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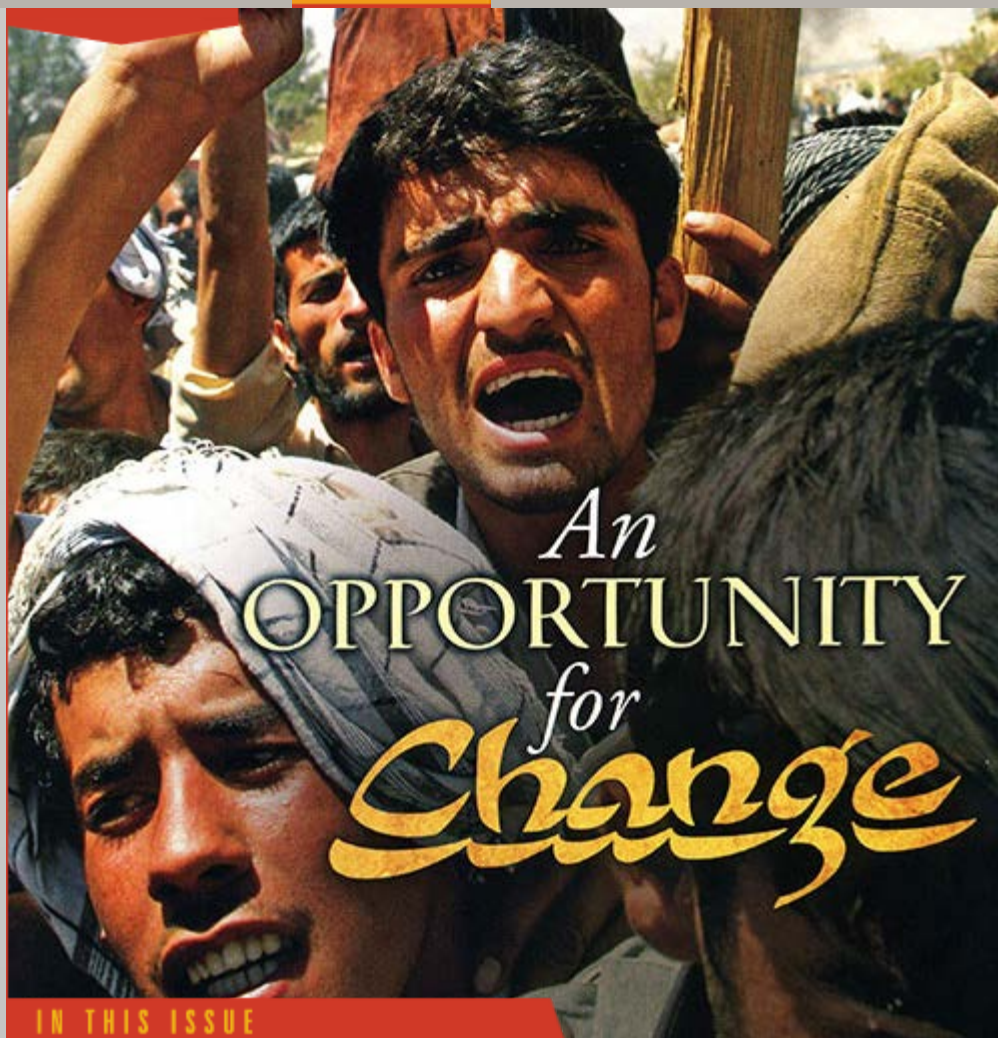
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[IN THE MEDIA](#)

SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER 2006

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IN THIS ISSUE

Religious Freedom in the third Millenium

Why Not Support Isreal?

Desperate Faithful

A Church by Any Other Name

No Freedom Without Religious Freedom

The Tragic Flaw

Freedom Heroes Honored

NEW! LIBERTY ROUND TABLE

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School prayer has been a matter of serious contention for decades. In 1962 the ...[Read More](#)



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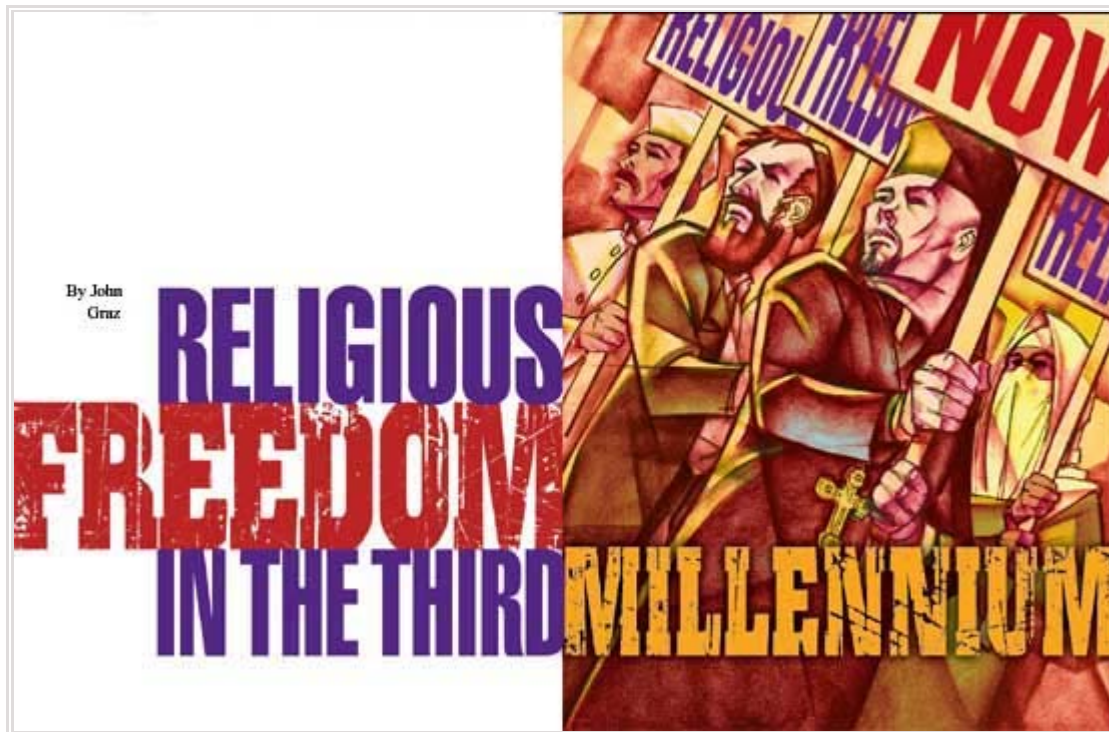
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SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER 2000

Religious Freedom In The Third Millenium

BY: DR. JOHN GRAZ



During the night of March 27, 2005, large graffiti was written on the walls of the Adventist Theological College in Belgrade, Serbia, with these words: "Death to Adventists" and "Death to Sabbatarians." In 2004, 26 Adventist churches and institutions were attacked. In all, more than 100 incidents targeting religious minorities were recorded that year.

Similar attacks have been recorded in Euro-Asia, in Georgia, and in Russia, where religious minorities have been targeted by religious nationalists, with the support of the media and the passivity of the police. In March 2005, in the city of Eisk, Krasnodar Region, Adventists were accused by the media and religious authorities of undermining the morality of the society because they do not believe in the immortality of the soul. A contact in the area reported that "a local TV channel stated that Adventists made a sacrifice of children."

In some states in India, Christians are regularly attacked. A report from *Compass Direct* (New Delhi, June 21, 2005) says that "eleven Christian families who were physically attacked in Jamanya village, Jalgaon district, Maharashtra state, on May 16, now face social ostracism after they accused Hindu villagers of sexual assault."

How are religions interacting in the world today?

