

# Human Values for the 21st Century\*

## Gerald A. Larue

The 21st century promises to be a time of scientific and technological growth at a level never before experienced in human history. This growth will either trigger chaos, disruption, war, starvation and disease or will introduce a period of humanistic cooperation, development, progress, and peace. What emerges will depend upon which values are embraced, taught, encouraged, and legislated. The value choices, which must be deliberately chosen and not left to chance, must be secular, global, and familial. The accepted values must be embraced, taught, encouraged, and supported internationally, nationally, locally, and personally. What is proposed here represents some of the value choices, the ethical building blocks, that will enable a world of peace and harmony to come into existence--a world in which human diversity is respected and tolerated and, at the same time, a world in which each individual will be enabled and encouraged to maximize his or her potential, without discrimination and in an atmosphere of freedom. What is required to bring about this idealized world is a democratic, pluralistic society which recognizes the human rights of each individual and in which no man or woman or class of men or women shall be demeaned and treated as mere slaves existing only to fulfill the desires of those who would be their masters; a world in which no man or woman or class of men or women shall be used as tools for the lusts of others, or for the ambitions of others, or for the greed of others, a world in which the life of every man and woman and child shall be recognized and esteemed as a unique and ultimate statement of the evolutionary process and therefore of inestimable value. To achieve and make real this concept of a world of peace for the 21st century the following humanistic values provide the basic essentials.

### **1. Humanistic values for the 21st century must be secular, democratic, and pluralistic.**

The values must be of the people, for the people, and by the people. They must embrace common moral decencies such as altruism, integrity, freedom, justice, honesty, truthfulness, responsibility, compassion, and must reflect the normative standards human beings discover and develop through living together. Value development must draw upon reason, science, the arts, and must express concern for justice and fairness and concern for the physical and mental well-being of every human being in an effort to maximize individual freedom without limiting the freedom of others.

Humanistic values espouse cooperation and peaceful living and reject the use of violence to settle problems whether the problems be international, national, local, or familial. Humanistic values recognize cultural or religious diversity and individual creativity while rejecting the validity of declarations made by any group alleging spiritual superiority or political autonomy over others. Humanistic values incorporate many of the moral and ethical values espoused by the world's religions, but seek to move beyond particularistic religious belief systems (which often foster separatism) and beyond political agendas (which tend to be local or too narrow) to focus on the full humanity of the person or persons. Obviously, some humanistic values will receive support from religious and political organizations; others will not. For example, the great religions have preached universal brotherhood but, unfortunately, intolerance of other faiths and a spirit of divisiveness have made the implementation of the brotherhood ideal

impossible. Narrow, parochial doctrines of salvation have barred those outside of the faith system from fellowship with those within. Humanistic values for the 21st century cannot be so contained and must not be limited by theologies or by deontological ethics that have, over the centuries, encouraged divisiveness and produced violence.

Nor can nationalistic or ethnic teachings and pronouncements that encourage divisiveness and produce violence be permitted to thwart the promulgation of humanistic values. It is clear that the development and emergence of nation-states have freed citizens from foreign domination and have encouraged ethnic and national self-determination. There is no reason why national governments should not play constructive roles in achieving a peaceful world by maintaining systems of law and order that encourage cultural growth and economic prosperity conducive to achieving conditions of internal harmony and enrichment of the lives of those living within their jurisdiction. Unfortunately, some nations-states have violated the rights of their citizens and have engaged in violence to achieve goals. Economic rivalries between nation-states have led to bloodshed and wars. Such battles will not cease until humanistic values are recognized and expressed in world law that is accepted and respected by all countries and supported and enforced on a transnational level

## **2. Humanistic values for the 21st century must be global.**

As the first generation in human history to have viewed our planet from outer space, we have been made conscious of the uniqueness of this fragment of cosmic matter which we call "earth" that circles a rather small star (our sun) in an immense universe. So far as we know at this moment, we humans are the only intelligent, rational beings existing anywhere in the cosmos. Statistical estimates suggest that elsewhere planets circling stars may have produced other intelligent life forms, but at this moment we know nothing of these other life forms, despite the claims of those who say they have encountered extra-terrestrial beings. To the best of our knowledge, we are utterly alone in the universe and we are bound together by our habitation on this planet. Our value system must extend beyond national, ethnic, religious, territorial, and racial boundaries. Only a global ethic, a global humanistic value system that embraces the entire world will suffice for the 21st century.

