

Spirituality USA *Surveying the Scene*

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Published in *Living Theology: the Intersection of Culture, Spirituality, and Theology in Asia and the Pacific*, 4-12. Edited by Jose Mario C. Francisco, S.J. Manila: Jesuit Conference of East Asia and Oceania, 2001.

Originally given as a paper presented to the JCEAO Theological Study Week, July 23-27, 2001, East Asian Pastoral Institute (EAPI), Quezon City, Philippines.

The task to articulate what “spirituality” might mean in the American context is not an easy one. America is well-known as a land of great contrasts and marked by a great degree of cultural diversity and religious pluralism, and all of these aspects carry over into our spirituality as well. Yet, I have had the opportunity for living in both East Asia (Korea) and Western Europe (mostly Italy) for an extended period of time (over a decade), and so I do believe I can trace some characteristics that describe the American context for a discussion of spirituality, even though this description itself will mirror the diversity and pluralism of American culture.

Perhaps, in contrast to Western Europe, and in common with the Philippines, by and large most Americans accept a belief in God. The French have a contemporary saying, *Si Dieu existe...*, but that is not a phrase that is bandied about much *chez nous*. Polls continue to report a nationwide weekly church attendance in the neighborhood of 40% and other polls indicate that a large majority of Americans—including the young—consider themselves to be very “spiritual,” though this “spirituality” is increasingly expressed in non-traditional ways, apart from established religions. In fact, this is an additional characteristic and challenge for theological reflection on spirituality in the American context: just where do we locate the discussion? In June I attended

our two major theological conventions (College Theology Society [CTS] and Catholic Theological Society of America [CTSA]) and there were several papers given on spirituality, including an excellent presentation by Christina Astorga on the intersection among spirituality, morality and culture in reference to the Philippine People Power Revolutions I, II, and III. Astorga's work echoes a theme one finds a bit in the American context, but more widely elsewhere, namely the connection between spirituality and social justice and liberation from oppression. Here one thinks of works such as Gustavo Gutiérrez's *We Drink from Our Own Wells: The Spiritual Journey of a People*, (Maryknoll: Orbis Press, 1984) which has had a wide influence in the United States and beyond. In Asia an example of this resonance might be found in the essays collected in Virginia Fabella, Peter K.H. Lee, and David Kwang-Sun Suh, eds., *Asian Christian Spirituality: Reclaiming Traditions*, (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1992). Works such as these also have a significant impact in the American theological academy.

At the CTSA convention I also combed the book catalogues for new titles in spirituality and one publisher (Twenty-Third Publications) had an extensive selection—listed as “Spirituality/Self-Help.” They were titles on Celtic prayers, centering prayers, books on grieving, male spirituality, feminist spirituality, solitude spirituality, several titles on healing spirituality, and a number of “how to” books on prayer. So eclecticism seems to be one mark of the contemporary American context for spirituality.

The titles I mentioned above might not seem very “traditional,” but “tradition” is another important strain in the American context. My generation and older grew up in both the pre-Vatican II and post-Vatican II Church, and so at a young age we were enculturated into a spirituality of very traditional piety: benediction, holy cards, spiritual bouquets, Marian feasts and

May-crownings, 40 Hours devotions, fish on Fridays, living Rosaries—a whole range of daily, weekly, monthly and yearly practices that told us over and over again that we were “different” (and better!) than the rest of Americans: we were Catholic. Most of these practices had largely disappeared by the time I entered the Jesuits in 1970, and those that still held to them were considered to be either too old and set in their ways, or impossibly retrograde. Their numbers continued to diminish until a strange phenomenon began to resurface in the late 1980's and early 90's: novices born after Vatican II was over but who militated for a return to many of these practices. While at the CTSA convention in Milwaukee I stayed in the room of a younger Jesuit, a recent graduate of both of our US theologates and now in doctoral studies in theology at Marquette. Except for the autographed picture of him and Ronald Reagan, the room looked like a scene out of “Going My Way”: holy cards and rosaries everywhere, a half dozen pictures of the Pope, the “My Daily Offering” taped to his bathroom mirror. I felt as if I had been caught in a time warp that had hurled me into the past—yet, I know well that this in fact is a significant part of our future.

