

On Prophecy, Catastrophe Theory, Globalization and The Omega Project

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This past weekend I read (in *The Economist*, 16 November 2002) the obituary of René Thom, creator of “catastrophe theory” (see his book, *Structural Stability and Morphogenesis* for details). In mathematical terminology, a “catastrophe” is the loss of stability in a dynamic system. The premise of catastrophe theory is that catastrophes are inevitable, but their effects may be modified (“damage may be lessened”) if they can be predicted. This rather obvious observation was the basis, for example, of the plot for Isaac Asimov’s novel, *The Thousand Year Plan (or Foundation)*. In that science-fiction novel, it was predicted that the galactic empire was doomed to collapse, but that the “dark age” period to follow the collapse could be lessened from forty thousand years to one thousand years by appropriate preparation.

It is a fact of life on Planet Earth that catastrophes do indeed occur. They occur both in nature (e.g., the destruction of the dinosaurs by a massive asteroid), and in human social and economic life (e.g., the destruction of civilizations, empires and nation-states; the bursting of financial “bubbles”). In fact, most of the significant changes in human social/political life are the result of catastrophes. In some cases, the “catastrophe” is sudden and unexpected, such as the rise and fall of Genghis Khan. In many cases, however, the “catastrophe” occurs as the rather natural and expected demise of an empire or nation, as a natural phase of its life cycle. A nation is founded and grows strong. Eventually and inevitably, however, decadence (or maturity or excessive growth) sets in, and another younger, stronger, more dynamic nation conquers it or part of it. The destruction of the nation occurs at the time when its strength or vitality assumes a level below that of other extant states. The change may be unfortunate for the losers, but it is certainly not so for the winners. It is just the natural process of change, and change is both evolutionary and revolutionary in character. It is when the change is “revolutionary” that a catastrophe is generally said to have occurred (simply dying of old age – such as the Roman Empire did – is usually not viewed as a “catastrophe,” in the usual sense of the word). That catastrophes occur is not unexpected at all – all that is unexpected is the exact timing of their occurrence.

Earth is currently in the midst of a catastrophe every bit as momentous as the destruction of the dinosaurs. It is in the midst of the “Sixth Extinction” – the destruction of the biosphere (environment, species composition, large animals) by extreme human overpopulation and industrial activity. If this destructive process continues without abatement, the planet will lose all of its large animal species, perhaps including mankind. In evolutionary terms, the human population explosion and associated destruction of the biosphere is occurring in an instant of time.

That mankind would eventually destroy the planet and civilization as we know it has been anticipated for some time. It is the basis for almost all prophecy, in all cultures. The Internet web site <http://www.crystalinks.com> contains summaries of the better known prophecies from various cultures, including Nostradamus, Mother Shipton, H. G. Wells, Native Americans, Christianity, and the Mayans. An interesting aspect of most of these prophecies is that they generally involve “catastrophes,” in the sense of a major

destruction of a nation or civilization. When you think about it, however, there is nothing remarkable about most prophecy – nations and civilizations often end – and begin -- in a violent cataclysm or convulsion (e.g., the American and French Revolutions, the North American Indians, the Aztecs, the Incas, the African tribes, the Assyrians, the Third German Reich, the Ottoman Empire). (To be sure, there are counterexamples to convulsive ends, where empires simply disintegrated over a long time, such as the Roman and British Empires, and there are certainly nations and civilizations that began *de novo* (e.g., Rome).) The point is, however, that it requires hardly any “prescience” to anticipate the occurrence of very large and very destructive wars. The occurrence of “war, rumours of war, plague, and earthquakes in divers places” is quite unremarkable, since those incidents occur all of the time, everywhere on the planet (where there are people).

