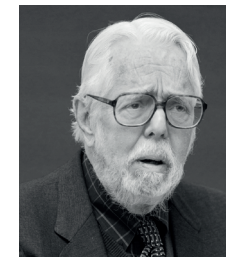


## *Il monastero, la città e il futuro dell'umanità*

### *The Monastery, the City and the Human Future*

*Nonostante i nostri tempi siano etichettati come "età laica", continuano a comparire impreviste correnti di spiritualità, contemporaneamente in nuove, vecchie e contrastanti forme. I molti luoghi, i pellegrinaggi sono ricomparsi spesso verso tradizionali luoghi sacri in Europa, America e Asia, ma con nuovi significati stratificati su quelli più vecchi. In questa fenomenologia del pellegrinaggio, l'autore classifica alcune delle caratteristiche di questi viaggi post-laici. Essi attirano persone convenzionalmente religiose, persone alla ricerca di qualcosa, aderenti New Age, storici dilettanti, salutisti, amanti della natura e turisti che insieme costituiscono un nuovo e diverso tipo di "comunità", che, come molti aspetti del mondo di oggi, è temporanea, in continuo mutamento e in movimento. Essi spesso mostrano aspetti di commercialità, ma suggeriscono una sorta di spiritualità "post-laica". Questo fenomeno rappresenta una sfida per architetti, urbanisti e studiosi di religione.*

*Despite our times being labeled "secular age," unanticipated currents of spirituality in both new, old and mixed forms keep appearing. I many places pilgrimages have reemerged often to traditional sacred sites but with new meanings layered onto older ones in Europe, America and Asia. In this phenomenology of pilgrimage the author catalogs some of the characteristics of these post-secular journeys. They attract conventionally religious people, seekers, New Age adherents, amateur historians, health buffs, nature lovers and tourists who together constitute a new and different sort of "congregation," which like many aspects of the world today is temporary, in flux and in motion. They often exhibit an element of commercialization, but hint at one kind of "post-secular" spirituality. This phenomenon presents a challenge to architects, urban planner and scholars of religion.*



**Harvey G. Cox, Jr.**

Hollis Research Professor of Divinity at Harvard, where he began teaching in 1965, both at HDS and in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences. An American Baptist minister, he was the Protestant chaplain at Temple University and the director of religious activities at Oberlin College; an ecumenical fraternal worker in Berlin; and a professor at Andover Newton Theological School. His research and teaching interests focus on the interaction of religion, culture, and politics. Among the issues he explores are urbanization, theological developments in world Christianity, Jewish-Christian relations, and current spiritual movements in the global setting (particularly Pentecostalism). He has been a visiting professor at Brandeis University, Seminario Bautista de Mexico, the Naropa Institute, and the University of Michigan. He is a prolific author. His most recent books are *How to Read the Bible* (HarperCollins, 2015) and *Lamentations and the Song of Songs: A Theological Commentary on the Bible* (with Stephanie Paulsell; Westminster John Knox Press, 2012). His *Secular City*, published in 1965, became an international bestseller and was selected by the University of Marburg as one of the most influential books of Protestant theology in the twentieth century.

Parole chiave: **Pellegrinaggio; Età laica; Rituali in movimento; Cammino di Santiago; Stato di ricerca; Homo Viator; Papa Francesco**

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This paper emerged from an ambitious project to, at long last, bring together architects, city planners, public health officials, theologians, philosophers, builders, and engineers, who all have something to do with the immense task that lies before all of us, which is the following: the next 20-25 years we human beings have to build as many cities as now already exist all around the world. The growth in population, especially the growth in population in urban areas is going to make that necessary. And frankly, if you look at the cities we built in the last 25 to 50 years, and done to the ones we have, the news is not particularly good. There are many very thoughtful architects and city planners and others who all agree we have not done a good job at this. We have to do better. One of the reasons we have not done a good job is because we haven't been talking to each other enough. The theologians live in one silo, public health people live in another, and architects live in another and we hardly ever meet each other. So now we have decided enough of that. We need to have a new and constructive conversation because of this enormous responsibility we have as human beings.

I want to say a word or two about myself and why I have any qualification to be part

of this conversation. It is almost universally agreed now by the people who design, build, and think about cities that spirituality is an essential dimension in human community. That wasn't always the case. Forty years ago people were talking about marginalization and disappearance of religion. Now there seems to be a consensus that the spiritual is a component of the human condition that simply has to be included. It has to be included not just in our minds, but in the way we design cities and how we live together; how we meet each other; the spaces we have to meet each other, and the places where we can encounter God's nature. We are at a critical moment in urban history.

