



The New Learning

In pursuit of Aim # 9 of the Declaration of Interdependence, the Institute program for 2011 is focused on education and the many pathways to an emerging world culture nurtured through multicultural and lifelong learning. A framework for considering these pathways is provided in an article “The New Learning”, authored by Professor Raghavan Iyer, co-founder of the Institute and published in the book Novus Ordo Seclorum (Concord Grove Press). The article expresses in an inspiring, visionary and still contemporary way a response to a request for recommendations concerning The Global 2000 Report to the President: Entering the Twenty-First Century. The Global 2000 Report was prepared by the Council of Environmental Quality and the United States Department of State with the sponsorship of President Jimmy Carter. Here are excerpts from his response, which will be discussed at an IWC Forum on January 15th.

Global 2000 wisely focuses upon the compelling necessity of timely global action and an ethical commitment to elevate the quality, richness and horizon of human life. America must play its part in an evolving multilateral programme to meet global needs by exemplifying a constructive spirit of social justice, public and private enterprise, and individual initiative. This is the proper starting-point of forward-looking initiatives in a new direction, a deliberate turning away from the

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language of outworn ideologies, the rhetoric of futile confrontation, and the uneasy collusion of the rich. A new beginning, and appropriate acts of leadership, must be made credible by concrete programmes and imaginative policy decisions, on the domestic front as well as in the international sphere. For instance, if social planners are truly committed to human equality, they cannot shirk the central issues of re-allocation of global resources on the basis of genuine global representation. Those who wish to honour the living tradition of Yankee ingenuity and American innovativeness must summon their intellectual and technical resources on behalf of the emerging global community which calls for constructive long-term planning and immediate cooperative action. By the year 2000, and certainly by 2030, there will not only be a new generation of humanity on earth, but also a new breed of men and women who have imbibed the facts of global life with their mother's milk. The critical requirement is to weigh current actions in the scales that these new generations will use, so that we will not be unduly wanting in wisdom, compassion and courage in the eyes of our descendants, who will certainly be less captive to the Ethos of expanding Capitalism, the Politics of the Big Stick, the crudity of the Utilitarian-Hedonistic calculus, and the dismal Economics of the once-Almighty Dollar. What may appear as new ideas in 1980, or as fresh extensions of enduring values and Enlightenment ideals, will then be seen as merely the common sense of free men and women everywhere. The cost of rampant American consumerism has become insupportable both at home and abroad. Whilst this cost may look feasible in the context of existing economic and technical resources, in a decade or so the social consequences of this wasteful mode of living will exact a heavy toll of human frustration, anger and anomie that will be aggravated by pressing scarcity on many fronts. In order to make any significant headway in meeting this problem, it is necessary to start now to prepare our citizens for a simpler, saner and richer way of life rooted in the humanistic psychology and naturalistic ethic of the civilization of the future. The concern of policy-makers, educators and corporations must be to foster a deeper appreciation of global diversity, a more

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realistic perspective regarding the changing roles of nations in the long course of universal human history, and a generous recognition of their own (and other people's) capacity for internal growth and moral maturity. Once the idea takes root that Lifelong Learning is the vital prerequisite to a meaningful and satisfying life, then there can be a significant shift from compensatory acquisitiveness to a broader and nobler conception of human potentials and attainments. Such a shift is essential if Americans are going to meet global demands upon their genius for energetic cooperation in constructive undertakings. What is at the core of the American dream is universifiable, no less than the restless striving for tangible tokens of security and success. ...

The necessary re-education of American public opinion on matters of global concern and welfare cannot be couched in either doomsday rhetoric or veiled references to venial power politics. Common sense and compassion can release the motivation to act and the will to cooperate far more effectively than any appeals to fear, guilt and nostalgia. The age of Metternich is over and beyond recall. It is essential that Americans generally become better informed about the post-colonial world before they can find their rightful place in the community of new nations and older cultures...

If some, or indeed all, of these proposals seem too difficult or demanding for the existing leadership in our nation, they are in fact small when seen in terms of the challenges spelled out in *Global 2000*. Long ago, when Benjamin Franklin and others were designing the Great Seal of the United States, they placed upon it the words *Novus Ordo Seclorum* – “A New Order of the Ages” – and had the disarming optimism and cheerful confidence to inscribe above this the motto “The Heavens Approve”. Franklin perceived America as a novel experiment undertaken on behalf of the whole world, a noble vision which could not be confined to this continent, a Promethean adventure of discovery that would summon tests and trials for all participants. We may think we now know that not all who were tried were equal to the heroic task of self-regeneration and the

golden promise of universal fellowship. We need not expect that present and future Americans will necessarily prove more willing than their forefathers to aim higher than they could attain. But in the labours of succeeding generations, the single unforgivable failing is the failure to try. We owe this much to our unthanked ancestors. It is immeasurably sad, for those who have the time to think about such matters, that America, which was once the beacon-light of hope to many hapless immigrants, has fallen so low that she is rebuked and reviled by those who rashly dismiss her as disloyal to her priceless heritage. This is hardly the exclusive fault of anyone man or group of men. It is intrinsic to the very order of the ages of which Franklin wrote. No one nation can single-handedly bear the burden of the hopes and fears of mankind, but each must play its role in turn, until the “still, sad music of humanity” works its subtle alchemy upon all. It is wise, as the older peoples knew, to be humble before the bewildering travails and uncharted pilgrimage of humanity. The forces of historical change make short work of men and nations too proud and fearful to admit that there is much they do not know. If it is true that “those whom the gods would destroy, they first make mad” there could be no worse madness for our nation than to imagine we are either wholly blameless or entirely helpless in the world of today. Oscillation between fury and fatalism can only breed a noisy congregation of manic—depressives.

Without guilt or fantasy, America may yet take her true place among her peers in the community of older and newer nations. Few will believe, any more, that she is mightier or maturer than all the others. Few will deny that she can, if she wills it, pull her own weight in a new way. If in twenty years there is to be a regenerated America ranked amongst the forerunners of the civilization of the future, our leaders and commentators must learn again that the heavens smile on all of humanity. The sun and rain fall upon the humble and the proud, the just and the unjust alike. If there is untapped moral greatness in America, it is the greatness of mankind, not of anything less. The saying that “the labourer is

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worthy of his hire” suggests that humanity in America today is wholly capable of inserting itself readily into the richer inheritance of the globe. From this universal standpoint, optimism and compassion, humility and perseverance, may still serve as the most practical of political virtues. In the long run, there is no single panacea for human ills and no novel trick for securing human allegiance, as Abraham Lincoln well knew. To see what is worth doing, no matter how difficult, and to reject whatever is useless though sheltered by self-serving prejudice, is always best for all. Hence these unorthodox proposals focus upon the New Learning, and upon seeking to be of some service to the humanity of the twenty-first century. Free men and women know that this is not impossible, and that nothing less will endure.

Raghavan Iyer

Selected passages from the article “The New Learning”
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