There have been some efforts at regional economic and political cooperation. Pacts and treaties between nations governed by rules of civilized behavior are in existence. But these do not go far enough and balance-of-power politics, economic exploitation, racial strife, and religious bigotry have fostered feelings of hatred and produced violence. The time is at hand for a new vision that will enable the development of political, economic, social, and cultural institutions that will foster peaceful coexistence and cooperation on a worldwide basis. This vision can only become reality through the recognition of a global ethic that acknowledges both responsibilities and duties to the world community.

Because humanistic values are pluralistic, a spirit of tolerance is primary. However, tolerance does not signify the ignoring of patterns of behavior that violate or infringe upon the rights and freedoms of others. Tolerance marks the recognition of the wide variety of human expression and patterns of living; it does not mean closing the eyes to injustice, cruelty, or the dehumanization of persons.

## **3. Humanistic values for the 21st century must be based on a familial ethic.**

Anthropological and mitochondrial DNA researches have made clear our evolutionary heritage. As one of the many life forms that have evolved over the millennia, human beings

have developed from very simple origins to become the most complex life pattern among all living creatures.

Our best research informs us that human life originated in Africa and from Africa moved to other continents to become the multicultural people we are today. We are all brothers and sisters--children of the same parents. Differences in skin coloration, hair, eye form, and so forth represent the kinds of variations one finds in any family where no two offspring are exactly the same or develop in exactly the same way. Nevertheless, so close are we to one another that blood from one race can be transfused to save the life of someone of a different race. Our body structures, despite minor discrepancies, are the same. Body parts such as heart, lungs, kidneys, liver, and so forth can be transposed between humans without regard to race, nationality, ethnic origins, or other sub-categories of the human family. Therefore, as members of a single family, we must embrace humanistic family values that supersede boundaries, of nation, race, religion, ethnic origin, sexual differences, sexual preferences, and so forth. We must move beyond the outmoded nationalism and separatism that have been taught for centuries and that only serve to breed tension in the human family. The implication that, by belonging to one nation or race or group of people or by embracing a faith system with its particular beliefs, rules, and regulations, somehow separates an individual from or elevates a person above others cannot provide a basis for global familial values. Such membership provides identity solely on the basis of a limited group association which negates responsibility and caring for those outside of the group. Separatism based on ethnicity, nationalism, and religion has bred disaster. The humanistic family ethic, while tolerating and understanding differences in customs, beliefs, and social agendas, embraces an inclusiveness that seeks to rise above religious and political animosities and tensions to emphasize what unites human beings rather than that which separates them. Wherever and whenever ancient moral and separative principles are taught they must be recognized and incorporated as subsections of the broader humanistic family values.

A 21st century humanistic ethic requires that the scientific basis for the oneness of the human family be accepted and taught internationally, nationally, and locally in classrooms, in families, in religious and secular institutions. Moreover, the factual basis for this teaching must supersede all creationist mythologies of human origins generated by earlier non-scientific generations.

At the core of this familial ethic is support for the universal declarations of human rights that embrace all human beings.

#### **4. Humanistic global familial values for the 21st century must embrace a survival ethic.**

To preserve and honor and reverence the small blue planet "earth" which is our home, all humans must recognize and support an ecological ethic that evolves out of a global family concept. Our view of the earth from space plus research into the interrelationship of ecological factors makes clear that our planet is an independent globe with a single life-support system. There is not one life-support system for Asia and another for the Americas and still another for Africa or Europe--all planet earth life-support systems are the same. There are no national boundaries to our ecosphere. We are one and the earth is our home.

