On Aug 28, 2019

**The Spirit of the 20’s***John Epps, August 2019*

The categories for determining the spirit of a decade supposedly come from Kierkegaard: An External Situation creates an Internal Crisis which raises an Existential Question from which we try to Escape. I’ve used them in trying to assess the situation since the 60’s. Here we go again:

**The Prevailing Spirit:**  
Our External Situation is best characterized as one of **THREAT**. Economically, health care costs are rising astronomically, the move away from fossil fuels and the trade war with China have put markets in turmoil and talk of recession is in the air. Politically, we have cut off alliances and find Russia, N. Korea, and Iran all upgrading their nuclear capabilities. USA Congress seems unable to act. Culturally, we are besieged with increased numbers of immigrants and mass shootings now appear commonplace. And encompassing all this chaos is the Earth’s environment which appears to be undergoing dangerous changes due to global warming.

All this has generated or contributed to an Internal Crisis of **FEAR**. We increasingly fear those who differ from us, whether by race, gender identification, nationality, or ideology. Everything different seems a threat, and we fear the changes already in progress. Compromise seems weak, and we’re increasingly in a black or white situation: agree or fight.

The Existential Question in this situation is **HOW CAN WE SURVIVE?** With the environment collapsing and threats at every turn, what can we do? Problems seem too big to tackle, and local action, while effective, remains local while the issues are larger. Institutions we developed to address larger issues appear paralyzed: CONGRESS, UN, NATO, NAFTA, ASEAN, Treaties with Iran and the Paris Accords for Climate all appear ineffective in providing remedies. Attempts to inact gun control legislation, despite agreement from both parties, cannot move through Congress.

We Escape through **BLAMESTORMING**; we look for scapegoats for each issue, then cast them as enemies toward which hatred is the only suitable relation. We demonize NRA, GOP, “Moscow Mitch,” Trump, Kim, Putin, Refugees, Democrats, Immigrants, Socialists, and many others. Extreme hostility takes the guise of radical nationalism attempting to band “us” against “them” or in too many cases, mass shootings aimed at eliminating “them.”

**Towards an Authentic Response:**This is where we meet the question of God today: wrestling with the question of responding to threats to our existence.

Local action may be the most we can do, and since that makes a difference, should be pursued with vigor. Maybe, over time, the mass changes needed can come from local people.

The threats are real. The status quo cannot and will not survive. The future is really open and unpredictable. We can, however, have a hand in inventing it.

Your comments, additions, corrections, and insights are most welcome.

**From:**Robertson Work <[warkers@msn.com](mailto:warkers@msn.com)>

Dear colleagues,

Good to see these concerns being shared. This is my brief summary of what humanity is facing, from page 3 of *A Compassionate Civilization: "We are living in the most critical time in all of human history, a time to do what is needful or face the direst of consequences. Why do I say that? Never before in the past five thousand years have we faced such colossal dangers and such exhilarating possibilities. The very future of life on Earth is at stake. We face multiple, interlocking crises, any one of which could be decisive—climate chaos, misogyny, systemic poverty, oligarchy, prejudice, and a culture of violence. A whole system transformation is underway, and we are at the brink of either mass extinction or a whole new way of being human on planet Earth. Which it will be depends on what you and I do with our lives."*

*And this is my summary concerning what we need to do at this moment in history: "Let us dare to dream and realize a new civilization of compassion. Let us take the necessary actions for environmental sustainability, gender equality, socioeconomic justice, participatory governance, cultural tolerance, and nonviolence and peace. Let us work together to do all of this as a movement of movements (MOM.) Let us do this as mindful activists using methods of innovative leadership including participatory facilitation, integral frameworks, and social artistry. Let us do this as global-local citizens. And let us do this while cultivating understanding and compassion, realizing happiness, celebrating gratitude, living lifelong commitment, choosing courage, dancing with time, and embracing sadness, sickness, old age, and death."*

PT 2 ROB WORK

A few of my thoughts: If a contradiction is that which is blocking a vision, what is the vision? If the vision is of humanity realizing its full potential to love all beings (all people and all nature), then what is blocking that from being realized? From my point of view, the human contradiction is the illusion that the self is a *separate*, independent, unchanging entity that must be protected and promoted at the expense of any and every other reality. This is based on ignorance of the true nature of the self as interdependent, impermanent, and in a state of suffering. That statement is from a Buddhist perspective. A Christian perspective on the contradiction seems to be very similar. Human beings are in a state of sin, which Paul TIllich clarifies as: "sin is *separation* from self, others, and the ground of being." This fundamental error of perception of the self is that which pits the self against all others and even its own nature. This is a tragic ontological narcissism and solipsism - the belief that "I" am all that matters or even exists, and therefore I can and must do whatever I need to do to subjugate other beings to my will and my glory.

PT 3 Rob Work

Beautifully, powerfully stated, Ellie. Thank you.

So if we are on target with the vision and the contradiction, what are the strategic directions that would deal with the contradiction and move toward the vision? As you say, love/compassion, and an understanding of the interconnected nature of all reality and of the self. In Buddhism this would be called waking up to the realities of interdependence, impermanence and suffering, and vowing to relieve the suffering of all sentient beings. In Christianity it would be experiencing grace or reunion with self, others, and the ground of being, and dedicating your life to love the neighbor (all neighbors) as yourself. And in my view this must be done in an integral manner: changing individual mindsets and behaviors, and transforming collective cultures and systems.

