Governance and Religions

by Harlan Cleveland and Marc Luyckx,

How will religion impact government and foreign policy in the 21st century? This joint paper, prepared by the World Academy of Art and Science and the Forward Study Unit of the European Commission was presented to representatives from various Foreign Offices of European countries in preparation for the "Brussels Seminar," May 14-16, 1998, as a way of thinking about Europe's approach to "Religion and Governance."

I- Introduction

In the modern era, the separation of religion from government has been a doctrine often repeated and as often ignored, bypassed, honored in the breach. That separation was in turn a subhead of the distinction between "private" and "public," a dotted line fading fast as governments farm out to private entities a growing proportion of the public business, and private organizations play a more muscled part in making public policy.

In the postmodern era, however it comes to be described, we already use the word "governance" to suggest that the organized functions required for a people to govern themselves go far beyond what "governments" can effectively fund or cause to happen. Within this framework, it now seems overwhelmingly likely that "religion" (defined as "organized spirituality") will play a weightier role in governance -- and indeed, that individual spirituality will be an increasingly important element of leadership in every domain.

Both concepts, "religion" and "governance," will carry into the 21st Century a great deal of cultural baggage, the heritage of long spiritual traditions and of theory, trial, and error in organizing human beings to work together toward common goals. It will be important to understand this inherited mix of wisdom and unwisdom, to analyze the changing dynamics of spirituality as they interact with the changing dynamics of governance.

II - Shifting ways of thinking

It may be useful to think of our time as a time of transition, from a *modern* way of thinking, still besieged by the backlash of *premodern* mindsets, toward a worldview that (because not even its advocates know just how to describe it) we will call simply *transmodern.*

The premodern worldview is an enchanted vision which evidently was functional in primarily agrarian societies of the past. There is one Truth, given to all people by a higher wisdom ("our God" or plural gods), the source of authority and the foundation of values. Spiritual authority is delegated to religious intermediaries; they, as surrogates for the spiritual authority, are responsible for making the rules of behavior for individuals and supervising the morality of political authorities. Authority of many kinds is exercised mainly by men, who in turn oversee the functions of women and children and are responsible for their behavior. The core values of society are stable; the sacredness of tradition is society's unshakable foundation.

The modern outlook began as a healthy reaction against religious authorities who feared scientific discovery, resented independent thinking, and resisted technological development. Modernity pushed the clerical authorities aside; in the resulting secular societies, it relegated religion to the "private" sphere -- making it harder in "public" affairs to raise questions of meaning, ethics, intuition, or the spirit. If premodern society, asserting a sacred foundation for values, was "enchanted," modern society was "disenchanted." Rational analysis and empirical proof were in the ascendant; truth was what could be discovered, rationalized, and proved by the scientific method. Science was itself sacralized, and religious intermediaries were no longer required as channels to the Truth.

Crisis of the modern view

The pedestal of Reason has in this century been eroded by experience that scientific discovery and technological innovation can lead not only to miracles of change but also to unprecedented dirt, damage, and disease; by repeated demonstrations that rational planning can take us efficiently to where we don't want to be when we get there; by new kinds of science, such as chaos theory, that seem to depend as much on intuition as on reasoning; by testimony of some scientists about how much they don't know and can only guess, or pray to understand; and by the increasingly obvious limitations of the hierarchical, pyramidal, bureaucratic structures which had earlier seemed the rational way to organize human cooperation.

A transmodern way of thinking is now emerging. It features a creative mix of rational and intuitive brainwork; an enthusiastic embrace of new information technologies; a tolerance, even celebration, of diversity; a conviction that protection of the physical environment has to be a central concern for every human being; a dawning realization that scientific discovery and technological innovation have made human beings the dominant actors in their own future evolution; a new openness to spiritual guidance as a basis for "private" behavior and "public" policy; and a move away from vertical authority systems toward "flatter," more "horizontal" organizations, away from "recommendations-up-orders-down" management and toward more consensual decision-making.

It is important to observe that the very concept of "transmodern" indicates that the best of modernity has to be kept, but that there is an urgent need to go beyond. Modernity has brought us indeed excellent and indispensable progress. It has helped us to *distinguish what was confused.* As Ken Wilber rightly explains, modernity has enabled us to create art, science and morals, in installing the distinction between those disciplines which were interrelated before. This "distinction" has been crucial for the intellectual,

artistic and ethical and religious progress of humanity. The problems began when an innovation became an excess: when the *distinction became separation.* It is indeed at this stage that the problems began to arise. Because the separation became exclusion. And as we have so greatly gained in civilizational level in shaping a space for ethics, aesthetics and science to be able to develop, we also suffer from those distinctions which have become separations and even exclusion of ethics and religion from science and public life.

