

**Open Letter to His Excellency  
the United States  
Ambassador in Canada  
Mr David Wilkins  
and to the Public Generally,  
Concerning  
the 2005 November 26  
Disappearance  
in Baghdad  
of My Friend James Loney  
and His Christian Peacemaker  
Companions**

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*This letter, on the subject of Baghdad captive James Loney and his fellow captives Tom Fox, Prof. Norman Kember, and Harmeet Singh Sooden, is directed as a matter of diplomatic and literary formality to His Excellency Mr David Wilkins, United States Ambassador in Canada. It is directed also (in a diplomatic and literary sense secondarily, but in a pragmatic sense first and foremost) to a more general readership, including (a) the many people, numbering in at least the low hundreds every month, who visit my Web site <http://www.metascientia.com> or its precautionary mirror <http://www.interlog.com/~verbum/> and (b) the security workers at the United States Consulate here in Toronto (notably Mr Stu Udall and his supervisor) and their Royal Canadian Mounted Police colleagues. Those security specialists have taken on themselves the joint ongoing duty of monitoring my half-hour prayer vigils for James Loney on the sidewalk outside the Consulate from 16:00 EST on all the afternoons of 2005 December 12 through 2005 December 21 and on Monday and Friday afternoons starting 2006 January 9—a regimen of twice-weekly vigils starting in January but moving forward from Yuletide into Lent, and extending if necessary far beyond Lent. I welcome their monitoring initiative and herewith thank them for their forbearance and courtesy.*

YOUR EXCELLENCY, I write only in my own name. I do not write as a representative of political or activist organizations of any kind. I write in my capacity as an ordinary private Catholic, as one of Jim Loney's many personal friends. I write also as an individual linked in private conviction through Jim to the witness of Jim's three captive Christian Peacemaker Teams companions, even though the three are not known to me personally.

Your Excellency, Jim and his three co-workers are the victims of an atrocity universally condemned in the tribunals of public opinion. It is an atrocity condemned by the United States government. It is an atrocity condemned even by Hamas and Hezbollah, antithetical though their cruel doctrine of violence is to the theology both of moderate Islam and of the Christian Peacemaker Teams.

Jim and his three co-detainees are the victims of a crime with public-relations benefits liable to accrue, whether by Machiavellian

design or by ironic accident, to the current (Green-Zone-anchored) Iraqi government, in other words to your side in the current Iraq chaos.

I speak here of potential ‘public-relations benefits’ because the atrocity can now be used by the current Iraqi government, in other words by elements allied with your own government, to justify harsh police work in Baghdad.

I add ‘whether by Machiavellian design or by ironic accident’ for the following reason: So profound is the current chaos in Iraq that no member of the ordinary civilian public can now hope to know the truth regarding Jim and his three companions. Although it has been asserted that the four captives are the victims of forces opposed to the Iraqi government, this assertion is itself speculation.

The perils in any type of speculation are recalled for us by the Peter Maass article, in the *New York Times Magazine* for 2005 May 1, entitled ‘The Salvadorization of Iraq?’. You will find the article retrievable instantly with the Google seven-word search string ‘new york times magazine’ ‘salvadorization of iraq’. You or your colleagues will no doubt now be analyzing the Peter Maass article for yourselves, examining Mr Maass’s contention that your government’s Iraq anti-guerilla adviser James Steele previously facilitated anti-guerilla operations in El Salvador. I for my part remark here that the bare mention of American-sponsored anti-guerilla operations in El Salvador has dreadful resonances for Catholics, recalling as it does for us the 1980 San Salvador assassination of human-rights exponent Archbishop Óscar Romero.

The chaos in Iraq is, I repeat, profound. I have mentioned a disturbing Iraq administrative link, in the person of James Steele, with the recent dark history of El Salvador. Please allow me to mention also, as further illustrations of the chaos now prevailing, the 2005 deaths of two journalists investigating Iraq human-rights abuses: on the one hand the death of Yasser Salihee, a writer whose portfolio includes a collaboration with Tom Lasseter in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* of 2005 June 28, in an article entitled ‘Campaign of Executions Feared in Iraq’; and on the other hand the death of Steven Vincent, whose portfolio includes an article entitled ‘Switched off in Basra’, in the *New York Times* of 2005 July 31.