In his controversial book *The Clash of Civilization and the Remaking of the World Order*, Samuel P. Huntington writes: "In the modern world, religion is a central, perhaps the central, force that motivates and mobilizes people." About 40 years ago religion did not play a major role in world affairs. That is not the case today. Religion affects politics and international relations. Religious forces can destabilize a country and create a major problem for peace. Religious leaders are playing a growing role in society at large. The riots in England a few years ago, and later in France, led to civil authorities asking religious leaders for help in calming the violence.



Yes, religion and religious leaders are playing a growing role today. Having stated that, we should be particularly concerned because all religions feel threatened in one way or another, and there are growing tensions between religions.

The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have been seen by many in the Muslim world as an attack by Christians. We have the same reactions in India with the fundamentalist Hindus and in Sri Lanka with the nationalist Buddhists.

Inside the "Christian world" the same feeling of invasion is shared by the Orthodox Church in Eastern Europe and Russia and by some Catholics in Latin America. Traditional religion feels under attack from Protestants or new religious movements. The Christian family also feels under attack when it comes to immigration in traditional Christian countries. An article entitled "Relations With Islam," by Daniel Williams and Alan Cooperman, says: "Many people in the Vatican view Christianity as under siege in parts of the world. They say that Christian populations are shrinking in countries in the Middle East in part because of long-term discrimination and repression by Muslim majorities." It is very clear that there are more and more mosques in traditional Christian countries and fewer and fewer churches in Muslim countries. It is impossible to build a church in the territory of Saudi Arabia, but Saudi Arabia has financed construction of mosques and schools in Europe, including in Rome.

Paradoxically, the Western concept of church-state separation, which gives such strength to religious practice in the United States, and which has become the creed of secular countries, is making Christianity the least-defended religion in the world on a geopolitical level.

Islam is the religion of the majority in 44 countries. In 22 countries, Islam is the official religion, and 10 countries are Islamic states according to their constitution. At least 4 countries have Buddhism as the state religion. Most of the traditional Christian countries are now secular. Christianity does not have a geopolitical visibility. As an example, the United Nations adopted without any question the idea that anti-Semitism and Islamophobia are a violation of human rights and should be sanctioned. It was far more difficult for the nations represented to accept that Christian phobia is also a violation of human rights.

Anthony Browne, in an article "Church of Martyrs," writes that "rising nationalism and fundamentalism around the world have meant that Christianity is going back to its roots as the religion of the persecuted."

Just think about the thousands of Christians who have been killed in the Moluccas, Eastern Indonesia, the 5 million Christians who live as an underclass in Pakistan, and the Christians under the oppression of the Sharia law in 12 states of Nigeria. In Sri Lanka, according to Christian leaders I met on a recent visit, about 150 Christian churches were attacked in 2004. Pending anti-conversion legislation in that country has as its real aim a restriction of Christian activity.

In some states of India anti-conversion legislation has been passed, and some pastors have been beaten and others killed with the purpose of terrorizing the Christian community.

The blasphemy law in Pakistan aimed essentially at Christians, establishes systematic religious discrimination, and promotes a culture of intolerance. Christians are seen as pro-American and promoting pro-Western culture, indeed as potential spies, in many parts of the world where they are a minority.

According to Paul Marshall, senior fellow at the Centre for Religious Freedom in Washington, D.C., 200 million Christians face violence because of their faith and 350 million face legally sanctioned discrimination in terms of access to jobs and housing. Today, all religions may feel threatened, but we can say that Christianity, even though it is not without resources, is probably the least-defended religion on a geopolitical level.

Where are we going?

The concept of "clash of civilizations" is a little simplistic when it comes to reality, but it stimulates our understanding of the current situation. A religious war on a planetwide level is very difficult to imagine, but extremists already have enough power and influence in several countries to change politics and increase the level of discrimination for religious minorities.

Religious cleansing is the not-so-hidden goal of all religious extremists. We seem headed for more tensions between religions. And persecution is the by-product of that tension. We may also have religious wars in parts of the world such as India and Nigeria. In cases

of deep crisis, we can imagine that the scapegoat of every society will have a religious dimension.

Christians are becoming the scapegoats in the Middle East and Asia. They are a minority, and they have links with the West and especially with the powerful America that is seen as a Christian nation.

Muslims can be the scapegoats in America and Europe because of their links, real or imagined, with terrorism. We have many examples of innocent Muslims being harassed, arrested, and detained.

What can we do?

The global trends are not in favor of religious freedom in the world today. It seems there is a great battle to come, and we must be ready to play our historical role in defending religious freedom for all. I believe we should champion the principle of church-state separation. We must build a strong international network to defend religious liberty—the International Religious Liberty Association is one such network. We should work in partnership with others on specific issues or cases and encourage interreligious dialogue. More and more we have to explain to governments, through such means as our interventions at the United Nations and in meetings with officials, that religious discrimination is not good politics. Involvement is healthy. In his article "The Politics of Persecuted Religious Minorities," Philip Jenkins writes: "The more they (minorities) are excluded, the more they will devote their loyalties and efforts to the religious subculture, and the more they will be seen as clannish, separatists, or subversive."

If you believe in religious freedom, don't give up; we need you.

If you believe that religious freedom is far more than freedom of worship or religious tolerance, don't give up; we need you.

The world needs you.

Don't give up. Be proactive. Be the voice of the voiceless—the millions persecuted for their faith. We need your commitment. We need to promote, defend, and protect religious freedom for all peoples. Freedom is truly a gift from God.



Dr. John Graz is Executive Director of the International Religious Liberty Association and Secretary General of the Christian World Communion. He writes from Silver Spring, Maryland.

1 Forum 18 News Service, by Branko Bjelajoc: "Serbia: Increased Attacks on Religious Minorities", June 10, 2005, p 2.

2 A Touchstone book, Published by Simon & Schuster, New York, 1997, p 66.

3 Washington Post Foreign Service, April 12, 2005.

4 See Tad Stahnke and Robert C Blitt, *The Religion-State Relationship and the Right to Freedom of Religion or Belief: A Comparative Textual Analysis of the Constitutions of Predominantly Muslim Countries*, USCIRF, research@uscirf.gov, March 2005.

5 Europe Correspondent of The Times, 2005 copyright, The Spectator, 56 Doughty Street, London WC1N 2LL, 26.03, 2005.

6 See Anthony Browne, op cit.

7 In *Religion & Security, The Nexus of International Relations*, Edited by Robert A Seiple, Dennis R Hoover. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, Lanham, Maryland, 2004, p 33.

SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER 2000

Why Not Support Isreal?

BY: MARK A. KELLNER



With all the sincerity of that recent box-office superstar, Chicken Little, Abraham D. Foxman of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith came out swinging against so-called evangelical Christians who support Israel. The tolerant sky, he says, is falling!

These largely conservative, Bible-oriented believers who want to "Christianize" America, Mr. Foxman asserts are bent on "converting" Jews by any means necessary.

Mr. Foxman is entitled to his opinion, of course, but several critics have noted that his viewpoint is a bit removed from the facts. Thundering that groups such as Focus on the Family, the Family Research Council, and the American Family Association "had built infrastructures throughout the country" through which they "intend to 'Christianize' all aspects of American life," he ignores an inspiring point about this very nation: In America, we have what is known as the "public square." In it, we each and we all have a right to advocate for our viewpoints, which may be accepted—or rejected—by the majority.

In fact, it can be argued that Mr. Foxman has constructed his own "infrastructure": his 40-year career with the Anti-Defamation League has seen him emerge as a major spokesman on Jewish issues, as well as interfaith relations. He has spearheaded educational projects on tolerance, most recently one where clothing retailer Abercrombie & Fitch have cosponsored a diversity program called "A Campus of Difference."

But while Mr. Foxman is happy to preach his own message, it would seem that woe betides the evangelicals who want to preach theirs. That's unfortunate, but it's not unusual: Mr. Foxman's interfaith harmony seems to begin and end with those Christians willing to ignore Jesus' own mandate to "preach the gospel to every creature," which is amplified by Paul, who said the good news should go "to the Jew first."

