**Spiritual Wholeness:**

**Sustainable Spiritual Resilience in a Conflicted, Destabilizing World**

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**Our Contextual Framework**

This morning’s paper requires a contextual framework for conceptualizing a conflicted, destabilizing world and Spiritual Wholeness. There are four structural elements we will use.

First is use of Whole of Systems Thinking, the examination of interconnectedness and interrelationships between parts of systems through a wholistic consideration of how parts or even multiple systems relate as a system of systems.[[1]](#footnote-1) Systems often operate organically with a range inputs, operative effects and outcomes that in turn enable a system to continue to function, that may require either minor or abrupt drastic change to avoid disruption.

The second concept, Complex Adaptive Systems, reflects this interaction and its impact on climate, environmental, human, and religious systems. Our current social and natural systems are experiencing varying levels of complex stress that result in unanticipated outcomes.

For example, global planetary system stresses are increasing, leading to an acceleration of unanticipated events and changes in natural climate states, necessary to support civilization. These lead to international attempts to naturally or anthropocentrically rebalance systems to return to old “normals” that no longer exist.[[2]](#footnote-2) Religious systems, including the Adventist Church, are enmeshed in these stressors and continue to react to, or adapt in, decision-making, economics and messages during abrupt, and at times, severe changes that impact membership and institutions.

The third contextual element is that of cascading and compounding risks. While use of Complex Adaptive Systems approaches help address challenges to the fabric of global ecosystems and the reinforce the capacity of human social systems to adapt as natural systems stress or fail, unanticipated events or effects can occur simultaneously or create conditions for the next stressor or threat to occur.

The international community progressively realizes that cascading and compounding effects of disasters and extreme events are enhancing risk of severe or catastrophic failure in natural ecosystems and resources that sustain human civilization.[[3]](#footnote-3) The increasing frequency and intensity of these events and resulting environmental and climate trends are the “new normal.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

As one global risk intelligence company states it, the “world is unprepared” for the magnitude of cascading climate risks and their primary and secondary impacts on human systems.[[5]](#footnote-5) This new normal is not static but will continue to shift toward higher frequency and severity for the foreseeable future and one recent UN report warns of increasing potential ecosystem and biosphere collapse.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Planning and preparation for future compounding and cascading systemic risk, extreme events and consequences in human and natural systems requires changed methods of planning and implementation. Thus, the fourth contextual element is use of anticipatory thinking. As used in this paper, “Anticipatory thinking is the process of recognizing and preparing for difficult challenges, many of which may not be clearly understood until they are encountered” and “formulating expectancies about future events.”[[7]](#footnote-7)

Anticipatory thinking is not predictive, but requires people to prepare individually and societally for potential futures with a wide range of possible outcomes and uncertainties and appreciate the implications of different events, their interdependencies and how individuals and societies may need to respond to a range of compounding or cascading challenges.[[8]](#footnote-8) It is anticipating events or planning for impacts while preparing ourselves to act in adaptation to change.[[9]](#footnote-9) Learning and enacting anticipatory thinking is essential for sustainable spiritual resilience as the framework spiritual wholeness.

**Current Disruptive Crises**

It is helpful to summarize current global crises and potential futures soon to be experienced by the global community.

Our world is grappling with the complex interdependent effects of COVID-19, other epidemics or pandemics, extreme natural events due to climate-disruption, geopolitical conflicts, supply chain interruption, inflation and cascading instability influenced by the interaction of political, economic, environmental, societal, and religious stressors. The result is stress and change in human physical, mental, social and spiritual health.