While the prediction of destructive wars is hardly worthy of note, some of the “signs” of prophecy are somewhat remarkable. These include Mother Shipton’s, the North American Indians’, and H. G. Wells’ descriptions of things to come, and some of Nostradamus’ prophecies. When it comes to dates, however, most prophecies fail miserably. In his book, *Observations Upon the Prophecies of Daniel, and the Apocalypse of St. John*, by Sir Isaac Newton cautioned against ever assigning a date to a prophecy. Any “prophet” who does so does at his own peril. Most of Edgar Cayce’s prophecies are believable, in the sense that they might eventually happen (since continents continually rise and fall into the sea), but it appears that essentially nothing that he predicted occurred on the date (or even in the time period) that he specified. To be successful in the art of prophecy, one must be very careful to avoid specifying dates, and to include lots of ambiguity (e.g., the Delphic Oracle). Prophetic dates are often stated in astrological terms, or other ambiguous fashion. Even if a prophet is correct on one date, he is still not to be trusted – spirit guides are notorious for sprinkling a little truth in fiction, to enhance their credibility.

Consistent with natural and human history, most prophecies describe the occurrence of major changes, which often occur very quickly, if not unexpectedly. As noted in *The Economist* article mentioned earlier, the fall of the Berlin Wall was hardly unexpected – it had to fall eventually – but few people predicted it to occur in 1989. Also, the breakup of the Soviet Union was not unexpected – all empires fail, eventually – but the fact that it would occur in 1991 was not predicted, and the rapidity with which it happened was quite surprising to most people. After the US opened its borders to mass immigration, and the terrorists had already tried once to destroy a Twin Towers building and promised to try again, it was no surprise that the Twin Towers were destroyed in 2001, but no one predicted the exact date of destruction.

In my book, *Can America Survive?*, I predict the eventual demise of America, and that it will happen relatively soon. But I do not specify a particular date. The US will collapse eventually, because all nations collapse eventually. It will collapse before fifty years passes, however, because the world’s commercial oil and gas reserves will be gone by then – this estimate (50 years) is based on known fossil-fuel reserves, discovery rates, and consumption rates. It will collapse well before that, however, because of its absurd (bizarre, suicidal) cultural and immigration policies. Once again, this prediction is based on facts about US cultural and immigration policy (up to three million immigrants a year, from diverse cultures). But will it collapse next year, or in 2007, or in any other particular year? Or be destroyed by ballistic missiles or suitcase bombs or an AIDS-like epidemic? I don’t have any idea. I could make some educated guesses, but the future is entirely

too “stochastic” to pin down a particular date. In my opinion, any “prophet” who specifies exact dates is to be taken with a grain of salt – at least with respect to the dates. The Mayan calendar is judged to end on December 21, 2012. Many Christians believe that global war will occur just before a thousand years of peace, that the East will attack the West, and that the war will start in the Middle East. Could be. These predictions may come true, and they may not. It doesn’t really matter. What matters is that extreme human overpopulation and industrial activity are destroying the planet’s biosphere at an alarming rate, and that if something is not done quickly, the biosphere as we know it will be gone forever.

So what am I leading up to? Just this: Students of history and students of religion agree that when “Earth changes” occur, they often occur very quickly. And sometimes unexpectedly. Following the defeat of Napoleon in 1812, the world had over one hundred years of relative peace, before exploding in the First World War. The world has had over fifty years of peace since the Second World War. Human population is doubling every few decades. Human misery is exploding. Thousands of species are being exterminated every year. This situation will not continue much longer, because it cannot continue much longer – explosive growth never lasts very long.

The objective of The Omega Project is to ensure that when the industrial world collapses, steps are taken to establish a long-term sustainable planetary population of ten million people – a “minimal-regret” population consisting of a single nation of five million people and a globally distributed population of five million hunter-gatherers. The purpose of this brief article is to remind those who would implement a long-term sustainable planetary management system that when the collapse of global industrial world occurs, it will likely be very sudden. It may also be very soon. The time to prepare is now.

The modern industrial world is a dynamic system, and it will not escape the fate of all dynamic systems – failure, whether catastrophic or otherwise. Because of its explosive growth, and because it is against nature (mass destruction of species, mass production of waste that is not recycled), it will almost surely suffer a catastrophic collapse. This catastrophic failure will be the opportunity to build a new and very different kind of planet. In the absence of careful planning and decisive action, a destroyed industrial world will attempt to rebuild, and simply complete the destruction of the biosphere at a later date. All large species would be destroyed, and large-scale human misery would continue. When the collapse of the industrial world occurs, however, advance planning, preparation and decisive action can change the future course of events, and establish a world of peace and ecological well-being. But if successful action is to be taken, it must be taken quickly. When the industrial world collapses it is very important to move quickly, both to reduce the continuing ecological destruction caused by the crippled industrial world, and to increase the likelihood of implementing a sound planetary management system.

