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FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS' SAKE

Blessed are the persecuted

A Blessed and Besieged Witness

BY MARTIN SHUPACK

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of God (Matthew 5:10).

Although trained as a lawyer, I had never seen an arrest warrant quite like it. It was issued by the municipality of San Juan Chamula in southern Mexico, and named a man accused of a despised offense. His crime was simply and plainly stated: being an Evangelical.

For two decades until the mid-1990s, “Evangelicos,” or Protestant Christians, in Chamula were routinely arrested and permanently expelled from the area. Community leaders, who practiced their own local religion, also expelled diocese-loyal Catholics and severed relations with the official Catholic Church.

This *Washington Memo* issue on persecution is the last in our series on the Beatitudes. Many people believe that freedom of religion and conscience is the most fundamental of all rights. Yet it is violated in many countries throughout the world.

Christians are subject to restrictions in many countries, and brutally repressed in others. So are Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus and members of other faiths.

Some people want the U.S. government to play a strong role in defending religious freedom around the world. Daryl Byler writes about the International Religious Freedom Act, legislation that mandates U.S.

policy to address violations of religious freedom in other countries.

However, religious believers in the Middle East and Asia have told MCC that U.S. government intervention can make things worse for them, turning religious struggles into international political conflicts. Dr. Riad Jarjour of the Middle East Council of Churches expresses this view.

Nor is the United States without fault. Since Sept. 11, Muslims, Arab-Americans and people mistaken for them, have been subject to hate crimes, “profiling” and questionable detention. David Whettstone explores this issue.

Human rights advocates, often motivated by religious faith, are also savagely persecuted “for righteousness’ sake” throughout the world. Their courageous work to expose torture, extra-judicial killings and other violations of human dignity regularly draws the wrath of oppressive governments. Rachele Schlabach writes about the risks facing human rights workers in Colombia. Finally, Elisabeth Harder looks at the U.N. Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

Jesus promises that the future belongs to those who bear witness to righteousness and justice and who, denied liberty and often life, “shine like stars in the world” (Phil. 2:15). Perhaps that is why the bearers of power and wealth try so hard to destroy them. ■

His crime was simply and plainly stated: being an Evangelical.

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BY J. DARYL BYLER

People of faith and conscience are frequently viewed as a threat precisely because they raise fundamental questions about the nature of God's reign.

A Good Witness

Soon after the Sept. 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, opinion pieces condemning pacifism began appearing in newspapers around the country. One called the pacifist position “evil.” Another called pacifists “liars, cheats and hypocrites.” Others castigated pacifists as naive.

Why so much attention to pacifism? In the buildup for the “war on terrorism,” some apparently view the dissenting voice of pacifism as a threat to national security.

It is not the first time. In *Mirror of the Martyrs*, John S. Oyer and Robert S. Kreider write that sixteenth century governing authorities in Europe feared “that Anabaptists were destroying God’s good society by disobeying their orders, not bringing their infants to be baptized, rejecting military service . . . and worshipping separately. Anabaptists were conspirators, these rulers believed, who had to be stamped out before they could win more to their cause and thus endanger the whole body.”

And so, public officials in Europe intimidated, tortured, drowned and burned at the stake thousands of Anabaptists. The promise of the last Beatitude—“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:10)—must certainly have reassured all who suffered such cruel forms of death.

Rulers were not successful in silencing these alternative voices. As Anabaptists went to their death, many prayed for the courage to make a “good witness” through a public prayer, statement or hymn. Their hope was to be able to give sound biblical reasons for their faith and to call others to faith—even as they were being killed. This public witness became so powerful that some officials resorted to secret executions to prevent Anabaptists from having a platform for sharing their faith.

While thousands of Anabaptists died for their beliefs in the sixteenth century, more people were killed for their faith in the twentieth century than at any other time in history. Indeed, millions of people worldwide are currently persecuted because of their faith.

To be sure, pacifist perspectives are not the only reason for religious persecution. But people of faith and conscience are frequently viewed as a threat precisely because they raise fundamental questions about the nature of God’s reign, about their ultimate allegiances and about the limits of the state’s authority.

After the recent wave of anti-pacifist pieces began appearing in newspapers, I received several calls from reporters wanting to know more about what pacifists really believe. One reporter was clearly fishing for a story line that I was being persecuted as a pacifist. Not so. Some have disagreed with my views. Some disrespectfully so. But my experience in the wake of Sept. 11 has been mild compared to many who are Muslim or Arab-American.

