

# Notes

The world is not what people think it is.



## Christina Khidr Ebada

The Islamic State (aka ISIS or ISIL) overran the Iraqi city of Mosul in August 2014, and shortly thereafter the Christian majority city of Qaraqosh. Hundreds of thousands of Christians who could flee from their advance did so. The elderly and disabled could not.

One family marooned in Qaraqosh included Khader, his wife Ayda, and their 3-year-old daughter Christina. Khader was blind. Elderly members of the family who could not leave Qaraqosh included Khader's sister and Ayda's father. On August 22 they were ordered to a medical facility, and then to a waiting bus. Here is Ayda's description of what happened:

We went and sat in the big bus, and then one man came aboard, I was carrying my child [Christina] in my arms, I sat in the bus and he came and took her from me, snatched her from me, and left the bus. I followed him inside [the building], and my little girl was crying inside the center. An old man, one of those ISIS people, who was apparently their leader then carried her.

He said "is this your daughter?" I said yes. He said "she is crying for you." I told him give her back to me, poor girl, what is she guilty of? She is breast feeding from me. For the sake of Allah, for the sake of Muhammad, what do you worship? Give me this little one, she is breast feeding from me. She will die if she does not see me. I am her mother.

He said "shut up. if you speak another word I will let them slaughter you. I will call them now to slaughter you." He drew his machine gun and said "go quickly to the car. If you come close to this little girl you will be slaughtered, we shall slaughter you. Come now, go!"

We got on the bus and left.

Stop and imagine the anguish of those few minutes. Stop and imagine the inhumanity.

A few weeks later Ayda and Khader received news at their refugee camp of a 31-year-old Christian woman named Rana. Rana had been captured by ISIL thanks to inaction by her husband and then possibly sold into slavery. Somehow she managed to access a phone and called her relatives. She reported that she had been taking care of Christina, but that Christina had been given to a Muslim family to be raised as a Muslim.

Khader's sister and Ayda's father would both die of neglect during the ISIL occupation of Qaraqosh.

Over the next months and years Christina had become the focus of the prayers of the Christian refugees, and of people around the globe thanks to the internet. In 2016 the refugees staged a play about the war, and Christina was a central character:

A young girl appears in a blood-stained dress. Moshtak, stunned, at first does nothing, then says: "Christina, where have you been, beautiful? Your mother is looking for you. She looked for you everywhere. Where did they take you, beautiful?" The girl continues to wander, then stops and looks out with a serious expression. The music becomes disturbing again with the return of Islamic State militants. Suddenly the doll drops and the young girl disappears... Moving through the desolation of loss, Moshtak is reminded of the Christian belief in resurrection from the dead. In turn, he reminds the Christina he remembers "that they will pass through the graveyard", but that one day "she will wear a new dress."

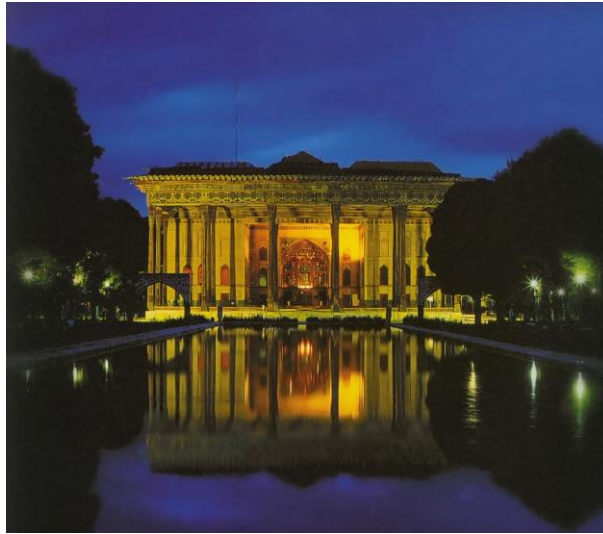
That last line was an admission that terrible times might not see a happy outcome, that the 'new dress' might only be seen in heaven. Yet God did answer everyone's prayers for Christina. The Iraqi military recovered Christina during fighting near Mosul in June 2017 and returned her to her family. The poor girl was frightened: she had no memory of them or even the Assyrian language. Everyone was thankful that she had been treated well and was 'safely home'. Please pray for them all.