Given the powerful stranglehold that economic/industrial globalization has on the planet, it is not possible to implement a long-term sustainable planetary management system by direct means. Rather, it is necessary to wait until the moment when this very powerful system destroys itself. It is at that time, when it is in collapse, that astute, committed and organized survivors can move to establish a long-term sustainable planetary management system.

Industrial mankind has been likened to a cancer in the biosphere. Every year, industrial mankind destroys thousands more of the planet's species. The end is nowhere in sight. No matter how many people there are or how much industrial production there is, all leaders of all nations call for more. No world leader is calling for a decrease either in his nation's population or its economic activity or industrial production.

As Sir Fred Hoyle once observed, mankind will have only one chance to establish a sustainable planetary civilization. Industrial globalization is rapidly killing the biosphere, and eliminating mankind's chance to continue to live on a wonderful planet, filled with marvelous other creatures. If you survive the coming collapse of the industrial world, please remember this: global industrialization is a pernicious destroyer of planets, but it can be stopped. When the industrial world collapses, acknowledge the tremendous ecological destruction and human misery that it caused, and work to establish a new, sustainable system. Read *The Omega Project* to see what to do. Whether Earth has tigers, pandas, and condors for the next 65 million years is up to *you*.

As I previously observed in *Can America Survive?*, economics is the driving force that has corrupted mankind and is destroying the planet. The renowned economist John Maynard Keynes emphasized (in his 1930 essay, "Economic Possibilities for our Grandchildren") the fatal limitations of economics as a long-term basis for human society:

"Some day we may return to some of the most sure and certain principles of religion and traditional virtue – that avarice is a vice, that the extraction of usury is a misdemeanor, and the love of money is detestable. But beware! The time for all this is not yet. For at least another hundred years we must pretend to ourselves and to every one that fair is foul and foul is fair; for foul is useful and fair is not. Avarice and usury and precaution must be our gods for a little while longer."

Epilogue

From time to time I am asked, "What will the future be like?" From those who have read my book, *Can America Survive?* I am also asked if I am not depressed at all of the "gloom and doom" that it portends. Let me assert first, that I am not at all depressed or pessimistic. On the contrary, I believe that this is the most exciting time ever in the history of the planet Earth, and I am privileged to be a part of this time. It is the time of transition from an out-of-control, unsustainable global industrial society to a rational planetary management system. This is a natural and perhaps inevitable phase of mankind's spiritual development, from a materialistic, physical, uncontrolled phase to a higher, more disciplined phase that is directed toward long-term goals. I believe that the planet will transit from its current incredibly destructive phase to a sustainable and ecologically sustainable phase because, as industrial globalization continues to destroy the biologically diverse biosphere, people will eventually realize the folly and evil of the current, economics-driven system, and support change to a better, sustainable, ecologically healthy system that works well for mankind and the rest of the biosphere.

In my view, the only real issues of concern – and uncertainty – are (1) timing; (2) the state of the planet after the age of industrial globalization – the age of destruction – is over; and (3) what planetary management system succeeds global industrialization. If many people read and discuss *The Omega Project*, I believe that the survivors of the collapse of the industrial world will move decisively to establish a rational planetary

management system along the lines described in The Omega Project – a Platonic government of a minimal-regret world population of ten million people. With respect to the state of the planet after global industrialization (the industrial age) is over, that depends essentially on when the collapse of the industrial world occurs. If the collapse happens soon and catastrophically, the Earth will be able to retain a high degree of biological diversity for millions of years to come. If it happens late or gradually, the biological diversity of the planet will be destroyed, and there will be little left to save. The likelihood of mankind's long-term survival decreases with each passing year of the industrial age (because the ecologically diverse biosphere is being destroyed at such a rapid rate, and because the likelihood of a "greenhouse" death of the planet increases with each passing year of macroscopic planetary change).

