



# Council for Research in Values and Philosophy

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## Report on “Meaningfulness of Life: Transformations of Cultures and Religions”

**Time:** November 11-13, 2017

**Place:** Gibbons Hall B-12, Catholic University of America

**Participants:** William A. **Barbieri** (United States), Anthony **Carroll** (Great Britain), José **Casanova** (United States), Tomas **Halik** (Czech), John P. **Hogan** (United States), Peter **Jonkers** (Netherlands), Nur **Kirabaev** (Russia), John A. **Kromkowski** (United States), **Ouyang Kang** (China), Philip J. **Rossi** (United States), Vincent **Shen** (Canada/Taiwan), William **Sweet** (Canada), João J. **Vila-Chã** (Portugal/Italy), **Hu** Yeping (China)

### Background

After the special research project on “Faith in a Secular Age” (2009-2015) that culminated with the International Joint-Conference at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome and now is published as a book.<sup>1</sup> the RVP held its consultation in Tewksbury, December 16-17, 2015, to discuss possible future research themes. In accordance with the theme “Learning to be Human” of the World Congress of Philosophy (WCP) to be held in Beijing, China, August 13-20, 2018, George F. **McLean** suggested the theme “Re-Learning to be Human for Global Times” for the RVP focus of the next few years. Throughout its history the RVP has focused on the thematic research according to the circumstances current, urgent and important to peoples, cultures, religions and civilizations across the world, while at the same time keeping specific focus in each particular region.

For instance, in the 70s and 80s in the 20<sup>th</sup> century the research focus in Central and Eastern Europe was to break through ideological barriers and to build post-communist and democratic countries. The themes were on human dignity, philosophical foundations of transformations on social lives and systems, national identity, etc. While in the 80s and 90s, in China the research themes were on economic ethics, civil society, humanization of technology, moral foundations for society, relationships between humans and nature, etc. In Islam in the 90s the themes were on faith and reason, dialogue of religions and civilizations, relations between religions and cultures, etc. In Africa in the 80s the focus was on the emergence from colonialism and the establishment of their own worldview and philosophy based on their indigenous cultures and identities.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the research focus shifted to challenges and opportunities of globalization along with concerns from both global and local levels. Meanwhile with **Huntington**’s prophetic

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<sup>1</sup> *Renewing the Church in a Secular Age: Holistic Dialogue and Kenotic Vision*. [First edition]. Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change. Series VIII, Christian Philosophical Studies, Volume 21. Washington D.C: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2016.

claim on clashes of civilizations and the former Iranian President **Khatami**'s proposal to the United Nations the RVP focused its research mainly on dialogue of civilizations and cultures and religions, which has been in fact the focus of McLean's entire life effort.

With the efforts from different regions a set of research studies was published in the RVP publication series "Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change" in accordance with each cultural tradition or region.

From 2009 to 2015 a specific research focus was targeted on the secularized society mainly in the West (Europe and North America) based on Charles **Taylor**'s book *Faith in a Secular Age*. The result was the 16 research teams which produced 16 volumes on the four themes of disjunctions/conjunctions along with the book from the Rome conference held in March 2015.

The question arises what will be the next phase for a possible RVP research focus. In this circumstance the November 11-13 consultation was planned and conducted.

### **Thematics**

The different phases of the RVP research initiatives:

- Nation building (80s)
- Dialogue of civilizations (90s)
- Globalization at the turn of the millennium (2000)
- Faith in a secular age (2009)
- Re-Learning to be Human for Global Times (2015)