We could call this another example of the diversity or pluralism which marks American society and the Society in America, but obviously this sort of pluralism is very paradigm-dependent and the paradigms frankly conflict with one another—often very sharply. Can strong supporters of Mother Angelica (a Carmelite nun who runs EWTN—Eternal Word Television Network, a very conservative cable TV station) on one hand, and those who are inspired by Rembert Weakland (the liberal Benedictine Archbishop of my home-town of Milwaukee who headed the US Bishops’ Pastoral on the Economy and diocesan “listening sessions” with women on abortion) really sit down comfortably together and dialogue seriously (and irenicly) about

theology, religious life, Church authority, and so on? This is a challenge not easily met, and so perhaps another mark of the contemporary American scene is a fair amount of tension over what constitutes genuine spirituality in the context of Catholic orthodoxy—in short, what counts for “Tradition” in the Church.

Like my home-town Archbishop (Weakland) I describe myself as belonging to the “radical center” and thus I find a some discomfort not only coming from the “right” but from the “left” as well. At the Graduate Theological Union (GTU), the consortium of nine seminaries of which the Jesuit School of Theology-at-Berkeley (JSTB) is a member, we have a good number of “seekers”—men and women who are lapsed Lutherans, recovering Catholics, and so on, who have come to seminary as a part of a personal spiritual journey or vision quest. Besides mainstream courses such as “Ethics and Spirituality,” “Experiments in Prayer and Meditation,” “Christian Contemplation and Action,” there are also courses on “Embracing Darkness,” “Resurrection Psychology,” “Creating Hope,” “Sacred Dance for Healing,” “Voices and Visions,” “Dreamwork,” and my personal favorite, “Animals as Spiritual Guides.” Just how does one choose good spiritual direction, canine or otherwise, from this menagerie? My question with some of these offerings is whether we have a genuine quest for faith seeking understanding or a rather circumscribed search for spiritual self-gratification?

So perhaps more than “diversity” perhaps “dualism” might be a mark of the contemporary American context. This diversity obviously poses a number of challenges of its own, and certainly we have seen much concern not just from the Vatican and the official Magisterium, but from other voices as well. One of our Lutheran colleagues at the GTU, Martha Ellen Stortz, gave as the *1998 Graduate Theological Union (GTU) Distinguished Faculty Lecture* a talk entitled

“Discerning the Spirits, Practicing the Faiths.” One of the key points Marty made was that spirituality and spiritual practices have to be grounded in a religious–faith tradition, and therefore one should just not approach spirituality and spiritual practices as if it were a religious smorgasbord in which one simply chose those items which s/he finds appealing and leave aside others. After the talk Marty was accosted by one of our GTU students who correctly divined that her personal spirituality was being criticized, and the encounter underscored for us the difficulties of trying to ground and root better so many of our students and others into our Church faith communities and their concomitant traditions.

Moving back to the radical center I would also highlight a couple of other developments in our religious cultural context. In June I attended the “Province Days” of my home Jesuit Province (Wisconsin) and we were joined by a number of our “Ignatian Associates”—men and women, including married couples, who have committed themselves for a certain period of time to one or another apostolic work of the Society of Jesus. One of the plenary addresses was given by Ron Hansen, a native of Omaha (in our Province), a well-known Catholic novelist, a professor of English at our Jesuit Santa Clara University, and a part-time Master of Divinity student at JSTB. Oddly, or not, his topic was a reflection on the apostolic priorities of the Wisconsin Province. Ron’s address I think evidences a new stage in the development of spirituality in America as we have now moved from disseminating our Jesuit charism in a sort of “top-down” approach, to a more dialogical sharing in which the accent falls more on collaboration and mutual support and inspiration. This sort of dynamic is not restricted to Jesuits alone. Much the same could be said of any number of other religious orders, especially those of women religious. I currently serve on the Board of Directors of the Sacred Heart Schools of San Francisco: four

schools in all (a girls grade school and high school and a boys grade school and high school) founded and run for decades by the Religious of the Sacred Heart. However, today only one sister works in the schools, yet I can attest that the “spirit” of Madeleine Sophie Barat and Rose Philippine Duchesne is taken extremely seriously by the lay leadership. Certainly this sort of lay-religious collaboration will grow in the future of the United States, and probably will be seen increasingly in other parts of the world as well.

