

Op/Ed

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WAR ON TERROR

Fight Against Darkness Takes U.S. Into Gray Territory

Taliban Hang Teen for Having Dollars," read a headline earlier this week. The story out of Kandahar, Afghanistan, captures all the moral clarity of the war on terror. Its distant echo here — in the case of Omar Khadr, a prisoner in Guantanamo — captures all of the war's moral complexity.



A. BARTON HINKLE

Taliban militants hung the boy from a utility pole and stuffed his mouth full of the dollars they found in his pockets. They said he was a spy and hung him as a warning to other supposed collaborators.

Incidents such as that one give the lie to the pretty conceit that the war against militant Islam is all just a big misunderstanding. In the eyes of those

who put air quotes around the expression "war on terror," the problem is that we in the West have failed to display sufficient solicitude toward jihadists' imagined grievances, and if only we were to do things differently — give less aid to Israel, pull troops out of Iraq — then peace, love, and understanding would reign.

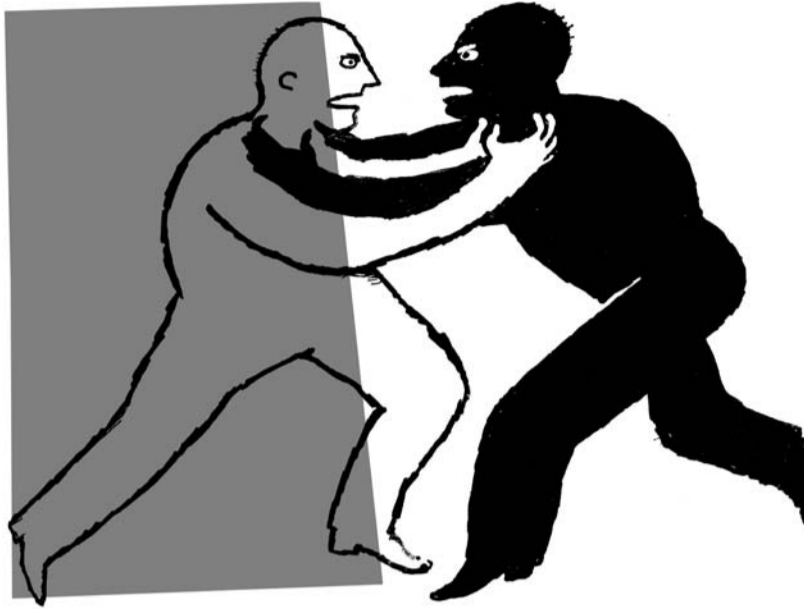
This is depressingly naïve. Militant

Islam is not going to be mollified by the very tolerance it finds abhorrent. One has only to listen to the speeches of a few radical clerics to be persuaded that they will not be persuaded. Even in comparatively moderate Turkey women and girls are stoned to death, strangled, and buried alive for no greater transgression than a lingering look at members of the opposite sex.

YET AMERICANS who are tempted to pat themselves on the back for their moral superiority over such barbarity should remember the barbarity inflicted on Emmett Till, who was only 14 when he was savagely beaten and murdered for allegedly besmirching the honor of a white woman by whistling at her. And lest that episode from five decades ago be dismissed as ancient history, note the case of Omar Khadr.

Khadr, a Canadian national, lived in Pakistan and Afghanistan as a boy. When he was 10 his father purportedly took him to meet leaders of al-Qaida, from whom he received military training. In 2002, when Khadr was 15, American forces descended on a compound near Khost, Afghanistan. In the ensuing firefight Khadr is said to have thrown a hand grenade that killed Army Sgt. Christopher Speer. Khadr was shot three times and left nearly blind in one eye.

Khadr was imprisoned as an enemy combatant in Guantanamo, where he spent more than three years without being charged. He finally faced charges under the first set of military commis-



sions President Bush established. Then came the Supreme Court decision in *Hamdan v. Rumsfeld* declaring those commissions unconstitutional, and then the Military Commissions Act of 2006, and further hearings. Now, barring further appeals, Khadr might face trial before a military tribunal next month — in his sixth year of captivity.

