

# **THE FOURTH STORY**

## **Seeing the World From a Profoundly Different Viewpoint**

**by Robert Theobald**

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Humanity has lived within three story lines in its history and is now moving into a fourth. This new story line, which may well not be the final one, forces us to reverse many of the most fundamental beliefs that we have used to reach this point in our development. We are confronted with the need for deep, rapid and fundamental change. It is clear that we cannot do what is vital for our survival without a very different level of commitment to ourselves, to others and to ecological systems.

Ever since we moved away from being hunters and gatherers, the drive has been to gain more and more power over other people, over other nations and over the environment. The latter half of the twentieth century has seen a slowly growing recognition that coercive power can backfire disastrously. We are therefore being forced to find new ways to continue the human journey.

The tragedies in East Timor, Kosovo and many African countries confirm that our current approaches fail to bring healing. Force increases levels of frustration and anger. In a world, where nation states and terrorists have access to more and more destructive weaponry, the end result of present directions is all too obviously disastrous. While this conference is not about international affairs but about Australian dynamics, I would be irresponsible not to give us a space to recognize our pain around this issue.

Nevertheless, we need to concentrate on the subjects that have brought us together. Our conference is about the basic directions that will replace our current developed-country commitments to maximum economic growth, maximum labor force participation and the use of technology without concern about its long-run impacts. We shall look at these issues in this country's context. I am not, of course, arguing that we can afford to ignore the very different dynamics in the poor counties. But I am convinced that until we can look more clearly at our own issues and dilemmas we are not going to be able to see the different directions which may resolve the rapidly worsening issues in all too many areas of the world.

In order to look ahead we need to first look back at the earlier stories. The first supported the lifestyle of hunting and gathering cultures. Human beings survived through close observation of natural forces. Societies saw these forces as either benign or threatening, in one case, offerings thanked nature for them; in the other, sacrifices or other forms of propitiation were observed. The universe was connected to the world of humans by specially gifted and/or law-initiated people (shamans or witchdoctors). Life was seen as cyclical, with the seasons, the planets and the stars beating the rhythm. There was considerable ability to take advantage of what existed, but little belief in the ability to alter it. Life was, to some extent, changeless. The priorities of family or the group outweighed those of the individual. Respect was afforded to the elderly, whose experience and survival was a model for the young to follow. When age was matched with infirmity, the old gave way to the young, ensuring they were not a burden on their families and group members.

The second story provided the underpinnings for the agricultural era. Agricultural societies learned how to herd animals and cultivate crops. The land was to be used to produce and could be altered for this purpose. For the first time, surpluses developed. While lives were dominated by natural cycles, the surplus permitted priests and kings to seize a role. This was a heroic period with both gods and men doing deeds that moved them out of the common ruck of humankind. Cities grew up and war became a dominant feature of life. Class structures developed. Most people lived confined within narrow boundaries of perception and place: only a few developed wider horizons. Respect moved to those with either secular or religious power.

The third story developed as people learned that understanding the way the world worked could be the basis for wealth and power. Attention moved to the innovators, the organisers and the entrepreneurs. Priests and kings failed to keep up with the changing times and saw their power decay. Democratic governments became dominant for they were more adaptive. Societies were organised to produce wealth, and obstacles to this goal were moved aside. Surpluses grew rapidly and became more disruptive both in terms of individual lives and nation state dynamics. Increasingly, people realised that they could affect their own fate. Tensions grew between the old who wanted to keep things as they were and the young who wanted change.

In the last fifty years, Story Three has deepened until it dominates most communication channels, which have themselves become more pervasive and diverse. There are now three profoundly different reactions that continue the beliefs of this story but lead to different outcomes.

Variant One. Capitalism has triumphed. The economic, social and political theories of the West, and particularly the United States, are right. Failures, such as they are, come from the fact that we have not yet followed through fully on the logic of the market and current political ideologies. This approach is supported by many economists and politicians and by free-market think tanks. It is the source of the rhetoric that claims 'there are no choices.'