Only fools trash their own homes. Nevertheless, some members of our human family suffer from short-term vision. Their lust for wealth and power expresses little or no concern for human well-being. These persons, and the corporations they represent, are indifferent to what

the rape, desecration, and despoiling of forests, land, and waters and the destruction of non-human life forms can mean to the health and security of present and future generations. They trash our home, the earth. In addition, the naive and ill-informed also despoil our environment. Acting on the basis of non-scientific superstitions, ignorant people kill endangered animals for bones, horns, tusks, penises, and other body parts that are supposed to have magical power to enhance sexuality, cure disease, or prolong life. No matter what excuses are given for ecological indifference, international, national, and local education, laws, and counter-controls must be developed as part of a conservation ethic. Individuals or groups of individual must not be permitted to trash our home, the earth. Those who do must be brought to account before courts of law and punished so that their actions become so unprofitable that they will be abandoned.

We are now at a point in history where the establishment of an international environmental monitoring agency is urgently needed. Appropriate standards for the disposal of industrial waste and for the control of toxic emissions must be developed not only to protect the earth's precious resources, but also to preserve a healthy environment for future generations.

**5. Humanistic global survival values for the 21st century require that we treat one another as members of a family, which means that we must look out for and care about one another's welfare.**

To honor and protect the lives of family members requires commitment to producing a world free from violence, conflict, and power struggles. Statements and pronouncements about the importance and value of human life are not enough. In the words of the ancient Romans, we require: *facta non verba*: deeds not words--pronouncements must be supported by action.

On an international basis, war and all forms of violent territorial battles and power struggles must be finally and completely outlawed. War has been recognized by military leaders, scientists, philosophers, religious leaders and others as an obsolete way of settling problems. Pacts and treaties promising peace must be supported with the potential for active intervention when agreements are violated and war is threatened. The employment of counter-controls makes the use of violence unprofitable and unsuccessful. In this respect, the United Nations has sometimes been effective but on the other hand has failed over and over again.

The experiences of World War II taught us the folly to trying to appease or negotiate with power-hungry sociopaths. In 1938, Neville Chamberlain, after seeking to appease Adolph Hitler at the Munich Conference, devised the slogan "Peace in Our Time." The emptiness of Hitler's commitment to peace soon became apparent. There were no counter-controls in place and World War II erupted. Today, the conflict in Bosnia, which could have been contained at its start, was permitted to escalate because the counter controls that were in hand were not immediately employed. NATO and the United Nations failed to live up to their promise of deterring genocide. Time and again after NATO threatened but failed to deliver, the Serbs ignored the threats and continued to slaughter. We know that only when effective counter-controls are put into action immediately that conflict will be contained thereby compelling negotiations. This fact was made clear after the Persian Gulf conflict. When Saddam Hussein's military efforts and radar were unable to locate and repel the American F-117A Stealth Fighters, his efforts to annex Kuwait failed. Later, in October 1994, he once again threatened to move on Kuwait. The deployment of both Stealth Fighters and Stealth Bombers

persuaded him to change his plans. Sociopathic, power-hungry people usually prove to be moral cowards and social failures who fear exposure. Counter-controls compel them to observe human rights and conform to international peace efforts.

As a further counter-control, war criminals--those who violate human rights and engage in international conflict--must be brought to trial before the United Nations War Crimes Tribunal and held responsible for their crimes against humanity. When those who employ violence and terrorism discover that the pay-off for their actions will be a demeaning trial in a criminal court, this counter-control serves as a deterrent. Presently, the War Crimes Tribunal is being rendered impotent because of political wrangling.