Present global climate disruption incorporates extreme and lengthy heatwaves, severe droughts followed by massive flooding, extensive forest fires and hurricanes creating costly losses to property and communities that will take years of recovery, if ever. Aon, a global reinsurer, estimates that catastrophic events have cost the world $227 billion in economic losses in 2022 through September 30.[[10]](#footnote-10) For the US alone, from 2017-2021, disasters cost the US $788.4 billion, more than one-third of its $2.3 trillion disaster cost total of the last 43-years.[[11]](#footnote-11)

Global food, water, and energy supply stability are challenged by these extremes with the result being humanitarian crises beyond the capacity of national governments to adequately respond. Currently, 83 countries are currently in various stages of humanitarian crisis.[[12]](#footnote-12) These humanitarian needs, along with societal stress have led to an increase in global riots and protests since 2013.[[13]](#footnote-13) Verisk Maplecroft, a global risk intelligence company, recently reported that 101 countries experienced increased civil unrest through 2022 with higher rates expected for the next decade.[[14]](#footnote-14) These compounding stressors lead to social disruption, that in turn impact economics, agriculture and ability to govern.

Global climate disruption contributes to ecosystem failure. As IBPES states, “Biodiversity – the diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems – is declining faster than at any time in human history.”[[15]](#footnote-15)

Biodiversity loss has high likelihood to occur in 39 countries with corresponding possibilities of 41,000 species threatened with extinction and is determined to be a global catastrophic risk.[[16]](#footnote-16) Analysis of biodiversity and ecosystems by Swiss Re led to a determination that one fifth (39) countries are at risk of ecosystem collapse, endangering 55% of global GDP.[[17]](#footnote-17) Initial species extinctions can lead to a cascade of secondary extinctions and devastate food webs.[[18]](#footnote-18) The future result is estimated to be $2.7 trillion in economic impacts in 2030 and up to 10 percent GDP loss in some vulnerable countries.[[19]](#footnote-19)

The United States is not immune to these effects. It is experiencing increasing weather and climate extremes and disruptive consequences. Through November 14, FEMA issued 83 US emergency or disaster declarations and 48 states have active disaster areas.[[20]](#footnote-20) The US has suffered 15 billion-dollar disasters to date in 2022 with a 5 year cost average of 157.6 billion dollars per year in damages.[[21]](#footnote-21) Recent research has determined that economic losses from hurricanes will become too large to be offset by the US government if warming continues - it will be beyond our economic capacity.[[22]](#footnote-22)

Over 85 percent of the US is currently in drought, and as a result, the USDA has proclaimed drought and agricultural disasters in 43 states.[[23]](#footnote-23) The US is experiencing the highest refugee and immigrant apprehension rates at its Southwest border than any time in its history. In FY 2022, 2.76 million encounters/apprehensions were recorded, 644,000 more than the previous record set in 2021. This flow of humanity is a result of South and Central American countries no longer having the capacity to care for their populations due to current complex crises.[[24]](#footnote-24)

This is a foretaste of impacts and crises anticipated in the United States and the global community during the rest of this century.

**A Future of Interrelated Cascading Crisis**

Our future global reality is one of increasing systemic risk and potential for catastrophic failures that threaten the fabric of national and global societies. These are impacted by increasing climate change unpredictability, non-linearity, fragility and vulnerability factors that are individual, communal, international, and global in scale.[[25]](#footnote-25)

Currently, there is no viable emissions reduction pathway to achieve the Paris climate goals.[[26]](#footnote-26) Global warming will continue for the foreseeable future. We have a 50 percent chance of reaching a 1.5C temperature increase over pre-industrial by 2026, even more likely by 2030.[[27]](#footnote-27) It is likely we will experience 2.4 to 2.7C of warming by 2100.[[28]](#footnote-28)

Overshooting these warming targets, “will result in irreversible impacts on certain ecosystems with low resilience, such as polar, mountain, and coastal ecosystems, impacted by ice-sheet, glacier melt, or by accelerating and higher committed sea level rise. Risks to human systems will increase, including those to infrastructure, low-lying coastal settlements, some ecosystem-based adaptation measures, and associated livelihoods, cultural and spiritual values.”[[29]](#footnote-29)

