
CHRISTIAN PEACEMAKER TEAMS

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Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) received confirmation that the body of Tom Fox, one of four CPT members abducted in Iraq on November 26, 2005, was found Friday, March 10, 2006 in Baghdad. Tom wrote the following reflection from Baghdad in October 2004.

Iraq: Standing Firm

by Tom Fox

"If an attacker inspires anger or fear in my heart, it means that I have not purged myself of violence. To realize nonviolence means to feel within you its strength – soul force – to know God. A person who has known God will be incapable of harboring anger or fear within, no matter how overpowering the cause for that anger or fear may be."

- Gandhi speaking to Badshah Kahn's Khudai Khidmatgar officers; "A Man to Match His Mountains" by Eknath Easwaran, 1985.

When I allow myself to become angry, I disconnect from God and connect with the evil force that empowers fighting. When I allow myself to become fearful, I disconnect from God and connect with the evil force that encourages flight.

The French theologian Rene Girard envisions Satan as "a parasite on what God creates by imitating God in a manner that is jealous, grotesque, perverse and as contrary as possible to the loving and obedient imitation of Jesus." ("See Satan Falling like Lightning," 2001)

If I am not to fight or flee in the face of armed aggression, be it the overt aggression of the army or the subversive aggression of the terrorist, then what am I to do? "Stand firm against evil" (Matthew 5:39, translated by Walter Wink) seems to be the guidance of Jesus and Gandhi in order to stay connected with God.

Here in Iraq I struggle with that second form of aggression. I have visual references and written models of CPTers standing firm against the overt aggression of an army, be it regular or paramilitary. But how do you stand firm against a car-bomber or a kidnapper?

Clearly the soldier disconnected from God needs to have me fight. Just as clearly the terrorist disconnected from God needs to have me flee. Both are willing to kill me using different means to achieve the same end, that end being to increase the parasitic power of Satan within God's good creation.

It seems easier somehow to confront anger within my heart than it is to confront fear. But if Jesus and Gandhi are right then I am not to give in to either. I am to stand firm against the kidnapper as I am to stand firm against the soldier.

Does that mean I walk into a raging battle to confront the soldiers? Does that mean I walk the streets of Baghdad with a sign saying "American for the Taking?" No to both counts. But if Jesus and Gandhi are right, then I am asked to risk my life, and if I lose it, to be as forgiving as they were when murdered by the forces of Satan.

Standing firm is a struggle, but I'm willing to keep working at it.

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“Why Are We Here?”

by Tom Fox

The Christian Peacemaker Team (CPT) Iraq team went through a discernment process, seeking to identify aspects of our work here in Iraq that are compelling enough to continue the project and comparing them with the costs (financial, psychological, physical) that are also aspects of the project. It was a healthy exercise, but it led me to a somewhat larger question: Why are we here?

If I understand the message of God, his response to that question is that we are to take part in the creation of the Peaceable Realm of God. Again, if I understand the message of God, how we take part in the creation of this realm is to love God with all our heart, our mind and our strength and to love our neighbors and enemies as we love God and ourselves. In its essential form, different aspects of love bring about the creation of the realm.

I have read that the word in the Greek Bible that is translated as "love" is the word "agape." Again, I have read that this word is best expressed as a profound respect for all human beings simply for the fact that they are all God's children. I would state that idea in a somewhat different way, as "never thinking or doing anything that would dehumanize one of my fellow human beings."

As I survey the landscape here in Iraq, dehumanization seems to be the operative means of relating to each other. U.S. forces in their quest to hunt down and kill "terrorists" are, as a result of this dehumanizing word, not only killing "terrorists," but also killing innocent Iraqis: men, women and children in the various towns and villages.

It seems as if the first step down the road to violence is taken when I dehumanize a person. That violence might stay within my thoughts or find its way into the outer world and become expressed verbally, psychologically, structurally or physically. As soon as I rob a fellow human being of his or her humanity by sticking a dehumanizing label on them, I begin the process that can have, as an end result, torture, injury and death.

"Why are we here?" We are here to root out all aspects of dehumanization that exist within us. We are here to stand with those being dehumanized by oppressors and stand firm against that dehumanization. We are here to stop people, including ourselves, from dehumanizing any of God's children, no matter how much they dehumanize their own souls.