Christina after her rescue, with her mother behind her

# A Young Saint in Isfahan

*The sixth angel emptied his bowl on the great river Euphrates. Its water was dried up to prepare the way for the kings of the East. – Revelation 16:12*



**Chehel Sotoon Palace, Isfahan, Iran - courtesy Arad Mojtahedi and Wikipedia**

When the Islamic Revolution began in Iran in 1979, it quickly turned against the Christians of the country. One October night Anglican Bishop Hassan Barnaba Dehqani-Tafti was shot at while in his bed in Isfahan, but the assassins succeeded only in wounding his wife Margaret in her hand. Seven months later their only son Bahram was abducted and shot dead by the Revolutionary Guards, apparently after he refused to abandon the Faith or to turn against his family. When Margaret received the news of her son's death she was at the hospital bedside of Jean Waddell, her husband's secretary; Jean was in critical condition days after having been shot by Revolutionary Guards in her home. Margaret elected to not leave Jean's side for her son until a qualified replacement could be found. Bahram would be buried after the funeral in Isfahan Cathedral.

Bishop Dehqani-Tafti later wrote about these events in his book *The Hard Awakening* – the title was borrowed from a 14<sup>th</sup> century Persian poem by Hafez [Love seemed at first an easy thing - / But ah! The hard awakening.]. In it he included a poem written in memory of his son, by Michael Burn. It is shared here in the desire to preserve its poignancy and truth:

## **In memory of BAHRAM DEHQANI-TAFTI**

murdered in Iran, May 1980

aged 24

One winter's night, says the Cathedral's booklet,  
A mason hung his slate out, and it rained,  
And down the slate the rain froze, perpendicular;  
And in the morning the new style was born.

Tears out to freeze into some architecture  
Of words for Bahram slain. Tears out to soar  
In some west window of an ode; not shrink;  
Equivocate, the Poets being embarrassed.

The Poets write, knowing he was a Christian:  
'Oh yes, a brave life...even a beautiful...  
Martyred for Human Rights...'; and that will do.  
Crucifixion they can take; not Resurrection.

Not 'Faith was part of him, and those who loved him.  
And God has put his faithful through the fire.  
Working through suffering; but will not fail  
To reunite them, and forgive his murderers.'

I never learned the language you returned to,  
Or saw the country you refused to flee.  
To me it just meant poverty, and domes, and princes  
Sauntering through gardens among nightingales.

The East that my imagination fed on  
I never dreamed would disquiet me with this death,  
Or show me Oxford's happy scholar lying  
Like a young saint in jeweled Isfahan.

Not long after Bahram's murder the Dehqani-Tafti family fled from Iran to Britain. Bishop Hassan Barnaba Dehqani-Tafti died in April 2008, and was buried in Winchester Cathedral. In October 2016 Margaret Dehqani-Tafti followed him and was laid to rest alongside her husband. One Iranian Christian eulogized her with these words:

Throughout their life together, Margaret was a constant support to Hassan and as the mother of a martyr, an uncompromising witness to truth. The events of our time remind Christians that the history of their faith is inseparable from the sacrifices and examples that people like the Dehqani-Tafti family set, representing the eternal challenge that believers witness in this fallen world. Their lives have influenced the way we think about faith in God, justice, social engagement and what it means to be the follower of Christ, and stand as testimony to the vast violence that we experience in the present age.



**Winchester Cathedral, Great Britain**



# The Church as a War Hospital for Souls

Very disquieting news from India during the week of March 11-17, 2018.

First, dozens of Hindu radicals returned to a Christian hospital in Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh state and seized part of the hospital's property, beating and manhandling nurses and nuns in the process. Worse, they blocked access to the emergency room and disconnected the building's electricity and water supply! Anyone with any kind of moral imagination would realize that these actions would put the lives of patients at risk. Indeed, the hospital administration noted that there were 200 patients with 12 in the intensive care unit; certainly some of these patients were Hindus. The police did nothing. The level of disregard for vulnerable lives in this story is really astounding. Jihadists in recent years have been known to attack hospitals, but there is a degree of cold calculation in this story that goes beyond the secretive planting of a car bomb by a handful of individuals.