As Human Rights Watch notes, putting child soldiers on trial is virtually unheard of: "Neither the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugo-

slavia (ICTY) nor the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) have charged or prosecuted any persons for crimes committed before age 18." In the Special Court for Sierra Leone, "the prosecutor is directed to consider alternative mechanisms, such as Sierra Leone's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, for dealing with child perpetrators."

This is because children are deemed less culpable, less capable of making fully mature judgments — a view

widely held by, oh, conservative supporters of parental consent for minors seeking abortion.

RATHER THAN punishing child soldiers, international standards to which the U.S. is a signatory advocate rehabilitating them and reintegrating them into society — and meting out justice to those who were involved in recruiting and exploiting them. In Khadr's case, those persons would be the leadership of al-Qaida and his sick excuse for a father.

Human Rights Watch draws attention to this irony: The U.S. has spent \$34 million since 2001 to prevent the recruitment of child soldiers and to reintegrate them into civil society — including \$4.5 million for a UNICEF effort aimed at rehabilitating child soldiers in Afghanistan. Yet in Khadr's case it does not practice what it preaches.

The point here is not to draw a false moral equivalence between America's lengthy agonizing about what to do with enemy combatants and Taliban militants who summarily hang alleged teen collaborators from utility poles. The point is simply that the struggle between right and wrong is internal as well as external — and in a war against great evil, we must guard against any resemblance to the monsters we fight.

My thoughts do not aim for your assent — just place them alongside your own reflections for a while.

— ROBERT NOZICK

SPACE RACE

Panic Spurred Lucky Discoveries

WASHINGTON Fifty years ago this week, America was shaken out of technological complacency by a beeping 180-pound aluminum ball orbiting overhead. Sputnik was a shock because we had always assumed that Russia was nothing but a big, lumbering, and all-brawn bear. He could wear down the Nazis and produce mountains of steel but had none of our savvy or sophistication. Then one day we wake up and he beats us into space, placing



CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER

overhead the first satellite to orbit the Earth since God placed the moon where it could give us lovely sailing tides.

At the time, all thoughts were about the Soviets overwhelming us technologically. But the panic turned out to be unwarranted. Sputnik was not subtle science. The Soviets were making up for their inability to miniaturize nuclear warheads — something that does require sophistication — by developing massive rockets. And they had managed to develop one just massive enough to hurl a ball into Earth orbit.

We had no idea how lucky we were with Sputnik. The subsequent panic turned out to be an enormous boon. The fear of falling behind the communists induced the federal government to pour a river of money into science and math education. The result was a generation of scientists who gave us not only Apollo and the moon, but the sinews of the information age — for example, ARPA that created ARPANET that

became the Internet — that have ensured American technological dominance to this day.

THERE WAS another lucky outcome of Sputnik. Two years earlier, President Eisenhower had proposed "Open Skies" under which the U.S. and Russia would permit spy-plane overflights so each would know the other's military capabilities. The idea was to reduce mutual uncertainty and strengthen deterrence. Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev rejected the idea out of hand.

The advent of the orbiting satellite circumvented the objection. By 1960, we had launched our first working spy satellite. But our greatest luck was the fact that the Soviets got to space first. Sputnik orbiting over the United States — and Eisenhower never protesting a violation of U.S. sovereignty — established forever the principle that orbital space is not national territory but is as free and open as the high seas. Had we beaten the Russians into orbit — and we were only a few months behind — Khrushchev might very well have protested our presence over sovereign Soviet territory and reserved the right to one day (the technology was still years away) shoot us down.

Sputnik and the space age it launched had one other curious, wholly unexpected effect. Before Sputnik, while still dreaming about outer space in science fiction, we always assumed that one step would create the hunger for the next — ever outward from Earth orbit to the moon to Mars and beyond.

Not so. It took only 12 years to go from Sputnik to the moon, on which we jumped about for a brief interlude and then, amazingly, abandoned.

There are technological, budgetary, and political reasons to explain this. But the most profound is psychological. It's cold out there. "In the Shadow of the Moon" is a magnificent new documentary of the remembrances of some of those very few human beings who have actually gone to the moon. They talk, as you'd expect, about the wonder and beauty and grandeur of the place. But some also recall the coldness of that desolation. One astronaut tells how on the moon's surface he was seized with the realization that he and his crewmate were utterly alone on an entire world.

