

The Greatest Danger – Environment or Peace?

We have all become accustomed to much doom and gloom talk about the sad state of the planetary environment as it relates to our survival and future well-being. We may be particularly concerned for our own local Kuranda environment and the threats from over-development and urbanization. We may also be concerned about national and international threats such as water shortages, climate change, pulp mills and other industrial proposals, potential energy shortages, pollution overload as it threatens delicate ecosystems such as the Great Barrier Reef, and the survival of certain species.

We are swamped by negative stories out there about the environment, but this does not seem to result in timely responses. There is obviously much more that could be done to improve the world's environment. Greed and crass, selfish materialism seem to be working to impede improvements. The planetary organizational system does little to help, with a world divided into so called "sovereign" nation-states, with limited international coordination and even less capacity for effective enforcement of minimum global standards. International capitalism has not yet on the whole displayed any heights of responsibility on this issue, and national governments are more intent upon minimizing the effect of any changes on their own country. Ignorance also plays its part, although there is a growing environmental consciousness that is assisting here.

The talk doing the rounds of the media is that pressing environmental issues now comprise the greatest danger facing the future of humanity. A recent UN report has stressed the urgency of the situation. Politicians are beginning to sit up and take real notice.

But the stories are not all negative, although the good stories receive less publicity. The growing environmental consciousness is still a comparatively recent event, yet it has really taken off in many parts of the world. Proposals that will impact on the environment are increasingly and vigorously being scrutinized. The main actors are being called to account with greater frequency. Science and technology are coming up with some solutions. NGOs in particular are demonstrating a more proactive role in this, particularly in democracies. They demonstrate that we are not just passive bystanders but all have a role to play.

So are these environmental issues, pressing and complex as they may be, the greatest danger to the future of humanity? A short while ago, before the fall of the Berlin Wall, it was widely thought that the threats to world peace and

of the potential for another global conflagration were the main danger. The spectre of the bi-polar world under a policy of “MAD” (mutually assured destruction) hung over the whole planet and all its inhabitants. The nuclear standoff was a reality. But this threat appeared to suddenly dissolve as the two main contender-nations backed down somewhat. The possibility of a new era of world peace appeared on the horizon.

In retrospect, we now realize what an error this latter view was. Despite the effects of globalization, the reality is that the world has never been so divided. Instead of a bi-polar world, we now have a world fractured along many contending lines, with arms races reappearing in various regions, the spread of weapons of mass destruction, an increase in international terrorism, the emergence of serious divisions and hatreds based on race, religion and other factors that were previously suppressed, a global race for limited resources with potential for conflict, and new anxieties for the future.

These deep divisions and prejudices and their potential consequences for world peace and prosperity still comprise the greatest threat facing humanity, with the capacity for them to result in mass violence and destruction. The risk of an eruption of these threats to international peace and prosperity cannot and should not be underestimated, in a world that is ever more closely interconnected yet so dangerously divided. The present world order is hopelessly ill equipped to deal with these dangers. We cannot expect to seriously and effectively address any of the great problems facing the planet, including those of an environmental nature, without a dramatic change in perspective and direction.

The message should be that there is a lot of hope out there for progress towards comprehensive planetary peace, prosperity and environmental sustainability, but it requires a recognition of the fact that the threats to world peace continue to be the greatest danger facing all of us, threats that must be seriously and vigorously tackled. This requires a much more comprehensive, more cooperative, more sophisticated, more morally and spiritually based, and more globally-unified approach on the part of all nations and all peoples. It needs a new vision that the whole earth is a sacred trust for all humanity, and that this can only be implemented by a consciousness of the oneness of the human race under one divine source.

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