<b>Barbieri</b>	<p>Hans <b>Joas</b> is concerned about the unfolding of axial age, the in-depth conversation on universals in different cultures and religions, cross-cultural compassion. Also the themes on transformation of new axial age; signs of the times and philosophy as ways of life; the importance of Bernard <b>Lonergan</b>'s thought.</p> <p>Ecologies, cultural ecology, social ecology, human ecology as integral ecology, ecology of person, integral philosophy. The importance of communication; dynamic of knowledge; the differences made by mass information and true knowledge.</p> <p>Absolutism and relativism should be integrated; need both authenticity and hermeneutics; to understand the text and ghettos for Muslim.</p> <p>Ideas for ideas, no concrete actions.</p> <p>Historical philosophy, social sciences, theology and religion on conception of persons in classical notion; discerning with mind; nurturing young scholars; inter-cultural dialogue; bridge of disciplines; marginalized places.</p> <p>We need some tools: listening, conferences, seminars, books, research teams.</p> <p>We need contact foundations and do some fundraising.</p>
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	<p>Themes discussed cover new axial age, reaching out to the marginal, reading the signs of the times, spirituality and alternatives; Pope Francis (how to translate his messages into other society), comprehensive to apply the work to other regions, meaningfulness of life, human flourishing rather than destruction, dialogue between Christianity and Islam, emerging new times and shift of consciousness, meaning of historical consciousness, developing capacity to judge, components in values, meanings and cultures, formation of teams.</p> <p>Listening as emerging task.</p> <p>Not to determinate meaning and values. What are acceptable, visible and intuitive. The importance of authenticity.</p> <p>David Campbell's workd. Religion and non-religion divide or dialogue.</p>
<p><b>Carroll</b></p>	<p>Working on a project related to the dialogue between religion and non-religion.</p> <p>How to work out between specific/singular with universals; empty space can help and allow others to enter without feeling dominated and controlled; universals in differences.</p> <p>The elements of social teaching and philosophical tools, such as hermeneutics and phenomenology; Eastern traditions such as Zen Buddhism (contemplative and paradox), arts, the framework of David <b>Martin</b>, renewed theology or new theology, alternative liberation theology or theology liberation, perspectives of marginalized people (social and religious).</p> <p>Specificity of religion, dialogue between religion and nonreligion; what is the division; we need space for transcendence, God, emergence, conversation of people; transformation of religion and rise of different religions.</p> <p>Who is listening or who is not? Listening to whom? Not listening to. Should be conscious of non-groups; universality.</p> <p>Education is open-ended process and a field work.</p>
<p><b>Casanova</b></p>	<p>Two dialogues: religious and interreligious.</p> <p>Most people live in peaceful and ordinary life, even in global cities, but there are special separations.</p> <p>Authenticity as modern phenomenon, should go beyond human flourishing.</p> <p>We are living in a pluralist world, and building transnational identities. Catholicism has been experienced differently in the West than in Asia, in Latin America, and in Africa. Even in the West, France and Britain are different. The impact of secularization differs in Catholicism, Irish, Italian, French and British. Post Vatican II, Pan-Asian, colonial times and nationalistic era. Catholic migrants.</p>

	<p>Religion was not a problem, there was no conflictual in transformation in the United States. Modernity opens more pluralism, industrialization, urbanization, etc. deep penetrations into communities and immigration society. Authenticity is there. Intellectuals play important role.</p> <p>With the movement universal humanity emerges, the global secularity, all forms of religious experiences; culture is important. What is pure religion? Christianity a pure religion? What is pure faith with culture? Islam a pure faith? Need extra-culturation, transnational trans-culturation. Religion as national.</p> <p>Axial age goes beyond transcendence, beyond Athens and Rome, beyond the West and Eurocentrism; it is decentralized and pluralistic and diverse, should have dialogue with non-Westerns: Africans, Asian, Latin Americans.</p> <p>Meaningfulness of cosmos; pure humanism (centered self), need open to cosmos.</p>
<p><b>Halik</b></p>	<p>Four themes: (1) new ontology of human beings: technology and ethics, artificial intelligence, sciences; (2) immigration: integration, migration, language, customs, religions, Arabic culture, new vocabulary; (3) new alienation: justice, the other; (4) cultures and values: loss of values, post modern, new values.</p> <p>What can we do; who we are; specific missions; transformation of religions from its instrumental.</p> <p>How to work together with meaningfulness with spirituality in cosmos environment.</p> <p>Sometimes religion can be a danger. Need to discover mystical and spiritual dimension in religion. Spirituality as alternative to fundamentalism. What is intrinsic and inner spirituality, what is extrinsic or instrumental power; religion should be understood deeply and need transformation.</p> <p>(1) division of religions, for instance, between Christianity and Islam, and within one religion itself, for instance Islam (Shiite and Sunni); (2) Islam in the West, particular in Europe, and the tension; (3) transformation of religion in global contexts, the presence and the future of Islam in Christianity or Christianity in Islam.</p> <p>Two teams to work on issues related to (1) religion, modernity and globalization; (2) fundamentalists in all religions, especially in Islam and Christianity; (3) inculturation; (4) mysticism and faith.</p> <p>Strategic development in Eastern Europe, religions in Western Europe, Islam in the West. We are in a new age or new axial age and should have a long term project on different topics. Themes can be discussed (1) transformation of religions and cultures in the process of globalization or in the context of globalization, nationalism as the reaction to globalization; (2) the relationship</p>

