://www.newworldlibrary.com); see Teasdale, W. 1999 in Bibliography.



## What is Interspirituality?

When one looks with what the early French aviator and author Antoine de Saint-Exupery referred to as “the eyes of the heart,” one’s vision is tempered with understanding, love, and compassion for one’s fellow creatures. One sees the absolute value, which we might refer to as divinity, of everything.

In other words, one looks beyond categories—deeper than labels such as Christian, Jew, Muslim, Buddhist, black, white, gay, straight. Saints, sages, and heroes across the centuries have always understood that seeing with the eyes of the heart allows the greatest potential for understanding, thereby fostering unity consciousness.

Interspirituality is the natural discussion among human beings about what we are experiencing. In academic terms, it’s the intersubjective discussion among us all about who we are, why we are here, and where we are going. In the context of religion, interspirituality is the common heritage of humankind’s spiritual wisdom and the sharing of wisdom resources across traditions. In terms of our developing human consciousness, interspirituality is the movement of all these discussions toward the experience of profound interconnectedness, unity consciousness, and oneness.

A more heartfelt and experiential definition focuses on the deepest implications of these phrases, rolling them into a statement such as “a spirituality so based on the heart and unconditional love that it would be impossible to feel separate from anything.” This definition has profound ethical implications.

The recognition of interspirituality as recorded in *The Mystic Heart* was the result of the world’s religious and spiritual leaders talking to each other, a discussion long overdue. In a very real way, interspirituality represents the culmination of years of international interfaith and ecumenical exchanges centered on the recognition of a common experience within all spiritual traditions—a sense of profound interconnectedness, and what this implies for how humans should behave both individually and collectively. This recognition is in no way divorced from the universal sense of unity that underpins the world’s advance toward

globalization and multiculturalism. There is a growing appreciation of the value of the world's religions talking to each other. In fact, a recent poll indicated that 80% of Americans felt it was important.<sup>3</sup>

The central challenge of the interspiritual experience is whether doctrinal and theological differences, which have traditionally pitted religious traditions against one another, can be considered secondary—or even left behind—in favor of an emphasis on the common understanding of love, service, and ethics that underpins all religions. This is a tall order, on a par with whether nationalistic allegiances, with their tendency toward competition and conflict (“fighting for your flag”), might fade, to be gradually replaced by an authentic world-centric holism.

Hope may be drawn from the fact that spiritual leaders in all the world's religious traditions point to interspirituality as the deepest of all spiritual exploration, testifying experientially to a sense of profound interconnectedness and oneness. They also claim this experience ultimately renders secondary the importance of beliefs, creeds, and theologies. It is enough, they say, to truly discover and live in loving recognition of one another.

Thus the leaders at the heart of interspirituality challenge adherents to traditions worldwide to step up to this new understanding of religion and spirituality—a frontier not unlike the ideals of true economic egalitarianism, the abandonment of militant nationalism, nuclear disarmament, and other ethical gold standards advanced by the secular voices of globalization and multiculturalism. They are the ideals that propel the defining edge of human development. Although they could be considered utopian, the question is: how high are we willing to raise our bar?

## Differences

Central to globalization is the fact that our two primary ways of knowing—the external explorations of science and the internal explorations of religion and spirituality—don't as yet agree much about

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<sup>3</sup> PRRI/RNS Religion News, 2011.

reality. There are important crossovers between these distinctive ways of knowing, most of which are relatively new and part of the arising globalization process itself. There has also been a long-term trend toward holism. Again, such trends are only now coming to fruition in this time of globalization.

The diversity of social structures and belief systems on planet Earth is astounding. Central to the current planetary dynamic is the reality that the world's major cultures, whether defined by political systems or religious foundations, often don't agree about basic aspects of day-to-day reality. This is mostly because each is also struggling to balance the historical elements of its religious or political heritages with the scientific and technological advances of its particular region.

On the surface, at the level of creeds and apocalyptic predictions, the various traditions appear to have little in common, so that even their everyday religious practices fundamentally differ. But with the advent of international communication systems, we have become acutely aware not only of the startling diversity in the views of the citizenries of individual nations, but also of striking similarities among citizens across all kinds of national and ethnic boundaries. This reflects a world in transition from ethnocentric identities to a world-centric identity.

Those religions steeped in creeds and theologies tend to offer a primarily magic-mythic narrative of reality. This is only natural given the ancient underpinnings of human consciousness and the social structures that arose to reflect these. Many of the historic religious narratives provide a cast of celestial characters, governances, and systems of reward and punishment that lay claim to entire populations' belief in absolute truth. This is one kind of religion. There are also religions that explore consciousness and its relationship to the pursuit of love and high ethical ideals, but that provide no narratives of celestial characters or end-time scenarios. There are of course mixings of these two general modalities.

It's important to remember that religion and spirituality are far from identical, as is apparent from the statistic that more than a third of the world's population define themselves as "spiritual but not

religious.”<sup>4</sup> In general, the tendency of religion is to value creed over deed, whereas the tendency of spirituality is to emphasize deed over creed. This is a conundrum.

Part of the dynamic of today’s globalization is the fact that the person on the street often subscribes to ideas that are entirely different from either their region’s science or their local religiously based culture. One of the biggest surprises in preparing this book has been to learn from opinion polls that what would seem to have been proven by science or claimed by various religions holds little sway among the world’s citizens. This has been a startling revelation. The implications can be seen in the eruptions of fresh thought that have characterized the beginning of this millennium—from the Arab Spring to the Occupy Wall Street movement. In such movements we are receiving a glimpse with new gravitas of what might be possible for our species.