In 2001 a group of Jewish believers in Jesus ran newspaper ads and offered a video that each highlighted the stories of Holocaust survivors, Jews, who found Jesus to be their Messiah. The ADL was quick to condemn this freely expressed speech, with Mr. Foxman himself a Holocaust survivor whose life was hidden by a "righteous Gentile," leading the charge.

"Jews for Jesus is trying to distort Jewish identity as part of their deceptive and offensive campaign to impose Christian beliefs on Jews. By emphasizing the Holocaust, Jews for Jesus is using the darkest chapter in the history of Judaism—the persecution and annihilation of European Jews—to attempt to mislead survivors and their children about their history and faith. It is impossible for a person who is

Jewish to worship Jesus Christ. That is the fundamental distinction that sets these faith systems apart."

I'm not quite sure who made Mr. Foxman the arbiter of what is and isn't possible for a Jew to do or believe in, but his statement suggests a narrow-mindedness that far outstrips anything Focus on the Family chief James Dobson has been accused of promoting. In a secularized American Jewish community where Jews are "free" to follow any free-form Judaism they prefer, from ultra-orthodox to ultra-liberal, Mr. Foxman has decreed Messianic belief off limits—if the Messiah in question is Jesus.

It would be nice if Mr. Foxman would remind his audiences of his position when tub-thumping against the so-called "Christian Right." Such context would help his hearers place such comments in perspective: Mr. Foxman is not particularly separationist; he seems to be anti-evangelism, and particularly "anti" Jewish evangelism.

As a Jew who believes that Jesus is the Messiah, that gives me some pause, as it should anyone who believes the gospel is for all humanity, and who cherishes the notion that such a message should be freely preached to all willing to hear.

In all my witnessing to others, including Jews, I've never—not once, not ever—tried to compel anyone to believe anything. In observing the evangelistic outreaches of many people, in my own denomination as well as in other churches, I've never seen even a hint of compulsion. Mr. Foxman's argument that either Jewish or Gentile believers in Jesus want to "impose" or "mislead" anyone into anything is very difficult to accept—it just doesn't square with what I've seen.

There's another, even more concerning, side to Mr. Foxman's denunciation of groups on the so-called "Christian Right." The people he demonizes also happen to be among the most fervent supporters of the state of Israel and its right to exist. Seeing that support ignored in a debate over moral issues may not be the way to win friends and influence people.

"If you keep bullying your friends, pretty soon you won't have any," Tom Minnery, Focus on the Family vice president of government and public policy, told the Forward, a national Jewish weekly newspaper, on November 11, 2005.

During a season when the elected president of a United Nations member country, Iran, calls for the "elimination" of Israel, it would seem irresponsible—even foolish—to lash out against your political allies. Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is, I believe, deserving of condemnation for his call to "wipe Israel off the map." America, which was the first nation to recognize the State of Israel in 1948, should be honored for those among its citizens who support Israel, not attacked.

But support of Israel—a concept that should be key to Mr. Foxman's beliefs—is not enough where evangelical Christians are concerned, or so it seems. If a Christian wants to support Israel and advance a moral agenda in a free society, watch out!

I'm not suggesting Mr. Foxman is amoral or immoral—far from it. But his concern over the legitimate actions of free people in a free society to advocate for their principles seems a bit overstated, as many, including some Jewish leaders, felt about his earlier alarm over Mel Gibson's film, *The Passion of the Christ*.

So what's a believer in religious liberty to do?

Believe in religious liberty!

Personally, I like this formulation: "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance."

Sound familiar? It's Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Those who support Israel, I believe, are most consistently in support of Article 18. To belittle or ignore their goodness because we may disagree with their political stance doesn't augur well for those wanting to retain their freedoms.

Mark A. Kellner is a freelance writer and newspaper columnist currently based in Rockville, Maryland.



This opinion piece by Mark Kellner is his response to the article "Jews and the Christian Right," by Clifford Goldstein, writing in our March/April 2006, issue. Both Mark and Clifford look at the topic from a Jewish perspective—yet they come to very different conclusions. What seems inescapable however is that the eschatology of many in the Christian Right influences U.S. policy toward Israel. Editor.

1 The opinions expressed in this article are his alone and are not intended to speak for any organization or publication.

2 Press release, "ADL & Abercrombie & Fitch Join to Bring Innovative Anti-Bias Programs to Campus this Fall," August 9, 2005, accessed at http://www.adl.org/PresRele/Education_01/4772_01.htm on November 14, 2005.

3 Jesus, as quoted in Mark 16:15, Authorized Version.

4 Paul, Romans 1:16, Authorized Version

5 Press release, "ADL Says Jews for Jesus Ads are Deceptive and Offensive," April 27, 2001, accessed at http://www.adl.org/PresRele/Rel_ChStSep_90/3817_90.asp on November 14, 2005.

6 Minnery, quoted in E.J. Kessler, "ADL Urges Joint Effort Against Right," *Forward*, Nov. 11, 2005, accessed at <http://www.forward.com/articles/6856> on November 14, 2005.

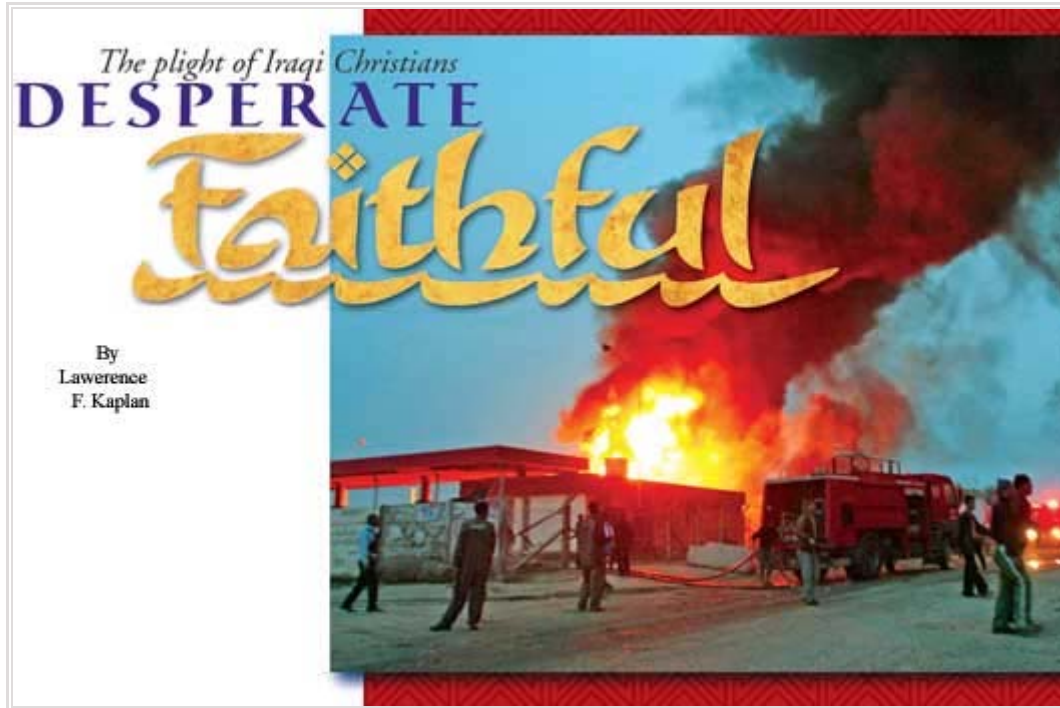
7 As noted in Kessler, *op. cit.*

8 United Nations, "Universal Declaration of Human Rights," accessed at <http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html> on November 14, 2005.

SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER 2009

Desperate Faithful

BY: LAWRENCE F. KAPLAN



Fadi has had it with Iraq. At his family's home in Baghdad, the Christian university student (whose last name has been withheld to protect his family) elaborates in fluent English. "There is no future for Christians here," he says. He knows this firsthand. Last year, four men drove up to his family's house and snatched his twelve-year-old nephew off the street. Targeted for riches that few of them actually possess, Christians routinely disappear from the sidewalks of Baghdad. "We have no militia to defend us, and the government—they do nothing," Fadi says. A day after the abduction, the captors phoned Fadi's family, demanding \$30,000. If his family failed to cobble together the ransom, Fadi knew what would come next. His nephew would be shot or beheaded.

After Iraq's Baathists seized power in 1968, they celebrated by stringing Jews up in a Baghdad square. With the remnant of Iraq's Jewish population having long since fled the country, Christians have become today's victims of choice. Sunni, Shia, and Kurd may agree on little else, but all have made sport of brutalizing their Christian neighbors, hundreds of whom have been slaughtered since the U.S. invasion. As a result, Iraq's ancient Christian community, now numbering roughly 800,000 and consisting mostly of Eastern rite Chalden Catholics and Assyrian Orthodox Christians, dwindles by the day. According to Iraqi estimates, between 40,000 and 100,000 have fled since 2004, many following their own road to Damascus across the Syrian border or to Jordan, while many more have been displaced within Iraq. As for the country that loosed the furies against them, the United States refuses to provide Iraqi Christians protection of any kind.

From his synod in Baghdad, the most prominent Christian clergyman in Iraq, Chaldean Patriarch Emmanuel Delly, denies the obvious. "There is no persecution of Christians," the septuagenarian archbishop insists. "All Iraqis have problems." The fiction has become canonical among Iraqi Christian leaders, who maintain it to avoid inciting their tormentors. Many members of Iraq's clergy, for example, dismiss as gross exaggeration reports that tens of thousands of Christians have fled Iraq.

But, however much the clergy may deny it, Iraqi Christians suffer for their faith. Along with kidnappings and assassinations, church bombings—beginning with the destruction of five churches in August 2004—have become a staple of Christian life in Iraq. To disguise their faith, Christian women, particularly in Iraq's south, tuck their hair under *hijabs*, while fewer and fewer attend church, performing Mass in homes and sometimes, like their ancient Christian ancestors, in crypts

instead. Even the Kurds, so often depicted as saints in Iraq's morality tale, have taken to pummeling Christians; the Kurdish religious affairs minister said last year that "those who turn to Christianity pose a threat to society." Commenting on a recent pogrom against Christian students in Mosul, Yonadam Kanna, the only Christian elected to Iraq's new parliament, says, "The fanatics blame us for doing nothing. They blame us for being Christian."



The blame accrues, in part, because of real and imagined ties to the West and to the Western power occupying Iraq. There is, in truth, a cultural affinity between Iraqi Christians, many of whom speak English (and, as such, account for a large percentage of the U.S. military's interpreters), and the mostly Christian soldiers occupying their country. "[Local Christians] were very supportive of having us in Mosul," says Colonel Mike Meese,

who served with the 101st Airborne Division in the heavily Christian city. "They'd have our soldiers go to Mass with them." But, as soon as their American protectors departed, the city's Christians became targets—their churches sacked and their archbishop kidnapped. In Baghdad, too, insurgents routinely execute Christians who work alongside the Americans. Threatened by her neighbors, a Christian friend of mine who worked in the Green Zone quit her job and today rarely leaves her house.

To the lengthy indictment of Christians, their persecutors have also added the charge of proselytizing. Unlike American soldiers, who mean to save Iraqi lives, the American evangelicals who follow on their heels mean to save Iraqi souls. There is deference. Evangelizing to Iraqis carries with it risks that evangelizing to, say, Latin Americans does not. The infusion of pamphlets and missionaries from organizations like the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention enrages Iraqi Muslims, who, Iraqi Christians leaders claim, increasingly conflate their congregants with "the crusaders"—and, too often, treat them as such. "The evangelicals have caused such problem for us," says Kanna. "They make the Sunni and Shia furious."

Even though Iraq's Christians suffer in the name of their American co-religionists, their fate seems not to have made the slightest impression on much of the evangelical establishment. Their websites and promotional literature advertise the importance of creating new Christian communities in Iraq while mostly ignoring the obligation to save ancient ones. Nor, with a few exceptions, have mainstream church leaders in the United States broached the subject, either. Dr. Carl Moeller, the president of Open Doors USA, an organization that supports persecuted Christians abroad, pins the blame on Christianity's own sectarian rifts. "The denominations in Iraq aren't recognized by Americans," he explains. "The underlying attitude is, 'They're not us.'"

The abysmal plight of Iraq's Christians, needless to say, long predates the arrival of the Americans. Since the first century, when Christianity first came to Nineveh province, Iraqi Christians have been cursed by geography. With its fields of mud burnt red by the sun, much of Nineveh—the ancestral home to a large number of Assyrian Christians that runs from Mosul to the Syrian border in Iraq's northwest corner—resembles a Martian landscape. Thousands of feet above the plains, a small U.S. outpost atop the Sinjar mountain range shines at night, a beacon to many of the Christians, Yazidis, and other persecuted minorities who populate the province below, a number of whom initially greeted the Americans as their saviors. But, having been massacred over the centuries by Ottomans, Kurds, and Arabs alike, most Christians know better than to rely on the goodwill of others.

Nor is this knowledge merely the result of their experiences under foreign rule. Even though the Christian presence in Iraq predates the arrival of Islam, in the Iraqi Muslim imagination, Christians will always be emissaries of the West. Because they operate a disproportionate share of Iraq's liquor, music, and beauty shops—industries deemed sinful in various interpretations of Islam—insurgents accuse them of embodying the licentiousness of all things American and have burned hundreds of liquor stores to the ground. Where Iraq was once awash in pop music CDs sold by Christian vendors, a more recent CD circulating in Mosul features the beheading of Christians.

It was against this backdrop that Fadi's family raced to save his kidnapped nephew from a similar fate. Luckily, Fadi's father, a doctor, was able to produce the \$30,000 ransom. Eight days after his abduction, the captors released Fadi's nephew. But the ordeal shook his family so badly that, a month later, they spirited the boy off to Jordan. "If, today, we all had a place to go, tomorrow there wouldn't be a Christian left in Iraq," Fadi says.

As for Fadi himself, who first applied to leave Iraq in 1998 while Saddam Hussein was in power, last year's kidnapping made him even more anxious to flee. With the doors to the United States sealed shut, he placed his faith in other Western countries. While over 40,000 Iraqi Christians have fled their homeland since the invasion, last year the United States permitted fewer than 200 Iraqis to immigrate. As

for the thousands of remaining Christian refugees, until recently, the U.N.'s High Commissioner for Refugees didn't even bother referring their cases to the United States, knowing we had no inclination to take them in.

Their case files amount to proof of Washington's callousness. There is the Iraqi American whose Christian sister saw her husband gunned down in the street. Following the assassination of two more family members, the sister fell into a crippling depression, unable to care for her two-year-old child. Caught up in a bureaucratic tangle, her American relatives have gotten exactly nowhere. Another sister of an Iraqi American, a Christian woman with four children, lost her husband, killed while serving as a U.S. military interpreter. Her family, too, has been reduced to pleading her case before unconcerned State Department officials. A heartfelt advocate for Iraqi Christians, Representative Jan Schakowsky, a Democrat from Illinois, calls embassies, by her account, "at all hours of the night," but "the policy since the war began is, 'We're not granting asylum.' . . . There is no processing of refugees from Iraq." The reasons derive from post-September 11 security restrictions and, in the telling of a senior administration official, from the fiction that Iraqis, now liberated, no longer endure systematic persecution.

Fortunately for Fadi, other Western governments have offered a more candid assessment, and, after seven years of waiting, one just informed him he will be granted his visa. He can barely contain his glee. "I feel happy because I go to a new place where I feel free," he says.

