

Unprecedented Challenges Ahead—November, 2015

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Key quote: “We are far from having the kind of widespread public discourse we will need to fully understand the implications of the challenges ahead—and to plan accordingly so our collaborative problem solving and community education efforts do not fall short at this critical time.”

Do we fully understand the implications of the challenges ahead?

The Community Peacebuilding and Cultural Sustainability (CPCS) Initiative provides research and analysis for critical challenge alerts, and research and support for collaborative problem solving and community education initiatives which seek to maximize citizen participation, and accelerate solution-oriented activity.

Critical challenges assessments done by the founder of The CPCS Initiative (Stefan Pasti)--

[“IPCR Critical Challenge Assessment 2011-2012: Summary Report”](#) (444 pages; January, 2012)

[“Invitation Package for Possible Board of Advisors”](#) (589 pages; November, 2013)

["An Assessment of the Most Critical Challenges of Our Times"](#) (36 pages; May, 2015)

--suggest that we are far from having the kind of widespread public discourse we will need to fully understand the implications of the challenges ahead—and to plan accordingly so our collaborative problem solving and community education efforts do not fall short at this critical time.

Are variations in human morality fully accounted for in our critical challenge assessments?

The list of ten critical challenges (with representative evidence) below does identify “global warming, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions” as the most critical challenge to resolve. However, the CPCS Initiative recognizes “A Marginalization of the Treasured Wisdom of Religious, Spiritual, and Moral Traditions” as a significant factor affecting every one of the ten challenges identified—with implications which are far from being fully appreciated [see especially point #2, p. 22-25, and further on to p. 29, in the CPCS Initiative Summary Paper ["Recalibrating Our 'Moral Compasses': to resolve unprecedented challenges and discover our collective spiritual destiny"](#) (82 pages; June, 2015)].

Two examples of the “marginalization of wisdom” the CPCS Initiative is referring to:

1) Most of us seem to be much more familiar with what is meant by cultures of violence, greed, corruption, and overindulgence, than what is meant by the wisdom which has been accumulated over the many centuries of human experience, and which has been confirmed again and again by the saints, sages, spiritual leaders, and sincere practitioners of all religious, spiritual, and moral traditions.

2) For the purposes of this brief discussion (and keeping in mind that any five points are far from representative of the spiritual wisdom of 5,000 years of human experience), the CPCS Initiative Summary Paper offers a five point list as examples of the wisdom which is being marginalized. The five points (see p. 22-23 in Summary Paper; link on p. 2 above, and p. 5 below) include:

a) Teachings from religious, spiritual, and moral traditions which encourage and inspire people to

- i) sacrifice personal desires for the greater good of the whole
- ii) find contentment and quality of life while consuming less material goods and ecological services.
- iii) 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

And yet... if readers carefully explore the following critical challenge assessments and solution guides (which are offered here as representative and well-known examples from the past 50 years)--

- 1) “The Limits to Growth” report (1972; updated 2004) (and “2052 - A Global Forecast for the Next Forty Years”, published in 2012 by one of the original authors)
- 2) “Gaia: An Atlas of Planetary Management” (1984; updated 2005)
- 3) Worldwatch Institute—annual “State of the World” Reports, and “Worldwatch Reports” (formerly “Worldwatch Papers”)
- 4) UN-Habitat (United Nations Human Settlement Programme)—“State of the World’s Cities” Reports and (formerly annual) “Global Reports on Human Settlements”
- 5) UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme)—annual “Human Development” Reports
- 6) United Nations—Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) Progress Reports, and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Updates
- 7) IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change)—ongoing reports
- 8) International Monetary Fund—bi-annual “World Economic Outlook” Reports
- 9) World Bank—“World Development Reports”
- 10) World Economic Forum—annual “Outlook on the Global Agenda” Reports
- 11) International Energy Agency—annual “World Energy Outlook” Reports
- 12) Earth Policy Institute—including “Plan B 4.0: Mobilizing to Save Civilization”, “World on the Edge: How to Prevent Environmental and Economic Collapse”, “Full Planet, Empty Plates: The New Geopolitics of Food Scarcity”
- 13) “Pathways to Deep Decarbonization” [Published by Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) and Institute for Sustainable Development and International Relations (IDDRI), September 2014 (and presented at the United Nations Climate Summit on September 23, 2014)]

--they will find that these critical challenge assessments and solution guides do not give serious attention to variations in human morality as a significant factor affecting the nature of the challenges of our times (from p. 24 of the CPCS Summary Paper).