Jim’s personal Toronto friends, such as I, cannot hope to know

anything of substance in the current nightmare of speculation and surmise. We stand blind, we stand powerless, in the darkness that your government has brought to Iraq in its unhappy effort to plant long-term military bases in Iraq, I fear in an effort to secure USA long-term oil supplies. Fourteen bases were alleged when, months ago, I first read of a count. The same figure appeared in January or February of 2006 at the Quaker ‘Friends Committee on National Legislation’ site at <http://www.fcnl.org/iraq/bases.htm>, and no doubt more will be heard on this matter (we must begin to Google on the Pentagon jargon phrase ‘enduring bases’) over the months to come.

I stand with my candle or lantern, and with a picture of Jim, before your Toronto Consulate walls at 16:00 EST each afternoon from 2005 December 12 to 2005 December 21 inclusive, and on Monday and Friday afternoons over the weeks and months from 2006 January 9 onward, as (I reiterate) a Catholic pacifist. I stand as my friend Jim would stand. Or let me say, rather, that I stand as my friend Jim did stand. For Jim was arrested at this very Consulate in 1991, protesting as a pacifist at your government’s first Iraq incursion.

Like Jim and his companions, I utterly reject any form of militarism. Jim and his friends, among them I, reject it whether the ammunition be fired by the tragically misguided “Coalition” troops or by the tragically misguided armed-resistance movement that our newspapers misleadingly term an “insurgency”.

Concerning the inappropriateness of the well-worn term ‘Coalition’, let me remark only that among the “Coalition” partners is my own tiny country, Estonia, perpetually dependent on the friendship of Washington for its security against Moscow. My country’s participation as one of the pressured, recruited, pro-invasion “Vilnius 10” Eastern European governments was defended with breathtaking cynicism by one Estonian, I suspect a public figure or civil servant, as being ‘a good investment’.

Allow me to explain also the inappropriateness of the term ‘insurgency’, to nail this semantic jiggery-pokery once and for all. The unabridged *Oxford English Dictionary* tells us that an insurgent is ‘one who rises in revolt against constituted authority; a rebel who is not recognized as a belligerent’. The second most authoritative source for exact English usage, *Webster’s Third New International*

*Dictionary*, calls insurgency ‘a condition of revolt against a recognized government that does not reach the proportions of an organized revolutionary government and is not recognized as belligerency’. The two leading authorities, then, agree. The insurgent is one who opposes constituted authority (Oxford), who opposes a recognized government (Webster).

An insurgency, ultimately defeated, was present in Malaysia in the 1950s. Insurgencies, some perhaps destined to fail and others perhaps destined to succeed, are present in parts of Africa now. What we had in Iraq in 2005 was not an insurgency, since the relevant armed persons were not opposing a constituted authority. The relevant armed persons were simply acting, whether rightly or wrongly, in reaction to an overseas power that had for its part first invaded, whether rightly or wrongly, and had then recruited, whether rightly or wrongly, a provisional and temporary administration from among not-fully-representative elements within the invaded populace. When Iraq does finally acquire a constituted authority (conceivably, for all I know, at some point in the painfully protracted 2005 and 2006 political process, itself orchestrated from within the Green Zone, that gave Iraq its hopeful 2005 December 15 elections), we may begin to speak of an insurgency. On the day of Jim’s disappearance, 2005 November 26, we had no right to use the *i*-word, and we had no right to use it in the highly fluid political situation current on the day, 2005 December 20, that I released the first significant public version of this letter. Instead, we were obliged, as conscientious political analysts, to resort, no matter what our private political stance may have happened to be, to a *g*-word or a *p*-word: the anti-American arms-bearing persons in the then-current political setting counted, in the clear and dispassionate language of political science, binding on all sides in the unavoidably passionate political debates, not as insurgents but as guerillas or partisans.

Like Jim, I repeat, I reject all forms of violence, including guerilla or partisan violence. Like Jim, and like our mutual Catholic exemplar Dorothy Day before him, I declare modern warfare to be itself a form of terrorism, no matter who practices it. Indeed I challenge the reputable Catholic theologians of the just war, should any such theologians remain now in our Church, to count, on anything more than the fingers of one hand, the significant concrete instances in living

human memory of unequivocally just wars.

