

# Towards A New Enlightenment This Time - Global, Spiritual and Comprehensive

**Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios**

In less than seven years from now a new century is to dawn upon us. Besides, on that same day, i.e., midnight of December 31, 1999, a new millennium will also burst in on us. At least for those many millions who have come to adopt the secularized European Christian Gregorian Calendar, which happens to be more accurate than others.

As we come together for the centenary celebrations of the Parliament of World Religions held here in Chicago in 1893, I sense a responsibility on our part, to reflect on what we should do in the next six years or so, in order to better prepare ourselves, as a human race, to enter and make a new beginning in the new century and the new millennium. In that sense we are assembled here at the end of the millennium, as Priests and Prophets of the New Humanity, to reflect, to pray, to give thanks together, for the centuries and millennia that the human race has traversed, and to envision the future in a new way. Let us begin our task with the classical Vedic invocation:

*Asato ma sad gamaya*

*Tamaso ma jyotir gamaya*

*Mrtyor ma amrtam gamaya*

*Om shanti ! shanti ! !shanti !*

(From untruth to the True, lead us

From darkness to Light, lead us

From death to the Undying, lead us

Om Peace, Peace, Peace!)

Our human race now lives in the untrue, caught in the darkness of evil, dying and dealing death to each other.

But not totally. Even in the midst of our untruth, the True is present in our souls, mostly as a yearning and a hankering after, but often as a radiant reality shining through the untrue, with its own light. We dwell in the darkness of cruelty and violence, of war and rape, of greed and lust of dishonesty and deception, but the light in our souls has not yet been totally put out, even by our professed unbelief and arrogant denial of the transcendent. Our hearts still rejoice whenever and wherever there is a glimmer of the life-giving light of goodness, in the mother's all-giving love, in the cup of cold water given to the thirsty, in the sage's saintly life, in the justice granted to the victims of oppression, in the liberation of the enslaved.

We are dying and afraid of dying; but yet we commend the heroic defiance of death, and admire the act of laying down one's life for the sake of others. We still refuse to give the last word to death, who seeks to rule over all. We live in a world where gross untruth, the darkness of evil, and death in many forms gnawing away at the entrails of our souls, are all there powerfully and unmistakably present, even seeming to grow stronger day by day; yet they have not managed to take over completely. The true light still shines in the darkness; truth prevails over untruth in the long run; the good, which seems sometimes to have been overcome by evil, rises again as victor; and life triumphs even when stung by death.

It is that true light which we should seek, in and through our various religions, on behalf of all humankind, in order that it may illumine us more completely and help dispel the enveloping darkness. I believe seeking that illumination is the central task of a Parliament of World Religions, today, as it was a hundred years ago, and will be a hundred years hence. And it is about seeking that light in a new way, about that yearning for a new *illumination*, about striving together for a new Enlightenment, that I wish to speak today.

### **1. What happened Here a Hundred Years Ago?**

As everyone knows, the Parliament of World Religions in Chicago

(1893) was part of a much larger show, one episode in a big exhibition. On the 400th anniversary of Christopher Columbus' "discovery" of America, the main purpose of the Columbian World Exposition in Chicago was to display proudly to the world the recent achievements of European technology on American soil, and to say to the world that the Manifest Destiny of America was to lead that world into the technological paradise.

The Parliament of World Religions was largely a decoration to the main show, though there were some in the organising committee of the Columbian Exposition who felt that "religion" had to find some kind of a place in such an important exhibition of the achievements of human creativity. The liberals in the Committee did not want the Protestant Fundamentalists or the Catholic new immigrants of America to run the religion part of the show. The best solution to transcend the problems both of maintaining "separation of Church and State", and of avoiding Fundamentalist domination of the Religion part of the Columbian Exposition, was to make it a Parliament of World Religions. For that very reason the Christian churches of America took little notice of the Parliament. And generally speaking they have today little or no memory of what happened here a hundred years ago.

Let us take a quick look at the America which organised the Columbian Exposition and the Parliament of World Religions in the last decade of the 19th century.