Other views?

A.M. Noel <[anthonymarianoel@gmail.com](mailto:anthonymarianoel@gmail.com)>

We always knew when we are able to articulate the contradiction. We could come up with what is possible, Are we willing to articulate what is the human contradiction?

A.M. Noel

Jack Gilles via OE <[oe@lists.wedgeblade.net](mailto:oe@lists.wedgeblade.net)> wrote:

John and Colleagues,

You have laid out the classic analysis of the existential crisis the world is facing very well. Indeed, the collective threat to our human and planetary existence is before us. What is obvious is that the pain will increase; for all of us. There will be no escape. We will all weep at the destruction of the planet and the dehumanization forces react to the fear they feel. Let these tears cleanse our hearts and clear the dust from our minds. We will rejoice at the signs of possibilities that so many will demonstrate daily, even though they also face the wind that can blow out the candles of hope. Cruelty will grow, greed will flourish and the beast will roar. Courage will be in big demand.

So many years ago, amazingly we saw it coming, although we had no idea of the particulars. You can remember and resonate to the words of wisdom that were spoken then. “Without a NRM there will be no NSV”. “Although we are engaged in the campaigns of Awakenment and Demonstration, the day after tomorrow we will only be doing the Third Campaign, Caring for those who Care.” “Discerning the Contradiction is the key to creative change”. “Never attack directly, indirection is the way”. And wow, all the learnings we amassed! We failed at replication, but now we know why. We failed at expanding Religious Houses, but now we know why. We failed at renewing the historical Christian church, but now we know why. And that wisdom needs to be collected and shared. Thus the mission of the Living Archives. It is now time to share that wisdom, but not just everyone, but with the newly awakened ones, those who discovered the Second Mountain, as David Brooks describes it. With those who have discovered the primacy of the local but have done so in partnership with the living Earth. We can trust the Mystery to raise up stones in amazing ways. New life will fill “dem bones”. New poetry, stories, songs and symbols will left hearts and strengthen spines.

Enough of the words. Practically what do we do? Most of us are long-in-the tooth, so we must discern our elder role and develop the strategy to make it happen. Time is short to do so. Maybe the ICA’s is the vehicle, maybe not. We lost something when we shifted from Global language to National language. The nation state is a social vehicle that will not work, it is dead, but sure does look and act alive (I mean it doesn’t represent the way life is anymore). So start with our Grid. Watch the TED talk on the 50 Urban Nodes that have emerged (these are the Areas from our Grid). Listen to the wisdom of Larry Ward and Peggy Rowe (see Larry’s short TED talk). Become fluent in speaking of what we called the NRM. See how it is indeed the absolute requirement to lead in the creation of the NSV. Understand the dynamics of the creative process and how our Social Process work reveals the wisdom of how it happens, and review the Pressure Points and Whistle Points for their relevance today, and have they shifted? Grasp the dynamics and forms of The Wayside Inn and how it can function. Probe the deeps of Imaginal Education and see how it can transform people. And so much more. Perhaps we need a forum to do the creative work needed as we remain dispersed. May I suggest the Living Archives can be such a forum, a way to glean every bit of our life experience of scattered wisdom and pull it through our collective historical wisdom.

As my dear colleague Larry Philbrook always says:

With Respect,

Jack

**From:**Ellie Stock <[elliestock@aol.com](mailto:elliestock@aol.com)>  
  
Hi John,

Thanks for this thoughtful piece--still pondering...

We continue to work with many others at the local level in our communities, and local, regional, national, and global levels through the church and other NGOS, specifically on issues related to the environment, racial justice/white privilege, immigration, root causes of poverty/hunger, indigenous rights--trying connect as many dots/movements as possible--hoping and trusting that all such work from every corner of the globe will eventually create a groundswell of action and change.

Sometimes, it is just overwhelming.  My mantra is to work toward the vision of what needs to be, rather than focusing on being against whatever/whomever we don't like.  Not always easy.  It just may take millions of people to take to the streets to change the tide, before it is too late--for us, our grandchildren or to the seventh generation.

Looking forward to reading responses from folks.

Pt 2 Ellie

>From a Christian perspective, Tillich was a good next step in articulating the reality of "sin".

For me another definition from the Christian perspective makes more sense:   The reality is that everything is connected and interrelated.  "Sin" is thinking, acting, living "as if" we were separated from the primal Energy of Life, humanity, and all creation which leads to destructive patterns of behavior towards all life.

Love/compassion is the antidote.  The call to demonstrate inclusive, unconditional love through our knowing, doing, and being is based on the interconnectedness/interrelatedness of All and therefore builds up rather than tears down.

Ellie

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 FR**om:**Marianna Bailey <[wmbailey@charter.net](mailto:wmbailey@charter.net)>  
  
John,

Thank you for your thoughtful reflection. I would like to suggest Order of The Sacred Earth by Mathew Fox.  He also has a daily meditation on email that brings together those who care.

**Mary Kurian**

John,

Thank you for beginning this discussion.

Our lifestyles, informed and mesmerized by media and television, is depleting the earth of its resources.

Our greed is inexhaustible at the cost of stealing from the poor.

Science has opened up vast reservoirs of information and understanding of how fragile the universe is.

We need to choose to change and evolve.

Mary

**Jo Nelson**

I think that facilitating respectful communication in workplaces and communities to bring people together, to create a multifaceted worldview that they are part of rather than a divided us/them worldview also addresses the contradiction of separation.