

Martin Dreamed... of Peace

By Camille Landry

Writing this piece in January 2009, local activist Camille Landry looked on what would have been King's 80th birthday on the eve of the inauguration of America's first black president.

Martin Luther King's words ring in our hearts and in our history: "I Have a Dream", he cried, and we dreamed together and ended segregation in America. Today people of every race, nationality and religion have equal rights under United States law. Black, white, brown, red, yellow children sit next to each other in school without question. We all eat at the same lunch counters. That part of Dr. King's dream has come true.

But the work is not finished. A more central principle of Dr. King's still remains unrealized. Although we remember MLK mostly for his civil rights work, his philosophy of equality of all people was rooted in a fervent belief in nonviolence as the means to achieve our goals.

Before he died Martin turned his attention toward the Vietnam war and embarked upon a quest for peace. "Man

must evolve for all human conflict a method which rejects revenge, aggression and retaliation. The foundation of such a method is love," he told us. "Nonviolence is a powerful and just weapon which cuts without wounding and ennobles the one who wields it. It is a sword that heals."

Dr. King encouraged young people to avoid going to war, even if it meant breaking the law. "One who breaks an unjust law that conscience tells him is unjust, and who willingly accepts the penalty of imprisonment in order to arouse the conscience of the community over its injustice, is in reality expressing the highest respect for law," he said.

If he were alive today, surely Martin Luther King would be pointing out the futility of war as a means of solving our problems. This week's cease-fire in

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**Martin Luther
King, Jr.**

Speaking on War

"War is a poor chisel to carve out tomorrow."

"We must pursue peaceful ends through peaceful means."

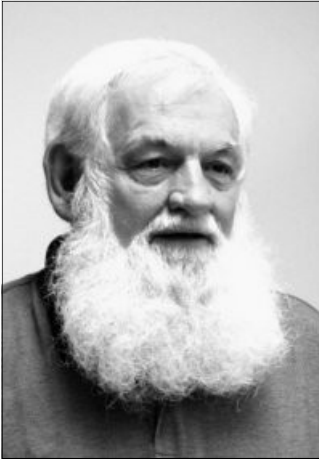
"It is not enough to say we must not wage war. It is necessary to love peace and sacrifice for it."

"We all have to be concerned about terrorism, but you will never end terrorism by terrorizing others."

"The chain reaction of evil ... wars producing more wars ... must be broken, or we shall be plunged into the dark abyss of annihilation."

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- Obama's Nobel Peace Prize



Nobel Prize: Peace Or Just War

By Gene Stoltzfus

What is the meaning of the Nobel Peace Prize? Alfred Nobel, Stockholm native and the inventor of dynamite and other explosives was chagrined that his inventions were used in cruel ways. In the late 1800s towards end of his life he dedicated his considerable fortune to those who

had made the greatest contribution to humankind. Each year prizes are awarded for achievements in physics, chemistry, physiology or medicine, literature, economics and peace.

Two sitting American Presidents Woodrow Wilson (1919) and ninety years later Barack Obama (2009) have been presented the Nobel peace prize. Both men believed that they had an overarching role to move history in a more peaceful direction. Wilson was disappointed and died in office. His League of Nations was crippled from non support at home and then burned in the ashes of World War II. We hope for a better outcome for Obama. Former President Jimmy Carter received the prize in 2002, 22 years after he was defeated by Ronald Reagan for a second term. Henry Kissinger accepted the peace prize for negotiating with the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam (North Viet Nam) in the early 1970s while B52s simultaneous bombed his enemy. His counterpart Le Duc Tho of North Viet Nam refused to accept the prize. The war continued for two more years after the Paris Peace agreements. Between 1973-1975, another half a million Vietnamese were killed and wounded, 340,000 of them civilians.

President Obama's eloquent speech accepting the Nobel Prize on Dec. 10, Human Rights Day laid out the necessity of war and ruminated on his nation's understanding of just war - "war waged as a last resort, or in self-defense; if the force used is proportional, and if, whenever possible, civilians are spared from violence." To his credit he defined what theorists believe is a just war. He did not identify how his administration purports to fine tune war making to meet the criteria of a just war in two big wars, Iraq, according to him a dumb war and Afghanistan, a necessary conflict.

