

## Argomentazioni per un'urbanistica spirituale

### Arguments for a Spiritual Urbanism

*L'ambiente costruito può e deve essere utilizzato per affrontare gli straordinari problemi che affliggono la civiltà contemporanea. Questa ipotesi segue una logica su quattro livelli. In primo luogo, l'umanità si trova ad affrontare una crisi senza precedenti in termini di velocità e di scala. In secondo luogo, una risposta seria richiede una visione del mondo secondo ed accrescendo la spiritualità. In terzo luogo, i credi tradizionali non riescono a causare il necessario trasporto spirituale alla velocità o al livello necessario. Pratiche spirituali più fervide e di successo ricavate dalle religioni e validate scientificamente hanno maggiori possibilità di ampia diffusione e quindi d'impatto. In quarto luogo, l'ambiente costruito è ben configurato per indurre e rafforzare alcune di queste "nuove" pratiche spirituali dato (1) il suo ruolo conformante in questioni culturali; (2) l'umanità come fenomeno urbano, e (3) l'enorme crescita della popolazione del prossimo mezzo secolo.*

*The built environment may and should be utilized to address the extraordinary problems afflicting contemporary civilization. This speculation follows a fourfold logic. First, humanity is facing an unprecedented crisis in speed and scale. Second, a serious response demands a worldview depending on and advancing spirituality. Third, traditional faiths cannot effect the necessary spiritual shift at the pace or degree required. More intense and successful spiritual practices extracted from religions and scientifically validated offer better chances for wide deployment and therefore impact. Fourth, the built environment is well suited to induce and reinforce some of these 'new' spiritual practices given (a) its shaping role in cultural affairs; (2) humanity being an urban phenomenon, and (3) the huge population growth of the next half century.*



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## 1. Our troubled condition

Looking at today's civilization we can't help but marvel at human accomplishments. We have made remarkable advances in science and technology; arts and philosophy, law, and commerce; health, food and shelter; and education and communication. All these and many others have brought an era of prosperity at a scale never experienced by humankind. But, there is another, darker side. Who can ignore the unprecedented magnitude and speed of the challenges we are facing? The list is long and overwhelming: massive environmental pollution and destruction; global warming and climate change; runaway consumerism, greed, and materialism; global economic inequality and instability; accelerating population growth and human migration; planetary terrorism; rising xenophobia; technological and scientific breakthroughs of uncertain impact; and media-anesthetized societies oblivious to it all. Looking into the future suggests an impending civilizational crisis with significant threats to the welfare, health, and even existence of vast numbers of human and non-human beings.

What is the source of our problems? We cannot blame some recent mutation in human nature. Desire, hope, fear, anger, love, seeking happiness, ignorance, greed,

and the many other human traits remain inexorably the same and tied to who we are. What has changed is the culture enabling old and new expressions of those archetypal drives. And it is hard not to assign responsibility to *modernity*, especially late (i.e., twentieth-century) modernity. After all, it was modernity's ideology, attitudes, practices, and social norms, along with market capitalism and industrialization that pushed aside millennia-old traditions in a matter of decades. Modernity's agenda of progress, rationalization, secularization, centralization, industrialization, urbanization, materialism/commodification found fertile ground in a Western civilization tired of inequalities, poverty, religious abuse, dogmatism, disease, and manual labor.<sup>1</sup> The incredible progress and challenges of today are the mixed blessing of the rise of modernity.

The point here is not to castigate modernity because, as said, there is much to be thankful for. Still, the limitations and dangers of the modern project are now all too obvious and call for significant correction. Plenty has been written and debated about the flaws of modernity and even its "end". Who doesn't remember when, more than a generation ago, *postmodernity* was being hailed as the new critical perspective that would point at, if not mend, the modern debacle?<sup>2</sup> Yet, something happened over the

