

## DISPATCHES FROM THE HOME FRONT

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My wife and I were staying in Contra Costa County, making final preparation for our daughter's wedding. She has chosen to live in sunny, hilly country where narrow roads wind through groves of trees and open to wide vistas of mountain-fringed sky. At 4 AM there is no traffic, and you can roll into San Francisco off the Oakland-Bay Bridge within twenty minutes. Even with lots of traffic, it is no longer than that to Berkeley, the university town that lies on the foggy side of the hills that separate Contra Costa County from San Francisco Bay.

On September 11th the quiet suburban communities east of Berkeley looked and felt planets away from what I saw on television that Tuesday morning in late summer. Terrorists attacked New York City and Washington, DC. They massacred nationals from sixty-six foreign countries and slaughtered almost as many Americans in one hour than the number who died in our eight-year War of Independence against Britain more than two centuries ago.

Then almost everywhere I looked in the Bay Area, the connection was made with our countrymen a continent away. American Flags sprouted from the front porches of homes, waved from cars and trucks and appeared in full page renditions in *The Contra Costa Times* and in the two dailies from San Francisco, suitable for taping to an apartment window or in an office cubicle. Those flags said we sympathized with the families of people who were murdered going about their daily work. They said we loved our country and agonized over her wounds. They spoke of quiet awe and pride in the all-American firemen and cops who had laid down their lives trying to save others.

The exception was Berkeley where the city council banned fire trucks from flying the National Colors.

### **Winter for Osama and Berkeley**

Berkeley is frozen in its past, the Vietnam War never ending its protests, so it offers perpetual sanctuary to privileged revolutionaries attending the University of California from overseas. They are embraced by homegrown radicals tenured in university

departments, in residence throughout the city and in control of the municipal government. These citizens think they are politically enlightened and morally superior to the rest of us. Therefore anything they want justifies any means they choose to get it.

Ironically, they are radicals in name only. They are in fact reactionaries, frightened of change taking place all around them. This results in self-centered or infantile behavior. With Free Love they were like children discovering their genitals and playing with them in public. With its Sixties companion, the Free Speech Movement, they wanted everyone to listen to their tantrums. No fair if you had an opposing point of view; they'd throw a rock at you. Unable to adapt (or grow up), they have had to expand their enemies' list. Presidents Johnson and Nixon can no longer top it, but big oil, big tobacco, the military and the National Rifle Association are still up there, with newer suspects ranging from meat eaters and white heterosexual males to anyone who believes that a few values are absolute

Berkeleyites are not heartless. Few children are. They were as repelled as any by what terrorists had been planning to do to for ten years and finally carried off—namely, the killing of Republicans, Democrats, Independents, socialists, communists, pacifists, soldiers, atheists, gays, radical feminists, pro-lifers, Moslems, Hindus, Buddhists, Zionists, members of the Christian right, left and center, and any person of color who was in the vicinity of the World Trade Center or the Pentagon.

But as of yet, Berkeleyites cannot shake the belief that Osama bin Ladin and his cohorts throughout the Islamic world have been somehow forced into committing atrocities by the United States. Wanting to see a lot more us dead, the terrorists actively pursue further plans for more destruction while the people of Berkeley murmur that we should have listened to their grievances. We should not have taken positions that irritated them. And we should not wave flags lest their sympathizers round about think we are intolerant.

This kind of thinking gives Berkeleyites a warm feeling of gratitude because it allows them to hold onto what amounts to a religious conviction: the United States is was, is and always will be the greatest threat to peace the world has ever known. The people of Berkeley represent a small minority of Americans, but they are not alone, and their influence is far wider than their numbers. America-haters are among the elite in college

towns across the land. They fill the National Educational Association, and have flooded into secondary and primary classrooms where American History, if it is taught at all, is given less important than teaching kids how to use condoms. They own the National Council of Churches. They are politicians and bureaucrats at all levels of government who could not remain in power without a clientele of perpetual victims and malcontents. They control much of the mainstream media and include Hollywood celebrities who, until September 11th, have been quick to express their anti-American sentiments.