1848 was the watershed year for America and American civilisation as a global phenomenon. In that year the Spanish were finally defeated; California and New Mexico were annexed; the Pacific frontier was opened up; the 'Manifest Destiny' of America as Leader of the World became clear. America was taking over from Europe the White Man's Burden of shaping the world and dominating it. Remember that 1848 was the year of the Communist Manifesto of Marx and Engels. Europe itself was torn asunder by the riots of 1848 in Germany, France, Austria and Italy. For those

with vision it was clear that America had to be Number One in the world, even though European nations like France, England and the Netherlands were quickly taking over the global empire from Spain and Portugal and by consolidating their own world empires becoming temporarily exceedingly powerful.

America, a powerful confederation of some 40 states, was the nation built by the European Enlightenment of the 18th and 19th centuries. America had thrown off the British yoke without any great effort. The Spanish had been brought to heel. The native peoples of the continent had been either decimated or marginalized; the Blacks had neither voice nor power; the Whites were the rulers of the land, the rest being merely hewers of stone and drawers of water. There was little resistance to the Industrial Culture or to the Enlightenment Ideology of the dominant group. Even agriculture was being fast mechanised and industrialised; the vitality of the nation as it emerged out of the Civil War was simply prodigious. Slavery was abolished, but the slaves were still there, along with the machines, to power industrial and agricultural production.

The 1870's saw a striking spate of creative innovations and ingenious inventions, accompanied by enormous finds of mineral deposits and smelting techniques. Rich silver deposits in Nevada and Montana, big increase in lead production in Missouri and Illinois, the development of the wonder metal called Aluminium (1887), Portland Cement (1870s), Steel (1875). Railways and the Telegraph came in 1866; the typewriter in 1873; telephones in 1876, and finally electricity, the most striking expression of power, in 1878. All this was quite new even at the Columbian Exposition of 1893, only 15 years later. And the real bid at that Exposition was to put all this new technological glitter into the global market.

Let me repeat: The main exhibit at the Columbian Exposition was Science-Technology, not Religion. The Parliament of World Religions had little lasting impact. The New Industrial Culture, based

on modern science-technology, with its secular assumption and global market aspirations, with little regard for the meaning of human existence or for the transcendent foundation of that existence, was the central reality in Chicago a hundred years ago. And so it is in our world today, a hundred years later. It was not Religion, but the Technological Paradise, that the salesmen of the Industrial Culture were trying to sell to the world. And the world has bought it, and wants more of it.

Religion was very marginal in that Exposition. It has become even more marginalised during the ensuing hundred years, in the whole world. This is the issue to which I wish to address myself. In order to do so I must take a closer look at what our civilisation has done to the whole concept of religions. And I must look also at the foundational assumptions of that civilisation. This alone can show us the true long term goals of inter-religious dialogue and collaboration.

## **2. The Nature of the Secular Culture**

In the Europe of the High Middle Ages, when the Roman Catholic Church reigned supreme, the religious and the secular were just two modes of being religious, not two distinct compartments of society; except that the words ‘religious’ and ‘secular’ did not have their present sense. According to classical and medieval use, *religious* meant ‘monastic’ or bound to a ‘rule of life’, while *secular* meant what was outside the monastery. The noun ‘religion’ was seldom used. Whenever somebody occasionally said “he has taken to religion”, it meant that he had joined the monastery, not that he changed from unbeliever to believer in the sense we give those words today. Medieval Christendom made no distinction between believer, but did make the distinction between Christian and ‘Heathen’. Everything in Christendom was Christian, including the ‘saeculum’ or the world of everyday life outside the monastery. Religion in our sense was the pervasive, non-pluralistic Catholic faith, which was no matter of personal or individual choice, not a private affair, but

the faith of the community. The community could have contained individual dissenters, but such dissenters were neither approved nor went without reprimand. The Western Church and its religion, with Rome at the centre, was the overarching authority over king and citizen, over the monastically religious and over the so-called secular outside. There was no separate compartment of life called the religious. Everything was religious, until the European Enlightenment of the 18th and 19th centuries which broke them apart into secular and religious new way, so that the secular was totally free from religion..

Christian Europe of the High Middle Ages had another noticeably distinctive quality. It neglected what modern civilization takes for granted — the seemingly obvious possibility that human beings, by the exercise of their reason, could gain mastery over nature. They believed the Augustinian-Anselmic principle that only by illumination through grace by faith, could the human intellect come into its own. *Credo ut inelligam* = “I believe that I may understand”. Only the Church and the Christian believer understand; the heathen is all mistaken in what he thinks he understands. Human beings depend on God’s illumination for their understanding of reality. This was medieval belief, which kept them from developing modern science and technology.

