"Unprecedented Challenges Ahead--March, 2020"

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[Note: The supporting evidence included below is only a representative fraction of the evidence accumulated in longer documents compiled by this writer (for two examples of longer documents, see www.cpcsi.org homepage). Source references for quoted passages (below) can be found (see Section 2 p. 9-20, or do phrase search) in the CPCS Initiative Summary Paper "Recalibrating Our "Moral Compasses": to resolve unprecedented challenges, and discover our collective spiritual destiny" (85 pages; June, 2015)(minor revisions, links updated—June, 2016).]

1. Global warming and reducing carbon emissions--the unprecedented cultural transformation needed to limit global warming to 1.5^{o}C means we have to achieve significant positive tipping points before negative tipping points in many areas---(climate change disasters; greed and corruption; the consumption juggernaut; water shortages; global inequities, overindulgence, malnutrition, and disease; epidemics and pandemics (some which originate from ancient pathogens released from previously frozen permafrost); transitional unemployment; loss of trust in institutions responsible for guiding public discourse; negative stereotypes; cynicism and violence; etc.)---destabilize social cohesion.

2. A marginalization of the treasured wisdom associated with religious, spiritual, and moral traditions—these "hidden" resources include teachings which inspire and encourage people to:
a) sacrifice personal desires for the greater good of the whole b) find contentment and quality of life while consuming less material goods and ecological services c) *prefer peacebuilding which supports and actualizes mutually beneficial understandings, forgiveness, and reconciliation--and which abstains from violent conflict resolution--as a way of bringing cycles of violence to an end* d) use resources carefully, so that there is surplus available for emergency assistance e) support community life and cultural traditions which "… bring to the fore how many good people there are, how many ways there are to do good, and how much happiness comes to those who extend help, as well as to those who receive it".

3. Cultures of violence, greed, corruption, and overindulgence--which have become so common that many of us accept such as inevitable. a) "The global drugs trade and the global arms trade are integral to violence in both developing and industrialized countries. Even modest progress on either front will contribute to reducing the amount and degree of violence suffered by millions of people. To date, however--and despite their high profile in the world arena--no solutions seem to be in sight for these problems" b) Unfortunately, there are many people in our communities who--regardless of the difficulties and urgencies associated with resolving multiple crises--choose to focus their attention on trying to make money by preying of people's fears, manipulating people's trust, and/or encouraging people to abandon hope in higher aspirations, and indulge in unhealthy, or immoral behavior c) *"The satisfaction of one's physical needs must come at a certain point to a dead stop before it degenerates into physical decadence"* d) "… every article in the bazaar has moral and spiritual values attached to it…."

4. The end of the Fossil Fuel Era--a) "Our industrial societies and our financial systems were built on the assumption of continual growth--growth based on ever more readily available cheap fossil fuels". However, "limiting global warming to an agreed U.N. ceiling 'means that three quarters of the fossil fuel reserves need to stay in the ground'…." and yet: lifestyles and habitats are still very much dependent on high fossil fuel input infrastructures b) *During the three to eight decades of unprecedented cultural transformation needed to achieve carbon neutral economies, this writer believes many serious blind spots will be discovered--issues which are far from being fully appreciated now, and issues which are serious enough to cripple our best efforts, if not remedied.*

5. The increasing world population and its implications relating to widespread resource depletion-- with special focus on the increasing number of people who are consuming material goods and ecological

resources *indiscriminately*—a) In 1960, the world population was 3 billion. As of March 14, 2020, the world population was 7.636 billion b) *"It would be foolish to underestimate the challenge of checking the consumption juggernaut…."* c) "Over the past 50 years, humans have changed ecosystems more rapidly and extensively than in any comparable period of time in human history…." d) "More than half the world's people live in countries where water tables are falling as aquifers are being depleted…" e) "…since 70 percent of world water use is for irrigation, water shortages can quickly translate into food shortages."

6. Current trends indicate that we are creating more and more "urban agglomerations"--(megacities with a population of more than 1 million people--more than 400) which require extremely complex and energy intensive infrastructures, where it is extremely difficult to trace the consequences of our individual investments of time, energy, and money—and which are the least appropriate models when it comes to implementing resolutions to many of the other challenges in this ten point assessment
b*) Almost all megacities (cities with populations over 1 million) are running massive "ecological deficits" ("resource consumption and waste discharge…in excess of locally/regionally sustainable natural production and assimilative capacity")*

7. Global inequities and the tragic cycles of malnutrition, disease, and death--a) "Hunger and malnutrition are in fact the number one risk to health worldwide—greater than AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis combined" b) "65 percent of the world's population live in countries where overweight and obesity kills more people than underweight and malnutrition" c) *"…the bottom half of the global population own less than 1 percent of total wealth. In sharp contrast, the richest 10 percent hold 86 percent of the world's wealth, and the top 1 percent alone account for 46 percent of global assets"* d) "12 percent of the world's population uses 85 percent of its water, and none of the 12 percent lives in developing countries."

8. Significant progress towards positive tipping points for the other challenges cited in this list will almost certainly make it impossible for the U.S., and many other countries, to resolve unprecedented public debt--
a) Unfortunately, too much of "economic growth" is debt-based, and *too much of such debt-based "economic growth" requires the continued exploitation of flaws and weaknesses in human nature, fragile ecosystems, and already significantly depleted natural resources* b) "Some might assume that bond markets are shielded from the effects of climate change, ecosystem degradation, and water scarcity. With more than $40 trillion of sovereign debt in global markets at any given time, that is a very high-risk game."

9. Deterioration of trust/confidence in institutions responsible for guiding public discourse—and the related loss of social and spiritual cohesion--a) "Most economic development and growth strategies encouraged rapid accumulation of physical, financial and human capital, but at the expense of… depleting the world's stock of natural wealth--often irreversibly ….. Existing policies and market incentives have contributed to this problem of capital misallocation *because they allow businesses to run up significant, largely unaccounted for, and unchecked social and environmental externalities"*
b) Confidence (not just confidence in financial markets, but confidence in our viability as a species) will be dimmed by a lack of clarity until there is widespread public discourse on the full dimensions of the critical challenges ahead.

10. Sorting out what are real challenges and what are sound and practical solutions is becoming more and more difficult—as there are now, in most communities of the world, a multitude of ideas of all kinds coming to the fore in personal, family, community, and cultural life--all at the same time*. Thus, even analysis supported by much credible evidence—that there are many danger signs flashing now (involving significant threats to ecological stability and social cohesion)—can be easily lost amidst a swirl of misinformation, other more trivial information, and the "siren song" of multiple entertainment venues. *People who are not sufficiently informed about critical issues are everywhere, and they are investing their time, energy, and money—voting—all the time.*