Perhaps we U.S. Anabaptists have become so acclimated to our society that we are no longer broadly viewed as a collective threat to the status quo. As the nation now makes war and trusts in the power of force to restore security, may we find the courage to make a good witness to the nonviolent way of Jesus. ■

WASHINGTON MEMO is written by Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office staff. It interprets national legislation and policy, seeking to reflect biblical concerns for justice and peace as represented in the work and statements of MCC U.S. and Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches. All biblical quotes are from the New Revised Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

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To contact the MCC U.S. Washington Office, please see our address on the back page. See our weekly commentary at www.thirdway.com

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"The Sacrifice of Our Lives"

BY RACHELLE SCHLABACH

Héctor Mondragón, a member of the Mennonite church in Bogotá, Colombia, has been advocating on behalf of small farmers and indigenous peoples for several decades. Soon after he started his work he was abducted and tortured by a colonel who had been trained at the U.S. Army School of the Americas. In recent years Mondragón's name has appeared on a paramilitary hit list.

But he continues on with his work. In order to survive he has cut all routine from his life. He sleeps in a different place every night, has not talked on a phone in several years, and can attend church only sporadically.

Mondragón is one of countless Colombians under threat because of their work for human rights and peace. They join the long list of people around the world persecuted for acting on behalf of conscience.

Journalists, professors, trade unionists, community leaders and human rights workers are among those frequently targeted by armed groups for speaking out against injustice. They face threats, kidnapping, torture and death. Some must leave their homes or country to protect themselves.

Church members, called to work for peace and justice as a matter of faith, have often been among those most under threat. In Colombia, pastors who minister to people wanting to leave an armed group often become targets themselves. Churches who have declared themselves neutral sanctuaries of peace are also at risk, as are those who provide aid to people displaced from their homes by the war.

U.S. military assistance is escalating Colombia's climate of violence. The increase in arms and training has prompted all sides to step up their fighting. This results in more civilians being targeted—a key strategy of the war. Those who defend their rights also face greater danger.

But amidst the daily threats of death, advocates around the world continue their courageous struggle for justice. As Mondragón explains, "[those without a voice] deserve all our sacrifices, even if that includes the sacrifice of our own lives." ■

CAPITAL QUOTES

"That same sense of not being able to control your destiny [that Americans felt following Sept. 11] . . . not being able to prevent something truly horrible, is the experience of many people around the world on a daily basis . . . and many of them pin that on the United States."

Anne-Marie Slaughter, director of the International Legal Studies Program at Harvard Law School.

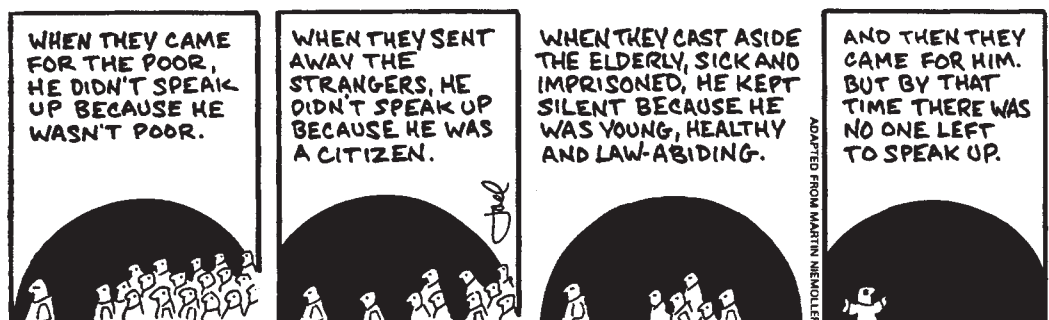
"We have about 50 percent of the world's wealth, but only 6.3 percent of its population. . . . In this situation we cannot fail to be the object of envy and resentment. Our real task in the coming period is to devise a pattern of relationships which will permit us to maintain this position of disparity."

from a 1948 secret Policy Planning Study by the State Department's George F. Kennan, author of the "containment" policy toward the Soviet Union.

"Suppose we . . . learned that every man, woman and child in Miami, Minneapolis, Atlanta, Denver, Boston, Seattle, Washington, DC, New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, Houston, Philadelphia, San Diego, Detroit and Dallas, combined, were infected with a virus for which there was no cure. Don't you think that we would respond . . . with the kind of finances as we did after Sept. 11?"

Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) urging a greater commitment to address global AIDS, which currently infects 40 million people and kills 8,000 people every

Pontius' Puddle



A Hard Act to Follow

BY J. DARYL BYLER

After more than a year of debate in Congress, the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) was signed into law by former President Bill Clinton on October 27, 1998.