It seems that Sir Isaac Newton, one of the founders of modern science, set out on his study of *Optics* in order to understand how the light of *illuminatio* works.

The secular civilisation in which all of us now participate, whether we are Christians or Muslims, Hindus or Buddhists, Jains or Jews, Taoists or Secularists, Sikhs or Shintos, Zoroastrians or People of the Primal Vision, has risen as a reaction to these two features of European Christendom. We are co-opted into that secular civilisation by our educational system, by our healing system, by our economics and other social sciences, by the institutions of our civic polity, by

our public media, all of which are not only secular in their foundational assumptions, but also actively promote secularism as an ideological religion. By secularism I mean that ideology, which believes that the world open to our senses and our instruments is the only world that exists, and that meaning has to be found in that universe without reference to anything outside of or transcending our field of sense-perception and our rational mind. It is that ideology which makes religion supposedly a matter of personal choice, and thus a compartment of life to be banished from public life and pushed into the margin.

The Protestant Reformation of the 16th century was the first major break with that mono-religious, monolithic tradition of Medieval Christendom. After the Reformation, Rome was no longer at the centre. The new bourgeois individual, particularly if he was propertied, was beginning to assert his authority over against the authority of the Church; but only if he could lean on another authority, the authority of the Christian Scriptures.

Before that, the Second European Renaissance (the First European Renaissance was the Carolingian or Charlemagne's Renaissance of the 8th and 9th centuries, which created Christendom in the first place) had already in the 13th and 14th centuries provided Europe with an alternate structure of authority to the Christian Church - namely the classical pagan wisdom of the Greeks like Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics. The West recovered it from the Arab culture which had taken over from the Eastern Christians. This alternate structure of loyalty had uneasily co-existed with Church Authority, and there was no rupture between the religious and the secular, partly because of the learned and cultivated Renaissance Popes who were able to integrate classical scholarship as well as worldly wit, pomp, power and pleasure-seeking into the religious leadership. Even the Protestant Reformation which revolted against Papal authority did not directly lead to a rupture between the secular and the religious.

That rupture came only with the European Enlightenment of 18th and 19th centuries. Now all religious authority was repudiated, including that of the Christian Scriptures. Human beings claimed to have come of age. At least propertied individuals among them; for Adulthood and Enlightenment or *Muendigkeit* and *Aufklaerung* were only for the economically independent and educated classes - the *Gebildete Staende*. At least for these classes there is no external authority or Master. Human Knowledge is freed from its bondage to faith. Human Reason is now Autonomous, not depending on God or Religion. You no longer had to believe in order to understand, nor did you have to ask anyone's permission to take over the world and transform it according to your own desires. God, grace, revelation and so on were all irrelevant and superfluous. The human reason, unaided by any external authority, was able on its own, to reflect on experience by the methods of science and to discover and enunciate the truth in the form of scientific propositions, which could be publicly tested time and again. Only in such a context could science/technology have triumphed the way it did, and proceeded to build the technological paradise which was on display in Chicago a hundred years ago.

By the European Enlightenment I mean that peculiar intellectual fever that spread in Europe in the 18th century which gave to the rising middle class the conviction that they could master the whole of reality by the human reason without any references or God or to the Transcendent.

The great first manifestation of the Spirit of the European Enlightenment was the French Revolution of 1789, which totally and publicly repudiated God, religion and religious authority; Its two great prevailing manifestations today are (a) Western Liberal Humanism-Secularism, and (b) Western Marxism-Socialism. Both systems idealise modern science and depend on it alone, as the principal way to vision and meaning. Both are basically secular in their outlook, and have the greatest confidence in the autonomy of



human reason and will. Both regard religion as something which belongs to the childhood of humanity. Both say: “In science we trust”. What is this science which powers these ideologies?

