is a professor of theology at Boston College and previously held the Sharjah Chair of Islamic Studies at the University of Eau. 29(s r) 88(s) 28990.4H0(00ss 22h)10.60)-164 0 9.1rpnT 181.9-19.61(a)-62hr)-3.

: In your talk today, or at least in your preliminary statement about your talk today, you suggested that spirituality has become more broadly accessible as a subject across every world religious tradition. Can you say a little bit about what you mean by that?

: It's an oddly invisible consequence of what some people call secularization. I think it's probably better to say the movement from agrarian-based societies to post-agrarian societies. We call them modern; we wouldn't call them industrial anymore. We don't know what to call them. You move from a society in which essentially, from the point of view of participants at the local level, everything is religion. Culture and religion is the same thing. And this doesn't mean that they're monolithic, far from it. It means exactly the opposite. Every local culture is often radically di erent from the one down the road, or the language or the religion down the road.

But there's a kind of assumption that the religion is the same as the culture that people grew up with. Under all of the impacts of modernity, which in Europe and the U.S. took several centuries to unfold and often unfold in the life of one individual in other parts of the world, it looks like those traditional forms of spiritual life and both ritual belief and practice simply disappear because they do outwardly disappear. So one of the things that I only gradually discovered was thi i1J22)act-pected domains and no longer, generally said, much more diverse and often in the vast majority of cases, tied to what the media call religion.



often empty forms of ideologies. The interesting thing about the study of religion is that it helps students to see that what was taken as the religious form, as sort of authentic and deeply embedded in cultural society, that these things all were historical creations themselves over periods of centuries and long periods. This is where spirituality comes in. Once you recognize the underlying spiritual intentions that brought those forms into being, it's often very easy to recognize them in their modern forms which are,

creative and constantly changing. In fact, as a historian, I started o by highlighting the di erence in the modern world, but actually there are so many periods of just as great a ferment of creativity at various times, when you really look back more closely at what was happening earlier in history.

It's often once things are established and in place, we talk like they've always been there. People come into the study of religion very often today, not just to learn about a historical discipline. This is why it often becomes so central to the liberal arts, where there are religious studies programs. It combines this historical and cultural appreciation of previous traditions with the students' impetus often seeking spiritual guidance, direction, understanding. What people don't see is what happens to the students and what they do with it. And that, I think, is fascinating, because they're really wrestling with the dilemmas of culture and religion, now on a global scale. Things that motivate people are human rights, women's rights, justice, peace, peacemaking, and especially issues related to the environment and the ecological and

natural world. And all of these have been central elements of that sort of classical, high cultural religion, but today those key contemporary political and ethical issues are generally not seen as a visible part of what the media and modern ideologies normally identify as "religion".

So when we look at what happens to our religious studies students, they tend to go almost entirely into three areas. One is service professions, so they become doctors and psychologists and therapists. Or often it's political and NGO activism, whether locally or internationally. And the third one is creative arts, an application of the arts to spiritual life. All of these again have their pre-modern equivalents. But basically, it's rare in my experience that they do any of these three things in what people identify today as an explicitly "religious" framework. But in fact they're forging the new religious forms of the centuries to come.

And also, this all depends on the local politics surrounding religious issues. You were just mentioning the [Fethullah] Gülen movement there, so certainly there are interesting parallels to be teaching in a Catholic university, a self-consciously Catholic university, that are very similar to the dilemmas that most Muslims face in the contemporary world. They grow up in nation states, ostensibly in secular education systems, but want those systems to pay lip service to Islam. So the particular form of the dilemma that Muslims face in those nation state environments mirrors a great deal what people are wrestling with who are Catholic in Catholic educational contexts.

: I want to come back to the Catholic question in just a minute and your argument about the liberal arts tradition and religious studies, a place of religious studies and spirituality there. how do you account for the resurgence of interest in this?

: Well again, I think it's a shift of expression. So in traditional times, if somebody were interested in this, they became a nun or a monk or a Sufi or a hasid. They became somebody who specialized in this within a particular culture, within a particular environment. Today, people who still have the same inclinations and the same interests, both in order to practice, fully, their spiritual life, and in particular to communicate and share it to other people. They have to find what the Buddhists call "appropriate means."

And that's where creativity comes in. I'd love to give concrete illustrations and anecdotes, because as I was saying about our students and graduates that if they're inclined artistically, they're not going to end up doing stained glass windows or manuscript illustration, but they're going to have to find new artistic means to express their still religious devotional art. The forms in which they communicate it and the way they get across their meanings, as well as the wider contexts have all changed. For example, the digital media have suddenly become so important both in communicating about aspects of spiritual practice and experience and in communicating about the wider artistic, ethical, political consequences of that. I felt strange, in fact, mentioning our graduates going into the helping professions or into NGOs, larger political activities or into artistic ones, because in fact most people who graduate today already are doing something of all of those. They make their living in those necessarily creative and changing new contexts. And this has to do with simply the extent of change in the world we live in today—in that creativity used to be something that was severely constrained by the socio-economic realities of the situations in which people lived, even in the 1930s and '40s in the U.S.

And now, on the contrary, we live in a situation, whether you look at education or ethics or intersection of politics and ethics, where human rights come to the fore-or at the intersection of politics, economics and sciences, in ecology and environment. People are actually being obliged to create new solutions to those problems. You still have to do what you always did, which is you try out something, see if it works. But if it works, you could go from the pilot stage to sharing that and asking other people to try and imitate it very, very rapidly in the world today. In the old days, you had to set up an intentional community whether it be a monastery, or America's longstanding tradition of Protestant and other little intentional communities. That was a lifetime's task. But now mom and dad and their two kids and their neighbors can do it: let's see if we can find a new way of educating our kids that brings in the centrality of nature, spiritual values and all that. And you don't have to call it anything or whatever, but if it works, that practice catches on pretty quickly and your college friends in Pakistan or Australia or China, well, you let them know about it, and they'll try it out. So yes, it's a di erent world.

: So is it fair then, just to clarify, there hasn't been resurgence of spirituality as you defined it –

## : A spiritual renewal.

: Yeah, not in any sensee.

