

THE AQUARIAN AGE — THE TASK AHEAD

By Dick Wolgamott

For many years our world has been experiencing ever greater and more rapid change. Certainly the events of September 11, 2001 have brought home this fact in a dramatic way. Many religious and philosophical teachers seek to describe what is going on and guide us through it. But what is often called the emerging of the Aquarian Age is bigger than any particular teaching; it is a planetary transition. It might be described as the basic flow of life, the force of evolution, or even the will of God.

Of course life is dynamic and always changing, but some time periods are more volatile than others. There are watershed moments in history when a little bit of effort can make an important difference. One example of this is the celebration of Christmas in Western culture. This is a time when the collective energies of love, peace, and goodwill enable lives to be literally transformed by simple acts of kindness. We sometimes call this the “Christmas Spirit” and we miss it when the season ends. We are now in the season of planetary transition. The good news is that a little effort on our part can help determine the direction of the trend. We truly have the power to create our collective future.

While change can be uncomfortable, most people realize that we cannot stop it; we must deal with it. Change requires us to make two decisions: to let go of the past and to embrace an unknown future. Even though old ways and attitudes may have served us well in the past, when they no longer work we must release them. Outworn ideas are like obsolete computers, aging automobiles and out of style clothing. It is necessary to let go of the past before we are able to reach out to new possibilities. This takes courage because we are just feeling our way into an unknown future. An analogy might be the trapeze artist who has let go of his swinging bar and is hanging in midair as he awaits the trapeze that swings towards him. It is in this risky time of uncertainty that we have the opportunity for our greatest growth. We take the leap of faith in response to the shifts of energy on the planet. We change our consciousness as we seek new understandings that make sense in our emerging world.

It might help to realize that ours is not the first planetary transition. We get some clues from the past, because whenever there is a shift in humanity’s inner awareness there inevitably follows a change in the outer structures of life. For example, humans formed tribes when they were hunter/gatherers. We shifted to villages with the establishment of agriculture. The industrial revolution gave rise to the nation/state, and now the information age requires us to adopt a worldwide perspective. Today we seek to fight a war on terrorism, not just as one nation, but also as a coalition of civilized humanity against those who would spread fear and hate. And our compassion stretches beyond national boundaries to encompass the plight of women and children in Afghanistan.

There are two concepts that we believe are valuable guidelines for humanity as we seek to navigate this planetary transition. They are: making our lives consistent with our ideals and values (sometimes referred to as “walking your talk”) and accepting the unity of all human life on the planet.

The last 2000 years were characterized by the teachings of new value systems, in particular, love and the importance of every human life. While humanity accepted those ideals and even

incorporated them into national legal frameworks, we seldom expressed them well. The time has come to move from proclaiming lofty ideals to the practical application of them in all dimensions of life. We have been visionaries; we have taught great truths to our youth. Now they demand we take our teachings seriously (witness the World Trade Organization protests, which basically call us to apply our professed value system to our economic life). We are called to recognize that there is no separation between the spiritual and the material sides of life. All life is sacred. The material dimension is merely the way that spirit expresses itself. Truth is universal in its application. It is time to walk our talk in *every* dimension of human life.

Likewise, it is time to rise above the separative categories we apply to human beings. We do have diverse racial, religious and cultural backgrounds, but we are all human beings with the same basic desires for meaningful lives. Technological advances force us to recognize our interdependence. No group of people can be isolated in the world today. And none of us has all the answers to the questions of life. Each group brings something to the table of humanity. We must accept the worth and value of everyone's contribution and learn to work together for the common good. We are all in this together; there is no separation, only unity.

But not everyone is supportive of these truths. We often see a backlash of fundamentalism, particularly among religious groups – whether they are right wing Christians who would condemn others to hell, Jewish nationalists that deny basic human rights to their neighbors, or Muslim extremists that take innocent lives. Indeed, many groups (not just religious ones) react to the planetary transition with fear, desperately clinging to old ways that daily become less relevant. But in a sense these fearful actions actually contribute to the transition. Their gross examples of separatism clearly demonstrate that such attitudes no longer work. Evil in its extreme becomes so obvious that the majority of people casts it aside and moves on.