Counter-controls must be employed nationally--only then will the disruptive and peace threatening efforts of sociopathic terrorists and paramilitary groups be contained. The presence of such controls in America became apparent following the New York Trade Center bombing and the Oklahoma bombing. Those responsible for the violence were quickly apprehended. The perpetrators were recognized, not as heroes but as villains. Counter-controls are also in effect in Japan as revealed in the actions following the subway bombings by members of the Aum Supreme Truth sect. Being caught, tried, and punished makes terrorism unprofitable. Apart from the naive who become the instruments of terrorist groups and who envision themselves as heroes who die for a cause, most terrorists do not want to die. They want to live and bask in the glory of their destructiveness. Counter-controls that pre-empt them to failure through exposure and containment are the most effective barriers to the growth and success of anti-social groups. Therefore each nation must establish counter-control units that cooperate with counter-control groups in other nations to protect citizens from terrorists.

On a familial and personal level it becomes incumbent upon every citizen of planet earth to embrace, teach, and practice values that reject violence as a way of solving human problems. Family members must protect one another, and protection can only develop out of a caring response. When familial disputes arise, violence can never be accepted as a way to resolve the problems. We must begin within the individual family units to reeducate the human family and to redirect aggressive instincts. Child abuse, child abandonment, spouse abuse, and elder abuse are on the rise worldwide. Whether the abuse be verbal, physical, psychological, neglect, or abandonment, those responsible must be held accountable. Through exposure, those who prey upon others or who abuse others lose the security of anonymity and become symbols of human depravity, thereby discouraging others from engaging in such behavior. Places of refuge, where the abused can obtain counseling, shelter, food, and support, must be established and maintained until the people of the world become educated to non-violent ways of settling problems.

## **6. Humanistic global family values must express concern for the health and well-being of all members of the human family.**

The first steps have been taken with the introduction of national health insurance programs in all first world countries except the United States and South Africa. Health protection must be extended worldwide. Epidemics can no longer be viewed as local problems but must be seen as menacing all members of the human family. Wars, crop failure, drought, earthquake and storm damage that affect the health and lives of members of the world family in one part of the globe affect us all and call for compassionate and supportive response from family

members worldwide. We are one family and in the words of the 17th century British poet, John Donne, we need to remember that:

No man is an Iland, intire of itselfe; every man is a peece of the Continent, a part of the maine; if a Clod bee washed away by the sea, Europe is the lesse, as well as if a Promontorie were, as well as if a Mannor of thy friends or of thine own were, any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankinde: And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls, it tolls for thee. (*Devotions*, XVII)

The first steps have been taken. For example, South Korea set aside past rivalries and memories of war to reach out to family members of North Korea with shipments of food. United Nations peace-keeping forces regularly respond to cries for food and medicine in ravaged countries. Feelings of concern for the well-being of our human family members prompt many of us to respond personally to human need. Such patterns of compassionate family outreach must be part of the value system for the 21st century.

What is equally important are the efforts to close the gaps in international family relationships occasioned by inhumane behavior in the past. For example, President Jacques Chirac has publicly acknowledged and apologized for the actions of the Vichy government which, with considerable citizen support, turned Jews over to Germany for deportation to the death camps during World War II. Some 800 Germans went to Holland to apologize to the Dutch for the Nazi invasions. Pope John Paul II apologized for the Roman Catholic Church's complicity in the slave trade and the exploitation of native people throughout the Americas. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has repudiated the 1543 anti-Semitic ravings of their founder Martin Luther and acknowledged his contribution to the slaughter of Jews in Nazi Germany. In June, 1995, the Southern Baptist Convention, which came into being during a North-South split over slavery, issued a repudiation of "historic acts of evil" and an apology "to all African-Americans for condoning and/or perpetuating individual and systematic racism in our lifetime." Japanese Prime Minister, Tomichi Murayama, has issued two apologies: the first was to women forced into prostitution to serve Japan's armed forces before and during World War II, and the second was for his nation's deeds during World War II. These acknowledgments and apologies are important recognitions of past inhumane behavior, but something more is needed. What is needed is an accompanying commitment to the present and the future that never again will the nation or the faith system become involved in any behavior or activities or attitudes that violate the civil rights or the human rights of other persons or peoples. Apologies for the past are important polite gestures; commitment to compassionate behavior in the present and in the future is essential.

