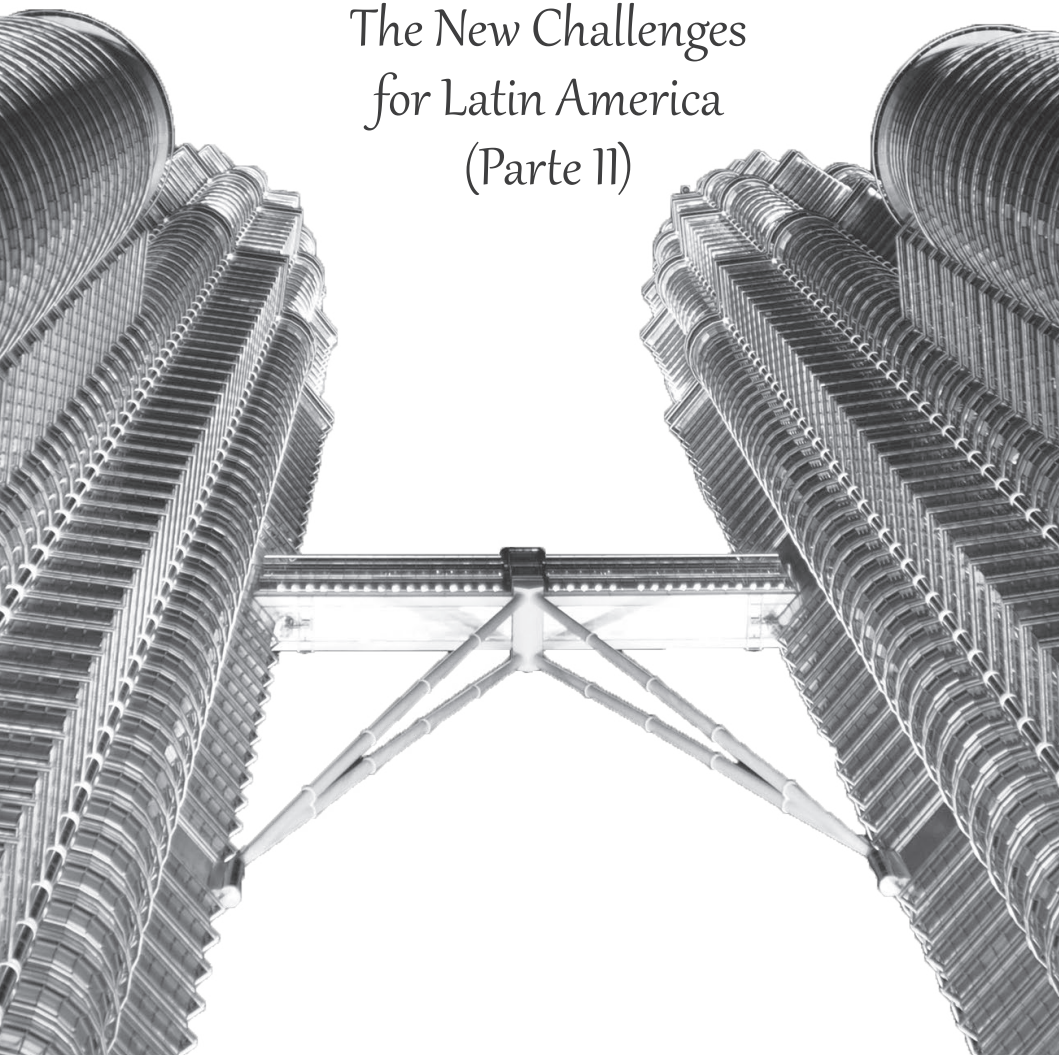




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*The New Challenges
for Latin America
(Parte II)*



Spiritual humanism in the age of cultural diversity and religious pluralism (an abstract)

Tu Weiming

The idea of the Axial-Age Civilizations in the scholarly community symbolizes the independent emergence of Greek, Judaic, Hindu, Chinese, and other major historical traditions in an unprecedented epoch of human consciousness and reflexivity. Whether we characterize it as a “transcendental breakthrough” or as the advent of a “second-order thinking,” it has been a continuous source of inspiration for virtually all major intellectual developments in human history. Arguably, we are now self-consciously entering into a New Axial Age. Salient features of such a sense of newness include ecological consciousness, feminist sensitivity, cultural diversity, religious pluralism, world governance, and global citizenship.

I have stated on a number of occasions that the most powerful and persuasive ideology in the world in more than a century has been the “Enlightenment mentality” as a cultural movement as well as a yet to be finished project of the modern West. Both socialism and capitalism grew out of this mentality. Market economy, democratic polity, civil society, multinational corporations, research universities, the military and industrial complexes have been its institutional outcomes. More significantly perhaps are the universal or at least universalizable values that it has engendered such as liberty, equality, justice, human rights, due process of law, and dignity of the individual.