ON EARTH, you can be wandering a forbidding desert but always with the hope that there might be something human over the horizon. On the moon there is nothing but dust and rock, forever. And then — just about all the astronauts talk about this — you look up and see this beautiful blue marble, warm and fragile, hanging in the black lunar sky. And you long for home.

The astronauts brought back that image in the famous photo, "Earthrise" — and, with it, that feeling of longing. That iconic image did not just help spur the environmental movement. With surpassing irony, it created at the very dawn of the space age a longing not for space, but for home.

This is perhaps to be expected for a 200,000-year-old race of beings leaving its crib for the first time. We will, however, outgrow that fear. It was 115 years from Columbus to the Jamestown colony. It will take about that same span of time for a new generation — ours is too bound to Earth — to go out and not look back.

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BASICS OF CHRISTIANITY

Richmonders Find Spiritual Fulfillment Through Alpha Course

For those readers who do not yet know, Alpha is a sort of 10-week crash course in the basics of Christianity. The Alpha manual's front cover promises to deliver an "opportunity to explore the meaning of life." Alpha has spread like wildfire since its birth more than 20 years ago at Holy Trinity Brompton Church in London, England. Under the leadership of the Rev. Nicky Gumbel of Holy Trinity, more than 5,000 churches in the United States have hosted an Alpha course, and about 1 million people in the United States and Canada have already participated.

What makes Alpha such a consistently popular class? Participants and leaders both point to the fact that there is "something for everyone." Indeed, since the original Alpha class began, offshoots have developed including Alpha Marriage, Alpha Teen, Alpha College, and Alpha Catholic. Those involved with Alpha consistently use adjectives such as non-threatening, welcoming, and open to describe the class.

The Rev. David Singh, pastor of Eternity Church on Richmond's North Side, explains Alpha's laid-back approach, which includes a weekly dinner, video viewing, and small-group discussion. This non-threatening atmosphere enables participants to broach typically uncomfortable topics involving faith and spirituality.

Singh knew he saw a good thing when he was first exposed to Alpha in Perth, Australia, in 1994. Five years later, he brought Alpha to Richmond. The first Richmond Alpha group took place in his basement and had 37 participants. At the course's end, 65 percent to 70 percent of non-Christian participants had formally accepted the Christian religion. Singh explains that the home setting, typically less threatening than a church setting, is one of the keys to Alpha's success. Singh never takes names at initial Alpha meetings, and promises not to contact members after the first week. He prefers to let those interested return on their own.

AFTER THE success of initial Richmond Alpha groups, numerous local religious leaders collaborated in April 2003 to bring Alpha North America to First Baptist Church for a conference. The conference's goal was to train and motivate leaders to start more Richmond Alpha groups. And it worked.

RELIGIOUS LITERACY

(A continuing series on issues relating to faith.)

More than 430 pastors from 17 different denominations attended the conference. Currently, the Alpha Web site lists 26 Richmond-area Alpha classes. Nine different denominations figure among the listed churches.

Teesie Howell, a past participant and current leader of Alpha at St. Bridget Catholic Church (the only Catholic church in Richmond to offer the course), explains Alpha's appeal. "It concentrates on the basics of Christianity, and how Christianity relates to daily life, so it is something most people can relate to." Howell explains she has stayed involved in Alpha because "[I] continue to grow in my faith, and see the Holy Spirit at work in it."

After eating dinner and watching a video together, participants break into small groups to discuss the week's topic. No question is viewed as taboo in a class whose topics include:

■ *Christianity: boring, untrue, and irrelevant?*

■ *How can I be sure of my faith?* and

■ *Does God heal today?*



Alpha

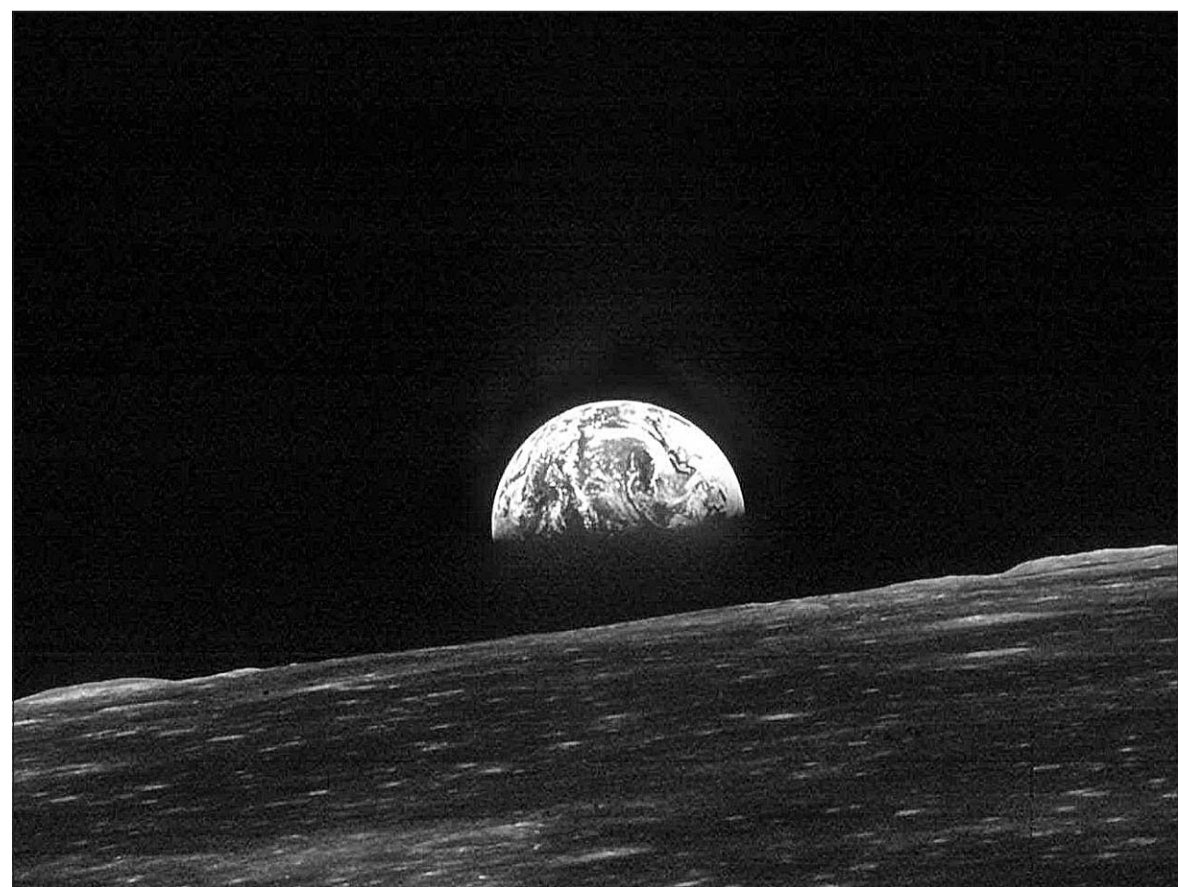
I ATTENDED a first-week session hosted by St. Bridget, and understood right away why participants

feel so at ease. Leaders were outgoing, and did not bombard anyone with questions about their faith or religion. Rather, participants started off by introducing themselves and talking about their favorite vacation spots. The video was funny and engaging, and addressed some important subjects right off the bat, such as the human condition and the quest for fulfillment.

Gumbel managed to talk about such heavy-hitting questions without being overly serious. He casually delivered his talk, expertly weaving the monologue with jokes and examples of normal people, and not-so-normal people like Leo Tolstoy (author of *War and Peace*), all complaining that something was missing from their lives. Alpha classes explain Christianity's proposal to fill this "missing something," and to further explain the relationship with Jesus that Christianity offers.

And it seems to work. St. Bridget Alpha leader Michael Siewers said one participant left saying she "already felt better." Not bad for a two-hour dinner meeting!

• Hilary Hendricks is the parish communications coordinator for St. Bridget Catholic Church.



NASA/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

The Earth rises over the horizon of the moon in this Dec. 24, 1968, file photo taken by the astronauts of Apollo 8.