If you read publications such as the Worldwatch Institute's *State of the World*, you will know that mankind's large-scale industrial activity has about reached the limits of its destruction of nature, with dire consequences manifest, apparent and accelerating. Mankind's large numbers and industrial activity are now causing macroscopic changes in the planetary ecosystem (environmental destruction and pollution, species loss, changes in atmospheric composition). The ecological state of the planet is now critical, and on the verge of collapse (i.e., major change). It is also very evident that the political state of the world is on the verge of collapse (i.e., mass misery, the materialistic versus the nonmaterialistic world – the "haves" versus the "have nots" – the politics of envy). The social/cultural state of the world began its collapse many years ago, when economic development stole a meaningful livelihood from most of the world's population.

So when will the industrial world collapse, enabling the transition to a rational, low-population, long-term sustainable planetary management system? Time is now of the essence, and the "window of opportunity" to a rational planetary management system with an intact biosphere is very narrow (since if the global industrial world continues for several more decades, there is nothing left to save). Global industrialization will not continue past 2050, when all petroleum and natural gas reserves are exhausted. Already, however, the social, political, and ecological systems are under great stress, and showing signs of collapse (major change). In my view, conditions are ripe for a catastrophic collapse of the global industrial world. Since I am an optimist, I believe that this collapse will occur very soon, and that mankind will move quickly to rational planetary management with a largely intact biosphere. Since movement to a new system of planetary management is now feasible (i.e., the collapse of the global industrial world is imminent), and because delay of a transition is so very destructive to the planet's biological diversity, I believe that it will happen very soon – "there is no known reason for waiting." Given this view, I believe that the global industrial world will collapse very soon – probably immediately (today is December 1, 2002), or within a very few years, but definitely not as late as 2050. Any time now. And the industrial world will not die, as T. S. Elliot predicted ("The Hollow Men"), with a whimper, but with a bang.

With respect to the nature (size, composition) of human population after the collapse of the global industrial world, there are two major possibilities. Without rational planetary management, the (solar-energy-supported) population of the planet will be on the order a few hundred million very poor people. With rational planetary management, the population will be on the order of ten million non-poor (i.e., the minimal-regret population consisting of a single nation of five million technologically advanced people and a globally distributed population of five million hunter-gatherers). When the industrial world collapses, the survivors will see that *laissez-faire* (individual freedom, multiple-

nation sovereignty, democracy, global industrialism, economics) is no way to run a planet (once technology is “out of the bag”), and they will move to establish a better system. For this reason, I believe that the post-industrial planetary population will be ten million, not several hundred million.

In the past, my references to Isaac Asimov’s *Foundation* have been a little misinterpreted. In Asimov’s *Foundation*, careful planning was able to shorten the time-span of the “dark-age” period following the collapse of the Galactic Empire from an estimated forty thousand years to one thousand years. The point of misinterpretation is that I do not see a return to a global industrial Earth having a high human population, after the collapse of the current high-human-population industrial age. For me, the crucial issues are whether we preserve a biologically diverse planet (i.e., with many large-animal species), or whether the survivors of the post-industrial age inherit a planet devoid of large-animal species (and many other species, as well), or whether mankind survives the post-industrial world at all. That is the point to The Omega Project and this Foundation. The purpose of The Omega Project is to preserve a biologically diverse planet Earth (for hundreds of millions of years to come), not enable a return to a high-population industrial age after the present one collapses.

In summary, my “prophecy” about the future state of the planet is this: The global industrial world will collapse, catastrophically (e.g., global nuclear war, greenhouse effect, plague), very soon; and the post-industrial-age human population will be on the order of an “optimal” ten million people, not a “maximal” several-hundred-million people. Furthermore, this population of ten million will be a “minimal-regret” population (consisting of a single nation of five million high-technology people and a globally distributed population of five million hunter gatherers), and the planetary management system in place will be a Platonic (synarchic) government along the lines described in The Omega Project.