More people are beginning to think for themselves, to make decisions based on personal value systems instead of the external authority of outworn institutions. This is the gift of the Baby Boomer generation, and it is no coincidence that there are so many of them all over the world. This attitude is reflected in the war on terrorism, as we see progress measured not so much by territory gained as the number of Taliban defections and the number of nations that join the coalition. This is truly a battle for the hearts and minds of humanity. The Islamic extremists would like it to be a war of Islam vs. Western culture, whereas the coalition frames it as world civilization vs. terrorism. It is interesting to note that Americans have begun to broaden their understanding of religious freedom and inclusiveness. People of faith are often referred to as those who attend not just churches, but synagogues and mosques as well. We are beginning to walk our talk and recognize that we must think beyond national boundaries.

This shift can also be seen in our approach to the war itself. Our nation responded to the horror of September 11 by first forming a worldwide coalition and taking time to assess the situation. This enabled destruction among innocent people to be minimized. We have “humanized” the enemy, recognizing that Afghan civilians are as much victims of terrorism as were the workers in the World Trade Center. Technology enables us to be more precise in battle, but it also exposes the war process to the world. Can any of us ever remember dropping bombs and food on a country at the same time? Negotiations with indigenous Afghans and the United Nations regarding a new government have begun even before the battle is won. While certainly not perfect, our response to the attack on America reflects a new value system that would not have been possible just a few years ago. The same quantum physics that produces advanced weapons also emphasizes the unity of all life.

What is the task ahead for those of us who would help create a better world? First, it is important that we honor the sacrifices that were made on September 11. Some say it takes a dramatic event to shake the world to its very foundations before new ways of thinking can become possible. Certainly we have experienced that! We might then view September 11 as a mass sacrifice on behalf of all humanity, a giving of life that the world might move forward. If that is true, then it is important that the rest of us seize the day and commit ourselves to renewed action. To slightly paraphrase Lincoln's Gettysburg Address: "It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us ... that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain. That this *world* under God shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, and for the people, shall not perish from the earth." This commitment is a necessary first step to honoring the heroes of September 11.

Since religion appears to be a major focus of this struggle, the next act on our part might be to respect all religions and be willing to learn from one another. This is not a loss of our religious heritage, but it is an awareness that God is bigger than any one religion and that no tradition has ALL the answers. Instead of trying to convert others, we affirm that our path is right for us and extend the same courtesy to others. Just as the One Life is present in many physical forms, so we can acknowledge that God is present in many religions. Such an attitude will dramatically reduce the hate in the world and enrich the lives of people of all faiths. It may even be that as we move away from judgment to mutual respect in the religious sphere that we will be able to carry over this value into economic, political and cultural areas as well. While maintaining our identity, we embrace others; there is unity in our diversity. Can we apply this "American melting pot" quality to move us from "one nation under God" to "one world under God"?

We also might take this opportunity to look at our value systems to see if they are still relevant in our emerging world. Again, it isn't that old ideas were bad; rather they may have outlived their usefulness. Values, like most everything else, evolve over time. Consider the following possible shifts:

FROM	TO
competition	cooperation
separation	inclusiveness
selfishness	good will
prejudice	brotherhood
provincialism	global consciousness
self-centeredness	justice/human rights
authoritative dogma	inner confirmation of Truth

Finally, after reflecting on our values, are we willing to apply them to transform the political and economic patterns of our planet? It is no longer adequate for people of goodwill to proclaim great truths; we must apply them! A keynote of this emerging Aquarian Age is practical service. We are being called to build a new world, to manifest our greatest visions, to walk our talk. We must move beyond "victory over terrorism" to create political and economic structures that raise the standard of living in Afghanistan. We must move beyond "peace in the Middle East" to establish national patterns that enable both Jew and Arab to live together in a just and workable society. We must move beyond "globalization of the economy" to a profitable pattern of trade that also respects human rights and the environment.

Perhaps never before in the history of humanity has such an opportunity presented itself. Tensions have been created that demand resolution. Technology has clearly demonstrated the interdependence of all peoples. The events of September 11 have shocked the world out of its comfort zone. We must now make the critical choices, both as individuals and nations, to create a new and better world – a world that coalesces its values into the structures and activities of daily life, a world that recognizes the unity of all peoples, a world that rediscovers its Soul.