For example, drought and desertification will intensify in the Southwest US, Southern Europe, South Asia and the Middle East and in turn will drive migration. The government of Iraq has forecasted that the Tigris and Euphrates will no longer flow to the Persian Gulf and Iraq will become “a land without rivers by 2040.”[[30]](#footnote-30) The Iranian government has already stated it may lose up to 70% of its farmland by 2048 and estimated that 30-50 million of its population may have to migrate by 2050.[[31]](#footnote-31)

Increasing temperatures mean half or more planetary ecosystem tipping points will be passed in the next two decades or at latest – by the end of this century.[[32]](#footnote-32) “Tipping points” are thresholds beyond which major and rapid changes occur when crossed that lead to abrupt changes or cascading impacts in the climate system and impact natural and human survivability over the next several centuries.[[33]](#footnote-33)

Currently 16 of 35 “vital signs” of the earth’s climate system are at new extremes, a condition which the authors call a “’code red’ for planet earth.”[[34]](#footnote-34) Tipping point thresholds will cascade in a domino effect, resulting in an environment far less tolerant of human civilization.[[35]](#footnote-35) Tipping points are a kind of global catastrophic risk which civilization wants to avoid to maintain economic, political and social stability.[[36]](#footnote-36)

This cascading effect and compounding severity is leading to new terminology and description of our world, that of being in the condition of “hitherto unrecognized, complex teleconnections and self-reinforcing feedbacks among global systems.”[[37]](#footnote-37) The ultimate result of these hitherto “unrecognized processes” may lead to a global “polycrisis” — a single, macro-crisis of interconnected, runaway failures of Earth’s vital natural and social systems that irreversibly degrades humanity’s prospects.”[[38]](#footnote-38)

In summary, three fundamentals are at stake - essential for humanity – survival, meeting basic human needs and well-being.[[39]](#footnote-39)

As Katharine Hayhoe, a leading Christian climate scientist recently summarized, ““People do not understand the magnitude of what is going on.” “This will be greater than anything we have ever seen in the past. This will be unprecedented. Every living thing will be affected.” She continued, “Our infrastructure, worth trillions of dollars, built over decades, was built for a planet that no longer exists.” “The whole of modern life is at stake.” “Human civilization is based on the assumption of a stable climate, but we are moving far beyond the stable range.”[[40]](#footnote-40)

As the UN Secretary General summarized our current and future state in his opening remarks at COP 27 on November 7th, “We are on a highway to climate hell with our foot still on the accelerator.”[[41]](#footnote-41)

**Crisis Impacts: Psychological, Emotional, Social, Physical, Economic and Spiritual**

With this context of current and future cascading crises and uncertainty, we turn to consider their impacts on human welfare. As summarized after COP 26 in Lancet, “This reality (climate change) takes a mental toll. It has been known for some time that environmental change can lead to emotional distress.”[[42]](#footnote-42) The range of emotion expressed by those working on or impacted by what we have explored included mostly a negative sentiment, describing it as “anger, exasperated, anxious, distressed, upset, and infuriated.”[[43]](#footnote-43) Few were positive terms. Hope was the most used and was either based on “logic” of a specific change or action to help with climate disruption issues, or wishful thinking that at times contained sarcasm or a “flippant” remark.[[44]](#footnote-44)

For the global community, the experience is wide ranging. The 2019 World Economic Forum Global Risks Report noted that a common global theme for human risk was “psychological stress related to a feeling of lack of control in the face of uncertainty” and that “declining psychological and emotional wellbeing” affects the wider global risks landscape, notably via impacts on social cohesion and politics.”[[45]](#footnote-45)

The same report noted that negative emotions were increasing, that “for many people, this is an increasingly anxious, unhappy and lonely world” and that we were entering into an “age of anger” with a “tremendous increase in mutual hatred.”[[46]](#footnote-46)

More recently, Gallup’s 2022 Global Emotions Report, surveyed wellbeing in 122 countries. It documented that 33 percent of those surveyed in 2021 experienced unhappiness, an increase of eight percent since 2014. Over 40% of respondents experienced stress or worry, and almost 25% experienced anger.[[47]](#footnote-47)