I teach at Harvard Divinity School. I also teach in the world religions program in Harvard College. I have been one of the faculty members associated with the Center for the Study of World Religions at Harvard where we bring scholars together of various world religions. They live together, they eat together, they talk, they worship together, they visit our classes, they get to know each other and I've got to know a lot of them. Part of what I can offer is what I have gleaned over the years, especially recent years, from some of these colleagues, Buddhists, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, and all the rest who gather in Cambridge and make our lives richer. So that's the project: future cities and what we have to do about them.

The road in between the monastery and the city is, let me use the Spanish term, the Camino.<sup>1</sup> There is a surprising and the unanticipated resurgence, in our so-called secular time, of interest in pilgrimage, in visiting old holy sites. Lots and lots of people are doing it. And it is an indication of something that is happening in our whole culture, something that takes us beyond the definition of ourselves as a secular people, and into what I like to call the post secular city. This is the new spirituality that is emerging in our time, a configuration in which spirituality is expressing itself in unanticipated and unexpected ways. The resurgence of pilgrimages all over the world, not just Christian traditions but various religious traditions, is a sign and indication of a new spirituality that is dawning in the twenty-first-century. It is a continuity with existing old spirituality, but also with new elements brought in, reconfigured, recombined, resulting in something that has not quite existed before in the world of spirituality. It's an embodiment of this new spirituality. It's a hopeful and welcome sign.

First I will present the "phenomenology of pilgrimage," which poses questions such as: What are the main features of pilgrimage? What attracts people to them? What is it about them that speak to us - not quite secular, not quite religious, but a

kind of wandering searching stage that we seem to be in nowadays? Second, I will discuss the implications of this new spiritual constellation that is emerging in our time regarding the way we plan and build future cities. My intent is to set up the picture of the emerging spirituality for the planners and designers of cities to respond to this emerging, unexpected spirituality.

Let's start with a wonderful pilgrimage site – Glastonbury Abbey in Somerset, England, which was built in the seventh-century and taken over by the Normans. It seems that somebody discovered what they thought was the tomb of King Arthur at Glastonbury Abbey. The gravestone read *"Hic Yachet Sepultus Includus Rex Authurus Ensua Avalona."* For those of you down on you Latin a little bit that means "Here lays the body of King Arthur". Admittedly, we do not know when that was carved. It doesn't say much about Guinevere, and it doesn't say a word about Lancelot.

Now, in recent years, Glastonbury has gone through a very interesting transition. It's now a pilgrimage site for Anglicans, Protestants, Roman Catholics, and what might be called New Age people. They all seem to be welcomed there. No one is turned away at the door. For me, this is an interesting example of this emerging spirituality of the radical pluralism which seems to be acceptable even to people

who are part of major religious traditions. Listening to the other, listening to other voices, has become part of the pilgrimage process. We are all to some extent on pilgrimage. We are on a Camino. We are moving along something and are not quite sure what the objective is. It's a little hazy. But we are on a spiritual journey with each other. There are a variety of people with us. It is a metaphor for, an indication of, one of the principal characteristics of the emerging new spirituality of the post secular city. I knew something was in the air about the Camino de Santiago Compostela when I read the other day that 270,000 people walked it that last year. And that is only the ones that registered for the Compostela certificate! There are probably another 300,000 who walked without registering.

What does this say about "secular" Europe when hundreds of thousands of people go to an old Christian Catholic pilgrimage route to the tomb in Santiago? Something is going on here. It does not fit into the secular model. But that is only part of it. I knew it had reached a certain threshold when Harvard University sponsored a pilgrimage to Camino de Santiago. I could hear the bodies of the Puritan founders rolling in their graves in Cambridge! What has happened to our "Puritan" university? This is only one symptom of what is going on. Let me quickly list some other

indications. Norway has reinstated an old medieval pilgrimage site of Saint Olav at Trondheim in Norway. Thousands of people are taking the various pilgrimage paths leading there. There is Washingham<sup>2</sup> in the UK that I will come back to. I had a student a couple of years ago who spent some time at Lourdes<sup>3</sup> because Lourdes has become so popular. He interviewed a lot of people and discovered that many of those he talked to are not church goers. Why? What are you doing here? he asked, and they said, "Well, something speaks to me here."