This leads to a generic personal story. Each one of us is embedded in a matrix that constrains our actions. We have the ability to gain a high standard of living but only if we accept the implications of materialism. One recent description of the emerging world is the Golden Straightjacket. In this world we can aim for larger numbers of toys but not for personal

meaning.

Version Two. Capitalism is the wave of the future but there are problems because it leaves out so many people. We need 'capitalism with a human face' or 'compassionate capitalism'. It can be achieved by changes at the margins of current systems. Variants of this model are being proposed in many rich countries. A growing number of prominent politicians including Blair, Bush and Gore are taking this approach.

If one believes in this approach then there is a profoundly different personal story. Meaning is to be found in current political battles and the struggles between different ways of ordering the capitalist order. It makes sense to be engaged in discussions around the options that exist within current ways of thinking. It is neither useful nor necessary to break out of the current box in which our democracies currently operate.

Version Three. Capitalism is the enemy. The multinational firm is the visible face of capitalism and must be destroyed. The style in this story is oppositional. The energy goes into defining what is wrong and fighting it. This approach makes the problems of our day visible. At another level, however, those who attack capitalism may maintain our current ways of thinking about the world and reinforce the old story. It is now known that opposition reinforces the vitality of the categories within which we live unless it turns the danger of the old story into the opportunity of the new one.

The personal story associated with this way of living has a strongly attractive mythic element. It is the struggle of 'good' versus 'evil'. It resonates with the earlier agricultural story and appears to provide an opportunity for heroes, and heroines, to achieve wonderful victories and alter the course of history. In its pure form it avoids the perils of uncertainty for one is clear who the good and the bad guys are.

The core clash of our times is whether we can continue to live by industrial era structures and beliefs or whether they must change. Your decision to come to this conference implies that you believe that we must find a fourth story. Once one believes in this fourth story one realizes that there are two urgent challenges. One of them is to break out of the inertia that causes us to continue to move in the same directions that have controlled our decision-making in the past. The second is to increase our depth of consciousness so that we are aware of the potentials of our times.

We must therefore move beyond the three reactions I have set out above. Our challenge is to develop a very different way of seeing the world. Fortunately, we are far further along in discovering what this story implies for ourselves, our families and our societies than we usually realize.

The fourth story is based on the belief that humanity is living through the most radical shift in its history. It has to learn how to manage the essentially unlimited productive and destructive power it has accumulated if it is to avoid destroying much of life on earth. Economics will remain a critical part of our systems but it will be recognised that the emergent issues lie elsewhere. Luckily, we are beginning to understand how and why the world and social systems work as a web. This will allow us to learn how to create resilient, sustainable, value-based societies that serve as stewards of the planet. If we are to make the

required shifts, we shall have to learn to think in new categories that challenge the understandings and behaviours humanity has developed over thousands of years.

Personal meaning in this new story is to be found in knowing one's own life purpose and mission, and meshing it with those of others. Relationships then produce meaning and equity. They do so within a universe where the fundamental importance of diversity and ecological limits is understood. Each one of us plays a role in the evolution of the people and systems we touch but we are most effective when we work through influence rather than power.

Story Four shares truths with each of the three previous story lines. From Story One it takes the recognition that humanity can only survive if it lives within the constraints imposed by ecological forces, although the understandings must now necessarily be more complex. From Story Two, it takes the importance of individual actions in changing the world. However, it no longer sees this type of behaviour as being limited to a few heroes and heroines but being the responsibility of all of us. From Story Three it derives the potential of knowledge to create a better world but understands that it can only be reached with radically different socioeconomic and political systems.

The fourth story requires each of us to move through cycles of learning. The first need is to decide what will make meaning in one's life given the realities we perceive. What is our unique mission? This choice is intuitive rather than rational. We need to dig deep into ourselves.

