Plenty of oxygen is flowing into theological lungs and hearts. Debates about globalization and postmodernity are reformulated because social movements are claiming that another world is possible and because religious behavior is flourishing. Secularism has reduced church attendance but has not impaired spiritualities. Human beings are enjoying new fragrances and potentials; we breathe more deeply.

Unfortunately, discourses about faith have often been church centered, and theology has depended on institutional goals. A major shift has been taking place. Many of our questions now deal with signs of the times and with God’s revelation in all human journeys. Theology again focuses on humanity and creation, on the Spirit of Christ, on communities who believe in a new earth and heaven. Due to dialogue with non-Western cultures and religions, our Christian faith becomes deeper and is less attached to absolutes that exclude others. Many Christians become engaged with different faiths and wisdoms and networks leading to another world.

Human and Theological Potential

In the past, understandings of the faith have been labeled either traditional or liberal; in fact both dedicated themselves to church doctrines and programs. Today, more attention is given to plural voices of common people, to changing paradigms in thinking and action, to ecology and spirituality, impoverishment and justice, issues due to science and technology. These and other factors are reawakening basic reflections on the mystery of God and on Christ’s Good News.

Moreover, theology is done in the midst of people mostly concerned about progress; their material and professional expectations are managed by the market and by the media. Pragmatism is like daily bread. Individual success is sacred. However, there is widespread malaise and search for alternatives. These situations call for theological inputs that are prophetic, mystical, and utopian. This last point has priority.

Throughout the so-called two-thirds world, compassion that arises from suffering has opened the door to utopian efforts. Communities and networks feel the urgency to gather old and new bricks, so as to continue building a full humanity. In these contexts, an understanding of the faith is reset by a global/local search for life.

Together with all kinds of local initiatives, there are regional and international

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networks and coalitions. World Social Forums (the first one in 2001 in Porto Alegre, and the next one in 2007 in Nairobi) bring together more than one hundred thousand delegates, and they focus on “another world is possible.” Such a dream has economic, political, hermeneutical, and spiritual components. It becomes flesh through goals and actions (see The Bamako Appeal 2006, www.forumtiersmonde.net [accessed October 10, 2006]).

Allow me to underline that each utopia is achieved through proposals (and not by wishful thinking!) and that addressing such concrete potentials sets the course for a hopeful theological discourse. However, utopian language has its risks, if it is confused with what exists now, behavior tends to be totalitarian. Another direction has to be taken: utopias are anticipated through ethics with its daily demands. This behavior allows faith to be truly hopeful.

**Culture and Religion Are Challenged**

When theology takes into account not only philosophical languages but also social sciences, it has a better view of changing contexts of faith. People today have greater homogeneity due to global factors; but there is also growing fragmentation and fundamentalism. A different dynamic is a re-discovery of local identities and ancient and emergent spiritualities. All this is often acknowledged. What is more difficult to see is how each culture and religion interacts with others and is reshaped by proposals leading to another world and how these phenomena influence understandings of the faith.

As I examined festivals throughout Peru, many persons showed a blend of autochthonous and adopted meanings. Andean festivals have recreated Christian rituals, since for centuries they have been interacting with other realities. For example, ceremonies during Lent and with the cross usually include biological and spiritual pleasure. The religious ideology of sacrifice is surpassed. On Holy Week, family burials, and other dramatic occasions, marginalized groups celebrate with syncretic and polyphonic elements. People say, symbolically, that bad fate may be overcome and that life is not a valley of tears but rather that being with God is to enjoy new and plural realities. This motivates believers to have new encounters (and understandings) with the risen Lord.

The Gospel is relevant and disturbing; so it was yesterday and so it is today. The person and message of Christ has challenged what modernity calls culture and religion. Jesus has been a prophet (and not what is now a lecturer or what is now labeled a mystic). In his situation, he did not explain God nor did he support sacred power. He rather confronted human traditions and official forms of the sacred and had an eschatology that made everything relative. With these frameworks the Christian community now handles ways of life and symbolic systems.

Theologies, responding to Gospel guidelines, have been confronting ethnocentric and sacrificial features in most religions. Another key debate deals with people’s spiritualities. Each experience of the sacred is not an absolute. Many today are fascinated by self-transcendence and doctrinal certainties. These are dead-end streets. The more genuine paths toward God are spiritualities that respond to the mystery of love. A religion by itself does not (from a Gospel perspective) bring about salvation. Only love is life-giving. Therefore, theological dialogue with culture and religion cannot be naive. Nor does Christian truth behave as a unilateral judge over human affairs.

That is one side of the coin. The other side is that church and theology are challenged by the “other.” Unfortunately, too often Western Christians who are monocultural and monoreligious wish to transfer
their particularities to others. New (and old) voices are rediscovering the blessings of pluralism. In fact there have always been plural insights and doctrines in christology and pneumatology. This is now seen as a contribution to the human rainbow.

Plural understandings of Christ and the Spirit are cornerstones of our engagement toward a new humanity and creation. It is not a simple strategy so as to get along with people that have other convictions. Rather, contemplating and interacting with people who are different flow from Christian wisdom and lead to mutual growth. Sharing with other cultures and faiths and seeking another world does lead us to life. In this pilgrimage we participate as a church community with unconditional faith in the Lord. Jesus Christ is the prophet of love that calls all peoples of the earth to freedom.