

Endless terror or path toward hope?

Pat Marrin | May. 6, 2009

BE NOT AFRAID: AN ALTERNATIVE TO THE WAR ON TERROR

By Tom Cordaro

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The fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 created a strange crisis for the victorious West -- what to do with the massive apparatus of the military-industrial complex that since the end of World War II had dominated U.S. foreign policy and consumed trillions of dollars for national defense. In Orwellian terms, a new enemy was needed to justify the costs of maintaining a well-entrenched and ideologically hard-wired national security state.

The end of the Cold War also required a fundamental shift in focus for peace and justice advocates around the world who for decades had concentrated their efforts on nuclear disarmament and ending proxy conflicts in the East-West stand-off. They turned their attention to the huge disparities between the developed North and the developing South and to addressing the violent legacy of post-colonial and post-cold war struggles between popular fronts and oligarchs, juntas and dictators.

The destruction of the World Trade Center and attack on the Pentagon on Sept. 11, 2001, thrust both global governments and the peace community into a new paradigm. The fiery crisis of 9/11 gave rhetorical birth, in the words of then President Bush, to an open-ended, world-wide "War on Terror" that has ever since defined U.S. foreign policy and has also reframed the efforts of peace advocates.

Tom Cordaro's book *Be Not Afraid: An Alternative to the War on Terror* provides a cogent and compelling picture of this shift in global conflict and the vast consequences for all of us if the narrative power of the "war on terror" goes unchallenged by a fresh narrative based on the logic of a just world community grounded in the shared philosophical and religious traditions that offer an alternative to endless war and perpetual paranoia.

Cordaro is a 30-year veteran of the faith-based peace and justice movement and currently serves as Justice and Outreach Minister for St. Margaret Mary Catholic Church in Naperville, Ill.

The tragedy of 9/11 and the deaths of almost 3,000 civilians, Cordaro writes, cannot be separated from the highly complex process of globalization. For all its perceived benefits, globalization favored Western economic and geopolitical interests that impacted the environmental, social and cultural values of much of the rest of the world. With the spread of capitalism through market models, trade agreements and global financial systems, many emerging nations saw only exploitation and corruption. Al Qaeda's strike against two highly visible symbols of Western commercial and military power can only be understood in the context of a radical response to the effects of globalization.

But 9/11 also provided neo-conservative ideologues in the Bush administration with the rationale for a radical response of their own, one that re-enshrined the national security state under the name of Homeland Security, justified the use of the American military to try and secure oil reserves in the Middle East, halted immigration

patterns that threatened class and racial hegemony, and suspended the civil rights of its domestic opponents under claims of wartime executive powers.

The chief tool of this transformation was fear, Cordaro writes, real fear of another attack but also a pervasive, debilitating, public terror that could be used to justify secrecy, the use of torture, arrest and detention without due process and the suppression of dissent, all in the name of preventing the loss of the very freedoms being violated. After five years of enormous cost and destruction, it must be asked, does anyone feel safer?

The antidote to this fear, Cordaro proposes, is not naïve hope or idealistic good will but the reassertion of a new post 9/11 narrative that realistically assesses of the cyclical causes of conflict and that reclaims the civic and religious principles at the core of our national story -- the freedoms we are defending in the first place. He writes specifically to the Christian community to encourage it to reaffirm its faith in the deepest paradigm of all, the death and resurrection of Jesus, the paschal mystery that gave birth to hope in the ultimate victory of justice in human history. The church, like the companions on the road to Emmaus, learns from the Christ, whose death was an act of state terrorism. That God's intentions, however paradoxical, will prevail. The Christian vocation is to live toward this end refusing to be discouraged by fear.

Cordaro has provided a well researched and richly factual resource for schools, church and civic study groups committed to building a new consensus about how to get beyond the psychology and politics of fear to a constructive engagement of the ideas and issues that are fueling the current war on terror. The text is an evocative compendium of voices for peace whose eloquence and common sense reveal the quotable power of the narrative we now need to end fear and restore our sense of purpose.

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