

(Draft)

## Section #7

A marginalization of the treasured wisdom  
associated with religious, spiritual, and moral traditions

(“Commentary” piece)

Part of a larger project  
“The IPCR Critical Challenges Assessment 2011”

which will be

a list ranking ten critical challenges which are  
destabilizing efforts for quality of life and basic human needs worldwide

and organized so that there are two sections for each critical challenge identified  
“Statistics and Observations” and “Commentary”

[Note: current Table of Contents included in this paper as Appendix]

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Commentary (for Challenge #7--A marginalization of the treasured wisdom associated with religious, spiritual, and moral traditions)

If some or many of the challenges listed in this “Critical Challenges Assessment...” get beyond efforts to “manage the risk”, there could be catastrophic failures in multiple systems at the same time: employment, food price stability, transportation, water supply, waste treatment, medical assistance, disease control, violence prevention, law and order—and the positive momentum which could have minimized such failures may be difficult to recreate. Whether we will have extreme difficulties managing the challenges ahead, or whether we will be a part of an unprecedented effort of international collaboration and solution-oriented momentum may—to a significant degree—depend on what the leaders of religious, spiritual, and moral traditions decide to encourage their followers to do.

This writer has heard a radio program during which the interviewer asked Lester Brown (“World on the Edge”) if he was finding it difficult to be an optimist, given the near overwhelming nature of the challenges ahead. His reply was to repeat what he had heard from a colleague of his: that it is too late to be pessimist. This writer would like to emphasize another kind of optimism: he hereby affirms his belief that all major religious, spiritual, and moral traditions do succeed at times in helping people to have faith in a “Divinity of a Universal Kind”—with attributes of wisdom and compassion which can be understood by ordinary human beings. When we *actually see manifestations of such wisdom and compassion in the everyday circumstances of community life*, we can have more trust in the ways such wisdom and compassion have been cultivated in the past, and do our best to cultivate them now.

The challenges of our times are such that it is now critical for us to access the storehouses of wisdom and compassion which have accumulated over the many centuries of human experience, and which have been confirmed again and again as essential to individual well-being and social harmony by the saints, sages, spiritual leaders, and sincere practitioners of all religious, spiritual, and moral traditions.

Many people may think it is naïve to imagine that people from so many diverse religious, spiritual, moral, and cultural traditions can decide to come together in such a way as to not only encourage, but participate in, a high percentage of constructive thinking and constructive action in response to the difficult challenges ahead (as in the high levels of participation encouraged by comprehensive Community Visioning Initiatives). From this writer’s point of view, such skepticism and cynicism depend for their existence on doubts as to whether it is possible for people to achieve highly advanced forms of wisdom and compassion through genuine instruction and sincere effort. *Thus it is that there is a great responsibility on those people who are in any way representatives of religious, spiritual, and/or moral traditions—to demonstrate what is possible along the lines of wisdom and compassion, to provide genuine instruction when sincere efforts are being made, to contribute to the greater good of the whole, and to help restore confidence in the higher values of life.*

And what is possible along the lines of wisdom and compassion? How many of us would say that we are fully aware of what is possible along the lines of wisdom and compassion? What would the everyday circumstances of our community life be like if many of us *were* fully aware of what is possible along the lines of wisdom and compassion? Many of us *could be* much more familiar with what is possible... unfortunately, much of the real treasured wisdom of religious, spiritual, and moral traditions now seems to be hidden—and thus in need of being re-discovered. These “hidden” resources include teachings which inspire and encourage people to

- a) place a high priority on the development of truth, virtue, love, and peace—and live disciplined lives for the purpose of adhering to truth, cultivating virtue and love, and maintaining the pathways to enduring peace
- b) sacrifice personal desires for the greater good of the whole
- c) find contentment and quality of life while consuming less material goods and ecological services
- d) 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
- e) use resources carefully, so that there is surplus available for emergency assistance
- f) support community life and cultural traditions which “... bring to the fore what is often hidden: 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.

In other words, 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.

There may be times when people focus more on self-indulgence or self-enrichment, and there may be times when people focus more on the greater good of the whole. For much of our modern age, we—collectively—seem to have been at a crossroads, a crossroads which has at least something of the following four themes in it.

- a) “For most of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, and especially since the Second World War, higher education has been largely a secular enterprise. The goal of a college or university education has been to provide students with scholarly ways of understanding both themselves and the world around them that required little or no appeal to God, religion, or the sacred. The underlying assumption seemed to be that as research and rational reflection explained more and more of the world, religion would become and increasingly unnecessary part of human life. Higher education prepares students for the future, and religion was not particularly relevant for the future as it was envisioned at most universities.” (from introduction to “The American University in a Postsecular Age”)
- b) “Were I to have the least bit of knowledge, in walking on a Great Road,  
it’s only going astray that I would fear.  
The Great Way is very level;  
but people greatly delight in tortuous paths.”
- c) As a result of the unprecedented opportunities created by the expansion of the Internet, we have now arrived at a very auspicious moment in time... for at no other time in the course of history has so many people had access to so much in the way of time-tested guidelines, inspiring role models, and service-oriented initiatives relevant to peace, prosperity, and happiness for all humanity.
- d) One of the most persistent ironies in life is that with so many opportunities to provide real assistance to fellow human beings—and with the potential for such assistance to result in happiness “to those who extend help as well as to those who receive it”—there are still many, many people in this world who cannot find a “way to earn a living” providing such assistance.