The Empirical Aristotelianism of Bacon had combined with the logical Platonism of Descartes, to create modern science, which now takes over the structure of authority from faith, theology and philosophy. A new “saeculum” comes into being, a world subject to human reason and human technological manipulation. In that the ruling authority is the secular-scientific ideology, which throws into the margin not only religion, but also art and literature, poetry and philosophy. Religion was allotted a corner in the global Columbian Exposition, as a private affair of individual choice, nothing to do with the common life, nothing to do with education, healing, political economy or public media. It may serve marginally as a sales pitch, or as a way of keeping the masses drugged.

### **3. The Question before this Parliament**

May I ask you, leaders and representatives of the World’s Religions, is that the role you want to accept? Sitting in the margins of human existence, are we going to go on croaking together like frogs, making a big noise about Peace, Justice and the Environment? Or alternatively, is the role of the World Religions simply chanting pious hymns and peddling a cheap spirituality that produces instant inner peace and tranquility through meditation?

What indeed are the alternatives open to us as members of the human race and as adherents of the World Religions today?

There is one alternative which seems to attract many people today - that of recreating a mono-religious state, where the state would be run according to the dictates of one particular religion, namely the religion of the majority, be it some form of Islam or Christianity or Hinduism. This will be more or less like going back to Medieval Christendom before it broke up, as a model. I cannot honestly say that an Islamic or Hindu state would be necessarily worse than many

of the states that we have today - states which deny justice to the poor, which let political crimes go unpunished, which deliberately deceive and oppress its own peoples, which use the army and the police to terrorise its own people, states in which business magnates, politicians and bureaucrats appropriate for themselves most of the wealth created by the hard work of the people. I do not reject the mono-religious state just like that, but I see two major reasons why I cannot accept that model even in the form of a Christian State, which fortunately does not exist outside the Vatican.

My two reasons for not accepting the mono-religious model are very simple. First, I regard human freedom as a sufficiently high value, as not to let me accept living under a state which forces me or any one else into a particular faith against his or her will. Enforced virtue ceases to be virtue. Enforced religion is a travesty of true religion. Second, if in one country the majority religion oppresses and persecutes the minority religions, this is an invitation to other states where those minorities are in a majority to engage in tit for tat. For example, when fanatic Hindus demolished the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, India, governments of many Islamic states I know had to use the utmost restraint against their own people to keep them from retaliating by destruction of Hindu temples; they did not all always succeed. But I do not want a world in which that kind of mad retaliation goes on. It is a simple fact that if the majority community in any state oppresses its religious minorities, in another state innocent members of that oppressing community will have to suffer. This is not just and cannot be accepted.

What is the other alternative? In my country intellectuals never cease from croaking about the virtues of the 'secular state'; they, in fact, go on to make up a fake ideology called 'secularism' as the panacea for all problems of inter-religious conflict. In India, both the majority of intellectuals and the Congress Party along with Leftist parties, delight in casting away all known meanings of the word "secularism" and to seek to endow it with a special Indian meaning

which the word cannot hold. To me secularism means an ideology which asserts that the world open to our senses is the only world that matters or even exists, and that meaning for life is to be sought without recourse to religion or revelation. It is the prevailing ideology of the civilisation created by the European Enlightenment, and I simply will not allow the state to stuff that ideology down my throat. “The secular state”, also a product of the European Enlightenment, is a concept that I can live with, but with which I cannot be satisfied. Why? Its fundamental principle is professed to be the “separation of Religion and State”. In practice it becomes much more. It means also the elimination of religion from education and healing, two areas of human existence with which religion should be deeply concerned. It means invoking the name of God in a state-related public ceremony becoming an offence. It means imposing a godless ideology on the culture itself. It means driving out religion, which should be at the centre of human life, to the periphery and the margin.

In my own country, which claims to be a “secular” democracy, this principle of separation of religion and state has become a farce and a fiction. Vote-banks and the choice of electoral candidates are still largely based on religion and caste. The President of India is seldom chosen without a lot of consideration of the religious community to which the candidate belongs. Strategic military posts and civil jobs are kept away from certain religious communities, Educational concessions and job reservations available to members of certain scheduled castes cease to be available, the moment they become Muslim or Christian. I think that it can be held that “separation of religion and state” does not work in most cases; religion continues to be a major factor in political decisions in far too many states. Nowhere is the state really secular, whether in France or in America.