intervening years that stopped any significant correction. With hindsight we could say that the largely intellectual and ineffectual stance of postmodernity never was a match to counteract the huge and inertial forces behind modernity. In fact, the relativistic, nihilist, and practically disengaged, and tautological attitudes of postmodernity insidiously exacerbated the stronghold of modernity. The fact that the rise of postmodernity coincided with the explosive adoption of the modern project across the world, notably in Asia, didn't help either. With little actual impact in the world beyond a few liberal enclaves, postmodernity lost its allurements, even among progressives. This is not to say that today's world is like the heydays of late modernity, it is not. But it is to acknowledge that despite much discussion, legitimate criticism, and well-intended changes, for all practical (and even ideological) purposes, we still dwell under the auspices of some 'advanced' form of modernity — what many now call hypermodernity or supermodernity.<sup>3</sup>

## 2. In need of spiritual development

The tragedy of today's immense crises is not only that they ethically undermine the way of life we have come to expect but, worse, fail to fulfill us.<sup>4</sup> After all, it is hard to find satisfaction in the materialistic, skeptical, market driven, always busy, stressful,

and analytical reality of modernity, or the fragmented, politically-correct, nihilist, and cynical world of postmodernity. Actually, we schizophrenically move back and forth between both unfortunate existential conditions. And if feelings of disenchantment, anxiety, insecurity, distraction, loneliness, and being lost are certainly not unique to our zeitgeist, their overwhelming presence defines our age. They are indicators of a profound dissatisfaction with and misunderstanding of our contemporary condition. At heart, the sickness of our time is a crisis of meaning.<sup>5</sup>

It is perhaps for this reason that, in spite of (or because of) the power and spread of supermodernity, religion continues to be the ethical, existential, and aesthetic compass for most people around the globe. For example, according to a 2012 WIN-Gallup International poll on religiosity and atheism, 59% of the world's population is religious, 23% are not religious (but not 'atheist') and only 13% are atheist. Indeed, a very recent study of the future of religion based on demographic data conducted by the Pew Research Center (2015) shows no expected decline in the role of faith in the world until 2050 and beyond.<sup>6</sup> As scholars have argued, far from moving to a secular age (as we were once told modern 'progress' would inevitably lead), the world has remained stubbornly religious. Hence, many describe our time as

a post-secular age, where religion retains power and must be considered regarding issues of any importance.<sup>7</sup>

Faced with this unavoidable presence (and relevance) of religion, modernity has fortified itself by pointing at the many mistakes, failures, horrors, absurdities, and prejudices of religion to call for more rational, secular, and instrumental approaches. Postmodernity, which is also highly critical of religion (but for other reasons), has only furthered such negative attitudes and generalized repression or disdain for spiritual beliefs and practices in most professional, academic, and research fields.<sup>8</sup> Underlying all is the expressed or tacit belief that whatever challenges we may face, they can be tackled using the tools and ideology of modernity. Yet, approaches that have put us in today's quandary cannot take us out of it. To the contrary, our contemporary civilization exhibits a dangerously narrow understanding of our place on Earth and what constitutes human development that must be urgently corrected – a correction that, paradoxically, religious wisdom is very capable of initiating if it is carefully and insightfully approached. Simply put, a religious outlook depends on an all-encompassing harmonious context of reference, one from which, at least in principle, today's intractable problems could be reframed within the ultimate meaning,

wholeness, or trans-personal nature of reality and all beings. It also provides each person with teachings, practices, aspirations, and attitudes to guide their actions, thoughts, feelings, and relationships beyond selfish, tribal, and other narrow interests. Besides, because matters of God and the spirit are crucial concerns of the majority of people, religion is a fertile environment from where to build a new paradigm.