A last area that might involve to some extent the American context of spirituality is what I will call “cross-fertilization”; others might use the term “syncretism” but that is such a loaded term that I believe we should use it very sparingly. By “cross-fertilization” I mean the mutual, interactive, dynamic process which occurs when different religious cultures meet—even if they be parts of the same Church. Theologian Robert Schreier terms this “inter-cultural hermeneutics,” and describes cross-cultural communication as the ability both to speak and to understand across cultural boundaries, which involves the lack of a common world shared by both the speaker and the hearer (cf. Robert Schreier, *The New Catholicity: Theology between the Global and the Local* [Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1997]). I would hold that this is simply part of the larger process of inculturation—though in this aspect the inculturation moves outward to other faith communities in the global Church. In the Asian context here is where we see some difficulties with the Vatican, e.g., Cardinal Ratzinger’s various speeches, interventions, and documents; the “cautious” and often defensive attitude struck by Cardinal Tomko and others. Much of this difficulty surfaced, albeit in often indirect ways, at the Synod for Asia (for a brief rehearsal of these discussions see my article, “Moral Theology Out of East Asia,” *Theological Studies* 61 [March 2000]: 106-121). In terms of the interplay between spirituality and inculturation I think

the problem appears to be what “counts” as falling within the legitimate range of orthodox Christianity. Vis-a-vis Asian religious culture consider the following “caveat” put forward by Cardinal Ratzinger:

two of the deepest and most fruitful prayers of Christendom; which are always leading us anew into the mighty river of the Eucharist: the *Stations of the Cross* and the *Rosary*. If nowadays we are so dangerously exposed to the attractions of Asiatic religious practices; it is surely in part because we have forgotten these prayers. (Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger with Vittorio Messori, *The Ratzinger Report: An Exclusive Interview on the State of the Church*, [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1985]: 134).

While I believe this tension probably exists more in Asia than in America, it is a challenge for us all. This theme is taken up in a number of different places by the FABC and involves what they have termed the dialogue of life—a dialogue to which all must first be “converted” before anything truly fruitful can emerge. From a methodological standpoint dialogue involves both a giving and a receiving and presumes something to teach and to learn. Dialogue therefore is a true art, but one which involves not just a process, but an antecedent conversion to the process itself, before one can become adept at this art of dialogue. To paraphrase Wittgenstein, knowing a language means not knowing just what to “say” but how to go on. In this process of “going on” I use some of the insights of the well-known Asian theologian, C.S. Song, who is on the faculty of the Pacific School of Religion at the GTU. Song points out that genuine dialogue does not necessarily happen all at once when two parties of good will sit down to talk to one another. Song identifies seven stages that each dialogue party will

most likely have to go through before reaching the point where actual effective dialogue can begin (C.S. Song, "The Seven Stages of Dialogical Conversion," Ch. 7 of his *Tell Us Our Names: Story Theology from an Asian Perspective* [Maryknoll: Orbis, 1984]: 121-141). Briefly summarized, Song suggests that this dialogue must move from a starting point of ethno or religio-centrism to the recognition that our own religious--cultural experiences are not the sum of all possible truth. Ultimately this recognition leads to the stage Song calls "Blessed Ignorance," in which the participants' conviction that they in fact do not know the total truth of the matter at hand allows for real dialogue to begin. Mistakes and miscues are bound to occur in the dialogical process and therefore patience, understanding and forgiveness are required among all dialogue parties.

This is one particular area in which I am doing some work myself, namely trying to reflect more deeply on the interplay between culture and some religious manifestations found in areas such as ethics and spirituality (I include some of my own works in the bibliography which follows). I regularly teach a course at the GTU on cross-cultural ethics in which I try to sharpen all of our dialogue skills while deepening the cross-fertilization process I've alluded to above (this course is described in my article "Through Thick And Thin: Teaching Ethics in a Cross-cultural Perspective," *Horizons* 27 [Spring 2000]: 63-80) . Since I suspect that this last theme may be taken up in some depth in our Study Week together I will conclude my own overview on that note.

Some Bibliography

Billy, Dennis J. C.Ss.R., and Donna L. Orsuto, eds. *Spirituality and Morality: Integrating Prayer and Action*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1995.