How will those who target drone attacks, and other expressions of air war make certain that no civilians are killed? How will a new chapter in just war be written in the basic training manuals of soldiers preparing for deployment, for interrogation of the enemy, for treatment of captives, and for clean up of military waste? Can Alfred Nobel's dynamite and its prolific offspring ever be controlled? Will the apparent unlimited use of U.S. wealth for military purposes bankrupt its citizens as once happened in Rome?

For a century the Nobel Prize for peace has hovered in that space between active peacemaking represented by monumental efforts towards peace and justice like land mine eradication, civil rights, or relief efforts, and the work of nations to create a framework that will constrict war and its effects on civil society. The prize was not primarily intended to celebrate pacifist solutions to war although people who questioned all war and violence like Martin Luther King and Jane Addams received the award. The acknowledgement of their achievements gives hope.

In his speech President Obama deftly distanced himself and his office from pacifist traditions as a President with responsibilities consistent with empire must do. To his credit he did so without the normal checklist of charges of idealism, lack of realism and or even naiveté, a checklist deeply embedded in the pillars of liberal democratic thinking upon whose shoulders his politic relies for ideological ballast.

President Obama didn't tell us if there are any serious negotiations with adversaries, coalitions of Pakhtoon villages or Taliban groups. In a part of the world where negotiations have been practiced for 3000 years it is hard to believe that something isn't happening to find an end to armed conflict. How is the conduct of the Afghan-Pakistan war creating the context for real peace, democracy or development? The people I talked to in Pakistan are not sure. How will his administration encourage or even mandate the military chaplain corps to become a genuine conscience and moral compass for "just combat" in the field. What about the thousands of soldiers who joined the nation's forces and, in the process of soldiering, developed a conscientious objection to war? Will they be allowed to get out without having their dignity and personal integrity dishonored?

For many peace people, church members and third world nations, Obama's speeches on Afghanistan and the acceptance of the Nobel prize despite their eloquence was a time of disappointment. This was the moment when I realized that my long term hope for ending the practice of war in, say, a century will require harder, more focused work than ever. I believe I can use this experience as a time to bound forward. The speeches remind me that the Lamb of God with even wider reach in the stretch for justice can overcome the god of empire that imposes chaos and destruction under the guise of democratic order.

The speeches remind us that fundamentalist preachers or pundits are tethered together with the liberal establishment on the question of war. Both stumble through various versions of just war ethics as the Predator drones drag us into a scary future. Above all the speeches remind us of the very limited options that are available to an imperial President in matters of peace and war. This is the moment to pull up our pants, turn off the

TV, awaken our imaginations, and listen to God's spirit of compassion for all human kind, and get on with our work.

Some of us will be called to unexpected sacrifice of time, career, and life itself. The goal of a world without war is worth all of the sacrifice of a great army of unarmed soldiers. This dream of a nonviolent world may be the only realistic vision now, despite the fact that our leaders doff their hats to just war. The renewal of our spirit will come one step at a time in fresh and even larger ways as our spirits are awakened to the politics of renewal and hope, a politic like Jesus himself, that is never dependent upon a president who himself is often powerless to transform an imperial culture that devours good policies and strong words.

The universality of this season's mantra, "Peace on Earth Good Will Towards People" is a good place to start and it gets the best angels involved. If the mantra is going to bring down the institution of war we better be prepared with discipline and armfuls of imagination infused with love. When we are called idealists we do well to give the realist answer, all of creation is groaning for something better. That is where we will put our energy. Even elder Alfred Nobel might cheer us on.

Gene Stoltzfus was director of Christian Peacemaker Teams for 16 years, from its inception in 1988 until 2004. He now lives in Fort Frances, Ontario, and blogs at peaceprobe.wordpress.com. This piece was written December 14, 2009.

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Thank you!

Report from Oklahoma GI Rights Hotline

Hotline calls increasing with deployments

By Moses Mast

The Oklahoma GI Rights Hotline is a project of Oklahoma Center for Conscience and takes calls from active duty servicemembers (or their family members) who are seeking legal discharge. We started the hotline in 2007 (after a year of planning), publicizing it on the web and through cards and fliers. While we were being trained by and networking with the national GI Rights Hotline (a network of hotline nodes), we were not officially a member until 2009.