The second issue is how we decide whether we are moving in the direction we wish. In this second area there are several challenges. One is to discover what is actually going on in the world. What are the driving forces of our time to which we must adjust? In addition, we have to measure the benefits and costs of what we do. Measurement of mechanical systems is relatively easy and reliable. Measurement of personal and societal success is far more complex. The challenge of finding the correct measures is increased because we have inherited, and maintain, measurements which no longer serve our real needs---the Gross National product is one example, as are many of our ways of measuring the achievement of students.

The third challenge is building coalitions of people and groups that have similar missions. Western cultures have difficulty in doing this at two levels. We tend to form new institutions for emerging purposes rather than to create coalitions of existing institutions. In addition, we spend more time in adversarial situations than in working co-operatively. It often takes a catastrophe to break through this conditioning.

We can use a powerful analogy here. Until some thirty years ago, it was assumed that alcoholics could not be helped until they hit rock bottom and had destroyed their lives. A technique has now been developed which surrounds the alcoholic with spouse, children, co-workers and others he or she respects. The members of this group then make it clear that either the individual deals with the addiction or that person will lose their job, marriage and everything else they value. The technique is remarkably successful.

We need to surround our culture with the same powerful evidence. We need to show that there is no way we can provide coming generations with a high quality of living unless we make profound changes in our directions. Once we understand this reality, we can develop a wide range of actions that move us out of the third story into the fourth.

When setting up action approaches we tend to make several major errors. One is to prioritise rather than to encourage everybody to follow their passions. Another is to assume that it is possible to find a single project that will excite everybody in a diverse group. Perhaps the most serious error is to assume that one must involve everybody within a group for change to be possible. In fact, the opposite is true. Change can only be achieved if one looks for the small proportion of people who are ready and then bring them together.

These four stages of creating a clear intention, discovering reality, creating coalitions and acting operate on a spiral. We need to move through this succession again and again. As we do so we support the transition from the third to the fourth story but we also recognize that the transition from the third to the fourth story is necessarily going to be very different than previous transitions. There are many profound reasons for this reality: I can only deal with a few of them here. The first is that we have lived in "dominator" cultures ever since we abandoned hunting and gathering and moved into agricultural styles. Some cultures were stronger than others and imposed their will on those who were weaker. There was a process of succession as some cultures failed and others took their place. As Arnold Toynbee pointed out: there are many more dead cultures than live ones.

If traditional patterns continue we could expect that the United States would also lose its predominant position and be replaced by another great power that understood the new story. The most obvious candidate is China. This model will not work, however, because we are developing unlimited productive and destructive power. Humanity can only manage this power if it finds ways to work with each other and cooperate. We are already living in a time when nations dare not use their most destructive weapons for fear both of world opinion and the consequences for their own people. The further development of chemical and biological weapons will enhance this "balance of terror." We shall have to learn how to live in partnerships rather than within systems of coercive power.

Adoption of the fourth story therefore requires the abandonment of much of the learning which we have done over past millennia when we believed that we could control each other and the environment. The shifts between the third and the fourth story not only demand new policies, directions and styles but a new consciousness. This new consciousness inevitably challenges all of the ways in which we think, behave and live. The processes by which we shift are inevitably confusing, complex and challenging.

At the center of this change, which we are already experiencing, is a profound alteration in the way we can hope to understand the world in which we live. The strengths of the industrial era have emerged from an objective way of looking at the universe. We have developed an ever-wider and deeper level of expertise and professionalism. We are now able to analyze at both the micro and the macro level. It is deeply ironic that we are discovering that while we have more information than ever before, our ability to make sense of the world in which we live is being lost in the details we can describe with more and more clarity.

We are therefore slowly recognizing that there is no single correct way to look at the world. Each of us is placed at the center of our own universe. The view we have differs from the view of others. If we have been brought up in the same culture there will be more similarities than if we come from different parts of the world. But just as each of us has different DNAs and fingerprints, we also see the world from a unique point of view.