Billy is professor of moral theology at the Alphonsianum in Rome and Orsuto directs the lay center "Foyer Unitas" and teaches spirituality at the Pontifical Gregorian University.

Bretzke, James T., S.J. "The Common Good in a Cross-Cultural Perspective: Insights from the Confucian Moral Community." In *Religion, Ethics & the Common Good*, 83-105. Annual Publication of the College Theology Society, 41. Edited by James Donahue and Theresa Moser. Mystic CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1996.

Recent discussion concerning multiculturalism, pluralism, globalization of ethics and the prospects for a "common morality" all provide a challenging context for critical ethical reflection on the notions of the common good as these are found in various cultural and religious traditions. This article investigates the possibility of enriching our liberal Western notion of the common good from a cross-cultural perspective afforded by Confucianism and what might be called the Confucian notion of the "common good," even though the precise terminological equivalent is not found in the Confucian literature or philosophical tradition. An original exposition of the notion of the common good exegeted from the Confucian canon is presented and discussed in reference to the Confucian cardinal virtues, the notion of the *chün-tzu* (paradigmatic moral individual); the four cardinal virtues of *jen, yi, li, and chih*; an understanding of community as fiduciary; and the moral force of the notion of the *T'ien-ming* or Mandate of Heaven.

Bretzke served as a missionary in Korea, teaching at Sogang University in Seoul, before doing his doctorate in moral theology at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, at which institution he taught for three years before joining the faculty of the Jesuit School of Theology/Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California.

_____. "Cracking the Code: Minjung Theology as an Expression of the Holy Spirit in Korea." *Pacifica* 10 (October 1997): 319-330.

Minjung theology's development in Korea as an indigenous theology of liberation is a genuine response to the Holy Spirit in Asia's fastest growing Christian population, though not without its problematic elements and critics. This article reflects on the inculturation of minjung theology in terms of a five-stage framework suggested by the Pentecost account in Acts 2:1-42.

- _____. "Cultural Particularity and the Globalization of Ethics in the Light of Inculturation." *Pacifica* 9 (1996): 69-86.

Increased interest in the so-called "globalization of ethics" has led to a number of studies which utilize various hermeneutical and communicative theories to sketch out viable paradigms for developing a fundamental Christian ethics as a whole, as well as its various components such as moral reasoning, which together would be capable of entering into and maintaining such discourse. The accent of most of these studies falls on the universalizability of ethical discourse and scant attention has been given to the cultural *particularity* of each and every ethos and ethical system. This article briefly rehearses the principal elements of the concerns raised by the globalization of ethics and then focuses on the *particularity* of culture using insights from both cultural anthropology and inculturation. The Confucian context of Korea is employed to illustrate some of the issues raised by greater attention to cultural particularity.

- _____. "Minjung Theology and Inculturation in the Context of the History of Christianity in Korea." *East Asian Pastoral Review* 28 (1991): 108-130.

Discusses the Korean version of liberation theology, minjung theology, in the historical context of the development of Christianity in the Korean Peninsula.

- _____. "Moi Aussi [So Am I]: A Jesuit Reflection on the Catholic Church in China Today." In *With Faith We Can Move Mountains*, 65-74. Edited by Judith A. Berling. Berkeley: Asia Pacific Bridges/Graduate Theological Union, 1996.

Reflection on participation on the GTU Asia Bridges Consultation held in China in October, 1995.

- _____. "Moral Theology Out of East Asia." *Theological Studies* 61 (March 2000): 106-121.

Also digested version found in *Tinig Loyola* (Quezon City, Philippines) 2 (September 2000): 11-14; 29-29.

Review of some of the main issues, recent developments and contributions of Christian ethicists and others working in East Asia. Special attention is paid to the recent Synod on Asia.

- _____. "The *Tao* of Confucian Virtue Ethics." *International Philosophical Quarterly* 35 (1995): 25-41.

Investigates the key aspects of the Confucian virtue ethics in relation to the notions of the *chün-tzu* (Superior Person), the Five Relationships of society, the particular Confucian virtues of *jen* (benevolence) and *li* (propriety), the moral vision of the *tao* (Way), and the

understanding of the *t'ien-ming* (Mandate of Heaven). The thesis of the article is that the moral matrix provided by the web of social relationships is what allows the Confucian ethics of virtue to function well.

