Fighting Fire With Water

By David Azevedo

Saint Mary's High School, Stockton, California

There is promise and peril in our world's future. The promise lies in strengthening our global community, with technology and communication helping to dispel borders. Yet the same technology that can bind us can also tear us apart. First-world countries continue to improve their nuclear arsenal, even as some of their people face the same poverty as third world countries. Our refusal to communicate with countries or people advocating terrorism leads to more suicide bombs and anti-American hatred.

Western countries, most notably the United States, label terrorism as the enemy of the age. Yet the definition of terrorism shows us that the West is not free from sin. Terrorism is "the unlawful use or threatened use of force or violence by a person or an organized group against people or property…for ideological or political reasons." (American Heritage Dictionary). According to this definition, the United States is a terrorist organization. We threaten and bomb countries that don't comply with our demands, all in the name of an ideology. We say our actions are lawful, because we democratically elect Presidents and Senators. But don't terrorist groups decide attacks on the basis of mass consensus as well?

Terrorism is the antithesis to peace. Using power to coerce and intimidate only leads to more coercion and intimidation. History shows us the fires of violence only fuel more violence, from the Battle of Thermopylae to World War II. Why, then, have we not learned to fight that fire with the waters of peace?

Terrorism is fueled by the fires of hatred; hatred is fueled by the lack of communication. It is necessary that we continue to communicate. To negotiate with terrorists with one thing, but to talk with them is another. To not have dialogue between countries because they differ ideologically, such as the United States and Iran, is catastrophically narrow-minded. The opportunity that comes with being open to conversation far outweighs the consequences of sticking one's head in the sand. The more heads in the sand, the less connected we are to each other. Alienation and nuclear weapons share a similar consequence--they both detach and destroy unity and order. If the disconnection from our world is the same as the scattering of men's ashes, then the lack of communication is just as bad as bombing the world.

Yes, there is a promise and a peril of technology and communication, in the form of bombs and the lack of dialogue. Yes, terrorism is the enemy of the age. It is an enemy in the sense it seeks to corrupt our original ideology: an ideology that stood for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. But it is more of an enemy to the United States if we continue to fight without an open mind and an open channel of communication. The lesson we must learn to help keep our world intact is to stop fanning the flames of violence, and begin to douse them with the waters of peace.