I think the time has come for us to reject both related concepts - the secular state and the separation of religion and state. We should replace these with the alternate concepts of “democratic pluralism

in the polity” and “right relation between religion and state”. I wish I had time to develop these two ideas at some length; but that would detract from my main point, to which I now proceed. That point is about an enlightened human culture, and only indirectly about the polity.

#### **4. Towards a New Enlightenment.**

Enlightenment is a concept to which the Indian tradition lays a special claim, though by no means it is India’s monopoly. It belongs to all traditions, but Buddhism made that concept central. *Buddha* literally means the Enlightened One. The word for Enlightenment as a noun would be *bodhi*, *sambodhi*, *samyagsambodhi*, or *prabudhhata*. It is not a concept, but a state of being and consciousness, or perhaps a state of being beyond being and consciousness.

There are some features common to both Buddhist Enlightenment and European Enlightenment. Both are reactions against misuse of authority by the dominant religion - Brahmanism in India and Christianity in Europe. Both repudiated not only clerical and religious authority, but also the authority of the accepted scriptures, the Vedas and Upanishads in India, the Bible in Europe. Both appealed to the human being to stand up in defiance of authority, and to think and act for oneself. Both were exhortations to a new understanding of the nature of reality, and to a new approach to dealing with it and with the problems of human knowing and existing. Both overthrew the prevailing notions about God and soul and proposed autonomy of the human person - in Europe, an autonomy centered in the individual reason, in Buddhism on the Buddha-nature of all reality. Both were regarded as godless by their opponents and by the established order which they dared to defy. Both were opposed to ritual and cult and dogmatic theology, though in fact they soon developed their own substitutes. Both sprang from deep socio-economic changes, from the 18th century rise of the power of the

bourgeoisie and the Industrial culture in Europe, and in the case of India, from the gigantic immigration of new races and peoples into the Indo-Gangetic valley in the 6th century BC and the consequent urbanization of the region.

That is indeed a great deal of commonality to reckon with, between the two Enlightenments; but their specificities are even more relevant.

The first and most significant difference is that the Buddhist Enlightenment provides a trans-sensual and trans-conceptual Vision of the Infinite Whole which puts everything inside that Whole in the right perspective, transcending the subject-object dichotomy and experiencing the Oneness and the all-inclusiveness, which unites the seer, the vision and the light, of that Single Reality. The European Enlightenment, on the other hand, relies on the senses and discursive conceptual thought for its vision, is directed to the part as finite and distinct from other parts (its vision of the whole is always one made up of parts), and keeps the subject outside of and separate from what it sees as object.

The Buddhist Enlightenment heals and transforms the person, putting an end to suffering and desire, generates a sense of co-being, compassion and friendship for all reality, and makes oneself unpretentious, transparently humble and non-domineering, capable only of transmitting peace, joy and meaning to others. The European Enlightenment gives knowledge-derived power over the object and impels the desire to possess and manipulate and dominate. It also heals and liberates, from ignorance and ill health, from unnecessary fear and from a great deal of superstition and untruth. It reveals much that remained previously hidden, and delights the senses. It gives power to produce goods, both those that are necessary for humans, and much more that is not only not necessary, but often becomes anti-human and damaging to all life. It helps war and violence to become more sophisticatedly destructive.

There are so many positive elements in the European Enlightenment (EE) for which we have to be thankful. It is not hard to imagine what a miserable place our earth could have been, if the EE had not happened. Humanity would have been disintegrating through ignorance and squalor, through plague and pestilence, through disease and natural disasters, through starvation and epidemic. The EE has given to us modern science and technology, the institutions of democratic polity, systems of education, healing, information-gathering, transport and communication, without all of which 6 billion people could not have lived on this planet. At the end of this millennium let us give thanks for what is good in the European Enlightenment, perhaps the most significant development of this millennium.

But that does not mean that we as the human race can continue to live on this planet by the light of the European Enlightenment alone. For it obscures more than it reveals - like bright sunlight that shuts out the night sky with its myriads of stars and millions of galaxies. If we lived 24 hours a day by the sunlight, who would know that the reality that the sunlight reveals is only a billionth part of the gigantic universe. What we see so clearly by the sunlight of modern science makes us blind to the mighty mystery that lies behind and beyond what we see and hear.