Lourdes is like many others. Think of the millions of people each year who go to the Holy Land, to Jerusalem and Galilee. I have made that pilgrimage and discovered it's a little different for Catholics and Protestants. Catholics love to see the Church of the Holy Sepulcher; Protestants want to go see where the Sermon on the Mount was preached. They come to "jog where Jesus walked", as one guide quipped. The Holy Land is also sacred for the Muslims who come to Jerusalem; so it is a very ecumenical center. Of course, every year the Hajj in Mecca draws millions of pilgrims from around the world.

It occurred to me that the death site in Memphis of Martin Luther King, Jr is becoming a pilgrimage site. Hundreds of people every day visit that motel – its little room and the balcony where King was

shot. Hundreds of thousands of people visit Auschwitz, which has also become a pilgrimage center. People stand there quietly remembering the awful tragedy that was inflicted on the Jewish people. Places like Auschwitz are not happy places; but are places to remind us of the tragic element of human life and Christian history.

What mood are pilgrims in? Remember that rather raucous pilgrimage that we read about in the Canterbury Tales where the pilgrims were headed for the cathedral where Thomas Becket was killed? He was murdered for standing up for the freedom of the Church against the King. It was a martyr site. Some people said to me that now the people who go to these sites are just vacationers, tourists. In the old days they were religious and spiritual. Go back and read the Canterbury Tales. This is a group of pilgrims, but as they tell their stories you have to keep the children out of the room. They were telling their own stories to each other and some were quite bawdy. But what was happening as they moved along on the route to Canterbury was that they were becoming a kind of a congregation: various different kinds of people there who were charmed by the old story of the Nun's Priest's tale and the Merchant's tale, and the tale of the Wife of Bath who is looking for another husband.

I hope I have made the case that what

we now have happening is a significant phenomenon in the post secular city. It configures a larger spirituality that combines elements of the past with elements of the future. I want to characterize the nature of this newly emergent world of spirituality by the following points.

Think for a moment of all those people you know who say, "Well, I am not religious, but I am spiritual". How many times have you heard that phrase? What they generally mean is "I want to have some connection with the great mystery, maybe with God, but I do not like the packaging or the superstructure by which it is delivered these days. I am not an atheist, but I want that connection without the packaging". Now, I think that there are plenty of things to object to about the packaging, we all have our discomforts and there are people who have taken it to another step. Here are the qualities of this emerging spirituality:

**First**, they are more open to the mystical and transcendence of faith, but they are suspicious of the institutional and doctrinal. Not just Christianity by the way. My young Jewish students and Muslim students tell me the same thing.

**Second**, they are much more oriented towards experience: they want to

feel, taste, touch spirituality. Not have someone else tell them about it, but to experience it themselves.

**Third**, they want to continue questioning, so are not suitable for the kind of catechism that many of us knew – the "here is the question and here is the answer." No, they want to continue questioning. One of my students said: "You have to occasionally buy books on Amazon and know what being in 'search mode' means. You have to press a little button to put it in the basket. We are still in 'search mode'." I do not think there is anything wrong with 'search mode', even when you are comfortable with a tradition that you are part of. You are still searching and looking and still open to new interpretations and new possibilities.

**Fourth**, the new spirituality involves being rather suspicious of the high walls that have been erected between the various religious traditions, especially when those high walls involve an element of exclusivism. I will tell you we are not going to get too far in the next generation making this exclusivist claim, of which they have a deep suspicion.

When I think about future historians of religions looking back at our time of the twentieth and twenty-first-centuries and picking out really significant religious personalities of our era; they are going to think about Martin Luther King Jr. being deeply influenced by Mahatma Gandhi, a Hindu, who was influenced by Leo Tolstoy, an unorthodox Christian. They are going to think about Thomas Merton, who as you may recall was a Roman Catholic monk, a Trappist, and who died when he was in Cambodia to pray with Buddhist monks. I think these are the significant breakthrough figures who are illustrative of this movement. If you ask in college bookstores what is the most popular poetry book on the poetry shelf, it is the poetry of Rumi, the Muslim Sufi mystic. This is something new that is happening. This is an understanding of spirituality, which has left behind that exclusivity. This is an example of John XXIII saying: "let's open the window and the doors." I have high hopes for Pope Francis. He has done the right things so far. He did a very daring thing to take the name of Francis, the first Pope to ever do so. He is writing his own agenda and a

very large check, which he will be expected to, at least in part, cash. I admire him for doing that.