The transmodern way of thinking is still a minority mindset, but it can no longer be discounted as a neglectable fringe. In the United States, recent survey research suggests that it is gaining ground with astonishing speed. In 1996 *The Integral Culture Survey,* by Paul Ray, counted 24 percent of U.S. adults, or 44 million, as "cultural creatives," who "are coming up with most new ideas in American culture, operating on the leading edge of cultural change." Two-thirds of this large category are women. The cultural creatives are of course a statistical category, not a "group" and certainly not "organized."

Duane Elgin's study of *Global Consciousness Change,* also published in 1996, finds five recurring themes as defining "the emerging worldview:" global networks of information technology; global ecological awareness and concern; a shift in social values (toward environmental sustainability, toward greater tolerance for ethnic, racial, and sexual differences); a new interest in and practice of "lay spirituality;" and "shifts in work, diet, consumption patterns, transportation, relationships, or other areas that express a desire to live more sustainably."

World values survey

The most ambitious effort, so far, to measure shifting values worldwide was the 1990-91 *World Values Survey;* it collected and collated a mountain of data from 43 countries containing almost 70 percent of the world's population, "covering the full range of economic and political variation."

Ronald Inglehart, its global coordinator, found what he called a "postmodern shift" well under way in about a dozen countries, all in North America and northern Europe. As summarized by Duane Elgin, people in these countries "are losing confidence in all kinds of hierarchical institutions" and in traditional institutions as well, "placing more emphasis on personal authority or the authority that comes from an inner sense of what is appropriate." They feel materially more secure, so they value "more meaningful work and the quality of the work experience, and tend to rank environmental sustainability over economic growth." Declining participation in organized religion is "linked with a growing interest in discovering personal meaning and purpose in life." In these countries especially, there is "a greater tolerance for ethnic, sexual, and political differences. And new roles for women are emerging "that allow for greater self-realization."

Generalizations such as these cannot draw a neat picture of so complex a moving target as shifting ways of thought by millions of individuals. Anything said in this mode is likely to overstate the shifts where they are most prominent, and understate similar shifts of thinking among smaller proportions of people elsewhere.

Some of the "global mind shift" that is obviously going on can be attributed to opportunities stemming from quite recent technological change -- the marriage of computers and electronic telecommunications, the stunning developments in genetics and biotechnology, the new choices opened up by space exploration and the chance to observe our home-planet with a genuinely global perspective.

Tools for thinking and communication don't guarantee mind shifting. The spread of knowledge in our time is quite as much the result of social choices and political leadership -- expressed in the starvation or feeding of quality schooling, vigorous or tepid support for higher education, protections or violations of the freedom to question and explore and invent and create.

Many countries' citizens have been slow to change their minds because their leaders fear the consequences of "many flowers blooming" -- as Mao Tse-Tung did, even though he popularized the phrase -- in gardens they wish to control. But it's dangerous not to take full advantage of new learning technologies; the breakdown of Communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union bears witness.

III - Impact on religions and governance

The transmodern mind-shift -- still far from dominant even where it is noticeable -- has important implications for religions and their impact on governance in the early part of the 21st century. One of these is that organized religions will be sharing their turf with "unorganized spirituality." Another is that their leadership, traditionally monopolized by men, will be increasingly shared with women. Yet another is that in the emerging worldview, the rigid separation of "us" from those professing other faiths will no longer be saleable doctrine or feasible politics; the *acceptance* of variety, the protection of diversity, and doctrines of tolerance seem more and more essential to security and survival. A fourth result of the transmodern worldview is this: the pervasive and continuing impact of globalization on every human activity is reinforced by the growing acceptance of globalization by those "coming up with new ideas . . . on the leading edge of cultural change."

Toward the end of our current century, one of the striking current trends is the large number of people who, professing a belief in God by whatever name, are moving away from the institutions which have traditionally intermediated divine worship and provided blessings on births, deaths, and everything important in between. In so doing, many of these people have by no means abandoned spirituality; they have found outlets for their spirituality in small-group practices that "search for God" in ways that are genuine alternatives to traditional practices in churches, temples, mosques, and synagogues.

In the U. S., the membership in "mainline" religious denominations is already down by some 25% from earlier peaks. Some of this certainly counts people who drop out of "organized religion" while actively searching, in New Age or other environments, for personal or small-group ways to express their natural spirituality. There may also be more "shopping around" and switches of allegiance between organized religions than ever before; the growth of Islam in the United States is one example.

These trends thus do not betoken a veering away from "spirituality." Human beings often seem naturally to reach out for more satisfying belief systems. In the absence of settled certainty, every organized religion is bound to be a "temporary home" to a good many restless spirits in its constituency.