	<p>between Christianity and Islam: problem of inculturation both West and Islam, Christianity in non-Christian society, difference of politics, mystical dimension; (3) spirituality: fundamentalism, political ideology, alternative to fundamentalism, non esoteric, contemplative, misuse religions, peace making potentials; (4) transformation of religions in Central and Eastern Europe, especially Christianity, enlarged the existing project to Austria and Germany, work with seekers; (5) Pope Francis: how to continue Pope Francis' messages on ecology, hospitality, new sensitivity to marginalized people; the Church as communicative, service, welcoming, reaching out and open church, discerning the signs of the times, ecological problems, responsibility of nature, going beyond courtyard of gentiles, pastoral care, going beyond the fixed structure, opening up, need new theologies, social sciences, need radical changes in cultures and religions. (6) New form of religions, post secular age, transformation of religions in politicization, postmodernity, philosophy. Theologians, sociologists, Church people should work together.</p>
<b>Hogan</b>	<p>Civil society, governance, distribution, trust, to be more human, American values; development for what, why and how.</p> <p>How to institutionalize through dialogue, how to process; incompatible ideas which not speak for the other, they are all developmental issue.</p> <p>Authentic institution is an issue. Message from Vatican II.</p>
<b>Jonkers</b>	<p>Need pilot projects on Islam in the West.</p> <p>Meaningfulness of life is more broader theme. Need a set of subthemes. Authenticity can be considered as Taylor's theme.</p> <p>Look for different issues: substantive and important. What is face-value and what is profound meaning.</p>
<b>Kirabaev</b>	<p>The importance of Islam. People normally have some kinds of stereotype about Islam. In fact, Islam is an integrated entity with civilization, nation-station, modernization and mysticism. Islam has many faces and different phenomena: Indian Islam, Arabic Islam, Egyptian Islam, etc. There should be different approaches to Islam. There are many ideal constructions and practical issues in Islam. It has theory and practice. In its history there was paradox between Averroism and <b>Averroes</b>, between reason and belief and knowledge. The historical root for Islamic mysticism began with <b>Ghazali</b>. Many issues related to Islam are the penetration of Islam into Central Asia, Europe, and other parts of the world, the radical forms of Islam, the cross-cultural dialogue among different Islamic ethnic groups.</p> <p>The importance of tolerance and education in religions and cultures; the dialogue with Russian Orthodox Churches; Central Asia; human rights; Russian divide. Islam as university and diversity; empirical practices and studies; the world changes Islam and Islam changes the world.</p>
<b>Kromkowski</b>	<p>The conference held in Washington on Abrahamic faith with scholars from Jewish, Islamic and Christian traditions. The book was published by the RVP</p>