336 Ironically, some of the most brilliant reflective minds in the global community, especially North America, Latin America, and West Europe, in the last fifty years or so have been thorough and persistent critics of the unintended negative consequences of westernization, modernization, and globalization. They have all been inseparably intertwined with, if not directly resulted from, the “Enlightenment mentality.” These negative features include limited and limiting anthropocentrism, unbridled possessive individualism, the Faustian drive to learn, to master, and to subdue, human aggressiveness toward other forms of life and nature in general, and self-interested instrumental rationality. In the 21st century, the fear of the viability of the human species has been greatly intensified. Manmade disasters such as the climate change, air and water pollution, depletion of natural resources, the threat of nuclear annihilation, financial crisis, wars, genocide, terrorism, food se-

curity, and disease compel us to recognize with increasing clarity that the more we are knowledgeable of what must be done to make the world safe, the more we are aware of our inability to make the necessary steps individually and collectively to attain the desired goal. While the rhetoric that we are all victims of this lifeboat (the Blue Planet) is widely understood and appreciated, rarely is there any coordinated and sustained international effort to develop effective measures to deal with the issue. On the contrary, any serious attempt to think globally on the gravity of the situation is likely to meet with ridicule, contempt, or humiliating failure. Disfunctioning international and domestic institutions, entrenched bureaucracies, failed states, and ingrained habits of the heart are so overwhelming that we are

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virtually immobilized to take any positive steps to change the status quo.

Against this background, I would like to share my tentative thoughts on the vital importance of spiritual humanism as a new mode of thinking which begins to merge in Cultural China and Confucian East Asia and hopefully, through intercivilizational dialogue, it will spread to the Asia-Pacific Region, the West and the rest, and eventually the global community. You are invited to take an active part in this joint intellectual and spiritual venture because unless we can transcend the ethnic, linguistic, territorial, cultural, and religious constraints, this proposed spiritual humanism cannot become a dynamic and transformative force for human survival and flourishing. Paradoxically, this potentially ecumenical and cosmopolitan spirit

of the time cannot be a form of abstract universalism. Of course, nor can it be any kind of close particularism. Rather, it must take globally significant “local knowledge” as an approach so that “concrete humanity “can be fully realized in the context of cultural diversity and religious pluralism. The idea of “enabling constraints,” for instance, regarding all our primordial ties—ethnicity, gender, age, language, class, place, faith, and so forth not merely as “constraints” but also as “enabling vehicles and forces for self-actualization, is worth exploration and in-depth study.

338 Strategically, since my participation in the “Group of Eminent Persons” appointed by Kofi Annan to facilitate the UN Year of the Dialogue among Civilizations in 2001, I have been in collaboration with UNESCO, and more recently with the Alliance of Civilizations to work toward the advent of a “dialogical civilization” based on tolerance (“Do not do unto others, what you would not want other to do unto you”), recognition (the acceptance of the other not as a threat but as a potential partner), respect, mutual reference, mutual learning, and celebration of difference. I was commissioned to draft the parameters of cultural diversity for the UNESCO in 2008. For the last decade or so, I have shared my ideas about spiritual humanism in Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai, Vienna, Athens, and Beijing. I am happy to note that Bakova and Hans d’Oville promoted the idea of humanism at the International Arts Festival in Shanghai in 2012 and 2013. The UN High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations, the Honorable Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser has articulated a similar line of thinking in Beijing

and Athens. This, in my considered opinion, is in perfect accord with the value-orientation of the Global Moderation Movement Foundation.

It is painfully difficult but categorically imperative in our age to embody ideas and practices of cultural diversity and religious pluralism in our diplomacy, domestic politics, economic system, social organization, cultural institution, and ordinary daily life. The art of living the rich and varied life in contemporary society requires that we live up to the minimum standards of an economic man (“a rational animal critically aware of its self-interest and motivated by the desire to maximizing its profit in a free market adjudicated by law”). Such a man recognizes the values of freedom, rationality, rights, legality, and dignity of the individual. However, no society can survive with only the mentality of the economic man in charge. We need also learn to be a cultural and ecological person. Values, deeply rooted in Islam, Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, Judaism, Greek philosophy, and indigenous traditions, such as justice, sympathy, compassion, responsibility, civility, social harmony, truth, and beauty are essential for human being to rise about their economic interest to embrace the salvific power of cultural and ecology.

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We choose to become Christians, Muslims, and Buddhists, but we have to learn to be fully human before we cultivate our religious sensitivity and commit ourselves to faith communities. The language of global citizenship must be added to our chosen religious languages. I venture to suggest that the language of global citizenship in the 21st

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century is the language of spiritual humanism. It is significantly different from, if not sharply contrasted with, secular humanism as manifested in the Enlightenment mentality of the modern West. As we begin to move beyond the “Secular Age,” the New Axial Age celebrates the human spirit, a spirit informed by ecological consciousness, sensitized by cultural diversity, and reverential toward all forms of human religiosity.