**Attack on Pushpa Mission Hospital, Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh state, India - courtesy UCAN**

Second, it became known that the Indian government had created a commission that was charged with re-writing Indian history with the aim of demonstrating that Hinduism was the religion of the original inhabitants of the country. In effect, the government of India was now concocting a lie. Hinduism arose from a lengthy and complex interchange between the original people of India – the animist *Adivasi* - and the Indo-Europeans who arrived during the Vedic invasion almost four millennia ago, and so it cannot be the ‘original’ faith of India. Christian leaders have alleged that this commission was another step in the process to de-legitimatize Christians and especially Muslims and to reduce their citizenship to a lesser status.

The goal of this government commission is reminiscent of the ‘Aryan studies’ that were adopted by German colleges in the 1930’s.

The action against the hospital and especially the police connivance is reminiscent of the mob violence seen in Germany in the 1930’s.

This should be no surprise to anyone. It has been noted many times by Indian Christians that the Sangh Parivar organizations that today are tightening their grip on Indian society are all derived from the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a paramilitary organization that was directly and deliberately modelled on European fascism and especially on the German Nazis.

There are other parallels.

RSS and other Sangh Parivar leaders have openly questioned the continued use of Western democratic institutions in India.

School children are now taught about Akhand Bharat, the Undivided India which cannot be realized without the annexation of most of India’s neighbors. Here is an obvious parallel with the 1930’s German concept of Lebensraum.

So where do the parallels with 1930’s Germany fail?

The obvious difference is that the Sangh organizations all lack a Fuhrer Principle. They have no requirement that all power ultimately be invested in a single individual. There is no equivalent to an Adolf Hitler on the horizon who could take cultural imperatives and convert them into murderous policies that must be realized within his or her lifetime. This is the primary explanation for the survival of Western democratic institutions in India, up to now. We should all thank God that this is so.



Yet, we should not allow the lack of a Fuhrer Principle to blind us to the real dangers inherent in these events. Even if the future were to look just like the present, we still have the same story seen throughout the world in the past two millennia: the power of a culture with elements hostile to the Christian Faith, the power of the state against the conscience of the individual, whether Christian or virtuous non-Christian, and the corruption of truth necessary for the misuse of such powers.

And there is no guarantee that the future will look like the present.

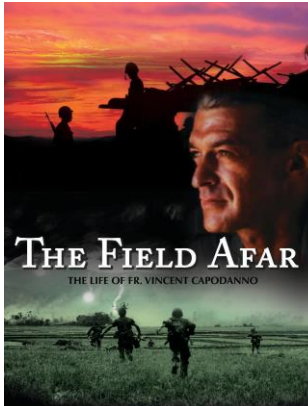
Against such forces what do we Christians have? We have truth, faith, hope, prayer, even love. None of these things are a shield from harm, as yesterday's and today's martyrs can testify. We should not expect them to be shields, even though Jesus told us we should pray for deliverance. They are rather the root and fruit of His Gospel, the Good News that is to be shared with the entire world for its sake as it approaches its ultimate destiny.



**RSS Paramilitary Rally**

# The Field Afar

*Don't you have a saying, 'It's still four months until harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. - John 4:35*



A field is well understood in Christianity as a place to sow and reap for the Kingdom of God. When a handful of American Catholics in 1906 started a journal to promote foreign missionary activities, they named it *The Field Afar*. Five years later the men and women who were attracted by this journal founded what became commonly known as the Maryknoll Missionaries. Maryknollers, as these men and women are also called, would live and suffer and die while laboring in the fields of Asia and Latin America.

Vincent Robert Capodanno was one of them. He is the subject of a film directed by Tim Moriarty and Jake Ehrlich, *The Field Afar: The Life of Fr. Vincent Capodanno*, which documents the major events of his life and the effect it had on those he served.

Vincent Capodanno was born in 1929 on Staten Island in New York City. He joined the Maryknoll Missionaries in 1949 and was ordained to the priesthood in 1958. He was first sent to a rural location on Taiwan, but after a few years was transferred to teach English at a school in Hong Kong. He was very unhappy with this assignment, and in 1965 he was granted his request to become a chaplain in the U.S. Navy; upon his acceptance he requested further training so that he could then serve with Marines, and he then promptly volunteered for an assignment in Vietnam.