And more: I assert war to be the most far-reaching form of terrorism known to humanity, to be the specific terrorism that begets and nurtures, even to the third and fifth and seventh human generation, the other terrorisms tormenting us. What is the hideous Middle East situation now, the situation that has threatened to take the lives of Jim and his three companions, if not the toxic residue of World War I? What were Hitler and Stalin if not the bitter double fruit of World War I? How was Hitler's system brought down if not through a misconceived armed struggle that facilitated the Jewish Holocaust, that inaugurated decades of suffering for those innocent European peoples having the misfortune to reside east of the Elbe river and west of Russia, and that enabled and consolidated the Stalinist tyranny oppressing the innocent mainland Chinese to this day? If we see nuclear weapons detonated in this decade, whether by governments or by partisan guerillas, what will such detonations be if not the next stage in a militaristic perversion of science first unveiled by Harry Truman's incineration of Hiroshima and Nagasaki? And (to look for a moment to the light, not to the darkness) how was Stalin's system brought down from the Elbe to Vladivostok if not by a nonviolent 1980s mass movement, a pacifist movement spearheaded from Poland: a movement that equalled, and more than equalled, Mahatma Gandhi's stupendous pacifist achievement in 1940s India?

For you, Your Excellency, and for your political attaché or other colleagues, I have a message of hope. You will find it an unexpected message, a cheerful message, almost a humorous message.

My late maternal grandmother, Ekaterina Ranne, born in Estonia in 1892, was as a young wife brought in the most immediate and physical sense face to face with one of the first great terrors of our time. The year was, I suspect, 1918 or 1919 or 1920. Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, having assumed power in the Petrograd putsch of 1917 November 6, was now seeking to consolidate his Bolshevik despotism through civil war. Grandma was at the time in a village in Ukraine with her young husband, seeking to escape famine.

For a while, her village of temporary refuge was in the hands of Mensheviks. Then something happened—I presume that some guys fired guns at some other bunch of guys—and the village changed hands. A soldier, one of the incoming Bolsheviks, who must by now

have become accustomed to the idea of shooting people for politics, banged on Grandma's door. 'Woman,' he said, 'our army is feeding. Give us spoons.' To this Grandma said, 'Spoons? What do you mean, spoons? The only spoons we have in this house are silver coffee spoons, and we are not handing those out to Bolsheviks.' The gun-toter apologized, as of course he had to apologize, and he went on to the next house.

The story has been told in our family as an illustration of our dear Grandma's very occasional naiveté. But I, for my part, say that she saw things the way my friend Jim Loney does, and as we indeed *must* see them if the cycle of violence is to be ended in the Middle East even as Karol Woytyla and his clerical and secular co-workers successfully ended it in 1980s Eastern Europe. For Jim and Grandma, and also for that poor Bolshevik soldier with whom Grandma in her vulnerability successfully pleaded or reasoned, people count for more than politics.

Grandma's viewpoint, perhaps in a particular way her openness and vulnerability, carried her safely through the Russian civil war. It carried her also through the still more terrible trials of World War II, which saw Estonia occupied both by Soviets and by Nazis.

What in the end happened to Grandma, you ask? She lived a long, happy, productive life, greatly enjoying her decades in Canadian exile, departing this world in 1992 half a year short of her hundredth birthday.

There is a message for you in this. It is, as I say, a message of hope. You have Jim's convictions to reflect on from recent newspapers, and now I have told you something of Grandma. I can imagine how much your team, as paid representatives of currently problematic Uncle Sam, hate what currently problematic Uncle Sam pays you to do. I can imagine how much some of you wince with every fresh exposé, in Toronto's *Globe and Mail* or on the BBC, of the current, and I bet temporary, betrayal of America's founding ideals. I think I know how your diplomatic team felt inside when you learned not from fringe people like me but from the very lips of your unrepentant General Peter Pace, as quoted on the BBC on 2005 November 30, that your troops used white phosphorus in Fallujah. I think I know how your diplomatic team felt inside when, upon picking up the *Globe and Mail* on 2005 December 5, you found front-page photos of jet planes



allegedly used to transport prisoners, in Uncle Sam's processes of "rendition" and "special rendition", from one island to another in his globalized *arhipelag gulag*. I think I know how your diplomatic team feels inside—I think I know what bleak parallels many of you draw in your heart of hearts—when I tell you that under Yuri Andropov, political detainees got moved across the Soviet Union in rail cars labelled *pagash*. (Do I take this fact from some book, from some Yuri Orlov, from some Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn? No. I myself spoke once with an Estonian 1980s gulag veteran, with a "political" who had himself been hauled by railway in this direction or that, as a piece of Soviet human baggage.)