### **7. Humanistic global family values demand familial responsibility as we face the problem of population control.**

We have learned from the past and the present what tragedies can develop when population exceeds the ability of a nation to provide food, housing, health care, nurturing, and education for all of its members.

It has been estimated that more than 35,000 children die needlessly every day from starvation, malnutrition, and diseases that could easily be controlled. These children are born into families unable to provide the food, clothing, shelter, health needs, comfort, and help required for a meaningful life. Because of where and when they are born, they are the unwanted. Should they mature into adolescence or adulthood, their futures promise to be like

those of their parents--characterized by poverty, lack of food, medicines, clothing, shelter, and the necessities for a dignified and purposeful life. We no longer need to breed like animals to assure our survival; our concern must be with quality of life. It is immoral to breed children whose existence will be characterized by want, suffering, and lack of hope.

As we look to future population growth, we know that we are at a point in human history when limits must be placed on the size and growth of our human family. The necessity for these limits must be taught, accepted and practiced internationally, nationally, locally, and individually. To bring children into the human family without the ability or means or intent to support their health, growth, and development is a desecration of family values. Every child should be a wanted child. Nor can there be discrimination on the basis of sex. A female child must be as welcome and acceptable as a male child. Presently, where efforts at population control are legislated, as in the Republic of China, there is good evidence that infant girls are abandoned, or exposed and permitted to die, or are killed, because a male child is preferred. Ancient values based on sex are no longer acceptable. Males and females are of equal worth and cultural or religious patterns of discrimination must be made obsolete through education and through counter-controls.

Even as we emphasize equality of the sexes it is important to realize that, despite the implications in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (which needs to be updated to avoid sexist language), all human life is not of equal value. The declaration states that

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of **brotherhood**.

This statement is acceptable in a general sense, but it is not accurate. All human beings are not endowed with reason and conscience. Anencephalic infants are born with only functioning lower brain stems that enable them to breathe and their hearts to beat but they lack all cognitive functions and are unable to live beyond a few days. Anencephalic newborns cannot be considered "endowed with reason and conscience," nor should such an infant be considered to be of equal worth to children not so incapacitated. Similarly, a person who has entered a persistent vegetative state has lost the ability to reason and is without conscience. The PVS person cannot be accorded rights equal to those who have the ability to reason and evaluate consequences. In both cases--that of the anencephalic infant and that of the person in a persistent vegetative state--these individuals will never function fully or cognitively as human beings and will forever be completely dependent on others to make life and death decisions. Nevertheless, they are still members of the human family and must be recognized as such. In the language of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights they are to be treated with dignity and accorded whatever rights are in keeping with their needs and dependency situation. Such "acting toward" might not include efforts to prolong their existence. With permission from next-of-kin, guardians, attorneys for health-care, or if the PVS patient has signed an advanced directive, "acting toward" might involve the termination of these lives with a lethal injection and, under proper safeguards and with proper permissions, include the utilization of body parts for the saving of lives of others. By such action, persons who do not have or who have lost the power of reason and conscience can be enabled to make valuable contributions to the welfare of the human family. In all cases and situations, the lives of family members must be honored and protected against abuse.

## **8. Humanistic values must be taught.**

It is one thing to propose values, but how are they to become known and adopted? One way is through education. The word "education" comes from the Latin root *educare* which means "to lead out." As an educator, it is my task to "lead out" (*educo*: I lead out). "Leading out" involves the dismantling of barriers which impede humanistic ethical growth, while bringing others to a place where new ethical horizons can be seen, recognized, appreciated and approached. Education calls for belief in what is to be shared, commitment to the ideals embraced by humanistic values, and hope for the future. So many are disillusioned and without any belief in the possibility for change. The educational program, which can be instituted as part of curricula in classes ranging from kindergarten to university and also through the public media should include the following.

