



HOPE SPRINGS ETERNAL

Students of history quickly come to the conclusion that history teaches us to hope.

While crusading barbarians, terrorists, megalomaniacs and weirdos have frequently sought to enslave their fellow human beings, ultimately, they have never prevailed. Gandhi was right when he observed, "When in despair, I remember that all through history the way of truth and love have always won; there have been tyrants and murderers, and for a time they can seem invincible, but in the end they always fall."

As the world settles into the new millennium, it is worth reflecting on the fact that despite the horrors perpetrated against innocent people, which we see and hear about daily through our various information systems, the world, nonetheless, is becoming a better place for human existence. Yes, there are struggles and negative competitive forces at work, but overall the power of civilization is slowly overcoming the forces of barbarity.

Despite some very uneven and negative trade effects, globalization in a deeper sense is quietly moulding the attitudes of billions of people into recognizing, that despite ethnic, nationalistic, religious and wealth differences, people are people who are the same as themselves. The internet and television are often very positive in their effects in these areas, since globalization of communication is now a fact of life.

Our shared common humanity is becoming recognized as the foundation which enables individuals to respect the sanctity of human life. Internationally, this concept is now more widely regarded as having fundamental validity, irrespective of which nation individuals are citizens of.

In 2007 the world community will reach an historic milestone, because by then, 50% of the planet's population will have become urbanized for the first time in history. This inexorable process will continue as people seek the services and opportunities urban living offers. Fundamentally, they wish to better their lives and see urban living as a way of doing it. Evolving technology in all of its forms is the vehicle for enabling urbanization to continue and be sustainable.

Urbanization enables very diverse groups of people to reach across all manner of divisions and interact with one another. The closeness of urban living enables people who are very different culturally and economically to ultimately come to see themselves as neighbours.

One of the problems most humans face is their automatic negative labelling of those who are different from themselves. It is so easy to be prejudiced against another, simply because one does not really know the individual. In urban living people use the same roads and public transport, they shop together, they are dependent on the same goods and services. These are great levellers.

Yes, there is room for optimism and hope as 2006 gains momentum. Being human means we are collectively on a journey of improvement. Tomorrow can be better than today; it is possible to reach out to fellow human beings and welcome them into our networks of civility and so strengthen the network of neighbourliness.

Nobody has a monopoly on enlightenment. Irrespective of who we are and what our cultural and family traditions might be, we can never be absolved from building positive relationships and treating others well, because the lifeblood oil of a successful society and of the world community are trust, compassion, respect, courtesy, understanding and appreciation. Each individual's energetic commitment is needed, in order to make the world a better place and ensure that those with negative intent do not rise to a position of ascendancy with destructive powers over others. History does indeed teach us to hope.

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