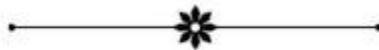




NO WOMAN OR GIRL IS ANYONE'S PROPERTY!

Women have been calling for gender equality for a long time. More men need to heed that call. And it is not only a gender issue. We are teetering between democracy and oligarchy. When we look at any part of our culture we must ask, "Where are the poor? Where are the people of color? Where are the women? Where are the ordinary people?" But first let's consider what the UN has given the fancy name of "Sexual Violence In Conflicts."



I may be the wrong gender to get into this subject but it seems to me it's a problem we are all involved with — besides I promised to have some of the women around me check it over before it was sent out!

First a few quotes. A retired general, who was a friend of mine, told me in disgust, "War and rape travel together." His point was that both are part of the dirty process of conquest. It's certainly not a thing of the past. Just a few months ago Burmese troops were systematically raping Muslim Rohingya women in a "cleansing" campaign.



A few years ago Abigail Disney (1960–) produced some documentaries about women in conflicts. She said, “You don't want to make war safe for women. You want to end war.” This goes along with the thinking of Christina Asquith, cofounder of the Fuller Project for International Reporting, who recently argued that war actually begins in the bodies of women who are treated as property.

When women are treated equally, and as empowered as men to make decisions about their country and their lives, the change won't just be that war is safer. It will be that there is less war, overall.



Recently the 2018 Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to two people deeply involved in the attempt to end the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war: the Congolese gynecologist Denis Mukwege (1955–) and the Yazidi rape survivor and activist, Nadia Murad (1993–). I would like to tell you more about her.

To me the Yazidi are among the most fascinating religious communities on earth. Their roots go far back and include elements of ancient Iranian spirituality as well as very old aspects of Judaism, Nestorian Christianity, Islam and Sufi. They probably number only slightly above 200,000. Yazidi are scattered around the world, but remain a very tight-knit religious community. Many have recently settled in Germany.

Yazidism is a mystical religion whose divine being is Malak Taus, which translates roughly as the Peacock Angel. They have a number of strict taboos, one of which is to never mention the name of Satan. Now through a ridiculous chain of illogic, radical groups like ISIS concluded that they were devil worshipers. It was a convenient excuse for what has been officially labeled by the UN as a genocide of the Yazidi, and a Crime Against Humanity.

On August 3, 2014, ISIS militants attacked a predominantly Yazidi area in northern Iraq. All men were killed and the women and girls were sold into sexual slavery. Some Yazidi managed to escape for a time to a small mountain that they hold sacred. Many were recaptured.

Nadia Murad (1993–) is one of the 4300 Yazidi women and girls who have been victims of rape and other abuses by ISIS. After a three month nightmare during which she was repeatedly subjected to rape and other abuses, she managed to flee and following her escape, Nadia chose to speak openly about what she suffered, despite the cultural taboo about discussing such things. At the age of only 23, she was named the UN’s Goodwill Ambassador For The Dignity Of Survivors Of Human Trafficking in 2016. She has continued to speak on behalf of the 1300 Yazidi women and girls lost or in captivity.



The Nobel Committee has rightly pointed out that both of the laureates, “have put their personal security at risk by courageously combating war crimes and seeking justice for the victims.”

Since the earliest times of human history, rape has been the ultimate demonstration whereby a conquering force proves it has won. It implies horribly that “your wives and daughters are simply our property to use in any way we wish.”



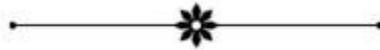
Now comes the tricky part of this Reflection. Maybe I am finding connections where there are only coincidences — but I feel compelled to go on.

The same day I received the announcement of the Nobel Peace Prize, this nation was in the midst of a highly partisan struggle. It concerned the truth or falsity of an allegation of attempted rape committed by a drunken student at an elite boy’s school. The victim, Dr. Christine Blasey Ford (1966 –), did not share her trauma for several decades.



An unintended result of the publicity was an incredible outpouring from women, of all ages, who had experienced similar trauma and kept it quiet. Some of these women live nearby. The stories also came in the press or by emails or on the phone. What shocked me wasn't only the number of stories, it was the actual statements. One young woman said, "I didn't tell because I knew my father would

kill him, and then I would lose my dad." Years ago I heard another person say the very same thing. I knew the circumstances of that family and knew she might well have been right!



Women are not property. Yet how many times has every male forgotten that? It is time to listen to the women in our lives and our culture. This is not just a political thing. It is essential to the re-establishment of a much tarnished right and virtue of human dignity.

From ancient times it has been taught that there are two sides of the spiritual mountain. Without the female side — Yin — the male side — Yang — will collapse.

That is still true!

Brother Toby