Thank God, many of these people are experiencing the angst of getting their heads screwed on right. They intuitively understand the terrorists' point of view: one dead New Yorker at Ground Zero is just the start for dancing in the blood of some New Age relativist enjoying a joint in Malibu. It has been said how remarkably focused the mind becomes when you're being shot at. I heard it put another way by a wonderful black woman stopped in a Manhattan street a day or so after the attacks.

"What would you tell people in Islamic countries who sympathize with the terrorists?" she was asked. "Nothing," she said.

"They believe one thing. And I now I know what I believe. We have nothing to say to each other."

### **Hallelujah! A Just War**

I drove back to Los Angeles heartened by remarks like that, as well as by Billy Graham's in the National Cathedral and of President George Bush to the Congress, the nation and the enemies of the United States. I was saddened too by all the wanton death and destruction. And I was very, very angry.

I'm angry at the terrorists and those who harbor them. I want to go to war against the peoples and the countries that want to kill my neighbors and me. I want to do whatever it takes to win the war so that America's enemies cannot destroy my country and trample on her ideals. I do not want to waste my anger on places like Berkeley, where the people must feel so ashamed of their unearned rights and creature comforts that they hate themselves. How else can I explain why they hate our country so?

Jesus tells me that I must turn the other cheek to hate and to love my neighbor as myself. He also tells me to carry a sword and be ready to use it. In the first instance the

context is about irksome family members, overbearing bosses, back stabbing co-workers and strangers who cut you off in traffic or demand a buck for a pint of wine. Refraining from acting in kind doesn't require that you let everyone get away with nonsense. Love demands that you tell the truth, correct when you can and always want the good for people even if they have no idea what good means. So I'm turning my cheeks to the citizens of Berkeley, and they can kiss my ass as I walk away and never do business there until they wake up the second instance of Jesus' teaching.

It is about God's wider, all-inclusive love. The kind that will not turn its back on evil. Christians aren't supposed to sit around and pray when they see someone climbing over the balcony to rape the neighbor lady. Love in this instance wants the best for the most. It shoots to kill. If it can't do that, it calls the cops. If it can't do that, it supports politicians and judges who understand executing a criminal will make sure that he can't hurt anyone ever again, including fellow prisoners. It underlies the concept of a just war that St. Thomas Aquinas wrote about under the heading of Charity. At Pearl Harbor it said, "Praise the Lord and pass the ammunition." It reduced nearly every city in Third Reich to rubble so that whoever crawled out of the ashes was saved from the evil of Nazism. Its atomic bomb killed 100,000 civilians in Nagasaki so that a million American men-at-arms would not have to die trying invade Imperial Japan. Thus it made sure Japan's Greater Asia Co-prosperity Sphere did no more harm.

This kind of love is about the severe mercy of God. Applied through human instruments, it is fraught with human failing. Until the Second Coming of Christ, evil is here to stay, and good guys will sometimes do horrific things. But it would be far, far worse, if the good guys sat around and did nothing.

## **Judgment**

I'm disconcerted by the outcry against Jerry Fallwell's suggesting that the United States is under God's judgment. Of course we're under judgment. If we weren't, thousands more people would have died at Ground Zero and more targets hit. That's the good side of having a sovereign God looking after us. The bad side is that, if we're going to act stupid and tie ourselves up in knots about things that never mattered, like banning

law abiding citizens from owning firearms, we'll get distracted from the important things, like foreigners who are deadly serious with their box cutters.

God seldom takes by force what He has given by grace. That means we have to live with the consequences of our free will. There are plenty instructions in the Bible and lessons from our secular history about how to exercise our will responsibly. There are also warnings about giving into momentary fads and fashion, and having our ears tickled with crises that aren't real, from agar on apples to disturbing the habitats of garter snakes and snail darters. Fill your mind with those things, and you won't be thinking much about national security.

Most Americans have an intuitive understanding of judgment although we get twitchy when religion is brought in. In our daily lives we hope for judgment when we are qualified for a job and want to be hired. Every time we vote, we cast judgments for or against candidates running for office. We exercise judgment when we look to see what was lacking in our national security and intelligence, and seek to improve them. We stand as judges when we laud the heroics of firemen, police and passengers. We even bring the Lord into it when we stand in the middle of a bombed out square--a neo natal intensive care unit three blocks down, an abortion clinic two streets over--and cry out, "God bless America!"

But which America?