Some contemporary scholars speak of religion as particularly well suited for helping us to address our troubled world. Philosopher Ken Wilber has articulated how religion could serve as a 'conveyor belt' to bring large numbers of people into the higher levels of spiritual development necessary to respond to today's maladies.<sup>9</sup>

A couple of examples may illustrate how spiritual development could make a difference. First, let us consider the result of a massive, heartfelt adoption of a sacramental view of the world. If reality were truly believed to be sacred (e.g., as a sign of an active God, by virtue of having been created by a now disengaged God, or by being God itself as in pantheism) it would demand our outmost attention and care. Such reverential attitudes would invariably lead to a more sustainable, ethical, and meaningful living.<sup>10</sup> Second, consider the outcome of applying spiritual sensibilities to today's unquestioned belief on economic/material growth.<sup>11</sup> While no

one can deny the importance of the material world in human life, reducing humanity to only this is superficial. Economist Manfred Max-Neef makes an excellent distinction between growth and development.<sup>12</sup> Growth is a necessary biological, material process that living organisms undergo during their infancy and youth but one that eventually comes to an end. Development, however, is something that naturally continues until the end of organic life as it involves learning, relationships, and experiences. Growth imposes significant demands and effects on the environment whereas development is much more benign as it is largely interior. Spiritual understandings of human nature could contribute to re-aligning the aims of our civilization toward development instead of growth.

Consequently, I assert that responding to our contemporary crises necessitates that humanity develops spiritually through returning to religion for wisdom. But, we should not be naïve about faith traditions. Religions have been often reluctant, if not resistant, to recognize or adopt many positive offerings of our secular world. Without openness to contemporary technologies and ideologies, religion risks being stuck in regressive positions and practices that are inappropriate or counterproductive. In other words, religion also needs to listen and change. At the same time, we should

remember that the depth and breath of secular civilization reach and include all people, including religious individuals. This implies that any significant correction of the current conditions must not only have the appropriate values and practices but also, and harder, be developed and presented in ways that contemporary people, even those spiritually inclined, can assimilate.

### *2.1 the necessary conversation between contemporary culture and religion*

Resolving our quandary demands building bridges between supermodernity and religion. Such an effort requires a serious and lengthy philosophical, theological, and scientific debate, something that has begun.<sup>13</sup> I will argue that the initiative to start a productive relationship between the two parties must come from secular culture for three reasons. First, because the contemporary is dominated by modernity, we must work within it. Second, since modernity is in the strongest position it is more likeable to listen and adjust without being overly defensive, particularly if it sees benefits from it. Third, modernity has historically proven to be more flexible than religion, especially if presented with empirical or rational evidence.

Applying secular methods to faith suggests using its rules and language to scrutinize the most significant claims put forward

by religious wisdoms. Key in selecting a claim for testing would be its (1) reliability, determined by its being held by many faith traditions; and (2) relevance, determined by its potential to address today's challenges. Although this instrumental approach to religious wisdom will not please everybody, it would nevertheless legitimate the reality and usability of religion in the eyes of most people (even many skeptics), offer real opportunity for application, and thus advance the agenda of 'spiritualizing' contemporary culture. This approach is not new. Over the past three decades, scientific research has been probing religious matters and finding a wide range of positive effects of active spiritual beliefs and practices regarding human learning, health, and wellbeing. These include the scientific literature in nursing,<sup>14</sup> medicine,<sup>15</sup> higher education,<sup>16</sup> psychiatry and psychology,<sup>17</sup> and brain-mind sciences.<sup>18</sup>

As an example, let us consider a spiritual practice common to many religions, contemplation. Despite their wide variety (e.g., meditation, prayer, visualization, etc.), contemplative practices share important traits and outcomes. Rigorous scientific experiments have found strong evidence that contemplation significantly improves cognitive and affective performances as well as cultivates a sense of wellbeing;<sup>19</sup> enhances immunological response;<sup>20</sup>

fosters brain growth and plasticity;<sup>21</sup> reduces stress, depression, loneliness, and anxiety;<sup>22</sup> increases motivation; and raises pain thresholds.<sup>23</sup> These scientific discoveries have been so impressive that scholars and practitioners speak of a 'mindfulness revolution',<sup>24</sup> hundreds of centers around the world offer mindfulness-based therapies for a variety of disorders,<sup>25</sup> the US military is actively investigating such practices for combat performance improvement and PTSD treatment,<sup>26</sup> politicians began to include the topic in the national agenda,<sup>27</sup> schools, hospitals and even prisons are slowly adopting them in their programs,<sup>28</sup> and a growing number of individuals and groups are devoted to meditation practices.<sup>29</sup> Although, doubts have been raised regarding whether or not spiritual 'techniques' (such as mindfulness) work without the 'sacred container' of a larger set of beliefs and practices;<sup>30</sup> and whether the scientific experiments conducted on small numbers of people apply to large groups, the empirical validation of religious practices does suggest the possibility for their widespread application in society. The hope is that such deployment will move large parts of humanity towards better mental, physical, social, and spiritual health and in doing address the problems of our time.

