

Has Armageddon Begun?

By Michele L. Rousseau

Watching yesterday's events unfold and eventually allowing them to penetrate through as reality (instead of some Hollywood-created sensation), my mind suddenly put forth the question, "Has Armageddon begun?" My response was almost immediate. "No, it really began some time ago, thanks to the politics played out worldwide and domestically." America has traditionally been home of the free and the brave. Yet, that role seems to have gone to our political head, giving us the arrogance to think that our way is the only way and that we can use any means available (including force) to help "educate" others to our way of thinking.

If you take a moment to look at that, you realize it's a paradox on the grandest scale. How can a country and culture so young propose to know what works best for others whose cultures have roots in the sands of time? How can we enact so little tolerance for cultures, religions, and values that we have taken so little time to understand? Why do we believe we know better than others who are every bit as human as we are?

An arrogant government begs to be challenged, much like the athlete who claims he can't be beat. Taking on the role of international watchdog, promoting our nation as superior to other areas of the world, and portraying our actions as always beyond reproach only brings on the very things we profess to abhor.

President Bush, in his address to the nation, stated that "Freedom has been attacked and freedom will be defended." Somehow, I doubt that freedom is in fact what was attacked, for there would be nothing to attack if we were pure in that intent and honest in our actions. Perhaps if we afforded other nations and cultures the freedom to operate within their own belief systems and economies, without political judgment and interference, the seed of hatred required to perpetrate yesterday's terrorist acts would not have been planted. Those who made their way into this country would have no choice but to commit to its glory if we offered freedom without judgment, as true freedom would entail. And those who were once patriots would remain loyal if the support was mutual, instead of working against us from within our own boundaries.

While we can try to represent the Waco and Ruby Ridge incidents, as well as the Oklahoma City bombing, as the acts of the irrational and militant, the control and neglect exhibited on the homefront every day is taking its toll. Growing numbers of people are fed up with the façade of freedom put forth by a government that strives to dictate almost every area of our lives. Even setting aside the radical situations, the last presidential election made it clear in a more acceptable light that people are increasingly disenchanting with the direction our country is taking.

It wasn't easy to accept that we do not even have much of a say in selecting our leader. In a country supposedly so focused on freedom, how is it that the people's vote is not what determines the presidency? There may have been a time when the electoral process served a purpose, when perhaps citizens were too busy farming or surviving to pay attention to the candidates and thus were willing to have their elected representatives carry the burden, but those days are gone. Our public is well-educated and well-informed enough to make their own decisions, yet our leader today was not the choice of the majority in this country. Is this really freedom?

And how can our leaders say they represent freedom while taking it upon themselves to impinge on the basic premise of the Constitution by enacting seat belt laws, helmet laws, gun control laws, abortion laws, and laws that impact our ability to try remedies for today's many killer diseases? How can a government that expects patriotism to instill a desire to defend a political cause really expect continued loyalty and support when it snubs those who do "their duty" upon their return home?

Most importantly, how can our leaders make the decision that retaliation is the ONLY answer to terrorist activity? History has shown that the effect of retaliation is escalation. So, shouldn't we have a choice as to whether we want to subject ourselves to that threat? Our leaders have their bodyguards and secure hideouts to protect them in a crisis. It is the American people who will suffer.

Even given that, we will, as President Bush already noted, respond with the "best of America." More than any other time, it seems that people are moved to show their true humanity in response to a crisis. The number of people who immediately responded to the request for help, even thousands of miles away in Las Vegas where the wait to donate blood was five hours last night, shows that the "best of America" is the heart and soul of the individuals who reside here. And they have come to the assistance of those in need without regard to national boundaries, religious differences, or other factors irrelevant to the human cause. People around the globe have begun to realize that nationalism is a farce. People are people, and people care about each other. If it were simply about humanity, we could most likely have the peace we all dream of.

Therefore, I feel quite certain yesterday's terrorist attacks were not directed at the citizens of our country but at what our government represents to the world. The lives taken were purely "collateral damage," an acceptable outcome in a political circumstance, as made known by Timothy McVeigh's attempt to justify his actions. Ours is a system of dual standards. If our government decides a violent action is justified and that collateral damage is acceptable, then it is all okay. If another government or political faction makes the same decision, it is unacceptable. Who determines what is good and what is evil? Is the taking of human life ever actually "good" or justified?

So, it is not about good versus evil, as President Bush stated. Those are judgmental terms so typical of the political arena. Perhaps, in modern terms, it's more a battle of Darth Vader versus Dr. Evil – between wanting to control the universe and wanting to destroy civilization. This status quo will simply continue to fuel the fire of disillusionment Americans and the world today are experiencing, which is the very fuel that will result in Armageddon in this lifetime if the tide doesn't turn soon.

I only hope that we can set aside our egos and political issues long enough to focus on the simplicity of being human. If we choose acceptance and humanitarianism over dominance and judgment, we will all benefit from the world of difference that results.