### **5. A Triple Orientation for Inter-Religious Dialogue**

At the close of our millennium let us seek to give inter-religious dialogue a triple orientation. Other goals and purposes of such dialogue may continue to operate. But these three goals that I propose need to become central. These are three aspects of what I regard as a New Enlightenment (NE), which starts with the religions in dialogue with science and philosophy, and spreads in the whole global human culture.

The first is that all religions seek inner renewal together so that each religion will be oriented to the welfare and redemption of the

whole of humanity, and not just to the interests of its own adherents. Here we need to help each other, calling attention lovingly to each other's parochialisms and exclusivistic or self-aggrandising tendencies. This means religions ceasing to attack, caricature and fight each other. The great principle of Ashoka's (295-232 BCE) Rock Edict, namely that any religion which could advance itself only by attacking other religions did not have the right to exist, has to come back into our practice.

What is more, we should lovingly help each other to correct ourselves by telling and being told what we are doing wrong to each other, not behind each other's backs, but straightforwardly and lovingly, face to face. A distinguished Muslim leader was telling me the other day that because he dared to point out, during an inter-religious dialogue organised by a Christian ecumenical body, some of the arrogant and patently non-Christian ways in which Christians had attacked and caricatured Islam, he had become *persona non grata* to that ecumenical body. If we cannot patiently listen to such criticism about our own religion, we are not equipped to enter into inter-religious dialogue at all. We have not really entered into deep inter-religious dialogue, until we reach the stage where we can lovingly and patiently correct each other and ourselves be corrected.

The second orientation that I regard as integral to genuine inter-religious dialogue is the commitment to the unity and welfare of humanity. I believe this is fully possible, but rarely practised. To me it means that without necessarily weakening my commitment to my own religion, I should work (not just talk) with people of other religions and with secular people, in order-

to eliminate all forms of social injustice and corruption, such as bribery, smuggling, hoarding and black-marketing, nepotism, unfair political, social, and economic or cultural practices;

to prevent as well as resolve conflicts among nations and communities on a just basis and by peaceful means;

to promote good education, good health, good life-environment and unhindered communication for all;

to ensure fair and equitable distribution of the globe's wealth and resources, and to secure fair and just terms of trade for all;

to advance responsible and democratic exercise of power within and among all nations;

to make it possible for the feminine half of humanity to exercise their rightful role in social-political, economic and cultural activity;

to eliminate war and the weapons trade as well as militarism and terrorism in general;

to liberate research in science and technology from its present enslavement to the interests of war and profit and empire building;

to ban effectively all research, manufacture, trading, stockpiling, testing and use of all weapons of mass destruction, especially nuclear, chemical, climatological, and biological weapons and delivery systems;

to provide for proper care and rehabilitation of all victims of natural catastrophes, of addiction to tobacco, alcohol and drugs, of famines, of human cruelty, injustice and neglect;

to provide inspiring models of self-sacrificing goodness and ennobling compassion;

to check the alarming growth of violence and promiscuity in society by providing healthy, cultured and sane entertainment, especially in the public media, which does not exalt violence as a desirable expression of power or sex as the main source of pleasure;

to find ways and means of bringing the growing power of national and transnational corporations under democratic international control, in order to enlist that power for the implementation of the above-mentioned objectives;



to pioneer in the creation of internationally democratic structures of global legislation, adjudication and executive power, with a healthy balance of central and decentralised exercise of political- economic and social-cultural power; and to renew creativity in all religions in order to make them true sources of life, light and meaning to all.

Pardon me for the length of that list. It is still far from exhaustive. Since the purpose is to demarcate a point of orientation in the horizon of humanity in the next millennium, this short list will do, to indicate its general nature.

The implementation of these objectives calls for enormous resources and a vast array of institutions of inter-religious collaboration. I regard a commitment to these objectives an integral part of the New Enlightenment we need.

Now to the third and final point of orientation for inter-religious dialogue and co-operation, by no means an easy point to delineate in a short speech. This is a New Enlightenment which takes the best from both the Buddhist or Classical Enlightenment and the European Enlightenment.

The European Enlightenment, unlike the Buddhist Enlightenment, was not primarily an experience of the individual, but of the whole of society, which as a result of it changed its entire perspective on reality at least among the educated classes. It was a social movement that spread like wildfire in Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries, and still continues to spread wherever the educational, medical, political-economic, social-cultural values and institutions of the EE are accepted by the elite, which means nearly all countries of our planet.

