

From: Dick Bernard dick@chez-nous.net
Subject: P&J#12 SUPER BOWL XXXIX...and A FORCED CHOICE
Date: February 13, 2005 at 8:18 AM
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My take on Peace: www.chez-nous.net/peace.html, if you care to visit.

-----Original Message-----

From: Dick Bernard [<mailto:dick@chez-nous.net>]
Sent: Tuesday, February 08, 2005 5:27 AM

A FORCED CHOICE:

Last Thursday and Friday I attended a great workshop.

"Pathways to Sustainable Peace: Accountability, Responsibility and Problem Solving" was its title. The University of Minnesota Law School Human Rights Center sponsored the program and among we 25 or so participants were representatives from 19 different third world countries. It was a very rich mix. The faculty was a distinguished one, including three people from the U.S. Institute of Peace www.usip.org, a small (in government spending terms) government funded agency. Their website is worth a visit. In an open-to-the-public panel, former US Ambassador to Rwanda, Robert Flaten, gave his perspectives on the genocide. His posting had ended there several months before the coup. His comments were candid and worthwhile, I felt.

There were many noteworthy moments, but one segment in particular seems worth sharing with this network:

Facilitator George Lopez of Notre Dame University asked us all to raise our hands if we believed in Peace. Of course, we all did.

Did we believe in Justice? Of course. Mercy? Certainly. Truth? Ubetcha.

Then he asked us the questions again. This time, he arbitrarily picked out a person who'd raised their hand to Peace, and hung a sign labeled 'Peace' around his or her neck. Ditto with Justice, Mercy, Truth. Of course, this was easy for him – we all believed in all of them.

I ended up wearing 'Mercy'.

We banner carriers were then assigned separate corners of the room, and Lopez then said to the remaining participants, you have to choose one of these labels. You can only choose one. When the sorting out was finished, everybody had chosen a group. For three of the four, there was a relatively even split. But only one guy joined me in 'Mercy'. (I really think he wanted to be in some other group, but was feeling sorry for me – 'merciful'?). But I appreciated having at least one soulmate in Mercy.

Once subdivided into groups, each group was given about 10 minutes to ponder two questions: "What does ____ (in my case, Mercy) bring to the reconciliation process? And the second, "Which of the other three does Mercy (etc) most fear?" The exercise required an answer to both questions. We, and one of the USIP staff who also stopped by, had a great discussion.

Now, put yourself into that group...and answer these same questions. What would you choose if you could choose only one: Peace, Justice, Truth or Mercy? Having chosen, why did you choose that one? Which of the others would you most fear? (For we Mercy-types, we decided we most feared Truth; we pretty quickly zeroed in on the Jesus-model of Mercy, which was a troublesome one given that perhaps a majority of the participants were not even Christian, and most Christians seem to have considerable trouble following the Jesus-message of the gospels – it's so inconvenient. But that was where we were at. Why "Truth" as the most-feared? Everyone has something disagreeable about them, and the more you know about them, the more potential issues there are, even with Mercy-dispensers – or so we felt.)

We've all been asked by the workshop conveners to do an essay on a few questions relating to the workshop. When I do mine later this week, I'll share it with you. *

A final note: one of the participants, Paul Corbit Brown, is a photographer of humanity. You can visit him at www.paulcorbitbrown.com. His is a nice e-gallery of people.

* 6 pages
Paths to Sustainable Peace
(Paths - Feb 14, 2005)

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