## 2.2 Defining Spirituality

'Spiritual' and 'spirituality' are terms used to describe experiences or considerations of meaning, transcendence, wholeness, awe, aspirations, values, and the sacred. Spirituality is interpreted as less interested in external or institutional responses (i.e., religion) than in living or exploring those concerns. In this sense, spirituality constitutes a more universal and open-ended human experience than religion. Spirituality usually includes (1) the 'transcendental' or beyond the understanding, limits, or control of individual consciousness; (2) a fundamental connectedness of self with others, nature, and/or possibly (but not necessarily) a divinity; (3) some type of practice, ritual, and/or experience with the capacity to access (1) and/or (2); and (4) a sense of existential meaningfulness based on any of the previous three.<sup>31</sup>

### 3. Traditional religious practices are not enough to elicit the spiritual development to address current challenges

As said, responding to our unprecedented problems necessitates that humanity develops spiritually. Yet, this transformation must inevitably start and unfold person by person and, as developmental psychology informs us, follow a relatively simple process: if an individual in a certain stage of cognitive/affective development begins to experience a state of a higher stage often

enough and in the sufficient quantity, they will naturally and permanently shift to that higher phase of development. Since there are similarities among individuals, pedagogies may be designed and implemented to facilitate group development. This is a fundamental principle of education. Spiritual development is no exception and therefore demands active, continuous, and lengthy engagement to have transformative effects. We must recognize that the frequency and intensity of traditional religious observances (once a week, one hour long ritual/visit to a temple, and other occasional celebrations) are not sufficient to deliver significant developmental results. But let us also acknowledge that even motivated people willing to commit time and effort will still face challenges in their spiritual practice. Take the example of contemplation, to follow the case study of mindfulness used earlier. We do know that meditative practices are difficult to implement and maintain for multiple reasons: they take time, discipline, and effort; may require training and company; are usually within the realm of the individual and/or small communities; and are not supported by today's way of life. In other words, the spiritual practitioner often finds more hurdles than in other types of personal development practices. This is also true for advancing human dignity, loving-kindness toward other beings, or any

other type of spiritual attitude, response, or aspiration. Therefore, even if we had a contemporary world receptive to 'empirically proven' religious practices and many such initiatives were offered, we would still have a hard time using traditional religious methods (even if scientifically enhanced), particularly at a large scale and in a relative short period of time.

Not surprising, we are not the only age or people that discovered the major liability hindering subject-driven methods of spiritual development: they demand personal effort to prosper. Many major faiths and wisdom traditions learned long ago to resort to external methods to facilitate people's access to religious experiences.<sup>32</sup> The great advantage of this technique is that it demands little or no work on the part of individuals. The myriad examples of sacred art and architecture represent an uncontested record of religions exploiting these externally induced effects. The impacts of means such as iconography, artifacts, architecture, and gardens exceed assisting the faithful in ritual, prayer, or meditation because other teachings are also promoted within sacred spaces. Sometimes larger urban interventions have been used, such as Vatican City, Bodhgaya, or Mecca. Low exertion, externally assisted spiritual practices and teachings offer attractive ways to advance spiritual development, and is the

topic of our next section.