	<p>under the title <i>Abrahamic Faiths, Ethnicity and Ethnic Conflicts</i>, edited by Paul <b>Peachey</b>, George F. <b>McLean</b> and John <b>Kromkowski</b> in 1997.</p> <p>Henri <b>Bergson</b>'s <i>The Two Sources of Morality and Religion</i>. Secularity as social phenomenon in Islam and how to be person in new situation. There are more new spiritual groups.</p> <p>The complementarity of each other; historical explosion and historical discovery, looking for theoretical ground; human experience and transcendence in consciousness and dream beyond non-experience and shared, breaking through gods; rash information as technical challenges, gathering historical information, whether there is real world classes; symbolization in discourse, culture and religion, humans and gods, nature and society; different knowledge, instrumental knowledge, natural knowledge.</p> <p>Happiness cannot be measured; we need balanced society with purpose, satisfaction and practice; good life means prophet, purpose, pleasure and power. Why anger due to religious intensity, attitude and type, typology of religion; we need decoding, ethical system in order to build competency to deal with issues.</p> <p>Institutions should enable to work; universities and students embedded in culture and process. We should work in brainstem with cultural concern and shaping the thinking in order to move ahead. Themes are ongoing activities, can give best focus and raise visibility.</p> <p>Story as project; space problems are housing problems; pluralism, new isolation, they are human ecology.</p>
<p><b>Ouyang</b></p>	<p>It seems the world becomes worse and worse, rather than better and better; what happened to our human beings and to our world; why such things can happen; how to create new environment to help each other; we need cross-cultural dialogue; Confucian tradition can make a rich contribution; a Confucian forum held each year with leaders from six religions to have dialogue on how to be able to coexist peacefully with each other and to avoid religious violence; all cultures and religions should become stronger and better; state governance and global governance both national and international to explore state/global responsibility and to establish green civilizations; international organizations should play a role.</p> <p>Why more religions became extreme; how to let good things become better and stronger. Religion is a problem. Spirit is different from spirituality. The latter is superstructure. Confucian teaching means to serve. Politics and religion should exercise self-cultivation. Confucianism is a culture.</p> <p>Meaningfulness of meaning means values; dialogue between non religions and religions in passive and positive; new situation need new values.</p> <p>Spirituality is more related to scientific. The Chinese emphasizes more on spirit.</p>

<p><b>Rossi</b></p>	<p>Grouping the possible future research themes:</p> <p>(1) Living together in a World of Plurality, Division and Conflict: co-existence with an open-minded horizon, commonality and diversity, convergence and divergence, dialogue and communication among cultures and civilizations, global responsibility, identity, universality and particularity</p> <p>(2) Religion/Spirituality/Transcendence: companionship of seekers, future of religion, healing process, Islam, transcendence and cosmology, crisis of spirituality esoteric and mystical dimension of religious teaching, spiritual awareness</p> <p>(3) Specific Problems Issues/Challenges with Global Impact: ecology--natural, cultural, political and communicative, education of young generation, impact of technology, transformation of globalization into communication, attention deficiency syndrome, mass information and true knowledge</p> <p>(4) Dynamics of Philosophy and Culture: philosophy emerging from culture, philosophy and existential problem of contemporary humanity and society</p> <p>(5) Additional possibilities: the displacement of people (refugee, cultural displacement); global health and the gap between poor and rich; authority, power, and violence in the 21<sup>st</sup> century; the future of the culture of democracy/of the nation-state; reconciliation and peacemaking in a divided world; the commodification of knowledge and the future of intellectual culture</p> <p>We live in an anthropocene age, humans are doing and creating dynamics. The contingency, the possible pilot projects and the practical and theoretical dimensions to open doors.</p> <p>Need time line; cultural cosmos, institution as maximum of meaningfulness.</p> <p>Institutions as formation of meaning, such as cultural consciousness, and cosmos.</p> <p>Engagement of values through silence or saying nothing or listening as contemplative approaches.</p>
<p><b>Shen</b></p>	<p>Relearning to be human is for life; what is the meaningfulness for life; it needs vision of history, transcendence, individual, collective, religious and traditional; it is about values and meanings; meaningful means satisfaction; mystical dimension with union and communion: One mind in Buddhism, Dao in Daoism, Heaven/Centrality/Sincerity in Confucianism, Allah in Islam, ultimate reality expressed in difference civilizations; need conversation and dialogue, to meet and to have, need consensus and meeting point in order to build and construct; experiencing and talking God.</p> <p>Meaningfulness of life can be applied to all cultures and civilizations.</p> <p>Asia has different situation. In South East Asia, for instance in Malaysia, it is Islamic state and intends to have a purified Islam as an ideal state. History of Islamic philosophy is not linear, it had an ideal past but it moves into future. In Iran it had <b>Avicenna</b> philosophy in the past, but now it is in post revolution</p>