Our hotline has never had more calls than one person can answer, so I take all the calls. Now we've agreed to take some calls redirected from other hotline numbers because those have "office hours." I take the calls on a cell phone and try to be available at all times, so I get calls when they do not answer.

Before the new year there were very few calls -- and this was true across the network. But since then there have been more calls, we think because deployments are again picking up.

One of the things I noticed is the number of calls from friends and family rather than directly from soldiers. Many of the soldiers may know the answer to their questions but want to be reassured. Others are badly misinformed.

Recently a person who had enlisted had just arrived at the base for training and decided she did not want to continue. Because she had not yet begun her training she thought maybe they would let her out. If not, she said she was going to leave without permission. The next day a friend called because she was under the impression that anyone leaving without permission could receive the death penalty. I reassured her that her friend is not facing such a possibility.

Most of those who want to leave the military do not do so because of con-

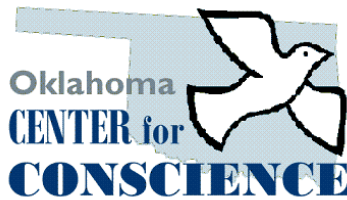
**Oklahoma
GI Rights Hotline
(405) 231-1138**

science. It seems there are many cases of changing circumstances, like the death of a mother and the need to be a caretaker to younger siblings, or a health issue, and some say they cannot adjust to military life.

I did have a call from a father who said his son had just graduated from the advanced class of basic training but for reasons of conscience could not continue his life in the military. His son believed he would be "PCF eligible," but that's a (relatively) simple discharge route mostly for those who have not finished basic training or who have been AWOL for a while. Unfortunately I had to tell the father that option was no longer available to his son. The father was a career soldier and said he does not agree with his son but will support him in his decision.

Some of the stories are rather interesting. I had a call from a mother who said her daughter went AWOL three years ago, now the military asked local law enforcement to arrest her. The local police refused, saying it is not their responsibility. In three years circumstances change; the daughter now has a baby. Fortunately the daughter is eligible for the PCF discharge.

One of the more frustrating parts of this work is that we often don't hear back from those who call us. I wish they would call back so that we could know how their situations turned out. We need this feedback to do our work effectively, but thus far have not found a way to get it consistently.



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OCC was founded in 2004 and is supported by Joy Mennonite Church, Veterans for Peace of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma Catholic Peace Fellowship, the Oklahoma City Religious Society of Friends and Eastern Oklahoma Pax Christi.

OCC is funded by community donations. We need your support.

We ask you to think about war.

Bits & Peaces

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Racism and War:

Dehumanization of the Enemy

Our real enemies are not the ones living in a distant land whose names or cultures we don't understand; The real enemy is a system that wages war when it's profitable, the CEOs who lay us off our jobs when it's profitable, the Insurance Companies who deny us Health care when it's profitable, the Banks who take away our homes when it's profitable. Our enemies are not five thousand miles away. They are right here at home. If we organize and fight with our sisters and brothers, we can fight this war, we can stop this government and we can create a better world.

- Mike Prysner, Iraq War veteran, speaking at Winter Soldier, 2008, panel "Racism and War: the Dehumanization of the Enemy"

See okgirightshotline.org for video of this moving speech about racism and war.



Gaza marks yet another war that has drawn to a close without a win by either side, illustrating the uselessness of killing as a way to resolve conflict. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have cost hundreds of thousands of lives, trillions of dollars and squandered the good will that most of the world used to feel toward the United States.

This week the world will celebrate change. The 80th birthday of Martin Luther King, who changed the landscape of racial relations in the United States, falls just one day before the inauguration of Barack Obama as President of the United States and on the same day as the lunar New Year. Change is the order of the day. Perhaps it is time that we also changed our attitudes toward violence as a way of solving our problems.

It is time that we take to heart the lessons taught us by Martin Luther King. "Wars are poor chisels for carving out peaceful tomorrows," he told us. As we celebrate new beginnings, let us consider a truly new way of living. Let us make peace our legacy to future generations.