#### **4. The built environment may assist the spiritual development of individuals and societies**

If spiritual states may be externally induced, can the built environment be utilized to advance spiritual practices? The built environment establishes conditions to facilitate certain behavioral, social, and/or psychological responses, and its stability guarantees their repetition. By exercising such influence, the built environment may not only have a pedagogical role and consequent developmental effects on people but, potentially, even an evolutionary impact.<sup>33</sup> And since it is a product of people living together, under shared beliefs, habits, expectations, stories, and language, the built environment is tangible culture calling forth tangible (e.g., behaviors) and intangible (e.g., meaning) culture.<sup>34</sup> Thus, instilling a spiritual pedagogical agenda through the built environment is fundamentally and inevitably a cultural operation. Besides, there is a well-known fundamental relationship between culture and religion, although positions regarding the influence of one over the other differ based on ideological and disciplinary perspectives.<sup>35</sup>

The built environment as a means of spiritual development leads to urban considerations. Cities are not only where

most people do and will dwell but also much urban design and development will occur in the next decades, the result of the fast population growth and urbanization underway worldwide.<sup>36</sup> The inevitable increase in human density will either exacerbate the already negative trends of today or help combat them. In other words, if there is a solution to our crisis, it will need to be found in the city.

Developing our urban environments towards spiritual principles, practices, or teachings has not been discussed very much. The reason may be found in the avoidance or repression of spirituality in the academy and professions (argued earlier), the controversial and political difficulty of the topic, and/or its seemingly indefinable, immaterial, and immeasurable nature.<sup>37</sup> But these obstacles shouldn't deter us. We can draw parallels to the struggle and delay in recognizing the central role that culture plays in cities. Let us make a short pause to consider how this limiting view was overcome, as it may indicate how to advance our proposal.

Even though there were many discussions on the interdependent nature and effects of culture and human settlements during the twentieth-century,<sup>38</sup> it took the UN adoption of the "Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage" (or 'tangible culture') in 1972, and

the “Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage” in 2003, to make this realization broadly applicable.<sup>39</sup> But this was not enough. Building on these documents and starting in the mid 1990s, UNESCO and UN-HABITAT began to publish definitions, expectations, and metrics for the ‘cultural’, ‘wellbeing’, ‘human development’, ‘creativity’, and other such immaterial but essential dimensions of dwelling.<sup>40</sup> Other organizations followed suit and provided urban metrics related to culture and other psycho-social aspects of human living such as the ‘Better Life Index’, the ‘Global City Indicators for Culture’, and the ‘World Values Survey’.<sup>41</sup> Recently (2012), UN-HABITAT recognized the importance of ‘quality of life’ as one of five factors necessary to assess the prosperity of cities.<sup>42</sup> While these ‘indicators’ and metrics are pragmatic and limited (and sometime misleading), they do show a growing and healthy acknowledgement by the world community that purely quantitative, materialistic, economic, and even environmental metrics are not enough to account for human life and development.<sup>43</sup> In fact, many of these indicators have language and components that could be associated to spirituality. Let us notice that many of the most sophisticated metrics didn’t surface until around 2010 and that the term ‘cultural planning’ was not much used until this millennium.<sup>44</sup>

Although it took time for the world to accept culture as an important dimension of cities, the time could be ripe for a next generation of cultural gauging that considers spiritual factors. This is not as radical as it may sound. Since 1983 the World Health Organization (WHO) has been recognizing the important role that the non-material or spiritual dimension performs in human health.<sup>45</sup> In 1998, WHO developed the ‘WHOQOL Spirituality, Religiousness and Personal Beliefs (SRPB) Field-Test Instrument’ to measure people’s mental health, which was used later to collect data in 18 countries and published in 2006 with results showing statistically significant correlations.<sup>46</sup> While discussions on this topic continue,<sup>47</sup> there is momentum for considering ‘spirituality’ as relevant to urban life and, possibly, a new vision and design of the built environment to advance it.