The bill underwent major changes during its year-plus review by Congress. MCC and other religious groups urged that the bill should focus on *all* religious persecution—not simply the persecution of Christians—and that religious persecution should not be elevated above other human rights violations. These suggestions were incorporated into the final bill.

As passed, IRFA “declares it to be U.S. policy to condemn violations of religious freedom, and to promote, and to assist other governments in the promotion of, the fundamental right to freedom of religion.”

Specifically, the IRFA:

- Creates within the State Department an Office on International Religious Freedom headed by an Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom;
- Establishes the independent U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom;
- Calls for an annual report on religious freedom to be submitted to Congress;
- Directs the president to take a range of actions against each foreign government that engages in or tolerates violations of religious freedom;
- Requires that religious freedom be considered as a factor in formulating U.S. foreign and military aid.

What impact has IRFA had? So far, it appears, lots of talk and lengthy annual reports! Lawmakers are finding that IRFA is even harder to implement than it was to pass. It is a daunting task to fairly pass judgment on every nation’s religious freedom practices—especially when one takes into account history, culture and traditions.

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom’s 188-page 2001 annual report (found at www.uscirf.gov/), highlights concerns in 10 Eastern European, African and Asian countries.

The State Department issued a separate 2001 report (www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2001/). It lists 34 countries (the same number as the 2000 report) with varying degrees of barriers to religious freedom—ranging from attempts to control religious belief or practice to stigmatizing certain religions.

The State Department report cites Burma, China, Iran, Iraq and Sudan (all countries with rocky or no official diplomatic relations with the United States) as “countries of particular concern” for engaging in or tolerating “particularly severe violations” of religious freedom.

However, a careful reading of the report reveals equally or more serious violations in other countries like Saudi Arabia who have stronger relations with the United States—leaving the report open to charges of bias. The United States will have the strongest and clearest voice on religious freedom if it addresses violations in an evenhanded way.

The report also lists 18 countries who have taken positive steps to improve religious freedom during the last year—including Mexico, Indonesia, Jordan, Kenya, Mozambique, Russia and Rwanda.

Perhaps the most positive impact of IRFA is that it has made religious freedom a frequent topic of international conversation. The power of dialogue for bringing about positive change points to the importance of maintaining diplomatic relations with all nations. Indeed, diplomatic dialogue and public protest—rather than harsher options available under IRFA like sanctions or other trade restrictions—have so far been the tools of choice in working with countries on the State Department’s list of violators. ■

It is a daunting task to fairly pass judgment on every nation’s religious freedom practices.

Racial Profiling Reemerging

For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive its approval; for it is God's servant for your good (Romans 13:3, 4).

The apostle Paul describes how governments ought to treat peaceful, law-abiding persons. Racial profiling violates this responsibility. Profiling occurs when law enforcement officers select individuals to stop and investigate based on race, ethnicity, or national origin. It undermines the civil rights of many people of color and tears at the fabric of trust and community throughout our nation.

A Boy Scout leader and his troop on excursion, a young doctor from San Antonio with a common surname, and donors to local charities that include foreign activities: all are Arab Americans and/or Muslims who have been subjected to racial profiling. They are part of a group with similar experiences that includes African Americans, Latino/as, Asian Americans, immigrants, and others.

Attacks upon persons wrongly blamed and stereotyped remain a constant threat and reap unfortunate results. Muslim and Arab American women have changed garb worn outside of the home. Children are sometimes subjected to ridicule. A Sikh man in Arizona was killed. Stores owned by people of Middle Eastern background have been vandalized. Where do victims turn, if they cannot trust their police and community?

A MennoLink email participant reports from Pittsburgh: "I was told [by a friend] about five Saudi Arabians who were arrested by the FBI, handcuffed together near the street beside a restaurant and left there for thirty minutes while the passers-by yelled insults and threw things at them. Later the FBI apologized and let them go." She also notes that three Muslim men have been beaten in the city.

Some Mennonites have responded. Richard A. Kauffman, pastor of Toledo (Ohio) Mennonite Church, shares that his Pakistani Muslim neighbors have gotten friendly support; others have not. He says, "Locally, a bunch of Christians had a prayer service outside the mosque on behalf of and with Muslims . . . which seemed to be received well by the Muslim community. And some churches have sent volunteers to the local Muslim school during recess just to monitor the situation and keep 'lunatics' from doing some kind of harm to the children."

Sen. Feingold (D-Wis.) and Rep. Conyers (D-Mich.) have introduced the "End Racial Profiling Act of 2001," with strong bipartisan support. Besides encouraging state and local law enforcement to end racial profiling, one of its provisions directs the U.S. Attorney General to produce an annual report on racial profiling on federal, state and local levels.