Gallup also found that the world is struggling with a silent pandemic of loneliness - that 330 million adults go at least two weeks without talking to a single friend or family member and that one‑fifth of all adults do not have a single person they can count on for help.[[48]](#footnote-48) Furthermore, Gallup estimated that “2 billion are so unhappy with where they live, they wouldn’t recommend it to anyone they know.”[[49]](#footnote-49)

The connection of warming, disaster and climate change to negative emotional experience and a drop in psychological wellbeing and growing unhappiness, loneliness, stress, anger, and its association with aggression, violence, trauma, protest and revolution is well documented.[[50]](#footnote-50)

It is known that “hot temperatures increase aggression by directly increasing feelings of hostility and indirectly increasing aggressive thoughts.”[[51]](#footnote-51) Surveys of 1.9 million Americans demonstrated that ambient temperatures above 70F resulted in reduced “positive emotions (e.g. joy, happiness), an increase negative emotions (e.g. stress, anger), and increased fatigue (feeling tired, low energy).”[[52]](#footnote-52)

The emotional and psychological impacts of extreme heat events and concern over long term change, produce mental health impacts. Even “a 1 ◦C temperature rise was associated with a significant increase in morbidity such as mood disorders, organic mental disorders, schizophrenia, neurotic and anxiety disorders.”[[53]](#footnote-53) Others experience anxiety or depression from direct or indirect impacts of events or anticipation of future events or loss and in more serious cases, despair and self-harm.[[54]](#footnote-54)

Solomon Hsiang’s 2014 meta-analysis documented that, “the majority of studies suggest that conflict increases and social stability decreases when temperatures are hot and precipitation is extreme.”[[55]](#footnote-55) Earlier work documented that past, current and future changes in precipitation and temperature regimes amplified rates of human interpersonal, intergroup, and national or institutional conflict that, in extreme cases, brought civilization collapse.[[56]](#footnote-56) In summary, “the available evidence strongly suggests that both of these changes should increase the risk of violent conflicts and socio-political instability for most populations in the topics and subtropics, as well as some populations in middle latitudes.”[[57]](#footnote-57)

A result of this negative emotional impacts cascade is the loss of empathy towards others, “the ability to put oneself in the shoes of another.”[[58]](#footnote-58) This loss emboldens fragmentation of decency and civility and encourages destabilization that the global community needs to avoid.

In addition, the religious and spiritual dichotomy is that the global regions with the largest religiously unaffiliated populations have produced the strongest climate impacts of greenhouse gas emissions, while the areas of the world with the highest percentage of religious populations, whether Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist or other groups, have suffered with the least capability of adaptability and greater future risk.[[59]](#footnote-59)

No matter the life practice or religion, the Global Wellbeing Initiative (GWI) provides some helpful insight into the yearnings of humanity across the planet. Its 2022 World Happiness Report reveals there is an international desire for balance/harmony, expressed as work-life balance, balanced diet, and “inner harmony” which included concepts of “inner peace, contentment, and balance.”[[60]](#footnote-60) Enmeshed in these are desires for “peace with life,” inner “calmness” and a mix of care for self and others.[[61]](#footnote-61)

The challenge is, what kind of religious and spiritual experience, to experience some kind of wholeness, will the global population embrace as it faces an uncertain future?

**Spiritual Wholeness - Sustainable Spiritual Resilience**

The concept of Spiritual Wholeness requires a framework and world view. Human activity and its consequence has at best - used, or at worst - damaged, the global ecosystem. Human civilization’s development and economic improvement for billions has remolded God’s creation for our intents and purposes. The results are captured in our own geological moniker, the Anthropocene, to commemorate that our civilization will change future geology. Humanity has, in some ways, reappropriated Isaiah’s, “I will be like the Most High”[[62]](#footnote-62)

In stark contrast, Genesis 1:1 carves the initial steps of Spiritual Wholeness - “In the beginning - God.” Genesis 1:26-30 demonstrates the interconnectedness of humanity and nature co-relating in the Divine Presence. Humanity is created in spiritual wholeness, from the ground God created yet receiving God-breathed sentience which captures the image of God.

