

THE NEW MILLENNIUM: A TIME FOR RECKONING

By MARGO DOCKENDORF

In this month when we celebrate the life of Martin Luther King Jr., and his vision for humanity, and as we move into this new millennium, one thing that he said rings loudly: "God's will expressed emotionally is love; his will expressed politically is justice."

And as we enter this new millennium, we are afforded a unique opportunity to examine ourselves, the way we relate to one another, where we've been and—most important—where we're going. It is a time for reckoning. It is time to take an inventory—individually and globally—to perform an accounting and to get our bearings as we chart a course for the future. Will we continue into our brave new world carrying with us all the baggage of the old? Will we continue in our pattern of dominance, control, exploitation, prejudice and hatred? Or will we achieve God's will? Will we express that will through love and justice?

Beneath an island in the Aral sea in what is now Kazakhstan, the Russians have buried enough Anthrax to kill every man, woman and child on Earth several times over. The inland sea is shrinking, exposing the top soils to wind and erosion. A team of U.S. investigators is there now, testing the air and watching the animals for signs that the deadly virus has escaped.

India and Pakistan have each detonated nuclear weapons into the atmosphere, and have developed ballistic missiles. Both have refused to sign the non-proliferation and test ban treaties. They have been at war for half a century. Now, both are fighting over the small province of Kashmir. It is a small but bloody conflict that is in danger of spiraling out of control and engulfing the entire world in a nuclear war.

In The Sudan, human beings are still being bought and sold as slaves. Around the world, children are forced to work in sweat shops for little or no wages. Famine, poverty and tyranny are rampant. China is about to become a new military superpower, and Russia, still with enough nuclear weapons to destroy human civilization forever, is falling deeper into chaos, rendering it more dangerous than ever in its history. And everywhere, human beings are butchering one another with self-righteous zeal. The stock markets sore, driven by unparalleled corporate profits, while regard for human life is plummeting. People everywhere are frightened for their survival. Despite all our wondrous advances in technology, life is becoming more incomprehensible and dangerous. We are lost and alienated, uncertain where the tides are carrying us. We whistle in the dark, assuring ourselves everything will be alright even while the foundation upon which we stand cracks beneath our feet. William Butler Yeats wrote:

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the center cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world;
The blood-dimmed

tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

In this new age of ours, we have all become closely linked together is a chain. It is a chain that binds to strengthen, but which also enslaves many. In our shrinking and highly interdependent world, events occurring in even the remotest areas of our globe impact all of us. Isolationism is no longer an option. Despite the enormous power and wealth of America, the burden of maintaining global stability and peace is becoming too great.

Irrespective of the moral arguments on either side, the U.S. simply cannot afford to shoulder the military or financial burden of world peace. The unbridled proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the ability of one despot, one terrorist, to inflict sweeping chaos on the planet renders every person on this planet weakened and vulnerable. It is the result of rampant inequality and injustice—and an utter absence of love. That inequality and injustice is like a cancer affecting the entire body of humanity. If there is a cancer in one part of our body, no matter how unthreatening it may seem to be, do we wait for it to spread to the vital organs before we take action? Until we bring equality and justice to our world, until we come to accept that none of us are safe until all of us are safe, we remain dangerously exposed. Until there is a truly effective means of global security and an effective supra-national guarantor of world peace, all of us remain vulnerable.

During this last year we witnessed a number of tragedies in our own cities.

None of them captured our attention like the murders at Columbine High School. But as a result of the tragedy at Littleton, Colorado, we, as a society, are beginning to take a closer look at our behavior, our culture, our values. Parents are sitting down with their children and talking to them, asking questions about their lives, their school, their activities on the Internet. We are examining the climate of violence in this country, and the role of guns, movies, television and video games. But mostly, we ask ourselves how two seemingly average young men could hold such hatred and commit such unspeakable violence?