**Fifth** is spirituality, which is open and welcoming to the vastly expanded universe and vastly expanded sense of time that has come to us through science. Our grandfathers and grandmothers did not have a clue about this. We now have this enormously expanded sense of the universe; that this is just one of many universes. One of the icons of the new spirituality is the image of the tiny little blue planet taken from the moon. There it is, our tiny little home against this vast endless darkness. It evoked within in me a sense of love for this little planet, of sympathy and recognition of its fragility. Our grandparents did not have that but it is part of this emerging spirituality. This is a conversation that has emerged between theologians and scientists and the warfare between the two seems to have been left behind. We are listening to each other. We are learning from each other and trying to help each other take the next step.

**Finally**, and very importantly, is the

deepened sense of responsibility of the people of faith for the poor, brokenhearted, and marginalized people of the world. Pope Francis has a grasp of that, for which I am grateful. If we really exist as people of faith, we are responsible for those who are left out and are suffering. I think we are witnessing now the emergence of the very interesting new phase of spiritual development of human beings.

I now turn to what this might mean for future cities. Think about a pilgrimage that you have been on and heard about. It is a ritual in motion. There is an element of mobility. You are moving when you are on a pilgrimage. You are going from here to there. This means that something is connecting the inner with the outer. They are being fused. The changes in location, and inside of you, somehow support each other. I am told that people often walk the Camino to try to leave behind some horrible thing that has happened to them: the death of loved ones, a broken marriage or a lost job. They often bring along with them something they can leave behind. On the Camino there is an iron cross where you can leave something you brought, as if to say "I'm moving on." Remember, people used to go on pilgrimage for

penance. From what I understand part of the intent of the sacrament of penance is to leave behind something and move on. It is not to wallow in your wrongdoing, but to confess it, to get it off your chest, to receive and be reminded of forgiveness. It is a sacrament of movement, which is what the pilgrimages are. They are flexible and they serve the needs of different people. I've been on a couple of pilgrimages with a wide variety of people – believers and non-believers, some of them skeptics, all walking along the path together. A new community emerges as we eat and sleep together and tell our stories to each other. Also, remember that on a pilgrimage you leave the noise, confusion, and demands of your normal life for a little while – the pace, the expectation, the information overload. As you walk you have an opportunity for things to settle. You meditate and pray, if you pray, and drink in nature and receive its spiritual refreshment. Leaving it all behind, not to escape it, but to go somewhere for renewal so you can go back into it. You get away from the crowded ways of life in order to come back to it with a renewed spirit. No wonder so many people are going on pilgrimages: to renew their spirit and take part in the liturgy if they want to. By slowing down and moving slowly pilgrims make small contributions to the sanity of the world.

One of the fondest memories I have is when I visited the pilgrimage site of Delphi in Greece where the oracle of Apollo used to speak. I was in a group, and along with the group was a colleague, the famous psychologist Eric Erickson. As we were going up the hill towards the Oracle of Delphi the bus stopped at the Castalian Spring, where you are supposed to cleanse yourself before approaching the Temple of Apollo. So, we all got off and did a little bit of cleansing. I started to get back on the bus, but Eric said, "Don't get on the bus. We are going to walk this last mile." He was in his 80s, but that's part of it, to walk. He said, "Slow down, approach it slowly, so when you get there you are ready for something to happen," very wise words of a wise man.

However, there are possible dangers. Some pilgrimages are to places that can have positive and negative connotations. For example, take the case of Our Lady of Czestochowa in Poland, a figure who inspired the resistance to the Communist regime in Poland.<sup>4</sup> However, as soon as that nasty business was done and Poland was liberated, within a few years the most right wing elements in Polish society kidnapped the Lady of Czestochowa and made her a symbol of the right wing clericalist platform they wanted to enforce in Poland. These appropriations can happen. It can go either way. Recently, the Prime Minister of Japan

visited the Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo<sup>5</sup>. He is not supposed to do that type of thing, but wants to reclaim Shinto. That was the state religion used to power Japanese militarism. Pilgrimage can also be corrupted by business and politics. Some of the people who are pleased with the emergence of the new pilgrimages are those who own the hostels and hotels and, of course, those who sell souvenirs and trinkets. I came back from Our Lady of Fatima in Portugal a few years ago with a Madonna who lights up when you press a little button. My wife said: "You like this type of religious kitsch? A Madonna that you can light up? Don't you think that's a bit too much?" I had her put it away.