But his case counts as a rare exception. Before leaving Baghdad last month, I got a taste of the desperation felt by Iraqi Christians left behind. Samira, a sad woman in her fifties who comes once a day to cook for an Iraqi friend, showed me a photograph of a woman in her thirties. She had a favor to ask: Would I marry her daughter? The proposition had nothing to do with me, per se. She simply wants to get her Christian daughter out of Iraq. Last year, insurgents murdered Samira's son. As a sign of respect, his Muslim friends transported the body to Najaf for burial in the Shia holy city. A kind gesture, to be sure, but Samira wants her son buried in a Christian cemetery. The son's Shia friends refuse to surrender his body, and, not being Muslim herself, there is no one to whom she can effectively—or safely—plead her case. Like most Iraqi Christians, she has nowhere to turn.



Lawrence F. Kaplan is a senior editor of The New Republic, and a well known author. He first wrote this piece for that magazine's April 3, 2006, issue. He writes from Washington, D.C.

SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER 2000

A Church By Any Other Name

BY: MARJORIE HANSOUR

A CHURCH *by Any Other* NAME



By Marjorie Hansour
Illustration By David Klein

What is a church? The Nebraska Supreme Court was asked to decide this question in a case stemming from a liquor license granted to a Kum & Go convenience store in Omaha. The Kum & Go is located across the street from the House of Faith, a nondenominational Christian congregation that has been worshiping in its rented building since 1990. In Nebraska a zoning exclusion law prohibits the issuance of a liquor license to an entity located within 150 feet of a school or church. No party disputed the zoning law, but a legal battle quickly erupted over a murkier issue—whether the House of Faith could really be called a church.

The controversy began in 1998, when the Kum & Go store applied for a liquor license. The Omaha City Council, citing the 150-foot zoning exclusion, denied the license, noting that the front door of the store is only 138 feet away from the front door of the House of Faith. Under Nebraska law the Kum & Go then had the right to appeal the city's decision to the Nebraska Liquor Control Commission. The commission overrode the city council's decision, stating that the House of Faith did not meet the liquor commission's definition of a "church."

The commission defined a church as "a building owned by a religious organization used primarily for religious purposes which enjoys tax-exempt status." Since the House of Faith rents space in its building and is not tax-exempt, it clearly does not qualify as a church under the commission's definition.

Kum & Go lawyer Michael Lehan defended the commission's law, saying it is no different from those requiring schools to be certified or colleges to be accredited.

Though the House of Faith was not considered a church according to the liquor commission, Lehan stated, "This does not mean that people do not assemble on occasion at the building and worship God."

While the House of Faith itself never disputed the issuance of the liquor license—its pastor, Mary L. Sherman, stated in her affidavit that the congregation "had chosen to use its energies to help its community in other ways"—the city of Omaha did take issue with the state's decision.

The city appealed the liquor commission's decision to the Lancaster County District Court, and the court once again sided with the city, but that wasn't the end of the dispute. The case of *City of Omaha v. Kum & Go* went on to the Court of Appeals, where the Nebraska Supreme Court pulled it, choosing to hear the case directly.

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) filed a brief in support of the city. "We got involved because of the issue of separation of church and state," said Tim Butz, executive director of the Nebraska ACLU. "We took on [the case] on the basis of the First Amendment argument that the commission's ruling infringed upon the rights of the members of the House of Faith to associate with one another, and that the government's definition of what constitutes a church amounted to a violation of the Establishment Clause."

In its brief the ACLU argued that the state was discriminating against small churches and poor worshippers.

"The House of Faith is a store front church," said Butz. "Its congregation is poor. It has no assets and therefore has never attempted to become certified as tax exempt or to incorporate. They're just people who for more than ten years have met in the same rented building for the purpose of worship."

The ACLU argued that, while ownership of a building and tax-exempt status should certainly be factors in determining what is or is not a "church," these criteria should not be hard requirements. As stated in its brief, the ACLU maintains that "such a definition is not only contrary to the plain and ordinary usage of the word 'church,' but so narrowly defines the term that it would operate to infringe upon the free exercise rights of religious organizations and would constitute a denominational preference in violation of both the Nebraska and federal establishment clauses The freedom of Nebraskans to practice the religion of their choice without interference from nearby liquor stores should not depend on the worshippers' ability to pay a mortgage."

The ACLU maintained that the Nebraska Liquor Control Commission exceeded its statutory authority when it promulgated a definition of "church" that requires the building to be owned by a religious organization that has tax-exempt status. It noted that the precise issue of the meaning of the word "church" was decided by the Nebraska Supreme Court in past cases and defined as: "The plain, ordinary, and popular meaning of the word 'church' would indicate a building where Christians gather to worship God or a building in which people assemble for non-Christian worship."

Based on this definition, the House of Faith would certainly constitute a church. According to the brief filed by the city of Omaha: "The House of Faith has a congregation of between 75 and 150 members and holds religious worship service each Sunday and Friday; prayer meetings each Monday; and choir practice each Saturday. Services at the House of Faith are open to any person wishing to attend. The building's sole use and function is for worship or religious purposes. . . . Photographs of the entrance of the House of Faith clearly show that the building is held out to the public as a place for religious services open to the public. Religious symbols of a cross and dove are publicly displayed on the entrance door and on the sign above the door."

According to Butz, "[the ACLU] felt that if the government is going to give a benefit to a church it must do so in a way that doesn't infringe upon people's right of association and doesn't discriminate or give preference to any type of religion. While this case does not involve a denominational preference, there is certainly a preference based on economics. An affluent church would never have a liquor license this close to its front door."

On April 19 the Nebraska Supreme Court agreed with the arguments presented by the city of Omaha and the ACLU, vacating the commission's order granting Kum & Go a liquor license and reversing the decision of the commission.

In its ruling the court stated that "the House of Faith is a church. Whether or not a building is a church . . . does not depend on the legal ownership of the building. The plain meaning of the word 'church' encompasses buildings in which persons regularly assemble for religious worship, regardless of whether the building is owned or rented by those persons. . . . The mandatory criteria for a church, set forth [by the liquor commission] are contrary to the plain meaning of the word. . . and may arbitrarily exclude from their definition a number of churches that are entitled to the protection of the statute."

While the court's decision was certainly a victory for the separation of church and state in Nebraska, it remains to be seen whether the ruling will have broader implications. "I think it may," said Amy Miller, Nebraska ACLU legal director. "These issues come up relatively frequently and sometimes how a court rules on one matter can have outside implications. Whether this decision will have an impact on courts outside of Nebraska is hard to say. It may be looked to for guidance by other courts but it won't be binding on any other court outside of Nebraska."

Marjorie Hansour is a freelance writer in San Francisco, California

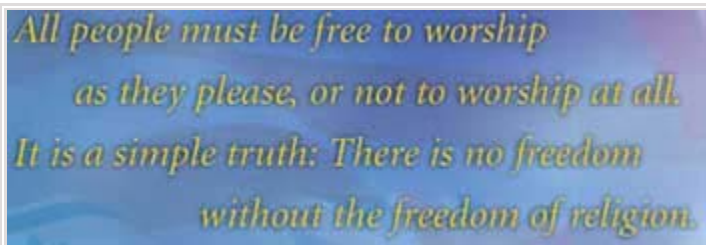
SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER 2000

No Freedom Without Religious Freedom

It's no surprise that the many Seventh-day Adventists here tonight seek the freedom to practice their faith—after all, Adventists have often faced serious discrimination around the world. What is remarkable, what is truly impressive about your work, is that you seek freedom not just for people of your faith, but also for those of all other religions. Your work on behalf of religious freedom and human rights is vital, it is transforming, and it is inspiring. And for it, the world owes you a deep debt of gratitude.

