

Preparing for the Future

Challenging Times Ahead

Issues for Discourse with Youth

Bahá'í Discourse – Future 1

What will the future bring?

We cannot predict the future. Too many factors are interacting. Too many leaders are unpredictable. Too many vested interests are blocking change. We are impacting the natural systems of the planet with unknown consequences. Do we face war, economic collapse, environmental catastrophe, or all of these?

There are efforts to try to model the future or to create scenarios of possible futures.

Almost no-one considers a spiritual revolution in any possible future. So how can you prepare?

Prediction of catastrophe from Limits to Growth

Scenarios from *Limits to Growth* – 1972 (Meadows et al. (1992) *Beyond the Limits*)

SCENARIO 1

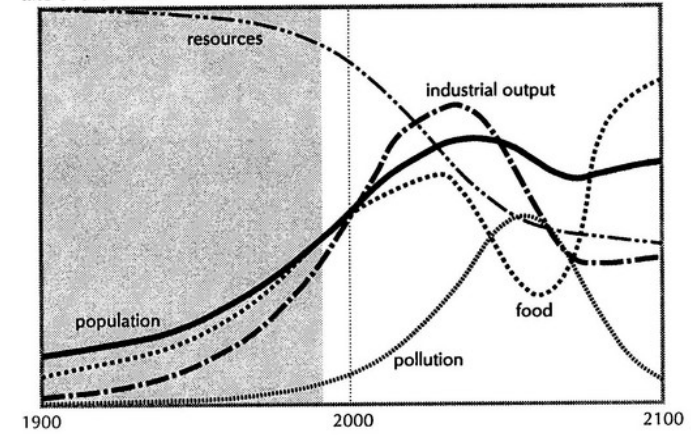
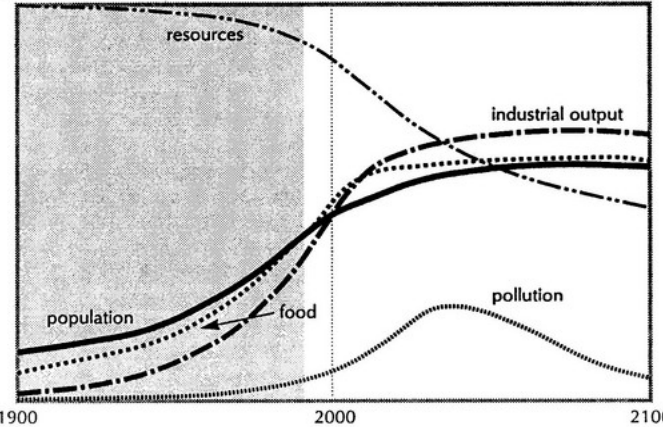
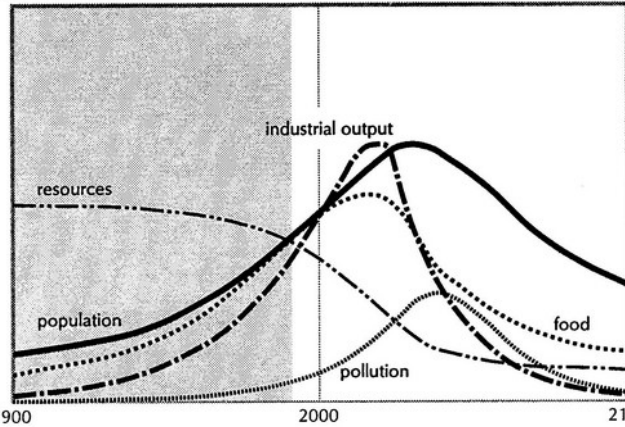
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SCENARIO 12