Special Notes:

a) This writer believes that human morality is not a constant—it is not something which is the same throughout the centuries of human existence; and thus it is something which can become degraded or raised up, depending on the leanings of human aspirations.

b) Since the above observation (“do not give serious attention”) points to content which is NOT a significant part of any of the reports (etc.), the omissions can be easily verified.

Four Key Points

Four key points which can lead to a comprehensive re-evaluation of the kind of collaborative problem solving and community education necessary at this critical time:

1) We must be careful—at this critical time—that our collective efforts are not tragically flawed by significant blind spots, as such efforts could contribute more to cynicism than confidence about our capacity to manage the most critical cultural turning point since the dawn of civilization.

2) In this time of unprecedented challenges—and especially in the context of collaborative problem solving on a scale most of us have never known before—there are going to be countless opportunities for reconciliation. There are going to be countless opportunities for arriving at a new appreciation of the personal qualities, skills, and beliefs of our neighbors and fellow citizens. And there are going to be countless opportunities for our neighbors and fellow citizens to become part of a system of mutual support and encouragement in our local communities, as we respond to multiple, unprecedented challenges.

3) If there is more recognition of the many unprecedented challenges we face, there will be more sympathy for how much we are going to need all the resources, knowledge, and skills each one of us has, how much we all need to be learning to so that we can be part of the solutions, and how much we really need to be on the same side, helping each other, if we are going to succeed at resolving the challenges ahead of us.

4) Once the need for unprecedented forms of collaborative problem solving and community education become more commonly accepted—and the natural creativity and capacity for innovation which we human beings have shown ourselves capable of becomes more focused on designing collaborative problem solving and community education models—we may discover that we can work towards goals which we have never thought possible before.

Unprecedented Challenges Ahead--November, 2015 (a ten point list)

[Note: The supporting evidence included below is only a representative fraction of the evidence accumulated in longer documents compiled by this writer. Three examples: [“IPCR Critical Challenges Assessment 2011-2012: Summary Report”](#) (444 pages; Jan., 2012); [“Invitation Package for Possible Board of Advisors”](#) (589 pages; Nov., 2013); and [“An Assessment of the Critical Challenges of Our Times”](#) (36 pages; May, 2015). Source references for quoted passages (below) can be found in the CPCS Initiative Summary Paper [“Recalibrating Our “Moral Compasses”: to resolve unprecedented challenges, and discover our collective spiritual destiny”](#) (82p. July, 2015)]

1. Global warming and reducing carbon emissions--“This is the first time in the history of mankind that we are setting ourselves the task of intentionally, within a defined period of time, to change the economic development model that has been reigning for at least 150 years, since the industrial revolution. That will not happen overnight and it will not happen at a single conference on climate change, be it COP 15, 21, 40 - you choose the number. It just does not occur like that. It is a process, because of the depth of the transformation.”

2. A marginalization of the treasured wisdom associated with religious, spiritual, and moral traditions—treasured wisdom which includes many teachings relating to sacrificing personal desires for the greater good of the whole, and finding contentment and quality of life while consuming less material goods and ecological services--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 on people’s fears, manipulating people’s trust, and/or encouraging people to abandon hope in higher aspirations, and indulge in unhealthy, or immoral behavior.

3. “Cultures” of violence, greed, corruption, and overindulgence—which have become so common that many of us accept such as inevitable; which are a significant part of the current crises of confidence in financial markets; *and which are in many ways slowing the restructuring of investment priorities needed to respond to an increasing number of other critical challenges*

4. The end of the Fossil Fuel Era--“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, and 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”)

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) “It would be foolish to underestimate the challenge of checking the consumption juggernaut....” b) “... every article in the bazaar has moral and spiritual values attached to it....” c) “More than half the world’s people live in countries where water tables are falling as aquifers are being depleted....” d) “...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”--(cities with a population of more than 1 million people—more than 400), which require more and more complex and energy intensive infrastructures, where it is more and more 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

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) 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”) c) “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.*

Additional Notes:

The current focus of The CPCS Initiative is outreach associated with the 82 page paper ["Recalibrating Our 'Moral Compasses': to resolve unprecedented challenges and discover our collective spiritual destiny"](#), which summarizes the work of The CPCS Initiative.

Most of the outreach being done for the CPCS Initiative Summary Paper is being done on the Twitter platform, through tweets to specific organizations, individuals, and related hashtags—and by way of creating the #CPbCSus hashtag (see [“Launching the Community Peacebuilding and Cultural Sustainability \(CPCS\) Initiative Hashtag \(#CPbCSus\)”](#) (5 pages; Nov., 2015)