The world owes you thanks not simply because of your active promotion of liberty, but also because you remind us that the freedom of conscience represents the core of any democracy. A government fails if it imposes on its people a predetermined way of approaching the world, a forced path to meaning in life. Freedom from such shackles prompted America's first immigrants to abandon their European shores; it animated the passions of our forefathers and found expression in the Constitution's First Amendment. "Every man," said our first President, "conducting himself as a good citizen, and being accountable to God alone for his religious opinions, ought to be protected in worshipping the Deity according to the dictates of his own conscience."

George Washington spoke of the newly formed Union, but his words are no less true today, when the world is by necessity within the scope of our ambition. The promotion of democracy, human rights, and religious freedom has been a much debated focus of our diplomacy in recent years, with some arguing that America should return to a more "realistic" foreign policy that deals with societies as they are—and avoids using our influence to shape their internal behavior. As you will see in the course of my remarks tonight, I reject this view. Surely pragmatism has a role in foreign affairs, but I believe that the object of American power should not be limited to our own protection and economic self-interest. We must seek a better world, one respectful of the rights we believe to be the universal province of all people. To do less would not simply threaten the very interests we seek to protect; it would also mean abdicating American leadership at this unique moment in history.



*All people must be free to worship
as they please, or not to worship at all.
It is a simple truth: There is no freedom
without the freedom of religion.*

There are many who disagree with this proposition. These individuals doubt that a system of government that works in prosperous countries with Western traditions can ever function in places that lack our traditions and advantages. They are reluctant to intervene in the domestic political arrangements of other countries, by force or by diplomacy. They argue that it is simply American arrogance to suggest that a system which works for us can work everywhere.

But advocates of a human rights focused foreign policy have never suggested that a country without previous experience with democracy should govern itself in ways identical to our experience, with a bicameral legislature, nationally elected chief executive with a four year term, full separation of church and state, and a two party system. All we claim is that people no matter where they live, no matter their history or religious beliefs or the size of their GDP, all people share a basic desire to be free; to make by their own choices and industry better lives for themselves and their children. And furthermore, that it is in the security interests of the United States and is inseparable from the moral foundation of our national character that we should do all that is practical to help them wrest their rights from regimes that do not govern with their people's consent.

Concern for the rights of all human beings must be a significant and enduring element of American foreign policy, informing our relations with all countries. While human rights will never constitute the sum total of our foreign policy, which by necessity concerns itself with myriad other issues, from counterterrorism to weapons proliferation to trade policy, we fail ourselves as Americans if we do not consider how our actions—or our failure to act—impact those who are as yet unblessed with our freedoms.

No one can claim ignorance of the basic rights all humans should possess. They include the right to life and liberty; protection against cruel, inhumane, and degrading treatment; basic political rights; the right to choose one's religion or to change it; and the freedom to manifest one's belief in teaching, practice, worship, and observance. The world summarized these and other rights in 1948 when, after the most destructive war in human history, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. This remarkable document begins simply but powerfully, asserting that "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights."

The first word of the document's title is important—these human rights are not an invention of America or of the western world, nor do they reflect standards which particular cultures or religions can reject. They are universal. But it's worth spending a moment to reflect on where these rights come from.

I believe that the genesis of these rights lies in the origins of the human spirit. As long as reflective people have lived, they have identified those universal liberties that separate us from the animals. Look at the earliest Greek philosophy and you will see emerging the concept that all human beings are created equal. The great Judaic and Christian teachers held that certain rights are endowed unto all people by the Creator. And to simplify John Locke a bit, governments are formed explicitly to protect the natural rights of its citizens, and thus rule only with their consent. "The State of Nature," he said, "has a Law of Nature to govern it, which obliges everyone. . . that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his Life, Health, Liberty and Possessions."

Our founding fathers were wise to shape our political system on Locke's ideas. The rights to which he refers exist above the state and beyond history; they can not be rescinded by one government any more than they can be granted by another. They inhabit the human heart, and from there, though they may be abridged, they can never be wrenched.

Jimmy Carter once said that "America did not invent human rights. In a very real sense, human rights invented America." Our Founding Fathers, having felt the weight of colonial oppression, forged a new kind of government, one that existed not to protect a regime or a class or a religion but to protect the people's rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. The promotion of those rights is the most authentic expression of our national character. To accept the abridgement of those rights for other societies should be no less false to the American heart than to accept their abridgement in our own society. Injustice and tyranny abroad should be as intolerable to Americans as they are intolerable here.

Promoting human rights abroad can serve our national interests in profound ways. In the 1970s, the military government in South Korea twice planned to execute dissident Kim Dae Jung. In both cases the United States intervened, saving his life. Years later, he became the president of South Korea, and his warm feelings toward our country endured. In 1986, when the United States condemned Ferdinand Marcos' sham reelection, we earned the abiding gratitude of the Philippine people, who promptly threw out the dictator. Our continuing good relations with the Philippines have enabled us to collaborate on numerous fronts, including counterterrorism and counternarcotics. Throughout the Cold War, America condemned human rights abuses and promoted religious freedom throughout Eastern Europe, and today troops from many of these same Eastern European nations stand beside ours in Iraq. In 2004, in refusing to accept bogus elections in Ukraine, we earned friends among the organizers of the Orange Revolution, and now its leader is better known by his title, the President of Ukraine. And today we stand with Aung San Suu Kyi, a woman of undaunted moral courage, and with the people of Burma as they oppose a brutal dictatorship. They will prevail someday, and America must be part of their success. And when they do succeed, America will have a new partner, linked by common values.

History shows that standing with democrats pays dividends far greater than collaborating with dictators for short term gain. How many times must we learn this lesson? Time and again we have embraced dictators who pledge their love of America while oppressing their citizens at home. Batista in Cuba, the Shah in Iran, Somoza in Nicaragua, the House of Saud today—in each case the repressed people of these countries identified America with their corrupt rulers. And, in the end, each case had dire implications for our security and economic interests.

It does not take a revolution to see that promoting human rights serves our interests in other ways. Where there are abuses, despair often grows, sometimes morphing into extremism and terror. In countries where the rule of law is arbitrary, corruption and other vices breed—such as the trafficking of narcotics, weapons, and even human beings. Human destruction, oppression, and religious prosecution prompt refugee flows and instability across borders, and foster disease and criminality.

But perhaps the foremost way in which promoting human rights serves America's national interests lies in this unique moment in world history. The United States is the only superpower on the globe today, but history teaches us how other countries traditionally react to the rise of a single great power. In the past this phenomenon has prompted other states to combine, acting to balance against perceived threats and to limit the preeminent state's influence. Since the demise of the Soviet Union we have seen few concrete examples that the world is attempting to diminish American power, but we would be wise to be wary. In so doing, we should also sense a great opportunity.

For America truly is not like past superpowers, countries who sought territorial gain or imperial dominion. We wish to free, not to enslave; to trade, not to steal; to enlighten and learn, not to dominate and convert. But however certain we may be about our own motives, the impressions of people abroad are the ones that count. Should they sense a truly imperial impulse, they will speed their efforts to limit America's reach. But should they detect a truly humanitarian motive behind American action, they are much more likely to welcome a powerful United States, rather than oppose it. Our moral standing is directly tied to our ability to maintain America's preeminent leadership in the world.

Don't underestimate the influence of this effect. America's traditional identification with democracy and human rights constitutes a critical element of our soft power. While our military can preempt and prevent threats, and our economic power can be used to promote or punish, our soft power is the power of attraction. It was not only the traditional metrics of national might that helped the West win the Cold War, it was also the deeply attractive nature of our way of life—a way of life that included freedom, democracy, religious liberty and economic prosperity. Only with the credibility that accompanies the union of words and action will the world's people believe what we believe: that America wishes good for all, not for some; that we seek security, peace, and justice, not land and oil. And above all, they

must see that we strive to respect human rights at home.