In his first message to Congress, President Bush said, "Too many of our citizens have cause to doubt our nation's justice when the law points a finger of suspicion at groups, instead of individuals. . . . [Racial profiling] is wrong and we will end it in America."

On Sept. 19, 2001, Attorney General Ashcroft stated, "I'm deeply concerned about the civil liberties of all Americans. I'm especially concerned about the civil liberties of Arab Americans and Middle Eastern Americans who are patriotic citizens . . . " However, he requested that about 5,000 males—Middle Eastern natives, 18–33 years old, with temporary visas since Jan. 1, 2000—voluntarily speak to investigators, though they are not legally required to do so, by December 21.

The official and public rhetoric of fairness have to closely match actions. To do otherwise is unacceptable. Menno Simons and other Anabaptist leaders exhorted authorities to exercise power fairly and justly. We should continue to hope, pray, and act so that everyone can live without fear. ■

BY DAVID M. WHETTSTONE

Where do victims turn, if they cannot trust their police and community?

Toward a New, Redeemed Humanity

BY ELISABETH T. HARDER

“... the full and complete development of a country, the welfare of the world and the cause of peace require the maximum participation of women on equal terms with men on all fields.”

—U.N. CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

Where are the voices of women peace-makers?” lamented one person at a recent public forum on nonviolence. “I know they are out there and doing good work, but we are simply not hearing enough from their unique perspective.”

Afghan women, many of whom have been active but “underground” civil leaders in recent years, have been under-represented in negotiations to determine the future of the nation.

And in the United States, domestic violence—even within the church—is a rampant form of violence that strikes women disproportionately. Indeed, approximately 25 percent of women, compared to 8 percent of men, have been physically assaulted and/or raped by an intimate partner in their lifetime (National Institute of Justice and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention).

MCC’s work with gender issues is driven by the affirmation that all human beings are created in the divine image (Gen.1:26). “Women and men are equally valued and loved by God and invited to become part of the new, redeemed humanity” (MCC Overseas Department Statement).

Some of this work involves seeking development partners that are women. This is sometimes because women are most in need of assistance and are not being otherwise helped, and sometimes because women’s groups are those most willing to work together for the common good. Such work encourages situations in which women can take responsibility for decisions that affect them.

This organizational experience undergirds support of a major human rights treaty for women worldwide: the U.N. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

Adopted by the U.N. General Assembly in 1979, CEDAW provides a universal definition of discrimination against women: any “distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex” which impairs or nullifies the exercise or enjoyment of “human rights or fundamental freedoms.”

Nations adopting CEDAW agree to take appropriate measures to end this discrimination in all fields—civil, political, economic, social and cultural. Measures must also be taken to suppress trafficking of women and forced prostitution.

Abuse of women by intimate partners is one of the most prevalent—and violent—forms of gender discrimination in the United States. The U.S.-based Working Group on the Women’s Human Rights Treaty points out that “victims of rape, domestic violence, and many other crimes are not selected at random . . . rather, they are exposed to terror, brutality, serious injury and even death *because of their sex*”(emphasis added). If ratified by the United States, CEDAW would push our nation toward improved protection of battered women.

To date, 168 nations have ratified CEDAW. President Carter signed the treaty in 1980, and fifteen years later at the U.N. Conference of Women in Beijing, the United States made a public commitment to ratify CEDAW by the year 2000. As with any international treaty, ratification requires a two-thirds majority vote by the U.S. Senate. Prior to such a vote the Senate Foreign Relations Committee must hold hearings. The current committee appears to be in favor of doing so, but with the plethora of pressing issues, CEDAW needs lifting up by advocates.

So much is riding on the full participation of women in all of society: complete development of communities and nations, the cause of peace, and indeed, the welfare of all the world. Ratifying this treaty would demonstrate the commitment of the United States toward these goals abroad and at home. ■

A Different Kind of Logic

IN OTHER'S WORDS

BY RIAD JARJOUR

The Rev. Dr. Riad Jarjour is General Secretary of the Middle East Council of Churches. Three years ago MCC surveyed partners in various regions, asking for their thoughts on an early draft of the proposed Religious Persecution Act (see page 4 for update). This text is excerpted from Dr. Jarjour's 1998 email response to MCC's query.

We are appreciative of the overwhelming concern by our North American Christian brothers and sisters about our situation here in the Middle East. We recognize the sincerity of their desire to support us and stand in solidarity with us. Support for the proposed legislation [on religious persecution] is misguided, because it is misinformed and threatens political and social structures in harmful ways, especially harmful to the Christians with whom they desire to offer solidarity.