We want the same to happen for the New Enlightenment which we seek. It may begin with a few pioneering individuals, as was also the case for the EE, but it must eventually become a powerful movement that sweeps through our planet. It must be global, spiritual and comprehensive.

On the one hand, unlike the EE, it will be based on the perception of reality opening up to us in the religious experience of various cultures, and not on the mistaken assumptions of the European Enlightenment about humans having attained maturity already and about human autonomy being independent of the Transcendent Whole. It is that perception which enables us to question radically the prevailing secular perception of reality which ignores the Transcendent. And that radical questioning, impelled by the deep-going religious perception of reality, will be the central thrust of the New Enlightenment or NE. This will help humanity to cast aside the erroneous secular perception of reality, in which we as perceiving subjects stand, as it were, outside the world we seek to know and manipulate and in which there are only two realities: the perceiving and manipulating human subjects, and the perceived “objective” world.

The New Enlightenment will give us a new perception of reality in which Reality is three-in-one : first, the Transcendent Source and Foundation of all being, call it Allah, God, Brahman, Tao or Buddha-nature; second, the universe as the manifest reality which comes from the Transcendent Unmanifest, and is totally contingent on it; and third this strange human entity which participates in both the Manifest and the Unmanifest, and has this specific and unique double mediatorial task of manifesting the Transcendent in the Universe and leading the Universe to the Transcendent.

In this alternative perception of reality, the centrality of humanity will not, as in the secular perception, be of a domineering nature, but will be entirely mediatorial, i.e. manifesting wisdom, power, glory, beauty, goodness and love, not humanity’s own, but wholly dependent upon and derived from the Transcendent, as well as embodying in ourselves the whole universe as we offer it up along with our own living selves to the Transcendent in thankful adoration. In this perception of reality, science and technology will still have their proper role of manifesting God’s power and wisdom, but will

not be the private tools of humanity to conquer, possess and dominate the universe.

Such a perception of reality will have earth-shaking consequences. To mention a few, education will not be oriented to the running of the machinery of economic production, but will be a genuine search for meaning and fulfillment for a mediatorial humanity which can never exist or be fulfilled without the Transcendent or without some kind of universe, which universe in turn finds its fulfillment only in the liberation and fulfillment of humanity in the Transcendent.

Its consequences in medicine and healing would be enormous and radically transforming. Diagnosis will no longer be in terms of defects in part of a mechanism called the human body, but in terms of arrhythmias in the functioning of person and society. And therapies will be more human and spiritual, directly related to the Transcendent as well as to the social and physical environment.

In the NE's perception of reality, economics and all social sciences would be basically transformed - away from the focus on commodities and closer to the right relations of humans among themselves, to the environment and to the Transcendent. After all, that is what economics literally means: the science and art of managing and correcting human *oikeia* or inhabitation of the universe. Economics should be primarily about human relations and only secondarily about money and commodities. A commodity-centered economics is a major defect of EE thinking.

In the NE, we will have a totally new concept of the function of the state, not as a sovereign power, but as an enabler of the local community; not as a dividing boundary, but as a unit in a global community. In the NE state, no one will speak of "separation between religion and state", but only about the "right and democratic relation of a pluralist state to religions inside and outside". In such a state, religion will no longer be on the margin; constantly renewed, the religions will vie with each other in serving the whole community in

spiritual and moral creativity. In such a state no one will think or speak of “foreigners and aliens” but only of “neighbours and friends”. In the NE state, politics will not be for opportunists and careerists, but for sages, for men and women of wisdom and maturity.

### **Conclusion**

We have to recover the classical enlightenment, The *samyagsambodhi* of all ancient traditions. We must use that perception to go beyond the European Enlightenment and its false assumptions. We must liberate and redirect science/technology to nobler human ends. We must seek a New Enlightenment in which the Transcendent is at the centre, and the whole universe and the whole of global humanity are also at the centre of our concern. Then only can the intent of the invocation with which we began be fulfilled for society as well as for individuals: from the untrue to the True, from infernal darkness to Light Celestial, from death to the Eternal and the Undying.

Nothing less can be the correct orientation for inter-religious dialogue in the coming years.