This last point is critical, because our credibility suffers a grievous blow from human rights abuses by Americans. The disgrace at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq set back our national cause and our international ambitions, and similar cases undermine our foreign policy. Because we hold others to a standard, we must be even more scrupulous in our own affairs. This does not mean that America has always been perfect. Nor does it mean that we are perfect today. But we must strive for perfection, whether it means interrogating enemy detainees in accordance with our values or treating immigrants as individuals possessing of certain basic human rights. Only by acting in accordance with our values can we further the interests we seek abroad.

This is not to say that our interests and our values are always identical. Sometimes our interests and our values point us in different directions, and balancing these can be the most difficult task policymakers face. How hard should we push President Putin, for example, on his rollback of democracy? All of us seek a fully democratic Russia, but we also hope for a Russia that cooperates with us to confront Iran's nuclear ambitions. Should we press the Chinese to loosen their restrictions on the Catholic Church and other faiths, while simultaneously pressing Beijing on currency issues and its military buildup? Should we threaten military action to stop ongoing genocide in Darfur while trying to force the Sudanese government to fulfill its peace commitments with the autonomous south?

In making these tough choices, it has long been axiomatic that interests trump values. But we should not be so quick to discount our ideals. Is tolerating a lack of democracy in Egypt helping to settle the hostility and dangerous instability of the Middle East? Or does it breed terrorists by depriving people of any lawful means to change their lives? America is number one—but for what? What is the object of American power and wealth? Is it only to garner more power, to grow richer, and to eliminate threats of every kind? If this were a different time, or if America were a different country, that concept of our national mission might satisfy. Today it does not.

I have long believed that the true worth of a person is measured by how faithfully we serve a cause greater than our self-interest, that encompasses us but is not defined by our existence alone. The same holds true for the conduct of nations, particularly in this unique era, when America stands astride the world with unmatched power. None of us knows for how long the United States will dominate international affairs, but we do know that history has handed us a unique opportunity. The U.S. could choose to pursue narrowly defined national interests—internal and external security, economic prosperity at the cost of others, perhaps even territorial domination. And yet we choose—we must choose—a very different path.

We must use our power and influence not only for security and prosperity, but to promote the concepts we hold dear, including democracy and the panoply of human rights. By doing so we help create a world of recognized norms and rules and if we are successful, we will have established a set of expectations for domestic behavior that will endure long after the so-called "unipolar moment" has passed.

One of these norms must be the basic right to freedom of religion. Choosing one's faith is the most personal of choices, a matter of individual conscience. That is why we cherish it as part of our Bill of Rights. That is why Franklin Roosevelt listed as one of his four freedoms the right of everyone to worship God in his own way, everywhere in the world. And that is why people fleeing religious persecution continue to find safety in our country. All people must be free to worship as they please, or not to worship at all. It is a simple truth: There is no freedom without the freedom of religion.

Until recently, as Freedom House has said, religious liberty has been "the orphan child" of the human rights movement. It is not any longer, and humanity is the better for it. Congress and the administration have taken great strides to promote religious freedom abroad, but I don't have to tell this audience that we have a long, hard way to go. Every time a Chinese Catholic is jailed, or an Afghan convert is arrested, or a Hindu is killed in Kashmir, or a Tibetan Buddhist oppressed, it is not simply a tragedy. It is a call for action, one worthy of this country founded on the principle that every person, possessing inalienable rights, deserves to be free.

And should we be tempted to look away, to ignore the trials of those lacking the rights we so safely enjoy, let us recall the words of John Donne, when he said no man is an island. With singular elegance, the great poet tells us that in thinking about the value of human lives in far away places, we just as well might think of our own: "Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee."



An address given by Senator John McCain at the 4th annual Liberty Awards Banquet, May 4, 2006.

SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER 2000

The Tragic Flaw



Just a few days ago I walked alongside my father as hospital orderlies wheeled him into the operating room for rather serious surgery*. He had been very ill for a week or two and I don't think he had much sense of current world events. But his mind was active and he couldn't stop talking about places and people from the past.

He could still laugh about the time in Nice, France, when he persuaded a petulant Jacques Cousteau to rejoin the International Drug Prevention Convention which my father had organized. The explorer re-entered the hall and promptly gave his speech—in English—to the largely French audience. "What an insult," hissed one of them. Freedom Fries, anyone!

As we covered those few yards of hospital vinyl, my dad was reliving the contacts of decades. Many of those contacts were in the Middle East. The same Middle East in flames again on many television screens in rooms throughout that hospital.



I remember taking some of those trips with him. I remember standing on one of the peaks that surround Kabul, Afghanistan, and looking down on the city and toward the Intercontinental Hotel where we would soon hold another International Conference. That was way back before the Communist puppet regimes and the horrors of the Taliban, but it struck me as a world apart—to be understood only in the mirror of its culture and religion. And I still remember the cascade of small pebbles against the car as we drove along the road past hostile children.

I remember walking down one of the main boulevards in Tehran, Iran. There were huge portraits of the Shah hanging from many buildings. But it seemed an overlay on the real culture of the city. I remember more clearly the handholding, giggling crowds of teenage boys who followed us at a not too discreet distance—I think my sister was the main attraction for them! I remember pausing out front of the U.S. Embassy gates and looking in and away to the main building; remote and silent, and soon to be occupied by student activists and hostages. And I remember the clear yet

wavering call of the Muezzin to prayers.

I remember many of the sessions of those conferences. Hundreds of delegates gathered from across the known and not so known world. (What was it that Mark Twain wrote about wars being God's way of teaching Americans geography?) I particularly remember the Saudis. Often dressed in flowing robes, they always projected an air of earnest religious fervor. No politics were ever spoken, but the conversation was always of moral reform—always on our shared goal of educating people away from the destructive habits of drug and alcohol use. I noticed that the logic of their argument derived from a spiritual goal and not from a public health point of view. And, of course, as Christians, we had much the same inner call to help our fellow men.

I particularly remember one public meeting, when there was a discussion about where to hold the next conference. Among other offers there was a strong lobby from the Arab nations to hold it in their region—Saudi Arabia and Kuwait were the two locations put forward. In the to and fro, pro and con of the debate, some questioned the logistics and expense of having it in those places. But the Saudis and Kuwaitis were insistent that it would work and that we would have the full support of the civil authorities. And I will never forget the clincher argument given by one of the government ministers for Kuwait: "Don't worry," he laughingly said, "there is no such thing as separation of church and state in our countries, so it will be easy to do." We all smiled, but in the years since, and since the war on terrorism has picked up, I have seen this as far more than something to smile about. It is the tragic flaw of the Islamic world. And the beckoning horror that the Christian West must avoid as it responds.

As the recent situation in the Middle East blew out of any semblance of sanity to non-political outside observers, a colleague of mine sent an e-mail in which he wondered if this might be the beginning of the Biblical battle of Armageddon. Probably not, I told him, but it got me thinking.

It's fine to read such things in holy writ and interpret world events in light of prophecy. It's intended that such musings lead the reader to a closer personal faith dedication. Where things get badly out of sync for all mankind is when such musings become elements of public policy.

When Iranian leaders see conflict with Israel and the United States as a necessary precursor to the hoped appearance of the Fifth Imam, we all have trouble. When and if the United States sees Biblical Armageddon as inevitable and a necessary prelude to world peace, we also have trouble.

The reality is that in both the "Christian" West and the Islamic world there are many adherents who see apocalyptic, bloody confrontation as necessary passages to their heavenly peace. Whether right or wrong in their interpretation, such thinking allied to civil power can bring only the Crusades, the Inquisition or the human apocalypse.

The last time the West fell prey to religious incitement to use secular power in the Middle East the result was nearly two centuries of military Crusades—or "wars of the Cross." They are well remembered in the Middle East—and in Rome too, to judge by the late Pope John Paul II apology for the sack of Constantinople. (A perfect illustration of how religious wars have a habit of turning back upon themselves.) And the Islamic world has been stirred before by the spirit of conquest that took it to the gates of Vienna and threatened the survival of Christian Europe.

