

Eight Big Questions: Over the last few weeks, I've been assembling a list of "big questions". These are not the "ultimate questions" such as, What ultimately matters? Who am I? What is expected of me? What happens when I die? But they are big questions all the same. I believe that if we could answer these eight, we'd know quite a lot about how the next ten years will unfold.

• **Will the US embrace a principled pluralism – i.e., will we find ways to peacefully co-exist or will the culture wars escalate?** At the moment, the left is moving further left and the right is moving further right, and both sides are acting as if this is a winner take all contest. Can the center hold, and if it doesn't, what happens next?

• **Will moderate Muslims regain control of Islam, or will the world's second largest religion be controlled by the radicals?** And if it's the latter, how do we avoid the "clash of civilizations" Samuel Huntington forecasted?

• **What is the future of the church?** The mainline church in the West has been in decline for decades. In recent years, evangelicals have lost favor and momentum. But the church in Africa, Asia and Latin America is exploding. How does what is happening over there affect here? How does the church here navigate the present moment? Who emerges to shape the next ten years?

• **How real is climate change?** I've avoided reading much about climate change because the answers are shaped more by politics than science, and because I do not understand the science. But there can be little doubt that changes in our weather are having consequences, and some think devastating consequences are coming. How much of this is man-made and what should be done?

• **How will local, state, national and international governments deal with growing debt levels?** To make this more personal, how will Illinois deal with the dark storm clouds of unfunded pension commitments?

• **What happens to those whose jobs are eliminated by Artificial Intelligence?** I've read Utopian and Dystopian scenarios about my life once machines are smarter than I am. Which is it?

• **Where does the sexual revolution lead?** Where does sex go next? What happens to marriage? The family? To what extent will sexual expression drive identity? How much will gender fluidity become mainstream?

• **Can everyone keep their hands off the button?** Nine countries have nukes. Will more join the list? Will those who have them be able to avoid using them, or will our planet be visited by colossal destruction?

There are other questions that deserve honorable mention – i.e., Are we entering a new cold war with Russia? Will block chain live up to its hype? What is the future of higher ed?, etc. – but these are my eight. If you have questions you think deserve to be listed, send them my way. Thanks.