Joel Kotkin points at the big role that the sacred historically played in the city.<sup>48</sup> Supporting arguments for a ‘spiritual city’ also come from already cited Philip Shelldrake who states that “purely instrumental or utilitarian responses to the future of cities are not sufficient. We desperately need to develop a compelling urban, moral, and spiritual vision.”<sup>49</sup> Planning researcher Maged Senbel approaches this challenge from a large scale and spiritually sensitive perspective of sustainability. He offers

what he calls “reverential urbanism”, that is, “a form of urbanism that facilitates a deep sense of respect and awe for nature and for other human beings... a practice that requires the poetic cultivation of hope alongside empirical analysis and inductive reasoning.” This ‘reverential urbanism’ fosters city living that encourages an “ethics of conservation over consumption [and of] spiritual growth over material growth.”<sup>50</sup>

#### *4.1 Preliminary Guidelines For A Spiritual Urbanism*

Defining guidelines to create urban environments that facilitate spiritual development is, of course, the next step but not within the scope of this article. However, a few things may be said. For starters, any such effort will have to be based on design principles and outcomes grounded on spiritual practices, teachings, and goals common to most religious traditions. The following list is only an indication of what these shared values could be (a substantive list would have to be rigorously developed with wide interfaith participation):

- Truth / authenticity / honesty
- Goodness / ethics
- Beauty / aesthetics
- Voluntary simplicity / humility
- Human dignity / equality
- Empathy / loving kindness / compassion
- Contemplative attitude / mindfulness /

prayer

— Respect for / celebration of nature and all life

— Belongingness / attachment / connectedness to community and universe

— Security / safety / peace

— Transcendence (of self, culture, ethnicity, reality, etc.)

— Meaningfulness / unity / wellbeing

These general values ought to be considered in their most sacred, inspirational and humanistic sense, and not through religious dogma. Our definition of 'spirituality' clarifies the underlying intention. After securing such shared ground of spiritual motivation, and based on the arguments presented thus far, we could risk saying that a spiritual urbanism might:

— Reveal, express, and celebrate a city's *genius loci* in order to bring the uniqueness and sacredness of a particular natural place and its beings into urban life;

— Choose development (i.e., 'thickening' the existing urban fabric to improve living conditions and opportunities) over growth (i.e., building new fabric);

— Prioritize opportunities for simple, spirit-growing and non-consumption oriented dimensions of communal and individual life;

— Avoid pollution, support health, and advance sustainability;

— Instill a contemplative attitude by slowing down daily routines, offering a rich

(aesthetic) present, and having destinations of transcending value and experience;

— Hold beauty as a fundamental value and goal for urban development and life;

— Advance what Sheldrake calls "urban love":<sup>51</sup> by enabling equality, encouraging spontaneous and planned connections among (all kinds of) people, and cultivating the common good, sense of community and belongingness, and respect/tolerance towards others.<sup>52</sup>

— Consider the repetitive and ordinary dimensions of tangible/intangible culture as essential to its success while paying careful attention to their special and extraordinary expressions.<sup>53</sup>

Other potential guidelines for a spiritual urbanism may be drawn from current knowledge in environment-behavior research, evidence-based design, evolutionary psychology, as well as successful examples of New Urbanism and Landscape Urbanism. However, these resources need to be carefully considered as they do not usually take into account spiritual concerns. A reasonable course of action would be integrating these knowledge bases with scientific findings in neuroscience, medicine, and other fields regarding spiritual practices.

Another source for insightful clues towards advancing spiritual urbanism could be found in empirical studies of successful

religious buildings, landscapes, and other sacred spaces that determine why and how they work.<sup>54</sup> A related and also productive line of inquiry would be translating scientifically validated spiritual teachings into experiential and design qualities of built environments. For example, what kind of spiritually arising behaviors, perceptions, mentations, and relationships are to be encouraged? If, say, we would want to foster a contemplative attitude; a reverence to nature and life; or the promotion of human dignity, empathy, humility, and authenticity, then, the research goal would be to establish built conditions and features that may induce them.