State of the world

State of the world

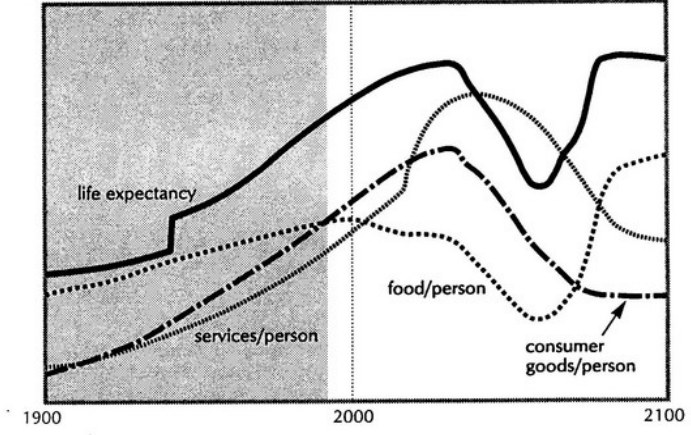
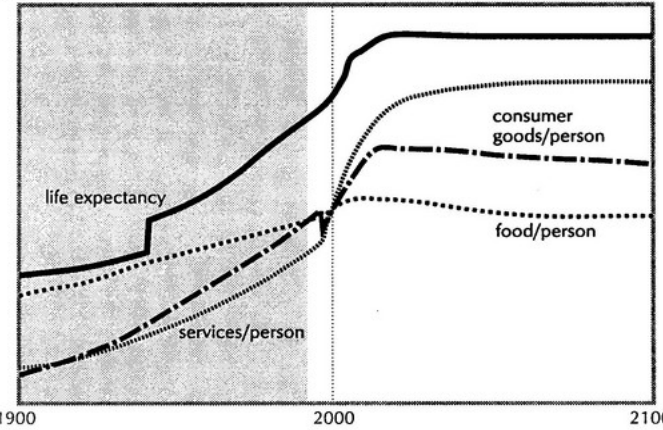
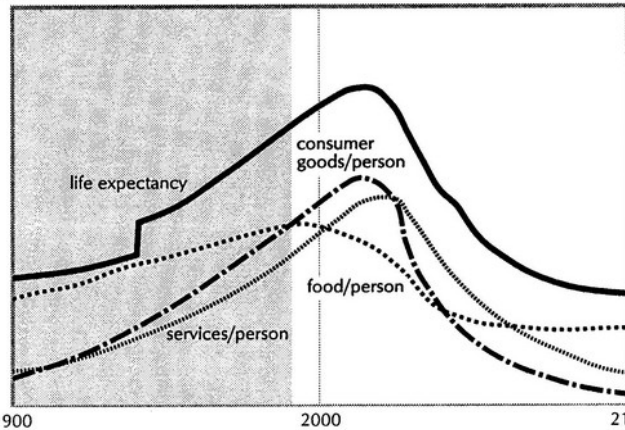
State of the world