Finally, I think there are enormous implications of this newly emerging spirituality for the way we think about, plan, and build our future cities. For this reason, cities should nurture and support, rather than discourage or deny, human spirituality. You have to do that from the outset in the way you plan the cities and not just add things after they are built. So, what does that include? Think about these mixed congregations of pilgrims I described. You do not know who will be in your group. Will the future city that our grandchildren live in be a place of ghettos built to separate by race or class, or will it be a city that will welcome people of various backgrounds that



can be integrated into the city? What we are building into them now is not that. What we are building now is the gated community concept. I close my gate; I do not want you to come in.

What about nature, which is becoming very important for many people? People love to be out in nature, the countryside, and along the Camino and other places – seeing trees and birds. Camino pilgrims also like the little churches along the way: the architecture, the music, the art, and these are people who normally don't go into churches. It says to me something about the sensitive architectural design of our churches, which can convey a deep meaning, even to people who get turned off by sermons. It says something on a deep spiritual level. Will that be a part of the future cities or will it be overlooked and even banned? What about parks? It's interesting when we pick up the paper today and read about the riots in Istanbul, which started when they tried to close a park and build a shopping mall. Think about that... "don't take away our park!" So, think about all these possibilities. We are talking here about historical preservation, about what you have to maintain so people can get a sense of the history of a city and can have a *sense of its future*.

I think that the ecumenical and interfaith beliefs of the new pilgrimages are very important. Different religious

traditions? – everyone is welcome. Nobody is excluded because they do not wear the right badge. The only entrance requirement is to be willing to be open and go on the trip; to be willing to share your stories and listen to the other stories. That is going to make a big difference in religion, in both the ecumenical and inter-religious phases. Pilgrimages that respond not only to the religious but spiritual needs are an expression of the fusing of the inner and outer movements. They are also particularly effective ways of reminding us that we are all on the way. We have not yet arrived. We are *Homo Viator*. This whole idea of the mixed congregation that is easy to drop in and out of, says something about church and religious architecture. We should widen the threshold and raise the ceiling higher, and don't make the step "in" a demanding one, but a little more porous. Maybe, the storefront church, which one can walk by and see what's going on inside, tells us something about that. Change in architecture is called for: a chance to break away from the chain of routine; to be refreshed and bring nature back into the picture, to leave behind things you want to leave behind; and move on to whatever the future holds for, and moves, you.

We need to build cities in the next 25 years that will reflect and support this kind of spirituality and not squelch it, because the people who live in these cities have a

right to have their spirituality respected and sustained, and not erased. There are also a lot of implications here for public health, as spirituality is now recognized by the world health organization as one essential component of wellbeing and good health. Everyone is welcome. You are all fellow pilgrims with us. We are all on the way on the Camino – from the monastery to the city. There is no turning back.

If we can't quite discern with any real clarity what that future world city will look like, I suggest that we take some comfort in the words of John Bunyan.<sup>6</sup> *The Pilgrim's Progress* begins with a pilgrimage that is about to commence, and he doesn't know which way to go. So the Spirit comes to him and says:

"Do you see yon city?"

"No, I don't".

"Do you see yon wicker gate?"

"No."

"Do you see yon glimmering light?"

"Yes."

"Follow it then."

Today, you don't quite see the city or the gate, but a little light is on and I hope we can follow it.



#### *Endnotes:*

1. The Camino de Santiago, or the Way of St. James, is the name of any of the pilgrimage routes, to the shrine of the apostle St. James the Great in the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela in Galicia in northwestern Spain.
2. The village of Washingham in Norfolk, UK is famed for its religious shrines in honor of the Virgin Mary and as a major medieval pilgrimage centre.
3. The Virgin Mary appeared at Lourdes in 1885 to the peasant girl, Marie-Bernadette Soubirous, who was later canonized. Today the pilgrimage site of Lourdes hosts around six million visitors every year from all corners of the world.
4. The icon of Our Lady of Czestochowa, also known as the Black Madonna, has been intimately associated with Poland for the past 600 years. The Virgin Mary is shown as the "Hodegetria" ("One Who Shows the Way"). In it the Virgin directs attention away from herself, gesturing with her right hand toward Jesus as the source of salvation. In turn, the child extends his right hand toward the viewer in blessing while holding a book of gospels in his left hand.
5. Yasukuni Shrine is a Shinto shrine in Chiyoda, Tokyo, Japan that was founded by Emperor Meiji and commemorates anyone who had died in service of the Empire of Japan.
6. John Bunyan was a seventeenth-century English writer and Baptist preacher best remembered as the author of the religious allegory *The Pilgrim's Progress*.