## 5. Conclusion

In many ways there is nothing new in what is happening today. We have always exploited and polluted our environments, grew population, fought wars, developed technology, built cities, and so on. What is different and worrisome this time is the speed and scale at which our actions are impacting the world and ourselves. At the same time, our dire situation offers opportunities for innovative and transformative architectural and urban work. The reason is simple: since the constructed world has major and constant energetic, economic, environmental, and cultural repercussions in society, a significant positive shift could have huge beneficial impacts. Hence our dilemma



today is not how to address particular problems, but rather to urbanistically harness this incredible moment to leap forward in human development and thus strike at the causes and effects of our very difficult circumstance. In particular, as argued, the capacity of the built environment to repeatedly nudge people into certain types of experiential states may help to move a good portion of society into a higher stage of development, ideally of a spiritual kind.

The question is how to begin to move in that direction. In this sense, whereas much can be said about using spiritual values and arguments for directing urban policies and growth toward, for example, meaningfulness, connectedness, conservation/reverence, authenticity, contemplation, transcendence, social equity, or beauty, we must recognize that it is a much better strategy to resort to science to make the case for them. Simply put, empirical data will always have more power than logical or moral arguments in our supermodern civilization. Hence the call for a strategic collaboration between spirituality and urbanism through the judicious use of science. But even then, a balanced (wide and deep) pursuit of spiritual urbanism would still demand interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, and transdisciplinary approaches; systems thinking;<sup>55</sup> an integral philosophy;<sup>56</sup> along a committed, nuanced, and strategic engagement of religion, culture, and the

highly qualitative dimension of human life.

The irony should not be lost nonetheless. Ever since the Enlightenment, Western civilization has witnessed the progressive escalation of the struggle between science/reason and religion/faith to occupy the central role in explaining and guiding our relation to the world. While modernity was the clear victor, we now find ourselves humbly returning to religion for meaning and insight to guide our way out of the fallout from science's triumph. If successful, the ensuing 'spiritualization' of our contemporary secular culture will herald a new and more integral way of life that will mitigate, if not avert, an otherwise bleak future.

## Endnotes:

1. Among others see: Morris Berman, *The Reenchantment of the World*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, 1981. Peter Drucker, *The Age of Discontinuity. Guidelines to our Changing Society*, Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick, 1992. Edward Harrison, *Masks of the Universe*, Macmillan Publishing Company, New York, 1985. Alvin Toffler, *The Third Wave*, Bantam Books, New York, 1980.
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6. The 2012 survey is available at <http://www.wingia.com/web/files/news/14/file/14.pdf>. The 2015 study is available at <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050/> [accessed on Dec 26, 2015]
7. Harvey Cox, *The Future of Faith*, HarperOne, New York, 2010. Philip Gorski, David Kyuman Kim, John Torpey, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen, *The Post-Secular in Question: Religion in Contemporary Society*, New York University Press, New York, 2012. Joseph Ratzinger, *Faith and the Future*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, CA, 2009. An example of the opposite view, coming from secular culture is offered in this recent article: Daniel E. Bennett,

"Why the Future of Religion Is Bleak", in *The Wall Street Journal*, April 26, 2015. URL: <http://www.wsj.com/articles/why-the-future-of-religion-is-bleak-1430104785> [accessed Dec 26, 2015]. It was Jürgen Habermas who articulated the once highly regarded but now contested correlation between the modern development of societies and their inevitable secularization. Interesting enough, Habermas has offered a different take on religion in the past decade. See more on this below.

8. The separation between church and state constitutionally or de-facto established in most modern states has exacerbated this discrimination by keeping religion away from participating in fundamental discussions and decision-making affecting societies.
9. Ken Wilber, *Integral Spirituality*, Shambala, Boston, MA, 2006.
10. Philip Sheldrake articulates this view well: "the world only has real meaning if it is seen as a materialization of God's presence. Any understanding of the world that denies its sacredness is a narrative of ultimate emptiness and meaninglessness." Philip Sheldrake, *The Spiritual City: Theology, Spirituality and the Urban*, Wiley & Sons Ltd., UK, 2014, p.204.
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36. According to the UN, a majority of people already lives in cities and their numbers are to increase significantly given the population growth and urbanization in the developing world as well as the cultural trends favoring city-dwelling in the first world. It is expected that nearly 70% of humanity will live in urban centers by 2050 (about 85% in the more developed regions and 64% in the less developed areas). Source: the United Nations' *World Urbanization Prospects, the 2011 Revision*, available at <http://esa.un.org/unup/index.html> [accessed Dec 26, 2015]