Now in what terms to I urge sanity on you, bringing you hope in a dark time? Did my Grandma urge her Bolshevik to become a Menshevik? Or did my friend Jim, when still freely walking the streets of Baghdad, urge your troops—they were of course among the people with whom he, as a documenter of alleged human-rights abuses, worked—to go AWOL? No. Grandma did not preach moral heroism at people, and neither, so far as I know, did Jim. And neither am I, for my part, going to summon you to some great shimmering height of moral heroism. But I want to suggest to you that there are ways for you and me to put people first and Uncle Sam's politics second. This is something the citizens of Eastern Europe, including of course the citizens of my own tiny country, learned in the communist decades. It's now time to apply those mild Eastern European tactics here.

If your team finds the current Uncle Sam misdirected, as I bet many of you do, then look for low-key ways, nonviolent ways, even legal ways, of limiting his reach. There are ways in the West not of leaking information (that would be contrary to the terms of your paid employment and so really would call for a type of heroism) but of intimating to outsiders that pertinent information is herewith withheld. There are ways in Iraq not of outright defying security-staff orders (that, too, would be contrary to the terms of your employment and so would constitute a type of heroism) but of interpreting them creatively. One can, speaking literally or figuratively, shoot to miss, as many a soldier did in the literal sense during World War II. Whether in the West or in Iraq, one can, so to speak, get those American GPU files, those American KGB databases, just a little bit scrambled, or

alternatively one can render them in certain judiciously chosen places rather ingeniously transparent.

If the worst should happen with Jim, then I propose, as I have already indicated to your security personnel, to initiate my small act of civil disobedience (my signing of your Consulate wall with a Cross in ashes) by singing one of the greatest of Christian Latin hymns, the *Dies irae*. The hymn—ash, in Latin *favilla*, is a running theme in its twenty majestic stanzas—reminds us that you and I, no less than Jim and his three companions, face death together. It reminds us that you and I, no less than Jim and his companions, face a righteous and merciful and loving Judge together.

The theologian C.S. Lewis writes (the italics are his) in the sixth chapter of his *Problem of Pain*:

If pain sometimes shatters the creature's false self-sufficiency, yet in supreme "Trial" or "Sacrifice" it teaches him the self-sufficiency which really ought to be his—the 'strength, which, if Heaven gave it, may be called his own': for then, in the absence of all merely natural motives and supports, he acts in that strength, and that alone, which God confers upon him through his subjected will. Human will becomes truly our own and truly creative when it is wholly God's, and this is one of the many senses in which he that loses his soul shall find it. In all other acts our will is fed through nature, that is, through created things other than the self—through the desires which our physical organism and our heredity supply to us. When we act from ourselves alone—that is, from God *in* ourselves—we are collaborators in, or live instruments of, creation. . . Hence as suicide is the typical expression of the stoic spirit, and battle of the warrior spirit, martyrdom always remains the supreme enacting and perfection of Christianity.

Let me on C.S. Lewis's behalf add that our English word 'martyr' comes from the ancient Greek verb *martureo*, 'I am bearing witness,' 'I am testifying.'

My friend Jim, perhaps the kindest, gentlest person I have known in all my endless travels, is a witness to truth. It is as witnesses, as

*marturoi*, that he and his three companions will be remembered, no matter how their terrible situation is resolved over the coming weeks, months, or even years. In the intensity of their suffering, Jim and his companions now bear witness to what C.S. Lewis, again in the sixth chapter of *The Problem of Pain*, calls

the very nerve of redemption, which anatomising wisdom at all times and in all places lays bare; the unescapable knowledge which the Light that lighteneth every man presses down upon the minds of all who seriously question what the universe is “about”.

It is as witnesses, as *marturoi*, that my friend Jim and his three companions will be remembered on that day when, as the medieval hymn foretells in its relentless imagery of ashes, God’s book is opened and God’s hidden things stand revealed. Jim and his companions do not live in vain, and if they happen to die in the harsh weeks or harsh months, or even harsh years, lying ahead for them, they will not die in vain. Let you and me then brace ourselves to our respective duties, strengthened by our Jim’s gentle example, working our respective public and political works, whether in honest cooperation or in honest opposition, in praise and gratitude and hope.

With my friend Jim and his three Christian co-workers, with our sisters and brothers in the varied Iraqi schools of Islamic theological scholarship, and indeed with all—with those of any faith at all—who seek to bear witness to truth, I wish you and your team well. May healing, peace, and joy attend you in the years ushered in by that unexpectedly oracular Holy Yuletide of 2005.