Material standard of living

Material standard of living

Material standard of living



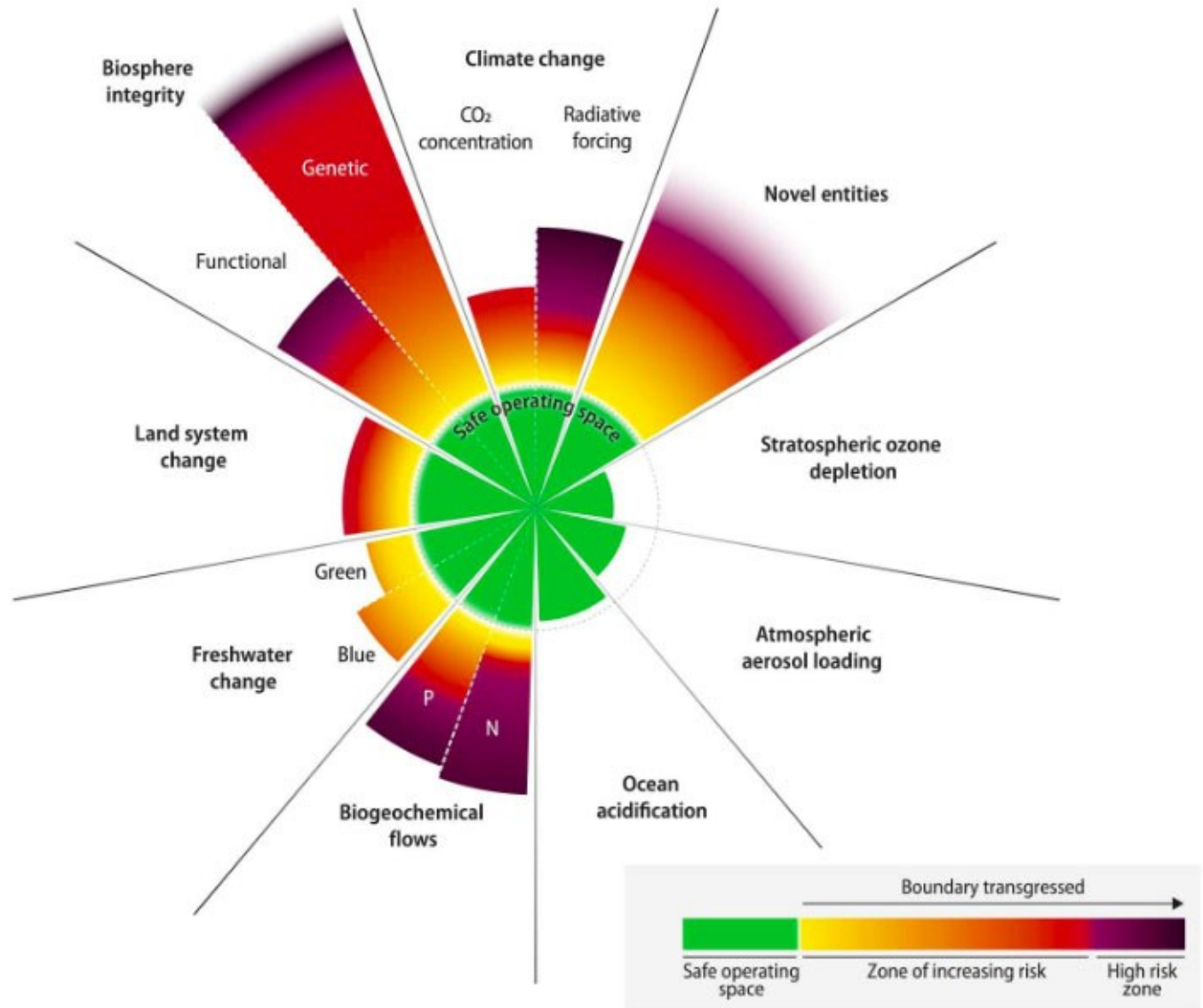
Business as usual

Transition 1995

Transition 2015

PLANETARY BOUNDARIES

We have overshoot seven of the planetary boundaries. The green zone is the safe operating space, and the red is a high-risk zone.



Warnings of Catastrophe

Bahá'u'lláh, to Napoleon III of France (1870):

For what thou hast done, thy kingdom shall be thrown into confusion, and thine empire shall pass from thine hands, as a punishment for that which thou hast wrought. Then wilt thou know how thou hast plainly erred. Commotions shall seize all the people in that land....

(The Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh,)

Warnings of Catastrophe

Bahá'u'lláh, to Kaiser Wilhelm I of Prussia (now Germany) 1873:

O banks of the Rhine! We have seen you covered with gore, inasmuch as the swords of retribution were drawn against you; and you shall have another turn. And We hear the lamentations of Berlin, though she be today in conspicuous glory.

(The Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh; Kitáb-i-Aqdas)

Warnings of Catastrophe 1912

...enmity and strife will increase day by day, and the differences and divergences of nations will be woefully augmented. Continual additions to the armies and navies of the world will be made, and the fear and certainty of the great pandemic war—the war unparalleled in history—will be intensified; for armament, heretofore limited, is now being increased upon a colossal scale. Conditions are becoming acute, drawing nigh unto the degree of men warring upon the seas, warring upon the plains, warring in the very atmosphere with a violence unknown in former centuries. With the growth of armament and preparation the dangers are increasingly great.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, 16 September 1912, §104)



Shoghi Effendi's Vision

In 1954, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, Shoghi Effendi, wrote to the American Bahá'í community about the catastrophe to come, and urging them to move away from the cities.

He said the same thing to pilgrims to the Bahá'í World Centre at that time, but when asked when this might happen, he said that he did not know, it was up to God.

The following is what he wrote:

American Bahá'ís in the time of World Peril

[America] is passing through a crisis which, in its spiritual, moral, social and political aspects, is of extreme seriousness—a seriousness which to a superficial observer is liable to be dangerously underestimated.