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41. The 'Better Life Index' was developed by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development - OECD (<http://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/>); the 'Global City Indicators for Culture' produced by the Global Cities Institute --GCI (<http://www.cityindicators.org/themes.aspx#Culture>); the 'World Values Survey' by the World Values Survey Association (<http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org>); 'A Study on Creativity Index' by the Home Affairs Bureau, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government, Hong Kong, 2005 (<http://www.uis.unesco.org/culture/Documents/Hui.pdf>); and the 'Happy Planet Index' by the New Economics Foundation (<http://www.happyplanetindex.org>). For initiatives measuring cultural phenomena and adopted by a large number of cities, refer to committee on culture of the world association of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), *Agenda 21 for Culture*, (<http://www.agenda21culture.net/index.php/documents/agenda-21-for-culture>) For further references

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43. Most of these indexes have very pragmatic goals such as gauging how culture affects urban economical productivity or social, environmental, and political development. At least one has been adopted by the general UN assembly: the *Human Development Index*, and produced by the Human Development Report Office --HDRO of the UN Development Programme (<http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-index-hdi>) [accessed Dec 26, 2015]

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47. For example see: Komatra Chuengsatiansup, "Spirituality and health: an initial proposal to incorporate spiritual health in health impact assessment", in *Environmental Impact Assessment Review*, 2003, 23(1), pp.3-15

48. Urbanist Joel Kotkin says that there were three fundamental

functions that cities historically fulfilled: (1) providing security, (2) allowing commerce, and (3) creating sacred space. Joel Kotkin, *The City: A Global History*, Modern Library, New York, 2006

49. Sheldrake, *The Spiritual City*, p.201

50. Maged Senbel, "From Bioregional to Reverential Urbanism", in Julio Bermudez, *Transcending Architecture*, the CUA Press, Washington, DC, 2015, pp.63-73

51. Sheldrake, *The Spiritual City*.

52. Most faiths acknowledge that our god-given potential is continuously undermined by our many human weaknesses that we try to ignore or avoid. The city offers us the best chances for spiritual growth precisely because it constantly presents us with the "other" and in so doing invites us to discover and transcend our limited perspective, behaviors, strengths, and more.

53. This dialectics between urban 'background' (everyday or habitual) and 'monuments' (unique and symbolic) was considered by the Krier brothers in the late 1970s and 80s and based on their investigation of Western historical urbanism. See Leon Krier and Richard Economakis, *Leon Krier: Architecture & Urban Design 1967-1992*, Academy Editions, London, UK, 1992. Rob Krier, *Urban Space*, Academy Editions, London, UK, 1979.

54. A good example of this type of research is Julio Bermudez, David Krizaj, David Lipschitz, Deborah Yurgelun-Todd, and Yoshio Nakamura, "fMRI Study of Architecturally-Induced Contemplative States", in *Abstracts of the 2014 ANFA Conference*, Academy of Neuroscience For Architecture, La Jolla, CA, 2014, pp.18-19. URL: [https://www.academia.edu/10346400/fMRI\\_Study\\_of\\_Architecturally-Induced-Contemplative\\_States\\_ABSTRACT\\_](https://www.academia.edu/10346400/fMRI_Study_of_Architecturally-Induced-Contemplative_States_ABSTRACT_) [accessed Dec 28, 2015]

55. A good example of the necessary type of systems thinking is made clear in Donald Foley's systems matrix. Refer to Donald Foley, "An Approach to Metropolitan Spatial Structure." In M.M. Webber et al: *Explorations into Urban Structure*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, PA, 1964.

56. Ken Wilber, *Integral Spirituality*. See also his *A Theory of Everything: An Integral Vision for Business, Politics, Science, and Spirituality*, Shambhala, Boston, 2011