It is our firm belief that for North American Christians to show their support, they must enter into dialogue with the Christians locally. A direct dialogue with the local Christian communities, based on mutual respect and open-mindedness, will inform the North American Christians about the actualities on the ground.

The New York Council of Churches delegation that visited Egypt to meet with local church leaders is a good example of such an encounter. That delegation left with a well-informed opinion about the situation in Egypt and made their findings known. More such fact-finding delegations could take place, and perhaps delegations from the region could visit North America to relate their point of view directly to congregations and clerical leaders.

In addition to Christian-Christian dialogue, we feel that constructive dialogue with Muslims in the region should also be fostered. As Christians we do not want to lose the dynamic encounter we have with Muslims. For us in the region, our positive dialogue with Muslims could be negatively affected by the proposed legislation. . . .

The U.S. [religious freedom] campaign, the proposed legislation, and the finger-pointing at countries and communities, is frequently depicted as a "Crusade" and more often than not, reactivates historical memories with their many unhealed wounds. We have strong reasons to fear that it is increasingly provoking general distrust between Christians and Muslims, Arabs and Americans. . . .

Christians face, in many Arab and predominantly Muslim countries, a number of problems, most of which are of a social, economic, and political nature. These problems affect Muslims and Christians alike, but they are exacerbated, in the case of the latter, by their dwindling numbers, the erosion of their influence in public life, and their growing anxiety for the future of their children. . . .

Dialogue and cooperation between Muslims and Christians, at various levels of shared living, need to be intensified in order to address these problems. Any impediment of such a relationship imperils the chances of improving the situation of Christians. . . .

In any case, the politicization of such an issue, making the protection of religious minorities part of the United States' foreign policy, is, to us, misguided. The campaign for "Religious Freedom Abroad" is inextricably linked to, let alone perceived as an expression of, the interplay of U.S. internal political polarization and differing views on foreign policy.

We recognize that there are forces in the United States, religious and political, which try to deal with the issue of religious persecution in a way ensuring that concern for human rights, including religious freedom, takes precedence over ideological and political motivations. . . .

However, the punitive logic does in no way promote tolerance, mutual trust, or inter-religious harmony. In most cases, it does not help the victims of "persecution" which it claims to help. A different kind of logic, one of empowerment of the victims, a strategy of prevention through consciousness-raising, dialogue, and inter-religious cooperation would be more effective. This can be accomplished through a vastly different approach to foreign policy. ■

It is our firm belief that for North American Christians to show their support, they must enter into dialogue with the Christians locally.



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SOUND THE TRUMPET!

Over the past year, we asked readers to respond to a variety of issues. Here is an update on some of them.	
Anti-Terrorism Measures	Post-Sept. 11, the Dept. of Justice has authorized federal secret detention and surveillance of lawyer-prisoner conversations; interviews of visa recipients based on country of origin; stricter visa policies; and secret military tribunals for non-citizens.
Climate Change	More than 170 nations agreed to the "Marrakesh Accords," guidelines for implementing the Kyoto Protocol on global warming. The United States, a leading producer of greenhouse gas emissions, has refused to participate.
Colombia	Final approval is pending, but Congress is set to provide \$625 million for anti-drug programs in Colombia and neighboring countries. This is \$110 million less than the Bush administration request.
Death Penalty	A national moratorium on the death penalty does not seem possible in the Senate at this time, though some progress is being made at the state level.
Faith-Based Initiative	The House passed the Community Solutions Act (H.R. 7) in July, which would expand government funding of faith-based social service providers. The Senate is expected to take up a more limited bill that offers tax incentives for charitable contributions.
Global AIDS	Congress will likely appropriate around \$650 million for global AIDS prevention and treatment, \$1 billion less than advocates say is needed at a minimum from the United States in 2002.
Iraq	U.N. sanctions and regular U.S. bombing over so-called "no fly zones" continue. "Smart sanctions" (allowing more goods to flow to Iraq via the U.N.'s oil-for-food program) were considered. A bill to grant access to U.S. food and medicine (H.R. 742) now has 31 co-sponsors.
Tax Cuts	Pres. Bush signed into law a \$1.35 billion tax package that doubles and makes partially refundable the child tax credit, but is otherwise tilted heavily towards top income earners. This cut puts future social spending at risk.
Trade	The House passed a bill to give President Bush "fast track" trade promotion authority, which reduces congressional and public input into negotiations for a Free Trade Area of the Americas.
U.S. Militarism	President Bush has requested (and a conference committee is now considering) \$343 billion for military spending in 2002. This is a \$33 billion increase from last year and does not include an addition \$11.7 billion requested for the Pentagon in response to Sept. 11.