Why am I optimistic that the post-industrial human population of Earth will be a minimal-regret population of ten million people? For one reason, because many people are accessing the Foundation Internet web sites (<http://www.foundation.bw> and <http://www.foundationwebsite.org>) and downloading my books and articles. My objective was to spread the word about The Omega Project, and this is happening. Some e-mail that I receive does not believe that the major planetary change that I predict is going to happen – they simply reject it out of hand, and assume that “technology” will find a solution. (In a sense, they are right – technology will indeed find a solution, but it is not the solution that they expect: it is the destruction of the technological world by itself!) Most e-mail I receive, however, does not take exception to my arguments. The response from students at universities (i.e., the idealistic part of the population that is not yet heavily invested in material possessions and lifestyles) is particularly encouraging. People are listening, and beginning to think about a better planetary management system. It will happen. The pernicious destruction of the biosphere by the global industrial world will be stopped, and a healthy new world order will be established.

As I mentioned earlier, it is foolish to attempt to place exact dates on predictions about the future (“prophecies”). As I have discussed, my “prophecies” are based on scientific observation, reason, and systems engineering, not on spiritual revelation. They are more akin to those of H. G. Wells and Arnold Toynbee than to those of Nostradamus, Daniel and St. John of Patmos. Perhaps a better word for them is predictions or

forecasts, since the word “prophecy” is loaded with revelatory implications. While I am convinced that I understand the process that is happening, and realize what “phase” of human development we are presently in, and have identified a good solution, I am definitely not certain over the precise timing or exact outcome (e.g., who will be in charge, or the exact location or size or composition of the surviving global management system). The industrial age (technology, the energy windfall of fossil fuel, large human population) has grown exponentially, and signs that it is coming to an explosive end are appearing. The massive increase in poverty and human misery is a sign. The mass destruction of species is a sign. The mass destruction of the environment is a sign. The dramatic rise in terrorism is a sign. There are many signs – too many to be ignored. But do I believe that the nonmaterialistic world (e.g., antiglobalization, Islamic fundamentalists or other religious groups, terrorists) will “defeat” the industrial world? No, I do not. The industrial world will destroy itself. I do not know whether the means will be global nuclear war, or disease from gross intermingling and overpopulation, or famine caused by genetically modified food, or a greenhouse effect, or climate change, or an asteroid, or a shift of the Earth’s axis, or some combination of these. And I do not know the exact timing. But it will happen. And soon.

What about established prophecy? How does my “prophecy” relate to those of Nostradamus, Daniel, Jesus, Mother Shipton, H G Wells, the North American Indians, the Mayans, Edgar Cayce and others? Most prophecies fall into essentially two categories – those with dates, which are almost surely wrong, and those without dates, which are almost certain to be fulfilled (since they usually refer to wars, famines and plagues, which happen always wherever human beings occur in significant numbers; or to earthquakes, volcanoes, polar axis shifts, climate change, and continent sinkings, which happen all the time). Popular prophecy suggests that the last great war of civilization will start in the Middle East, last for ten years, involve a great struggle between East and West (or Islam and Christianity). The most widely accepted interpretation of the Mayan Calendar suggests that the current world age ends on December 21, 2012. Does this mean that Armageddon begins in December of 2002? Who knows? It can easily be argued that the initial skirmishes of Armageddon have already begun. Time will tell.

My friend, Gordon, asked me who will make the crucial, life-and-death decisions to set up a minimal-regret population. He was concerned with the moral issue – that no one is willing to take a human life “just to save plants and animals, or even to save mankind.” My correspondent Heiko once remarked, in a similar vein, that he was not willing to kill a three-year old child to “save a rat.” Taking charge of the planet will require conflict and killing. But I do not see the problem here. The unilateral decision to kill another human being is indeed murder, punishable by death in many societies. But killing to protect one’s society, or to save the planet, is both a social obligation and a sacred duty – it is war, or defense of one’s society, not murder. Societies have always gone to war, for both noble and ignoble causes. America entered World War I and World War II on moral grounds, to help build a better world. When the industrial world collapses, plenty of people will strive to take charge – there will be no lack of contenders. The objective of The Omega Project is, through its information program, to ensure that whoever prevails after the collapse of the industrial world will move to establish a planetary management system based on a minimal-regret population. The situation after collapse of the industrial world will not at all be analogous to a few environmental activists or antiglobalization activists declaring war on the industrial world. As I have observed before, that approach is doomed to failure – the industrial world is too strong to be

defeated by nonindustrial forces, prior to its own self-collapse. Violence perpetrated by individuals or small groups is regarded as the crime of murder or “terrorism”; violence in support of a social cause, under legitimate leadership, is not – it is war, or defense, or public safety. Fighting for the survival of the planet prior to the fall of the industrial world will be classified as terrorism, and it will fail. Fighting for the survival of the planet when industrial society has collapsed, and destroyed much of the world with it, will be regarded as the right, responsible, and proper thing to do.