(Shoghi Effendi, “American Bahá'ís in the Time of World Peril”, 28 July 1954, *Citadel of Faith*)

World Peril

The steady and alarming deterioration in the standard of morality as exemplified by the appalling increase of crime, by political corruption in ever widening and ever higher circles, by the loosening of the sacred ties of marriage, by the inordinate craving for pleasure and diversion, and by the marked and progressive slackening of parental control, is no doubt the most arresting and distressing aspect of the decline that has set in, and can be clearly perceived, in the fortunes of the entire nation.

(Shoghi Effendi, "American Bahá'ís in the Time of World Peril", 28 July 1954, Citadel of Faith)

World Peril

Parallel with this, and pervading all departments of life—an evil which the nation, and indeed all those within the capitalist system, though to a lesser degree, share with that state and its satellites regarded as the sworn enemies of that system—is the crass materialism, which lays excessive and ever-increasing emphasis on material well-being, forgetful of those things of the spirit on which alone a sure and stable foundation can be laid for human society.

(Shoghi Effendi, “American Bahá’ís in the Time of World Peril”, 28 July 1954, *Citadel of Faith*)

World Peril

It is this same cancerous materialism, born originally in Europe, carried to excess in the North American continent, contaminating the Asiatic peoples and nations, spreading its ominous tentacles to the borders of Africa, and now invading its very heart, which Bahá'u'lláh in unequivocal and emphatic language denounced in His Writings, comparing it to a devouring flame and regarding it as the chief factor in precipitating the dire ordeals and world-shaking crises that must necessarily involve the burning of cities and the spread of terror and consternation in the hearts of men.

(Shoghi Effendi, "American Bahá'ís in the Time of World Peril", 28 July 1954, *Citadel of Faith*)

World Peril

Indeed a foretaste of the devastation which this consuming fire will wreak upon the world, and with which it will lay waste the cities of the nations participating in this tragic world-engulfing contest, has been afforded by the last World War, marking the second stage in the global havoc which humanity, forgetful of its God and heedless of the clear warnings uttered by His appointed Messenger for this day, must, alas, inevitably experience.

(Shoghi Effendi, "American Bahá'ís in the Time of World Peril", 28 July 1954, Citadel of Faith)

World Peril

It is this same all-pervasive, pernicious materialism against which the voice of the Center of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant was raised, with pathetic persistence, from platform and pulpit, in His addresses to the heedless multitudes, which, on the morrow of His fateful visit to both Europe and America, found themselves suddenly swept into the vortex of a tempest which in its range and severity was unsurpassed in the world's history.

(Shoghi Effendi, "American Bahá'ís in the Time of World Peril", 28 July 1954, *Citadel of Faith*)

World Peril

Collateral with this ominous laxity in morals, and this progressive stress laid on man's material pursuits and well-being, is the darkening of the political horizon, as witnessed by the widening of the gulf separating the protagonists of two antagonistic schools of thought which, however divergent in their ideologies, are to be commonly condemned by the upholders of the standard of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh for their materialistic philosophies and their neglect of those spiritual values and eternal verities on which alone a stable and flourishing civilization can be ultimately established.

(Shoghi Effendi, "American Bahá'ís in the Time of World Peril", 28 July 1954, *Citadel of Faith*)

World Peril

The multiplication, the diversity and the increasing destructive power of armaments to which both sides, in this world contest, caught in a whirlpool of fear, suspicion and hatred, are rapidly contributing; the outbreak of two successive bloody conflicts, entangling still further the American nation in the affairs of a distracted world, entailing a considerable loss in blood and treasure, swelling the national budget and progressively depreciating the currency of the state; the confusion, the vacillation, the suspicions besetting the European and Asiatic nations in their attitude to the American nation; the overwhelming accretion of strength to the arch enemy of the system championed by the American Union in consequence of the re-alignment of the powers in the Asiatic continent and particularly in the Far East—these have, moreover, contributed their share, in recent years, to the deterioration of a situation which, if not remedied, is bound to involve the American nation in a catastrophe of undreamed-of dimensions and of untold consequences to the social structure, the standard and conception of the American people and government.