Some of the challenges of our times are at the very core of the difficulty of being human beings, and are challenges which people have faced since the beginning of time. Some of the challenges are circumstantial: during times when there is much prosperity many people may not recognize these fields of activity as problematic... and yet, such activities may contribute much to the persistent irony mentioned above. And some of the challenges may be considered the result of a kind of spiritual sickness: people with clear opportunities for walking on a Great Road are instead “greatly delighting in tortuous paths”.

This writer believes it is becoming more and more likely that an exponential increase in compassion for our fellow human beings will need to become an essential and critical element of a truly comprehensive response to the challenges of our times. In such circumstances, we cannot afford to exclude from our “tool box” the time-tested sources which have helped people learn compassion over many centuries. What we need to do instead is to learn how to cultivate the time-tested sources so that the sources yield the treasured wisdom.

This writer also believes—and hopes many other people share this belief—that if we are to overcome the challenges of our times we will need not only the resources which innovators can prove the existence of by scientific method; we will also need the resources which people of faith believe exist as a result of inner experience.

The IPCR Initiative encourages and supports the belief that the likelihood for a positive outcome to the challenges of our times will be increased

--if there many people in same community who were “pulling for each other” to find spiritual strength by way of deepening their faith and belief that there *is* a more advanced and more benevolent spiritual entity than ourselves—and that such an entity *does actually count for something* in overcoming the difficult challenges ahead.

This writer understands—to emphasize by repetition—that as a result of the unprecedented opportunities created by the expansion of the Internet, we have now arrived at a very auspicious moment in time... for at no other time in the course of history has so many people had access to so much in the way of time-tested guidelines, inspiring role models, and service-oriented initiatives relevant to peace, prosperity, and happiness for all humanity.

And this writer understands that there is now a profound and critical need for as many people as possible to exercise as much love, understanding, and forgiveness as possible—in as many ways as possible. Because the beliefs of this writer go in such a direction, his feeling towards anyone who is sincerely trying to cultivate love, understanding, and forgiveness is that he would like to encourage them and assist them, in any way possible. (*When the going gets difficult in our personal lives, will we have enough faith to continue to do our part? And will we have enough wisdom to understand that it is just as important for others to maintain their faith, as it is for us to maintain ours?*)

As a way of concluding the (draft) commentary for this Section #7, I have included some introductory information about the “I Ching”, and a quote from one contemporary interpretation of the “I Ching”.

#### a) Introductory Information

“The Book of Changes—I Ching in Chinese—is unquestionably one of the most important books in the world’s literature. Its origin goes back to mythical antiquity, and it has occupied the attention of the most eminent scholars of China down to the present day. Nearly all that is greatest and most significant in the three thousand years of Chinese cultural history has either taken its inspiration from this book, or has exerted an influence on the interpretation of its text. Therefore, it may safely be said that the seasoned wisdom of thousands of years has gone into the making of the I Ching. Small wonder then that both of the two branches of Chinese philosophy, Confuciansim and Taoism, have their common roots here..... [Lao Tzu knew this book, and some of his profoundest aphorisms were inspired by it. Indeed, his whole thought is permeated with its teachings. Confucius too knew the Book of Changes and devoted himself to reflection upon it. (Confucius is known to have said: “If some years were added to my life, I would give 50 to the study of the I Ching, and might then escape falling into great errors.”) He probably wrote down (some of the interpretive comments attributed to him), and imparted others to his pupils in oral teaching.”]

(from Richard Wilhelm “Introduction” to his I Ching interpretation p.1-2) (with Confucious quote added)

The 64 “hexagrams” associated with the I Ching contain commentaries and observations associated with particular patterns of experience. (Ex: Difficult Beginnings, Calculated Waiting, Adapting, Reform, Danger, Retreat, Obstacles, Temptation, Changing, Reuniting, etc.) The Chinese people who developed the I Ching discovered that reflecting on these patterns of experience was of great value in aligning themselves with the Tao. The Tao has been defined as “the only reasonable and harmonious path for the individual through the cosmos, given his nature and the nature of the cosmic forces at a given moment in time.” (this writer; and quote from R.L. Wing)

b) In the interpretation of the “I Ching” (ancient book of Chinese philosophy) by R.L. Wing, this writer found the following passage:

“It is possible for leaders to be so magnanimous and progressive—and circumstances to be so constructive and inspiring—that even the most evil elements change for the better.”

(#11 Prospering R.L. Wing)

There are actions people can take in the everyday circumstances of community life which will encourage the emergence of many such leaders.

## Appendix

### IPCR Critical Challenges Assessment 2011 (draft) Table of Contents (seeking input)

Introduction

**1. Global warming and reducing carbon emissions**

**2. “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*

**3. The end of the era of “cheap energy” (particularly in reference to “peak oil”)**

**4. 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*)

**5. 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 individuals 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

**6. The U.S. and many other countries will enter the next 15 to 20 years burdened by substantial public debt**, possibly leading to higher interest rates, higher taxes, and tighter credit

**7. A marginalization of the treasured wisdom associated with religious, spiritual, and moral traditions**

**8. Global inequities and the tragic cycles of malnutrition, disease, and death**

**9. Community building associated with responding to the above eight challenges may or may not be accompanied by an exponential increase in compassion for our fellow human beings.** In such circumstances, shortages of goodwill in times of unprecedented transition could tilt already precarious systems into further disarray, and thus erode established systems in even the most stable communities and regions

**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*

Concluding Comments