There is a scene in the film, *Patton*, where General George S. Patton is attempting to motivate his troops to kill the enemy. As is well known, most soldiers, unless suitably conditioned, will not fire directly at another human being, even though it be a mortal enemy. Patton tells each soldier to imagine his best friend positioned next to him in a bunker, facing the enemy, when an enemy bullet hits his friend directly in the face, mutilating him beyond recognition and killing him instantly. And Patton then says, “When you place your hand in the mush that was your best friend’s face, you will know what to do.”

The time for decision is near. And you will know what to do.

Postlude

As I lay in bed in the early hours of the morning (Lusaka, Zambia, December 3, 2002), off in the distance I hear (was awakened by?) the muezzin’s call. Allah akhbar – God is great. The wind is rustling the Lombardy poplars outside my bedroom window. The cool night air flows through the open window and gently moves the mosquito net that surrounds the bed. From time to time, one of Dimitri’s turkeys voices its mournful rattle, in anticipation of its coming end. As I look out the window, I see the first red tones of sunrise on the eastern horizon. I look higher and I see Venus, the morning star, shining more brightly than I can ever remember, except perhaps, as my memory now reminds me, as a bright diamond of the evening on the Sea-of-Cortez shore of San Carlos, Mexico, next to the slivered, silver crescent of the pearl-Moon in a deep blue sky. The sky is totally clear, with the last few stars of evening showing in the pale blue dome of night. As I turn my gaze further along the plane of the ecliptic, I see Mars, the red planet, the god of my profession. Off in a different direction is Sirius. There is no Moon tonight, so the stars last long until dawn slowly fades them away.

Venus and Mars – love and war – one of the many dualities in God’s unitary universe that makes everything possible and interesting. As I lay awake, I reflect on the wonders of it all. Good and evil. If evil did not exist, God would have had to create it. It is the catalyst that renders life significant, that provides the challenges that make life meaningful and worth living. It occurs to me that we are all God’s creation, all pawns in his magnificent game of chess. I reflect that it is He that has made us, and not we ourselves. Not a single thought enters my mind, but He has placed it there.

Man will never know peace in this physical existence, but the endless striving for it is one of his greatest and most rewarding challenges. It has fascinated and preoccupied men from all ages. L. Ron Hubbard, founder of Scientology, once stated its goal as “A civilization without insanity, without criminals and without war, where the able can prosper and honest beings can have rights, and where man is free to rise to greater heights.” This will be achieved.

I reflect on the words of Omraam Mikhaël Aïvanhov (*The Powers of Thought*, Collection Izvor No. 224, Prosveta, 1989): "...think of the world as one immense family whose members all love, understand and smile at each other. Picture a world in which there are no more wars, no more national boundaries, in which all human beings are free to travel and meet others. The whole earth sings a hymn of joy and gratitude to the Creator." But this new world will not happen without significant change – "tremendous upheavals," as Aïvanhov described the dawning of the Age of Aquarius. And as part of this change, to mold the new world into one that is proper and good, will require much work. And this ideal world will never be realized as a permanent state of our physical world. It is but a transitory goal that, once achieved, must be once again destroyed in the never-ending cycle of birth and death of all material things. We may desire peace, and we will surely work for peace, and we will achieve peace. We may even achieve a thousand years of peace. But, in the physical world, everlasting peace will never be the final end. It cannot be the final end, for then physical life would have lost its greatest goal and challenge and *raison d'être*.