(Shoghi Effendi, “American Bahá’ís in the Time of World Peril”, 28 July 1954, [Citadel of Faith](#))

World Peril

No less serious is the stress and strain imposed on the fabric of American society through the fundamental and persistent neglect, by the governed and governors alike, of the supreme, the inescapable and urgent duty... of remedying, while there is yet time, through a revolutionary change in the concept and attitude of the average white American toward his Negro fellow citizen, a situation which, if allowed to drift, will, in the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, cause the streets of American cities to run with blood, aggravating thereby the havoc which the fearful weapons of destruction, raining from the air, and amassed by a ruthless, a vigilant, a powerful and inveterate enemy, will wreak upon those same cities.

(Shoghi Effendi, "American Bahá'ís in the Time of World Peril", 28 July 1954, Citadel of Faith)



World Peril

The American nation, of which the community of the Most Great Name forms as yet a negligible and infinitesimal part, stands, indeed, from whichever angle one observes its immediate fortunes, in grave peril. The woes and tribulations which threaten it are partly avoidable, but mostly inevitable and God-sent, for by reason of them a government and people clinging tenaciously to the obsolescent doctrine of absolute sovereignty and upholding a political system, manifestly at variance with the needs of a world already contracted into a neighborhood and crying out for unity, will find itself purged of its anachronistic conceptions, and prepared to play a preponderating role, as foretold by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in the hoisting of the standard of the Lesser Peace, in the unification of mankind, and in the establishment of a world federal government on this planet.

(Shoghi Effendi, “American Bahá’ís in the Time of World Peril”, 28 July 1954, Citadel of Faith)

World Peril

These same fiery tribulations will not only firmly weld the American nation to its sister nations in both hemispheres, but will through their cleansing effect, purge it thoroughly of the accumulated dross which ingrained racial prejudice, rampant materialism, widespread ungodliness and moral laxity have combined, in the course of successive generations, to produce, and which have prevented her thus far from assuming the role of world spiritual leadership forecast by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s unerring pen—a role which she is bound to fulfill through travail and sorrow.

(Shoghi Effendi, “American Bahá’ís in the Time of World Peril”, 28 July 1954, *Citadel of Faith*)

Persecution of the Bahá'ís

The Universal House of Justice has also warned about the coming persecution of the Bahá'í Faith:

Persecution of the Bahá'ís

Has [the Guardian] not advised us all that the subsequent stage of oppression must precede the stages of its emancipation and its recognition as a world religion? Can the friends forget the oft-quoted warning of 'Abdu'l-Bahá concerning the bitter opposition that will confront the Cause in various lands on all continents? In the case of the American believers, has Shoghi Effendi not alluded to this coming fury in his description of them as “the invincible Army of Bahá'u'lláh, who in the West, and at one of its potential storm centers is to fight, in His name and for His sake, one of its fiercest and most glorious battles”?

(Universal House of Justice, 29 December 1988, *Messages 1986-2001*, p.115)

Persecution of the Bahá'ís

...let there be no mistake about the certainty of the opposition which must yet be confronted in many countries, including that which is the Cradle of the Administrative Order itself.

(Universal House of Justice, 29 December 1988, *Messages 1986-2001*, p.115)

The warnings have continued

In 2023, the Universal House of Justice wrote:

Violent Convulsions

None can anticipate precisely what course the forces of disintegration are destined to take, what violent convulsions will yet assail humanity in this travailing age, or what obstacles and opportunities may arise, until the process reaches its culmination in the appearance of that Great Peace that will signalize the arrival of the stage when, recognizing the unity and wholeness of humankind, the nations will “put away the weapons of war, and turn to the instruments of universal reconstruction”.

(Reflections on the First Century of the Formative Age, Universal House of Justice, To the Bahá'ís of the World, 28 November 2023)

A Most Perilous Period

... the unfailing divine protection that encompasses the House of Justice will ensure that, as the Bahá'í world navigates the turmoil of a most perilous period in humanity's social evolution, it will follow undeviatingly the course set by Providence.

(Reflections on the First Century of the Formative Age, Universal House of Justice, To the Bahá'ís of the World, 28 November 2023)



Advice on how to respond

So, how do we respond to these warnings and predictions? Do we try to go and hide? Do we look for some safer place?

The Bahá'í Faith has often passed through perilous times, with warnings and guidance from its leaders. The next class will review this guidance to youth.