I believe that the rapid rise of religious extremism is foretold in Biblical prophecy. By extremism I am including all the major faiths. After all, let's not delude ourselves, a hard edged militant "Christianity" that yearns for political power is at our own door. But, I can't expect that every reader of *Liberty* will agree with me. We live in a free society and my view of religious liberty, which I also derive from the Bible, has to allow you equal right to believe what you want.

What I must insist upon and enlist your aid in maintaining is a principle: the separation of church and state. It is biblical. It is historically proven. It is Constitutionally mandated.

Look into the flames of religious conflict. Look into the cauldron of post 9/11 paranoia. Tell me if there is any hope without a reassertion of the separation of church and state. Without it we have the Tragic Flaw writ large on a wall in blood red characters.



*Ernest H. J. Steed, the editor's father and a pioneer in communicating faith-based drug prevention ideals to governments around the globe, died in Orlando, Florida, July 25, 2006.

SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER 2006

Freedom Heroes Honored

BY: MARK A. KELLNER



More than a capacity audience jammed the historic Senate Caucus Room, part of the U.S. Capitol complex, May 4, 2006, to honor religious freedom and give honor to those leading out in its advancement. The event was the fourth annual religious freedom dinner, sponsored by *Liberty* magazine, the International Religious Liberty Association (IRLA), and the North American Religious Liberty Association (NARLA)—three religious freedom outreaches sponsored by the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

"America truly is not like past superpowers, countries who sought territorial gain or imperial dominion," United States Senator John McCain of Arizona, the evening's keynote speaker, told attendees at the event.



(Left to Right) James Standish, Executive Director, North American Religious Liberty Association; Massimo Vicini, Embassy of Sweden; Caroline Vicini, Deputy Chief of Mission, Embassy of Sweden; Jonathan Gallagher, UN Liaison, SDA Church.

"It's no surprise that the many Seventh-day Adventists here tonight seek the freedom to practice their faith—after all, Adventists have often faced serious discrimination around the world," McCain said in comments that preceded his formal presentation. "What is remarkable, what is truly impressive about your work, is that you seek freedom not just for people of your faith, but also for those of all other religions. Your work on behalf of religious freedom and human rights is vital, it is transforming, and it is inspiring. And for it, the world owes you a deep debt of gratitude."

Actually, Adventist religious liberty activists were in minority of the audience that evening. Making up the capacity event were representatives of many other faiths, including Islamic, Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant groups. Given the event's location, there were staff representatives from many Senate and Congressional offices, as well as media representatives. Given the international scope of the event, it was also appropriate that dozens of ambassadors and embassy staffers from a wide variety of nations were present.

"Every time a Chinese Catholic is jailed, or an Afghan convert is arrested, or a Hindu is killed in Kashmir, or a Tibetan Buddhist oppressed, it is not simply a tragedy. It is a call for action, one worthy of this country founded on the principle that every person, possessing inalienable rights, deserves to be free," Senator McCain told the international audience. (See the complete text of Senator McCain's remarks following this report.)

According to Dr. John Graz, Public Affairs and Religious Liberty director for the Seventh-day Adventist world church and IRLA secretary-general, the annual dinner has taken on a measure of importance as a valuable human rights forum.

"This dinner has become a major event for religious liberty in Washington, which is the political capital of the world," Graz said. "It is an extraordinary privilege to make our message of religious liberty known among those who have responsibilities and can have an influence in the world today."

Liberty editor Lincoln Steed, in welcoming the guests to the event, reminded them of the track record of the magazine in defending religious freedom, and remaining unwavering in promoting the virtues of the separation of church and state. More than a century ago Seventh-day Adventist editor Alonzo Jones argued powerfully for it in the *Sentinel*, the precursor magazine to *Liberty*. Connecting to that heritage, a special presentation of the A. T. Jones medal was made to California flight attendant Deborah Fountain, who was suspended from her job with a major airline because of her refusal to work on Sabbath. She regained the position when the airline agreed to accommodate her needs.



(Left to Right) W.Cole Durham, Professor of Law, Brigham Young University; Senator John McCain.



(Left to Right) Senator John McCain; Jonathan Gallagher; Lincoln Steed, Editor, Liberty Magazine.

Fountain, who did not know of the award before it was announced at the event, told the audience, "I stand before you tonight as someone who simply was willing to stand on my belief in God, and He has stood by [me]. I just thank you all for this honor."

Dr. Nathaniel Higgs, a 41-year veteran of Seventh-day Adventist Church work, has spent much of that time spearheading religious liberty issues in the southern region of the United States. On the eve of his retirement, Higgs received an award of merit.

"I have had many responsibilities," Higgs said of his career. "But perhaps the most rewarding of all has been working with religious liberty, helping individuals with challenges in the workplace and with protecting and defending individuals' freedom of conscience."

Another longtime Adventist Church worker who was honored for his religious liberty work was attorney Robert Nixon, former general counsel for the world church, as well as for many years a religious liberty leader, and a former vice president and president of the IRLA.

"The 35 years that I have done religious liberty [work] really is one of the most satisfying parts of my whole life," Nixon told the audience. "Men and women, there is a battle between good and evil. The good support religious liberty," he declared.

Two other attorneys—one a law professor—were also honored at the event. Jeffrey A. Berman is a partner in Sidley Austin, LLP in Los Angeles, where his work for more than 35 years has centered on the special needs of faith-based hospitals.

"My appreciation of the value of religion and religious organizations didn't come early to me, as it did with most of the people in this room," Berman conceded. But his experience with church-sponsored hospitals taught him that there was something different about these institutions.



(Left to Right) Don Schneider, President, North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists; Senator John McCain; Constacio Pinto, Deputy Chief of Mission, Embassy of East Timor-Pinto.

"In order to remain special, they need to operate in a manner that is consistent with the teachings of their sponsoring religion and consistent with their mission," Berman said. "I have also learned that some governmental efforts to intrude into those workplaces can cause them to lose what makes them special."

Noting that sometimes decisions are not in favor of the institutions involved, Berman urged persistence and patience: "Don't lose heart. As with many things, this too shall pass," he said.



Senator McCain accepts an award from Dr. John Graz, Executive Director, IRLA.

Brigham Young University law professor W. Cole Durham, Jr., was the other attorney-award recipient, honored for his contributions to religious freedom and support of various IRLA conferences. Graz paid tribute to Professor Durham's dedication: "You are a great ambassador for your country around the world, for your university and your church, and beyond that you are a fabulous ambassador of religious freedom," he said.

In response, Durham praised the IRLA: "One of the great privileges of my life has been to be associated with IRLA and work with people like John Graz and Bert Beach, and too many others to mention," he said.

Durham said he had just returned from a meeting in Amman, Jordan, with Iraqi leaders anxious to help that nation maintain religious freedom. "While the challenges vary from country to country, we are all involved in a race not very much different from that in Iraq," he pointed out. "Can we actualize the values of religious freedom faster than their achievement is unraveled by the course of human events and man's inhumanity to man?"

Durham added that members of the IRLA are also interested in the cause of liberty: "I have felt how the shared commitment to freedom of religion or belief overcomes distance, so I can say of many in the field, this is my brother or this is my sister," he said.

Also speaking at the event was U.S. Representative Roscoe Bartlett, Republican of Maryland, a Seventh-day Adventist who was honored for his religious freedom efforts. Bartlett said he believed America's unique status in the world stems in part from its commitment to individual liberty.



The banquet hall during Senator McCain's speech.

Rockville, Maryland.

"One of the reasons we are such a great nation is because there is no other country, there is no other constitution, there is no other Bill of Rights, that so supports the rights of the individual," he told the audience.

Mark A. Kellner is a freelance writer and newspaper columnist currently based in



(Left to Right) Hia Excellency Sereyath Ek, Ambassador, Royal Embassy of Cambodia; Ali Suleiman Aujali, Minister, Libyan Liaison Office



Robert Nixon (left) accepts award from John Graz.