	<p>era. New axial age is an old topic, many scholars discussed it, for instance <b>Tu Weiming</b>, a Confucianist.</p> <p>What is meaningful sense: 20% non-Canadian born, what to say to people and what to learn, need listening. We need pay attention to Indian and African voices.</p> <p>RVP publications are more on metaphysics and culture and values and philosophy.</p> <p>Institution and authenticity are important issues, they are accumulative and transmit meaningfulness, for instance educational system, social institutions, receiving gifts of language, not give back to teachers.</p> <p>Space includes past and future. Cosmos means heaven and earth in Chinese imaginary thinking. Need both material and spiritual civilizations through self-cultivation. Mystical union or mysticism means togetherness with the ultimate reality, more possible extensions in the Chinese tradition. Christian experiences mean union with God.</p>
<p><b>Sweet</b></p>	<p>The goal of the RVP is “reaching out”, for instance, in the 70s, the 80s, the 90s; to look for ultimate meaning in different cultures.</p> <p>Need to understanding meaning of spirit, culture and cosmos. Need to develop certain discourses.</p>
<p><b>Vila-Chã</b></p>	<p>Human conditions as limited, we should avoid absolutism and relativism, religious absolutism, how to open more to dialogue; it is difficult to find common language among religions both in theoretical and conceptual; we need to look at structure to find out where the confusion is about good and evil; the importance of authenticity and behavior.</p> <p>Look at human history with quality of speaking, new media and new technology, lost generation with too many voices without voice, transcultural phenomenon, authenticity and meaning and meaningfulness, authenticity of institutions, we and other.</p> <p>Spirit is not philosophical. Gift is one of McLean’s major theses. Gift of meaning across cultures; meaningfulness of life across cultures.</p>

**Halik suggested the following proposal:**

- Transformations of Religions and Cultures: NEW AXIAL AGE?**
- 1) **Discerning the signs of the times**
  - 2) **Christians and Muslims in the new axial age**
  - 3) **Spiritual renewal in religions as alternative to fundamentalism**
  - 4) **Transformation of religion in Central Europe (in comparison with the other part of the world)**

- 5) **Respond to the impulses of Pope Francis in different cultures and religions**
- 6) **Belief of nonbelievers and disbelief of believers**

### **1. Discerning the signs of the times**

- Do we live in a new axial age?
- Globalization and counter-globalization (nationalism, populism, fundamentalism, politization of religion).

### **2. Christians and Muslims in the new axial age**

- Experiences with inculturation of religions in the new cultural context:
- Islam in the West and Christianity in the nonwestern world.
- Impact of modernization and globalization on Christianity and Islam.
- Hermeneutics in interpretation of Bible and Quran
- How to overcome the danger of misusing religion for political radicalism, fanaticism and violence?
- Legalism and mysticism in religion.

### **3. Spiritual renewal in religions as alternative to fundamentalism**

- Religions after secularization – new fundamentalism on one side, interest in spirituality on the other side
- Faith as fortress and faith as a way
- Psychological and social roots of fundamentalism in our time
- How can spiritual renewal in religions empower the peaceful potential of religion and create an alternative to fundamentalism and political misuse of religion?

### **4. Transformation of religion in Central Europe (in comparison with the other part of the world)**

- Is there still a significant difference between “the post-communist countries” and the other European countries that did not go through the experience with communism?
- Importance of “accompanying the seekers”
- Reflection on experiences of “categorical pastoral care” (chaplains in hospitals, in the army, in prisons and at the universities) in communication with the people outside the church.
- A new alliance of social scientist, theologians and religious leaders can reflect on alternative scenarios of the future development, inspiring visions for the future.
- Comparison of the situation in Central Europe with the other part of the world.

### **5. Impulses of Pope Francis as inspiration for different cultures and religions**

- Impulses of Pope Francis for a new epoch of global Christianity.
- (Ecclesiology of Pope Francis).
- Impulses of Pope Francis as an invitation for cooperation between religions
- (Integral ecology).
- Respond to the impulses of Pope Francis in other religions and cultures.

## **6. Belief of nonbelievers and disbelief of believers**

- What is “sacred” for nonbelievers?
- Fundamentalism and fanaticism as a hidden disbelief of some religious people and groups