To make matters even more complex, once we recognize that there is no objective reality, then we have no absolute way to be sure what is right or wrong. We cannot compare our map to the "master" map, or to an ultimate reality. It is this recognition which has led certain modern schools of thought to argue that it is impossible to determine the truth. Similarly, these groups claim that it is arrogant for one culture to argue that its norms are better than those of another.

Fortunately this viewpoint overstates our problems. A surprisingly clear picture of the twenty-first century is already available if we make the effort to look for it. But discovering the new understandings does take effort for many reasons. I can only cite two of them here. The first is that each of us ignores the vast majority of the signals that come to us from the world in which we live. This is a necessity if we are to keep our sanity. The problem is that the screens we have learned can prevent us from seeing the most vital elements affecting our lives. This is often the case today given the very rapid pace of change.

The second reason is more subtle. We do not yet know how to cope with the fact that there is no master map of reality. If each of us carries our own picture, and the pictures are necessarily incompatible, how do we work together at all scales from the personal to the global? Fortunately, we do have an image which can help us grasp the issues with reasonable clarity. We can think in terms of holographs. These provide three dimensional images of reality. Their most remarkable quality is that a portion of the holograph produces the same overall picture as the whole but the quality of the resolution gets steadily worse as the amount of the originating film is reduced.

We can therefore think in terms of each of us having a holographic perception of the universe. This perception is inevitably fuzzy because we cannot have all the material necessary to get a clear picture. Each one of us can, and will, use different ways to improve the clarity of this picture. Some will use meditation and prayer. Some will use conversation and dialogue. Some will study. Some will find knowledge and wisdom through various religions and spiritual paths. This holographic model opens up considerable space for looking at the process of fundamental change from a very different point of view.

If this approach is correct, we face two core problems at this point. First, we have to recognize the profound difference in worldview between those who see maps and those who see holographs. Conversations between the two groups are very difficult. The people who see maps believe that certainty is attainable and work to achieve it. Those who see holographs recognise that we live in conditions of profound uncertainty and that expecting to be "sure" about the future is unrealistic. The first group aims to predict and to be able to deal with the consequences of their predictions. The second group knows that they cannot plan ahead but that it needs to be ready for whatever may emerge. It lives by the precautionary principle for it knows that whatever we do will have second and third level consequences and that we must avoid taking steps that may have disastrous results.

The second issue is how holographic pictures can be made clearer and more useful. This is a question that we are only now beginning to explore. Here are some insights that are emerging. At the individual level, people see a clearer picture as they are able to clarify their identity and their mission. At the group level, good conversation and dialogue permits people to see areas which their blinders currently hide from them. At the cultural level, examination of the emergent knowledge structures reveals what issues are most critical at a given moment in time.

As we look at what is being discovered, we can see clearly that the values and directions that inspired the industrial era are dying. We are increasingly aware that our concentration on economic growth is threatening environmental integrity and social cohesion. We are also seeing that we need to make conscious decisions about the potentials of new technology rather than assume that it will always be beneficial. We are recognising that economics is not the central issue for the twenty-first century. We can supply enough for people on this planet if we are willing to make a maximum effort to limit population growth and to create social justice: if we fail to do this then the future looks very bleak.

I am haunted by a comment made by Willis Harman, the great futurist, shortly before he died. He pointed out that communism died when nobody was expecting the collapse. He asked; "If capitalism were dying, would we recognize the signs?" It is my conviction that our current systems are far more fragile than we understand. Our challenge is to create a new way of ordering the world before the old one fails.

Fortunately we are far further along in this process than we realise. We now know that we need to concentrate on the quality of living rather than the quantity of goods. We can only do so if we make social cohesion, ecological integrity and effective decision-making our watchwords. And this in turn will depend on our adoption of the religious and spiritual values of honesty, responsibility, humility, love and the acceptance of mystery.