- _____. "The Three Bonds and Five Relationships: A Korean Root Paradigm." *Inculturation* 5 (Summer, 1990): 16-18.

Discusses the possibility of identifying the Confucian Three Bonds and Five Relationships as a cultural root paradigm in Korean society.

- _____. "Through Thick And Thin: Teaching Ethics in a Cross-cultural Perspective" *Horizons* 27 (Spring 2000): 63-80.

As the 20th century closes our universities, theological centers and even seminary settings, can no longer presume a homogeneous religious and cultural academic community among either students or professors. This fact, coupled with recent discussion concerning the globalization of ethics and the prospects for a common morality, as well as related issues such as inculturation, pluralism, and multi-culturalism all provide a challenging context for critical reflection on how religious ethics can and should be done in these universities, theological centers and seminaries. This article outlines both some of the major concerns raised in teaching ethics from cross-cultural, ecumenical, and inter-religious perspectives in the United States, as well as developing a coherent methodology which is grounded in the theological tradition of Christian ethics, but which seeks to integrate these different perspectives. As a practical example of how a concrete course might be developed for undergraduate, graduate, and seminary settings I utilize a course I have designed entitled "Cross-Cultural Christian Ethics" which I have taught regularly at the Jesuit School of Theology/Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley. The participants in these courses reflect a diverse background both theological and culturally and thus may provide a reasonable microcosm of many of our contemporary academic institutions. Critical evaluation of the course's theological and pedagogical premises, as well as discussion on the students' participation and feedback on the course, hopefully will stimulate further reflection on both the theological issues connected with doing cross-cultural ethics in the Christian theological tradition as well as aiding concrete curricular development in this area.

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Papers presented to the 3rd Asian Theological Conference, held in Korea from 3 to 5 July 1989, by authors from India, Korea, Indonesia, the Philippines, Hong Kong, and Sri Lanka.

Gula, Richard M., S.S. *The Good Life: Where Morality and Spirituality Converge*. New York: Paulist Press, 1999.

This is an excellent book for a variety of possible uses, e.g., as a companion text in moral, spirituality, and/or pastoral theology courses, in adult education, RCIA, and/or general enrichment reading on how one could consider and grow in the life of a committed Christian disciple. Gula grounds and develops his work in Scripture and the rich tradition of moral theology, and draws as well on the best of contemporary work in the field.

Gula is professor of Moral Theology at the Franciscan School of Theology/Graduate Theological Union.

Gutiérrez, Gustavo. *We Drink from Our Own Wells: The Spiritual Journey of a People*. Maryknoll: Orbis Press, 1984.

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Most of the essays in this book have been previously published as articles in various journals. Reviewed by James Keating in *Theological Studies* 57 (1996): 784-785.

O'Keefe teaches moral theology at the St. Meinrad School of Theology.

Schreier, Robert. *The New Catholicity: Theology between the Global and the Local*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1997.

This book is a revised edition of lectures given at the University of Frankfurt in 1995. See also his first chapter, "Globalization and the Contexts of Theology" for some excellent reflections on the process of globalization involved in contemporary theologies.

Song, C.S. "The Seven Stages of Dialogical Conversion," Ch. 7 of his *Tell Us Our Names: Story Theology from an Asian Perspective*. Maryknoll: Orbis, 1984: 121-141.

Song is Professor of Theology and Asian Cultures at the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, California.

Spohn, William C. "The Need for Roots and Wings: Spirituality and Christian Ethics." *Theology Digest* 47 (Winter 2000): 327-340.

Fifth annual Henri de Lubac Lecture in Historical Theology delivered at St. Louis University 21 March 2000.

Christians cannot be spiritual without being religious. To be spiritual one needs the roots of religious tradition and community, while to be religious in a Christian way one needs the wings of committed spiritual practices.

Spohn is professor of Christian ethics at Santa Clara University.

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Stortz, Martha Ellen. "Discerning the Spirits, Practicing the Faiths." *1998 Graduate Theological Union (GTU) Distinguished Faculty Lecture*. Berkeley, CA.

Stortz is professor of historical theology and Christian ethics at the Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary and the Graduate Theological Union (GTU) in Berkeley, California.