



A critical time of transition

Although humanity confronts a critical time of transition, the importance of this particular era should not be unduly inflated. In one respect, it is simply another link in a long chain of human evolution.

The present era is no more important than any other—failure to forge a strong link anywhere along a chain weakens the entire lineage of development. Yet, in another respect, because the current link in the evolutionary chain can lead to some form of planetary consciousness and consensus, it does seem particularly vital.

If we can open to reciprocal learning with other cultures and, through that learning, discover a shared sense of reality, human identity, and social purpose that draws out our enthusiasm for life, then the evolution of humanity will surely lead to unforeseen heights.

In the past the idea of a peaceful and mutually supportive global civilization was viewed as a utopian dream. Now, it is a requirement for continuing human evolution. If we do not rise to this challenge, we will surely unleash upon ourselves the most massive wave of suffering ever experienced in human history. Time has run out. The era of creative adaptation is already upon us.

We can put our predicament into perspective by turning, once again, to the work of the historian Arnold Toynbee. After analyzing the dynamics of development of all the major civilizations throughout history, he concluded that a civilization will begin to disintegrate when it loses its capacity to respond creatively to major challenges.

Toynbee also concluded that a failure of creativity often follows a period of great achievement. When we consider industrialized nations and their two centuries of unparalleled material achievement, we should be especially wary of social complacency and diminished creativity.

After acquiring a self-image of seemingly invincible mastery, many developed nations find themselves in the demoralizing position of being unable to manage their own affairs, let alone cope creatively with mounting global problems. Redoubling efforts along old lines will fail. It is time to seek out fresh approaches to national and global challenges.

Toynbee was clear in stating that a civilization is not bound to succumb when it enters a stage of breakdown. Particularly in a democratic society, when a civilization fails to employ its inventive capacity and begins to disintegrate, then it is the people themselves who bear ultimate responsibility.

Traumatic breakdown is not inevitable, but results from the complacency and inaction of citizens.

Duane Elgin