We are moving less rapidly than we can because far too many of us would rather see the glass as half-empty rather than half-full. We fail to draw attention to the extraordinary shifts in thinking and behavior that have already taken place in the twentieth century. It is reasonable to argue that we have far further to go. It is destructive to fail to celebrate how far we have already come.

I am, of course, all too well aware that it is difficult to remember how well things are going when one is also assailed by evidences of breakdown. Tom Atlee caught our dilemma in his statement that "Things are getting better and better and worse and worse faster and faster. Nevertheless, we cannot expect to do useful work unless we are aware of the growth points in the culture which we can further develop.

From my perspective, one of the most remarkable shifts has been the commitment to involve women, racial and ethnic minorities and the handicapped into the culture. I am not arguing that this revolution is complete. But anyone who has lived as long as I have can only marvel at how much has been accomplished in so short a time. And I also have to be grateful for the degree to which old, white males like myself have been enabled and sometimes appropriately bullied to change their styles.

A second extraordinary change has been in our acceptance of different lifestyles. While some people maintain their moral indignation about sinners, more and more of us understand that we cannot judge others if we have not experienced their traumas or situations. This shift is not, of course, pure unalloyed benefit. Many people found it easier to make choices when there were clearer community and cultural norms. But looked at within the long-sweep of history, this movement to greater freedom has to be seen as extraordinarily exciting and indeed necessary if we are to meet emerging challenges.

Once we look for evidence of change, we can also see how far our social systems have already moved. One of the most remarkable changes has been the movement toward promotive health and away from allopathic medicine. More and more people see the need to keep themselves healthy and, when they get sick, to be part of the team that is responsible for decision-making. This trend has developed with extraordinary speed. The anti-tobacco movement is part of the overall movement.

We are also seeing a shift from adversarial law to mediation. Court cases are increasingly seen as too unpredictable and too costly. In addition, the assumptions of traditional law, that it is possible for people to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth are collapsing as we learn how people perceive events and the inevitable levels of distortion. Our current patterns of legal procedure assume an objective universe which we now know does not exist.

We are becoming aware that learning institutions and learning societies are necessary to future success. Unfortunately we are also discovering that effective learning does not take place in traditional schools and colleges. The real challenge is always to provide people with the interest and skills to be self-motivated learners. Regrettably, past patterns of teaching have often numbed the spirit of inquiry that children naturally have. In addition, concentration on single styles of learning excludes others who gain knowledge in other ways, such as using their hands and their bodies. It is to be hoped that current schools and universities will adapt but much of the most interesting innovation is coming from outside them.

The work world has changed. Workers are increasingly part of the decision-making team. Unfortunately, however, the implications of this approach have often failed to be drawn. If everybody has a part to play, high levels of morale are crucial. Many companies have destroyed their own profitability by reckless downsizing.

This is one of the many clashes between the universe which is being born and the one that is dying. Perhaps the most dramatic clash is in the area of economics where I took my degrees although my failure to adhere to the party line has lost me any credibility within the profession. Economics has always concentrated on the problems of increasing supply. But as John Maynard Keynes, the great British economist, pointed out in the thirties, the difficulty has always been demand.

In the years since World War II, we have made a Faustian bargain. We saw that the economy would not work if supply ran ahead of demand because we would then have unemployment. We therefore decided that we would encourage consumption and materialism to avoid this result. The specific step taken was to encourage people to buy before they had the money



and to go into debt. This technique has been remarkably successful.

Now people doubt its satisfactions. A recent survey in Australia showed that only 24% of Australians think life is getting better while 36% felt it was getting worse. Many are worried that the push for economic growth is coming at the cost of quality of life and moral values. While 38% believed more money to buy things was very important, 75% rated spending more time with family and friends as very important for improving their quality of life.

This should not surprise us. Keynes in an extraordinary essay in the thirties, entitled "Economic Possibilities for our Grandchildren" stated that the grandchildren of his generation would be able to recognize for the vices they actually were those things which we now proclaim as the highest virtues. The time has now come to make this shift in our directions.