## **Why Humans Disagree**

While myriads worldwide can agree on common patterns we all observe, we tend to differ greatly about what accounts for these patterns. Most of the differences in our views of reality, including those that have led to wars, boil down to how successfully we are able to link an effect with a cause. Discerning the process that has accounted for a pattern should be the goal not only of science but also of common sense. The crises we face on the planet today differ only in complexity and degree from the challenges that faced our cave-dwelling ancestors. If spear or arrow tips were designed to kill game, and a certain tip didn’t penetrate a creature sufficiently, an appropriate change was made to the fashioning of the tip—a change on which the survival of the tribe depended.

The right diagnosis is key to arriving at solutions. In seeking the cause, our point of entry is crucial, for the lens through which we view the problem will influence what we see, especially in cultural and religious terms. As an example, the 14<sup>th</sup> century person viewed the great plague of that century—the Black Death—either as God’s

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<sup>4</sup> PRRI/RNS Religion News, 2011.

wrath (the magic-mythic lens) or as caused by a germ (the rational scientific lens). Today we are still navigating between these two lenses as we move into the current millennium.

The capacity we most need, which is the ability to investigate issues from multiple perspectives, is the capacity we often most lack. Yet the ability to diagnose from a variety of perspectives would prove one of the greatest boons for the successful advancement of globalization and multiculturalism.

The international debate centered on biological evolution versus theistic creation is a classic example. While all can agree that *Homo sapiens* is a mammal, we differ on the process that accounts for this—biological evolution, creationism, or a blend of the two.

Another example is experiences in consciousness. Historically, many have reported seeing visions of Jesus, Mary, Buddha, and a variety of religious figures. Others report seeing pink elephants after long bouts of drinking or while taking drugs. Depending on who you consult, you'll either be told these are *all* visual hallucinations, or hallucinations in the case of pink elephants but not the religious figures.

In reviewing the relatively new field of consciousness studies, it turns out that most findings are still based on asking individuals what they experience, then extrapolating from there. The diversity in this is astounding. The question is how we will move toward a global holism, given the confusion and disagreement.

The dilemma is no different in global problem solving. Although the rational scientific paradigm proclaims itself capable of solving the world's immense challenges, problems continue to spiral out of control. Nevertheless, the rationalist establishment is hard-pressed to agree with the spiritual traditions that what's needed is a post-rational conversation combining the fruits of the scientific (external) and spiritual (internal) ways of "knowing." The rational establishment often identifies the claims of spirituality in terms of "inner knowing" as superstition belonging to the pre-rational, and there is no further progress.

We can agree with the rationalist position that for most of human history, humankind has viewed reality through a magic-mythic lens that in so many ways has stymied progress and led to conflict instead

of moving our species forward on the path of consciousness. This lens still commands most of the world's artistic and entertainment modalities, as witnessed by our bestselling superheroes and sagas, from Superman to Star Wars and Harry Potter.

When the strictly rational lens developed, it became just as deeply entrenched as the magic-mythic, so that over time the two ways of knowing separated into two conflicting cultures that are at total loggerheads in their understanding of reality and their resulting public policies.

What is trying to arise now in the world globalization process is an integrative or holistic lens that combines the best aspects of both of its precursors. Yet the need for a new holistic discussion is still widely unacknowledged.

## **Healthy Change, Unhealthy Change**

Every historical change contains the seeds of a positive or negative result, and history seems to have meandered between these extremes. This is especially the case for the person on the street, who has so often been the casualty of war. A revolution based on high ideals one day is hijacked the next day, sending the energy in a totally different direction—a phenomenon seen in the French and Russian revolutions, which were enveloped in tragedy. Even America's 9/11 moment of unity, when there was so much international goodwill toward the United States, was hijacked for political ends, resulting in greater division instead of a coming together.

Worldwide, humans individually and collectively long for change. We seek something truly new, even at the cost of great consequence, not excluding death. This desire for change is what's driving the phenomenon of the street protestor, chosen as *Time* magazine's 2011 Person of the Year. What this new reality would be is far from clear, its precise structures undefined, requiring well thought-out solutions. Currently this global movement exists on the edge of a precipice, sustained only by a sense that something new is trying to arise from some deep gravitas erupting in our species collectively.

The interspiritual trend emerging as part of globalization and multiculturalism is born of incremental steps from interfaith and ecumenical exchange, raising the potential of a trans-traditional experience of spirituality. However, this trend could still have variously fruitful results. Just as economic globalization could result not in a growing egalitarianism but in a shift of most of the wealth to relatively few (which currently seems to be the case), religious globalization could take a pathological turn and result in a dangerous faceoff between conflicting views of reality and the societies that foster them.

However, if interspirituality could take root in a heart-based experiential discovery of the “universal spirituality within the world’s religions”—the claim of Brother Teasdale—this could be a momentous positive. It could make religion an asset for humanity’s future and not the liability it has so often proven to be.

Three doomsday scenarios currently confront our species: being wiped out by wars based on religious allegiance, wiped out by wars based on national allegiance, or wiped out by the polluting and warming of our planet to the point that it becomes unlivable. How religious experience plays out in the world is linked to all of these.