

Foreword to *A Monk in the World* by Brother Wayne Teasdale

This is a beautiful, wonderful, wise book that gently touches and compassionately evokes the deep spirituality in all of us. But more than that: it further invites us—challenges us—to carry that awakened spirituality into the world, thus integrating inner life with outer life, drenching both in a radiance from the realized heart that allows grace the room to do its divine work. A more balanced, a more complete, a more “integral” spirituality—uniting both inner and outer—is the theme of this moving book.

It seems that humankind’s spiritual aspirations have often fallen into two major camps, what we might call “this-worldly” and “other-worldly,” or earth-oriented and heaven-oriented. The latter portrays salvation as existing in a dimension or realm that is somehow apart from this world, not of this earth, profoundly beyond this plane of existence. Whether this is a mythical Heaven beyond earth, or a nirvana divorced from samsara, or a contemplative ascent that leaves the senses far behind, we find in these traditions a concerted proclamation that this world is, at best, a prep school for the Divine, and, at worst, an active source of evil, sin, duality, and despair, the escape from which is a prerequisite for salvation.

This-worldly traditions, on the other hand, are headed in more-or-less the opposite direction. All true liberation and salvation must be found on this earth, in this body, in this life; any aspirations for a transcendental Heaven are not only based on childhood illusions, but actively deny and repress present human potentials that alone can lead to a bettering of life for millions of human beings. This-worldly traditions include a wide variety of approaches—from classic paganism to modern Marxism to scientific materialism to virtually all ecology movements—but what they all have in common is the belief that transcendental religions are not only the opiate of the masses, they devastate effective action here and now in the only arena that actually matters—this earth, this world, right here and now.

Is my ultimate salvation to be found in this world or out of it? It seems that the first obstacle to a more integral or comprehensive approach to spirituality would be discovering a way to truly bring together the important truths of both this-worldly compassion and other-worldly realization, thus uniting the immanent and transcendent aspects of a spirituality that charitably embraces both.

But that challenge, daunting enough in itself, is only the first in a series of difficult but incredibly exciting opportunities for discovering a spirituality that is at home in both this world and the other: a Heaven that transcends and includes the Earth and all its blessed inhabitants, a spirituality that does not cloister its realization but ecstatically shares it with the world, a nirvana not divorced from samsara but embracing samsara in the radiance of its own self-realization.

It appears that a truly integral spirituality—the spirituality of a monk in the world, of a contemplative Heaven embracing this Earth—would have to integrate or include a vast range of truths from across the entire spectrum of human possibilities, including not only this-worldly and other-worldly spirituality, but also the undeniable truths of modern science. In short, a truly catholic spirituality, as a matrix of manifestation, would have to include the very best of premodern, modern, and postmodern truths, bound together by a Spirit that transcends all and includes all, goes beyond but intimately embraces this and all possible worlds.

A tall order, yes? But what is so exhilarating about this quest is that many spiritual adepts and practitioners from around the world are rapidly converging on the outlines of what a truly integral spirituality might look like. This truly catholic spirituality does not deny the revealed truths of any tradition, but gently sets them in the context of each other's realizations, fostering an inter-spirituality that deepens, not denies, the truths of each. I have suggested one such approach in *A Brief History of Everything*, but the important point is that these types of approaches are beginning rapidly to emerge around the world, and Brother Wayne, in the following pages, will introduce you to some of the truly great pioneers in this

move toward a more integral spirituality—toward a more catholic communion of all souls in the radiance of being, the radiance of a timeless other-worldly Spirit that finds its own body and its own substance and its own realization in the glories of this world, in the pulsing of this Earth, in the beating of the hearts of all sentient beings, moved by grace and found by a glory that reminds us all that the temporal and historical are simply the ecstatic self-expressions of the timeless and eternal.

Brother Wayne dedicates this book to Father Thomas Keating, whom he calls “my spiritual father, brother, and friend,” and who, I deeply concur, will be judged by history to be one of the great founding saints of a more integral and catholic spirituality. Brother Wayne discusses several others who, I also agree, are among the founding souls of this more charitable embrace—Thomas Merton, Abhishiktananda, the Dalai Lama, Bede Griffiths, Raimon Panikkar, Brother David Steindl-Rast, Amma, Thich Nhat Hanh, and Rabbi Zalman Schachter (and he certainly would not exclude the great historical forerunners of such, from Plotinus to Lady Tsogyal to the remarkable Sri Aurobindo).

While the timeless truths of Spirit are surely just that—namely, timeless—it appears that the temporal truths of Spirit ceaselessly unfold, with new truths emerging daily, new revelations constantly accumulating, screaming surprises jumping out at us from every corner of Spirit’s astonishing creativity, as evolution itself searches secretly through the stream of time that is Spirit’s great unfolding sport and play. And it does appear, or so it seems to this poor soul, that today’s world—today’s modern and postmodern world—is slowly groping its way, guided by the cunning of grace, to find forms of spirituality more intimately suited to the times, which is to say, suited to Spirit’s unfolding in this historical arc of its own manifestation.

And it does likewise appear that truly catholic souls such as Brother Wayne will join the ranks of those who are compassionately acting as Spirit’s contemplative witness to a yet more encompassing, more compassionate, more glorious embrace, so that each and every sentient being may truly become a monk in this world.