We are at this conference because we are convinced that we need to move in new directions and the longer we wait to develop them the higher the costs will be. The survey I have quoted above, as well as my experiences criss-crossing this continent show that many people are ready to support fundamental change.

The obvious reaction to this statement is to ask why this group is relatively invisible if its size is so significant. Some of the reasons have already been stated. There is significant pressure to conform. Even if we are willing to take the risk of stating our views, each of us struggles to find language and images to express this very new form of thinking. We thus remain part of the isolated many.

There is a particular problem which deserves attention. It first became clear when I was talking to member of the United States Senate some years ago. I told them that there were many people like me in the population. Their reply was that they had no evidence of their existence. Because the mesh between current political systems and the emergent thinking is so poor, many who are trying to bring about fundamental change have abandoned any effort to be involved in the political process. This reinforces the inertia of the current culture.

There are two primary challenges at the current time. One is to help people who are part of existing systems see there are alternatives. We have lots of evidence that bureaucrats and politicians are willing to look at new possibilities. It is all too often our failures to inform them of what we know that keeps them caught in old approaches. The second challenge is to link those who are thinking about and acting to create fourth story directions.

One of the most critical results of this event could be to connect up people who share this same set of beliefs. Here are some brief suggestions as to how we could do this. Story four thinkers, who understand the need for fundamental change, have little support in the culture at present. The reasons are obvious. Not only do they disrupt Story Three, which is currently dominant, but the style in which they think and act falls outside the acceptable norms. Story Four thinkers use integral understandings rather than disciplinary approaches. They are often storytellers and artists rather than intellectuals. They are synthesisers rather than analysts. The outcomes they propose are 'fuzzy' rather than clear-cut. They aim for resonance rather than brilliance.

Addressing two areas would make a huge difference. First, there is an urgent need to find support for Story Four work. One could imagine it developing within new university structures and different types of think tanks. The story may now be sufficiently compelling that money might be available from individuals, businesses and foundations. One way to make this approach attractive might be to develop exciting statements about the contributions key individuals had made to the emerging understandings of our time and ask for money to support their further work. This would be the equivalent of 'patronage' for artists during the Renaissance.

A second issue in this area is that there are few opportunities for Story Four players to get together effectively: many of them are so busy collecting resources that they have little time to stop and think. Industrial-era style meetings are not appropriate for the creativity now needed. It seems as though small, intimate, relaxed gatherings are required. A second specific task would therefore be to arrange more small face-to-face sessions and support them through Internet and worldwide web processes.

The second issue is to enable those who are interested in these issues to learn more effectively. The essential problem here is that industrial-era knowledge structures are disciplinary. They attempt to deal with problems by breaking them down into their components. This approach inevitably keeps us confined within the old story. Only holistic thinking, within an opportunity framework, can provide the space for creating Story Four.

There are two primary challenges therefore. First, we must provide knowledge in ways that encourage people to use new categories. For example, one might think about the implications of a 'full unemployment' society instead of one based on 'full employment'. Or one could ask whether the industrial-era idea of 'retirement' is valid for the future. We can get a new slant on poverty when we ask how it benefits each one of us personally. The challenge is to find probes that remind people that the categories in which we currently think are changing but none of us know for sure what the new understandings will be. This work has more in common with the arts than with existing intellectual traditions.

Finding ways to support this work is inevitably difficult. Existing systems tend to be so bound by tradition that they cannot change quickly enough. New systems tend to be so short of resources that they have little potential. A hybrid may provide more opportunities. One might, for example, encourage institutions to redirect resources and fund relatively small projects within their existing structures. If the time for fundamental change is indeed ripe, as would seem to be the case, the new projects would attract energy and grow rapidly. It is my hope that the University of Canberra will commit to some innovations along these lines.

The core challenge of these new efforts would be to create integral patterns of knowledge. These would recognise that everything is connected to everything else and that 'bounding' is therefore a key skill in future work. They would also aim to focus the state of knowledge in a particular area as clearly as possible so students and citizens could start from as clear a base as possible.