Humanity is called to reign as the image of God in harmony with His creation, accountable to God for keeping or caring for creation as God’s vice-regents.[[63]](#footnote-63) Yet humanity is also fully dependent on divinely created nature for well-being.

Hoffman and Sandelands define this as a theocentric environmentalism, as “an environmentalism centered on God — an environmentalism that is theocentric rather than anthropocentric or ecocentric.”[[64]](#footnote-64)

They clarify further, “Man and nature are related in God. Sharing the same Father, they relate as siblings in love and mutual respect. There are no grounds to suppose one includes or dominates the other. Man does not lord over nature, and nature does not lord over man. God lords over both.”[[65]](#footnote-65) The focal point is the relationship with God. Because of God’s dominion and Creatorship, “Man may press nature into his service, but he himself must also serve nature, to preserve her integrity and, where possible, to improve her.”[[66]](#footnote-66)

In Genesis 2:2-3, God ceases creative action, yet memorializes His creation in sacred time, in which God, humanity and the environment rest in holiness. Sabbath is a day of divine rest for God and all His creation encapsulating in time and relationship the Spiritual Wholeness that God intended.[[67]](#footnote-67)

However, we do not live in Eden. Human brokenness has mutilated the beauty of nature, and our human efforts to repair our destruction of nature will fall short of God’s original handiwork.

Yet God has not abandoned humanity, even in this time of disasters described in apocalyptic terms. In the divine sustaining of the spiritual, Christ rebreathed the Spirit or it descended at Pentecost and is still present in this world today.[[68]](#footnote-68)

It is in this broken, climate disrupted world that was are called to lives of Sustainable Spiritual Resilience. Each terms needs definition, for our purposes this morning.

Sustainable has multidimensional application. First nothing is sustainable unless one continues to thirst for life connected to God through the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit. This comes from the yearning of God to be Emmanuel, God with us, and we with him.

Brother Lawrence, a 17th century monk, explained that “That his prayer was nothing else but a sense of the presence of God, his soul being at that time insensible to everything but divine love… That we ought, once for all, heartily to put our whole trust in God, and make a total surrender of ourselves to Him, secure that He would not deceive us.”[[69]](#footnote-69) Like Lawrence, we are called to “draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”[[70]](#footnote-70)

A second aspect of sustainability is in relation to the environment and nature. The Adventist Church affirmed thirty years ago that we are called to be stewards of God’s creation. In our 1992 statement we recognized that “The world in which we live is a gift of love from the Creator God” and that “As Seventh-day Adventists, we hold its preservation and nurture to be intimately related to our service to Him,” and that over consumption was harming the planet.[[71]](#footnote-71)

Spiritual resilience is lived through our connection with God through the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit. Spirituality requires dynamic development of a personal life with God, which impacts the individual, provides the basis for religious and communal interrelatedness, and enables integrative awareness for leadership facing the increasing frequency of systemic stress and cascading crises.

Resilience has been defined as “universally understood as a form of adaptation or flourishing in the face of adversity.”[[72]](#footnote-72) It is also described as “The ability to prepare and plan for, absorb, recover from, and more successfully adapt to adverse events.”[[73]](#footnote-73)

Spiritual Wholeness integrates resilience in the physical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual aspects of life to enable and empower persons to adapt to disruption, to sustain renewal, optimism and hope. The adaptation of Spiritual Wholeness enables a resilient Christian response to crisis, essential to future mission fulfillment and growth of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in a conflicted, destabilizing world.

In closing, Paul in Romans 5 captures essence of Spiritual Wholeness for our current world. “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”[[74]](#footnote-74)

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