- The right to personal security and protection.
  
- The right to personal liberty which includes
  - freedom from involuntary servitude or slavery,
  - freedom from harassment,
  - freedom of thought and conscience,
  - freedom of speech and expression,
  - moral freedom to express one's values and pursue one's lifestyle so long as it does not harm others or prevent others from exercising their rights.
  
- the right to privacy which calls for respect for the rights of others concerning
  - confidentiality,
  - control of one's own body,
  - sexual preference and orientation,
  - life-stance,
  - reproductive freedom within the boundaries proposed by value 7 (above),
  - health care based on informed consent,
  - the desire to die with dignity.
  
- the right to intellectual and cultural freedom which requires a spirit of toleration and understanding with regard to
  - the freedom to inquire and engage in research,
  - the right to adequate education,
  - the right to cultural enrichment,
  - the right to express and publish one's views.
  
- the right to adequate health care (see value 6, above).
  
- freedom from want which means that society must guarantee
  - the right and opportunity to work,
  - the satisfaction of basic needs when individuals are unable to provide for themselves,
  - care for the elderly,
  - care for the handicapped,

- the right to adequate leisure and relaxation.
- Economic freedom including
  - the right to own property,
  - the right to organize,
  - protection from fraud.
- Moral equality, which entails equal opportunity and equal access.
- Equal protection under the law which is vital to a free, democratic society, and include
  - the right to a fair trial,
  - the right to protection from arbitrary arrest or unusual punishment,
  - the right to humane treatment.
- The right to democratic participation in government which include
  - the right to vote,
  - the right of assembly and association.
- the right to hold religious beliefs or not hold religious beliefs.
- The rights of marriage and the family which include
  - the right to marry or cohabit,
  - the right to divorce,
  - family planning,
  - the right to bear and the responsibility to raise wanted children,
  - child care,
  - the right of children and each family member to be protected from abuse and physical or cultural deprivation.

I conclude where I began:

**9. Humanistic global family values must be concerned with providing each member of the human family with the means to become involved in meaningful work, employment or efforts designed to promote the well-being of the entire human family.**

A meaning-filled life is more than mere existence; it involves purpose, direction, and a sense of belonging. Humanistic family values embrace individual rights to autonomy, dignity, free choice, liberty, fraternity, the pursuit of happiness, and security. Our human family has devised a multitude of different ways to accomplish these goals through law, education, role modeling, as well as through words, acts, and symbols of encouragement and support. Each positive effort must be appreciated and inherent differences tolerated. To establish such values and the ethical standards that protect all human beings for the 21st century we must be prepared to learn from the past, evaluate the present, and project the highest and best that we know into our aspirations for the future. We must examine our values on the basis of international, national, and personal commitments.

What we do now is important. We must, each one of us, pledge ourselves to action in helping to move humankind towards a way of living where the humanistic family ethic overlays the

nationalistic, linguistic, religious, and ethnic differences that separate us. We work toward the time when the world will be at peace and human energy will be focused on the needs and well-being of all members of a single family, a time when we will enjoy and celebrate our unique differences while exalting the importance of our human similarities, a time when we will acknowledge the basic human needs that unite us including our mutual concerns for the futures of our children, our grandchildren and our great-grandchildren who constitute the future.

**For the world of the 21st century, humanistic values must project the vision of a peaceful world in which no man, woman or child, or class of men, women, or children shall live as servants or slaves existing simply to fulfill the whims and wishes and desires of others, a world in which no man or woman or child shall be used as a tool to satisfy the lusts or greed or ambitions of others, a world in which every human life, the life of every man, woman, and child shall be a wanted, welcomed, and esteemed member of the one human family.**

---

© 1998 by the North American Committee for Humanism (NACH) All rights reserved, including the right to reproduce this book, or portions thereof in any form, including electronic media, except for the inclusion of brief quotations in a review.

ISSN 1058-5966