The third challenge is how we enable citizens to learn about these new directions. We have always known that it is only possible for societies to make good decisions if there is a knowledge base within which they can think and act. Unfortunately, Story Three has

justified the adversarial approach to politics, believing that the truth can only emerge from heated argument. The citizen has been bombarded with contradictory, partial propaganda aiming to score points rather than to inform. Story Three also developed a short-run emphasis and drastically underestimated the power of long-run trends.

Story Four requires a radically different approach. It assumes that people can work together in order to state what the real issues are by setting out the agreements and the disagreements. It believes that shared understandings can lead to shared strategies. Skilled communicators would take the knowledge developed in the new academies and translate it into different media and for different age groups and skill-levels. In actual fact, there are more efforts being made to translate the emerging knowledge into popular media than we often recognize. The challenge is to enhance and speed up the process that is already going forward.

One of the areas where new patterns are emerging most rapidly is in the information technology universe. Certain web-sites make it easier to find interconnections than ever before. Our access to the accumulated knowledge of the world is getting easier although there is still much to do. In this area, as in so many others, the artist and the thinker are creating a new form of web.

Let me close by talking about what I hope will happen during our time together. The purpose of the next two days is to find friends and colleagues with whom we can journey together. We might think of ourselves being together around a campfire. This campfire is a safe place where we can tell our stories, learn from others and expand our thinking before we go on our way. It is highly unlikely that we shall all meet again but it is quite possible for all of us to affect each other's learnings through an increasingly interconnected set of linkages.

Teilhard de Chardin, the great Catholic Theologian, would understand and applaud what we were doing. His vision for the future was the creation of the noosphere: a vibrant web of relationships which would enable people to guide but not control the future. This noosphere already exists. The only reason it is not effective is that we are failing to see its extraordinary potentials.

Throughout my career people have challenged my deep belief in the power of real conversation. I have always argued that we act out of our understanding of how the world works. If we engage with others and we recognize that our perceptions are incorrect, then we shall act differently. I do not need to stress for this audience the fact that I am only interested in real conversation. It is possible to chat and gossip without touching the deep wellsprings out of which thinking and action stem.

We intend to give you this chance to engage in real conversation. What do I mean by this term? The first step is to take off our "Hats" and the arguments we are meant to make because of the roles we play. The second harder step is to listen to others, and ourselves, rather than continue to make the same statements that we have made so often before on a rote basis. This work needs intensive interaction. Hence the commitment to most of our time being spent in small groups or in the corridors. We have heard people say, again and again, that exciting learnings take place outside formal conference sessions. We are going to give ourselves the chance to prove this potential.

Obviously this statement implies that the organisers of the meeting will not determine whether the meeting is a success or not. Only you can do this. We need each of you to bring your best selves to this event. We need you to check your "official" opinions at the door and to talk out of your deepest intuitions. We need you to bring your passion and your compassion to the small groups. We need you to see that silence, as well as talk, create meaning.

This event is a beginning not an end. There are other events planned in Australia to continue opportunities for learning about transformational change. The most imminent is Australia Connects that will take place from October 14-17. Many of the key players from this group are present at this meeting and you will have an opportunity to talk to them.

The change we need will not be tidy or planned. It will happen as people recognise that current patterns of behavior do not satisfy them and they yearn for something better. Each of us can be a small part of this process. I hope that we shall go away from this meeting with a greater sense of hope and excitement.

Blessings and Peace,  
Robert

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We need new goals for the 21st century: a high quality of life, social cohesion, ecological integrity and effective decision-making. These will only be possible within a radically new way of seeing the world from an organic, system-theory, spiritual viewpoint. For more on this see:

[www.resilientcommunities.org](http://www.resilientcommunities.org)

Robert Theobald. June 11, 1929 - November 27, 1999

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<http://www.transform.org/transform/tlc/rtpage.html>

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