The growth of "unorganized spirituality" certainly complicates the interaction between organized religions and the institutions of governance (governments, but also corporations, associations and the many other elements of "civil society"). Among the people who don't feel the need for spiritual guidance from large established human institutions will be a good many activists on secular issues -- such as human rights, environmental protection, or economic fairness -- who will nevertheless present their

case as motivated by spiritual concerns with wide political appeal.

As we move toward the changes implied by the transmodern worldview, it appears that women are often quicker to understand and more open to adaptation than men. That is, for example, the lesson of Paul Ray's finding that two-thirds of the subset of Americans he calls "cultural creatives" are women. Why would this be? And what does it portend for the nature of the coming changes and for the leadership in bringing them about?

First, why? One reason that leaps to the eye is that in every modern society women are on the average less identified with or beholden to the patriarchal structures, pyramidal management, and vertical leadership styles characteristic of modern industrial society. Women are also typically more intuitive than men. If moving toward "transmodern" ways of thinking and acting implies a new openness to spiritual guidance, women can be expected to be among the frontrunners. Even in traditional religious institutions, a majority of congregations have been women, and the same seems to be true -- anecdotally but observably -- of communities where "unorganized spirituality" is strong.

The transmodern mindset gives promise of dialogue that avoids trying to persuade the not-yet-modern first to "modernize" (a goal now freighted with cultural baggage from the industrial era, including vertical authority systems and super-rational thinking). If women in other cultures can see a possibility of improving their personal situation (in terms of subsistence, rights, equality, and love) without having to dig up the roots of their cultural identity, the resulting dialogue might well be more fruitful than if it starts with "modernization" as the first requirement. Within non-Western cultures, there seem to be a growing number of women who are reinterpreting their scriptures (the Koran, the Bible) in post-patriarchal ways -- to produce a softer, more tolerant approach that doesn't threaten the basic faiths themselves. Such a dialogue might best be initiated by Western women accustomed to the uses of indirection in improvising on a general sense of direction.

The emerging transmodern image is a round table, around which people of both genders and all races, cultures and faiths sit to consider how to manage our common planetary home in a way that is responsible not only to its current inhabitants but to their grandchildrens' grandchildren as well. There is plenty of room in this pluralistic scene for striving toward an ultimate, universal Truth -- but the search requires tolerance of other peoples' chosen paths to the elusive goal, and of the differing liturgies with which they celebrate the goal and describe their search. And it doesn't require any seeker to concede that any of the other seekers has already found the Holy Grail -- or that the universal/pluralistic search can now be called off.

This image is a far cry from today's reality, either in secular governance with its mostly two-sided processes for resolving conflict, or in the mostly exclusivist politics of organized religions.

Indeed, just when individual human rights have achieved superstar status in political philosophy, just when can-do information technologies promise what the U.N. Charter calls "better standards of life in larger freedom," distortions of cultural difference have scattered big, ugly boulders in the road called Future.

Cultural diversity is not the villain, but "culture" is being used -- as *Kultur* has been used in other times and places -- as a reason for repression, exclusion, or extinction. The trouble lies in overenthusiasm for cultural loyalties, which can create something akin to a runaway nuclear reaction. Without the moderating influence of other enthusiasms in civil society -- acting like fuel rods in a nuclear reactor -- the explosive potential gets out of

hand. What's needed is the counterforce of wider views, global perspectives, and universal ideas. Equality is not the product of similarity; it is the cheerful acknowledgement of difference.

"The goal," as John Gardner says about communities large and small, "is to achieve wholeness incorporating diversity. That is the transcendental task for our generation."

The rapid spread of knowledge through global networks has already required business and finance, and the news and entertainment media, to adapt their workways, their marketing, and their planning to appeal to worldwide audiences. And this is only the front end of a long-range trend; the so-called "global networks" are still far from global in a world where some two-thirds of the people don't yet have a telephone.

It is not, therefore, surprising to find each of the Great Religions operating in a more and more global context. They proselytize beyond their traditional geographic regions. They become more eclectic as they try to appeal to more and different kinds of people. And, since religious experience depends heavily on how it is expressed and received, they are interpreting or modifying their stories to make them more understandable in more languages.

Moreover, world religions are more and more universally available. Pilgrimages to Mecca or Rome or Jerusalem -- or China or Tibet or India or Sri Lanka -- have been speeded up by jet aircraft; and their virtual equivalents are now coming into homes by television and into personal computers via Internet.

The opportunities are also enhanced for "unorganized spirituality." Teachers, preachers, and therapists representing hundreds of varieties of specialized inspiration are spreading wherever freedom of speech, freedom of communication, and freedom of peaceable assembly are protected.