As discussed by Aïvanhov, spiritual work and material (physical) work are two very different things. But both are necessary. From spiritual work one can expect light, peace, harmony, health and intelligence. As physical creatures we must do physical work to accomplish the objectives and manifestations of spiritual desire. Work is the means by which this is accomplished. Through spiritual work we will come to know the right path. Through physical work we shall travel that path and help achieve spiritual development. How shall we know what to do? How should we then live? Jesus provided much insight in this matter, and emphasized the importance of work. "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God." "My Heavenly Father is always at work, and I am working with Him." "As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work (the inspiration for the beautiful hymn, 'Work, for the Night Is Coming,' by Anna Walker and Lowell Mason)." "Watch and pray." Work – struggle, challenge, setting and accomplishing goals – is essential for human happiness and physical and mental health. "Nature has no patience with creatures who do nothing. Every being must be committed, busy...." He quotes Master Peter Deunov, "Rabota, rabota, rabota, Vréme, vrémé, vrémé. Vera, vera, vera." Work, work, work. Time, time, time. Faith, faith, faith.

What is the right path? In *An Historian's Approach to Religion*, Arnold Toynbee provides insight on this. "The Hinayana arrives at its policy by starting with the value-judgment that the greatest of all evils is Suffering. From this it follows that a release from Suffering must be the greatest of all goods; and from that conclusion it follows, in turn, that a human being's paramount objective ought to be to extinguish Suffering at whatever the price may be. The price turns out to be nothing less than the extinction of the Self; for Suffering cannot be extinguished without the extinction of Desire, and when Desire is extinguished, Self is extinguished with it.

"...Christianity and the Mahayana arrive at their policy by starting with a distinction, which the Hinayana does not draw, between desires of two different kinds... According to the Christian-Mahayanian diagnosis, there are self-centered desires, in which the Self yearns for an object outside itself in order to exploit this object of desire for the greedy Self's own satisfaction; and, where it is a question of these self-centered desires, the Christian-Mahayanian and the Hinayanian policies do not differ. The common counsel is: 'Extinguish them.' The difference in policy arises when Christianity and the Mahayana go on to diagnose another kind of desire, which is not self-centered but, on

the contrary, is self-sacrificing. Self-sacrifice means, not selfishly extinguishing the Self, but lovingly devoting it to the service of others at the cost of whatever Suffering this service may bring with it.

“...It is a fact of experience that every human self can and does have desires of these two different kinds, and that the two are not only different but are at opposite poles of the spiritual gamut. Here we have a further manifestation of the paradoxical union, in Human Nature, of opposites that conflict yet are inseparable. And the unceasing struggle which is an unescapable accompaniment of human life in This World is, in truth, a struggle to extinguish our self-centered desires and to follow the lead of our self-devouring desires at whatever the price may be. The price turns out to be Suffering to an extreme degree. The pain to which we expose ourselves through Love is still greater than the pain to which we expose ourselves through Cupidity. In the judgment of Christianity and the Mahayana, even the extremity of Suffering is not too high a price to pay for following Love’s lead; for, in their judgment, *Selfishness, not Suffering, is the greatest of all evils, and Love, not release from Suffering, is the greatest of all goods.*

“A synoptic view of the living higher religions thus confronts us with two different policies for the conduct of human life, based on two different diagnoses of the nature of Man and the Universe. Which of the two diagnoses comes the closer to the truth? And which of the two policies will bring us nearer to the true end of Man?”

In the same vein, Aïvanhov observes, “You will, perhaps, say that to want to tend to the earth is not a very glorious ideal, whereas Hindus...and Buddhists are only interested in escaping from this earth of sorrow, suffering and strife. That is their philosophy, but it is not the philosophy of Christ.”

As noted by Pascal (*Pensées*, No. 433, quoted by Toynbee), “A religion cannot be true unless it has attained a true knowledge of our nature. It will have to have attained a knowledge of Man’s greatness and his pettiness, and a knowledge of the reason for both these characteristics of his. What religion has attained this knowledge except Christianity?”

In a few days, my wife and I leave for a long-anticipated vacation in southern South America (Argentina, Chile, Uruguay). What will the future hold? What is around the next corner? The world seems to be unraveling, but this is just the prelude to the next act. What is the next mission? “My heart is in the work,” was Andrew Carnegie’s motto. Whatever is next, it will surely be a fulfilling challenge. There is much work to do. “Let’s roll!”