My novel *Mahdi* was about terrorism and a global apocalypse. It was written as a "wake-up call," and an opportunity to examine ourselves. The overwhelming human tragedy at Littleton, Colorado also provides an opportunity for us to examine the society in which we live and to make fundamental choices about how we want to occupy this planet. The actions of

the two teenagers in Littleton was an act of terrorism—no less than if committed by any foreign terrorist striking at the heart of America. It dramatically reveals our vulnerability on a very personal level. And it dramatically demonstrates the devastating impact that even two angry teen-

age boys can have on a community and a nation.

As a nation, we condemn other cultures on this planet as barbaric and cruel, as violent and primitive. Yet, America has more violent murders than any other nation on the planet. But look within our own inner cities. They are a reflection of the world in which we live. Our own Third World is a cauldron for violence spawned from injustice and inequality and fueled by the virulent anger caused by those toxic ingredients.

But the murders in Littleton were amidst affluence and opportunity. Still, the actions of those two sociopathic youths of Littleton are, in actuality, no different from any individuals or groups who commit acts of terrorism in their desperate fight against oppression. While the names change; the actions remain the same. Are those two young men any different than any other terrorist group? People who find no inclusion, who feel oppressed because they are different, may turn to violence because they see themselves as martyrs in a cause with nothing to lose. They strike out in their pain and their frustration—and their hate.

The killings at Columbine High School also reveal the lack of accountability we have as a society. This lack of accountability is a reflection of our fear. We try to comprehend the reason for such actions in order to assuage our fear, and in doing so we try to escape our responsibility through blaming the parents, the gun lobby, the media. While there may be some justification for that blame, what about each of us?

Because it says something about our society, it says something about how every one of us chooses to live our lives—in every aspect of our lives. Do we put love into the world through even the smallest of our actions? Do we forgive another's mistakes? Do we allow for diversity and difference? Do we make our lives about power and competition?

I wrote *The Mahdi* because of a long-held and passionate belief in the development of a system of global government that would ensure not only our survival as a species into the next millennium, but would guarantee freedom, equality and justice for all human beings, and which would allow for the human spirit to escape the enslavement of poverty and oppression that keeps us from exploring our unlimited potential. I wanted to record events occurring in our present world in the hope that they might serve as a mirror

to ourselves—a mirror that would help us see ourselves and what could happen if we do not take conscious steps to change the way we relate to one another on this planet. Such a system of world government is not an end in itself but simply a necessary step in a very long journey.

All humanity is at war. It is not a war among conflicting nations—such wars are only a symptom. It is a war between good and evil, the darkness and the light—fear and love. It is what

connects the myriad conflicts and terrorism of our planet with the tragedy of Littleton. We live in a time in which we must make a fundamental choice whether to create a world based upon love or continue in one dominated by fear. All evil stems from fear. Love represents our highest virtues; fear our lowest. Love flows from our spiritual beings—our connection to God, if you will—while fear is born from our animal natures. Charles Darwin said "Man, with all his noble qualities, his god-like intellect, still bears within his bodily frame the indelible stamp of his lowly origin."

In *The Mahdi*, Ben Williams notes during the midst of World War III that

there are no more bystanders in the world, only participants. In his actions in unleashing evil and global chaos into the world, Abu had made certain of that. It is time for all of us to choose sides. There is no middle ground.

And that choice has never been more critical than at the present time. It has been observed that for evil to triumph all that is needed is for good people to do nothing. As Margaret Mead said: "Never doubt the ability of a small dedicated group of individuals to change the world. Indeed, it is all that ever has."

Our survival on this planet is not and never has been assured. It is the highest form of arrogance to assume

otherwise. If we are to survive, and if we are to live in a new age of enlightenment, we must actively choose it. Humanity is in a state of adolescence. We are experiencing all the pain, passions and conflicts attendant to that state. Before we rush to blame those two horribly demented youths of Littleton, Colorado, maybe we should first stop and reflect upon the possibility that they are us. And, just perhaps, that is what scares us the most.

If God's will is to be expressed among us and upon this planet, it falls upon us to make it happen. The choice is ours. That is what Martin Luther King wanted us to know; it is what his life and his mission were all about.

"We must pray with unceasing passion for racial justice, but we must also use our minds to develop a program...to bring an end to racial injustice."

By Martin Luther King



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