In other domains the globalization trends illustrate an ambiguity of outcomes: global standards coexist with global diversity. In matters of cuisine, for example, the standardization of healthy hamburgers and tasty fried chicken is spreading in every world city, but no faster than the proliferation of ethnic restaurants in those same cities. The new information technologies helps exclusive faiths to spread beyond traditional jurisdictions; they also may amplify the voices of those reaching for a wholeness that incorporates the religious diversity.

"No one can speak for the world of faiths," says the Episcopal Bishop of San Francisco, William Swing, in his forthcoming book about a United Religions. "But someone must shout to hear an echo. I do believe that an echo will be coming from the indigenous, from women, from spiritual margins, from the restless pious, from children, from refugees of religious intolerance, even at last from religious leaders. . . . I have an utter urgency because of the squandering of the treasure chest of spirituality which religions could offer the world if they could grow beyond mutual hatred to a place of mutual respect."

IV- Synthesis

This paper is prepared in preparation for the Brussels Seminar, May 1998; to draft now a strategy for Europe's approach to "Religion and Governance" would be presumptuous and premature. But some synthesis is in order.

It is clear that the wall between religion and government is so porous as to be an

unreliable guide to attitudes and actions. "Governance" describes a scene in which decisions about public policy are formulated and carried out by multiple organizations, "public," "private," and (mostly) mixed. "Religion," organized and unorganized, is therefore likely to play a growing part in the making of public policy and carrying it out.

If, in the early part of the next century, world religions come to play the important role that Andre Malraux foresaw and others are forecasting, what kinds of conflicts are most likely to occur?

Based on our analysis, it seems likely that conflicts will not mostly be either (a) because organized religions collide in the historic "clash of civilizations" envisaged in the recent writings of Samuel Huntington, or (b) because politics inside and between nations reverts to another historical precedent, the clash between clerical and secular authority (i.e., between "premodern" and "modern").

But a third kind of clash, increasingly visible both in internal and international politics in recent years, is now making its way to center stage. It is the split between "fundamentalists" of many varieties who see their traditional scriptures and teachings as so absolute as to divide humankind into irreconcilable believers and infidels, and others who see their ancient traditions or new spiritual insights as raw materials for wider human reconciliation, as the basis for an intensified search for common purpose among people of differing races, creeds, and national origins. In short: the split is between "premodern" and "transmodern."

"Fundamentalists" of many faiths -- in Eric Hoffer's language, "true believers" -- often feel threatened by modern society and modern worldviews. The reverse is equally true. Huston Smith suggests that we are all both absolutist and tolerant -- but about differing beliefs. "Conservatives" often fear the messiness and disintegration that tolerance of pluralism can produce. "Liberals" often do not understand "the wholeness that certainty can bring" to the human psyche; because humans are fallible, some absolutes seem required as the glue that holds communities together.

The "transmodern" way of thinking outlined in this paper is *actively* tolerant. It acknowledges that it's important for all civilizations to be receptive to that which is alien, whatever form this may take. It is open to the transcendental, while resisting any authoritarian imposition of religious certainty. The Truth is at the center of things; each person converges toward it with his/her own culture, along his/her own path. Nobody has a monopoly of the Truth any more -- yet it does exist.

To begin a constructive dialogue with societies immersed in cultures different from our own, we might do well to start with a moment of truth-telling, along these lines:

"We, for our part, are products of a secular industrial society. But we realize that we can no longer discuss political futures without also discussing questions of meaning, spirituality, and cultural identity. We are therefore asking you to join us in a serious effort to project mutually advantageous futures for our societies. In order to do this, we will all have to set aside our superiority complexes, our intolerances whether based on scientific rationalism or on spiritual tradition, and our dreams of having our views prevail in the whole world."

Dr. Marc Luyckx is a member of the Forward Studies Unit, in Brussels, a think tank with connected with the president of the European Commission. Dr. Harlan Cleveland, eminent political scientist and public executive, is the former U.S. Ambassador to NATO under President Johnson and Nixon.

The following year, Luyckx summaried the Brussels seminar. The Abstract is below. The link is:

ABSTRACT: For a Brussels Seminar at the European Commission, a "double hypothesis" was proposed: that we are in transition to a transmodern way of thinking that combines intuition and spirituality with rational brainwork; and that 21st century conflicts will likely be not between religions or cultures but within them, between premodern, modern, and transmodern worldviews. Non-Western thinkers find this framework useful: it opens a door to criticism of the worst aspects of modernity without being "anti-Western." Western reactions are more mixed, some critics wanting to maintain a high fence between religion and governance, others welcoming the transmodern concept as helpful in relating States to religions, and in analyzing conflicts involving beliefs about belief. "Transmodernity" turns out to be a rich tool of analysis, with important implications for European foreign policy in the century to come.