

D 5. WHAT IS OUR FUTURE ?

No one can foresee the distant future, and it should be apparent that many predictions of even the rather near future often turn out to be wrong. One of the main reasons is that humans are sometimes unpredictable. And if too many people do somewhat unexpected things, some predictions may be wrong. That of itself establishes the fact that what humans do affects the future. And we are not the only element in the picture that may change unexpectedly and upset predictions. Yet we can't avoid making some predictions, because what it makes sense for us to decide to do is affected by what we expect to happen. So people's decisions and actions have effects upon the future, and things beyond human control affect the future. The more we know about those things the better, because then we can take them into account in making our decisions.

The more important things for humans to consider are whether what we are doing individually and in the aggregate are likely to produce a future we would be wise to choose or one we would be wise to avoid. When any of us give serious thought to the sort of world that might be produced if enough people kept on doing the sorts of things we are doing and want them to be doing, we might be surprised by the sort of world that might result. It might not be the sort of world we really thought we were creating.

But the fact of the matter is that humanity is divided into a multiplicity of groups, each with somewhat different patterns of actions and different notions as to the world they think they are creating. Each may be surprised if they knew what they were really creating. Many may be working at cross purposes which may cancel each other out. Others may unwittingly reinforce some tendencies that others initiated.

So what can we say about the sort of world that may result. It might continue indefinitely be to a melange of uncoordinated tendencies. Or it might as though by accident produce any one of several different types of worlds. There would be no reason to think that any one of them would be regarded by many people as very desirable, though by accident one that might or might not be the resulting world might be desirable.

There is always another possibility. We are all familiar with the sorts of problems each of us thinks exist today in our region and in the world as a whole, but we have quite divergent ideas as to how best to deal with them if indeed we have taken the time to find out enough about the causes of each of the problems and the merits of different ways of dealing with each of them. Those of us who have informed ourselves & have wrestled with the policy questions could find ways to enter into open minded discussions in every possible medium of communication with the objective of seeking some consensus on what would be best to do about each. Where we can't agree we

will have to go our own ways, and where we agree we can explain the basis on which we take an agreed position and seek the support of those who did not participate. We will explain the sort of future world we expect that this will create and why it is desirable.

Some Individuals and groups have studied the various directions in which various popular movements now seem to be taking the world. One of the most extensive research projects of the sort was the 2050 Project, involving research by three major research organizations: the Brookings Institution, the Santa Fe Institute, and the World Resources Institute. A member of the last of these, and a person with a decade of his own research on world trends, Allen Hammond, published in 1998 a book drawing on all this research entitled **WHICH WORLD: SCENARIOS FOR THE 21st CENTURY**. On the title page in bold print the following words appear: **GLOBAL DESTINIES, REGIONAL CHOICES**.

The book suggests that there is evidence enough in what has been going on for some time to make a case for any one of three possible future global worlds to result. The first of these he terms **A MARKET WORLD**, one in which market economics completely dominate, a world in which everyone seeks to gain economically & general prosperity is expected to result from unlimited globalization of the world economy. When markets alone are allowed to dominate, however it is clear that inequality increases without limit. Those with money make money and those with little money tend to be left behind by the market. If the rising economic tide floats all boats as the saying goes, many boats in partially isolated backwaters rise little while luxury ocean liners float high. The other problem Hammond sees is that on this finite globe, if the market rules with no environmental restraints, the environmental damage done may darken the future irreparably for everyone & for some much more than for others.

Hammond's second possible scenario he calls **A FORTRESS WORLD**. It might result after a time if the market world leaves too many people and some nations in poverty, or if environmental damage is too great, then the situation might become quite unstable. Civilization might unravel to some degree, with more crime, cruelty & violent conflicts rising especially between the poor & the rich, fear spreading through society with more terrorism & chaos against which people & nations arm more heavily.

The third scenario Hammond terms a **TRANSFORMED WORLD**. This he thinks would be better than either of the other two. For this world to be the future, society would have to act as the steward not as an exploiter of the Earth. And society would have to actively seek to promote human well-being and indeed to increase fairness (equity) instead of simply seeking wealth. This world does not reject market economies at all but does allow deliberate social choices to modify pure market rule. It expects enlightened corporate citizenship & attention to stakeholder interests as warranting normal profits.

Hammond fears that we may have to work for this sort of world lest the market world lead to a fortress world from which there might be no escape. This world has the most to recommend it anyhow, so he hopes we soon opt for trying to bring about what he calls a transformed world.

A substantial section of the Hammond book is devoted to chapters that discuss trends that are important in shaping the future, region by region, and for the world as a whole. He examines the following critical trends: population, economic, technological, environmental, national security, and social & political.

Hammond's book then discusses the situations in seven world regions to try to form judgments on what choices seem likely to be faced in each region that would change their future, and he inquires in each region as to the prospects that one or another of the three scenarios might unfold for it. The regions are Latin America, China & Southeast Asia, India, sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa & the Middle East, Russia and Eastern Europe, and North America, Europe, & Japan.

This book is obviously based upon vast knowledge obtained in each region and the world as a whole by a very thoughtful person concerned about human well-being and our relationship to our life-support system & the natural resources used by our economies. It can be highly recommended to anyone with a little time to inform themselves about our possible futures & how present choices influence what future we get.