*The Field Afar* is a near-perfect documentary. It briefly but meticulously describes the atmosphere of the Catholic Church in the United States of the 1950's, a time of strong awareness of Communist persecution of Christians and others in Europe and Asia. Vincent Capodanno went to Vietnam in the belief, as many others did at the beginning of the U.S. combat commitment, that he was doing God's work against Godless Communism. What made him different was that he fervently saw his role as aiding the salvation of the men on this other field, what the men who fought on it would call with many mixed emotions the 'field of valor'.

Father Capodanno did not usually wait in the medical battalion for casualties to arrive. He would wait for the last helicopter to leave on a mission and he would then attempt to board it – as a Marine officer would later put it, when everyone who could stop him had already left. Once on the battlefield he would cradle the wounded in his lap and pray over them, sometimes after dragging them out of the line of fire without regard for his safety. Back at base he would talk with the men about their salvation, about the reality of God and heaven and their need to have faith and to be prepared for death. He acted with the calm passion of a man who really believed it all.

He went back home to Staten Island in mid-1967 to visit family. By then the antiwar movement was gaining strength. *The Field Afar* documents the growth of dissent against the war both in the Church and within the Capodanno family. It didn't matter. He went back for another tour. He flew on the last helicopter to another battle near a village called Dong Son, where he continued to minister to the wounded and dying. He gave his gas mask to a Marine during a tear gas release and continued without it. He tried to aid three men lying wounded near a North Vietnamese machine gun emplacement; the gun opened fire and he was instantly killed. He would be mourned by his family, by his fellow Maryknollers and New Yorkers, and above all – as the documentary shows - by the men he served in Vietnam.



**Former Maryknoll Seminary, Ossining, New York, USA**

At the time of this writing in 2019 *The Field Afar* is in pre-release.

**Postscripts:** In late 1968 Vincent Capodanno was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor, the highest decoration of the U.S. military, and in 2006 the Catholic Church declared him a Servant of God, marking the completion of the first step in the process of canonization, which could end in the official recognition of his sainthood.

Watching *The Field Afar* makes one truth obvious: it is hard for people born after the 1960's to understand what life was like before their time. Another documentary could have explained the failures of the Vietnam War in all their heroism and woe and incompetence for all sides, something that has yet to be done (there is a reason why historians often say a hundred years must pass before an event can be fully understood). Another documentary could be made that enlarges on the cultural changes of those years, with measured respect for all viewpoints. Another documentary could have expanded the understanding of the role of Catholic Christianity in the history and conflicted tension of those years: the apocalyptic battle with Communism, latent pacifism, the Fatima 'secrets', the papal encyclical *Pacem in Terra* [*Peace on Earth*], and all the rest. But such a documentary would be the story of America, or Vietnam, or Catholicism. It would not be the story of Vincent Capodanno. *The Field Afar* has made the correct judgement as to where to draw the line with the historical and cultural backstory.

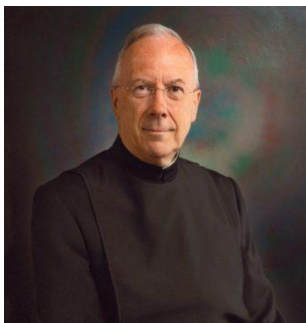
Yet these glimpses of history raise a question: is the faith of a Vincent Capodanno possible today? His world, after all, is not our world.

Maryknoll experienced its peak of martyrs just after Vincent Capodanno entered the seminary, in China and Korea. The Catholic Church was not shy in those years about preaching the suffering of its contemporary martyrs, nor were other Christian churches. Yet by 1970 martyrdom was not heard very often from the pulpit. Scripture tells us “*Remember those who **are** in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who **are** being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured*” [Hebrews 13:3]; this is an *obligation* on all Christians, not an option. The Church Fathers tell us “*The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church*” [Tertullian], and so we should see Christianity strengthened by such stories. Conversely, we should expect that a de-emphasis of martyrdom would weaken Christianity. This is what seemed to have happened in the United States and the rest of the Western world since that time.

If this is the case, then much of the blame probably lies with the Vietnam War. By 1970 real bitterness had set in with much of the American public. There was a belief, reinforced by the contents of the so-called Pentagon Papers, that the public had been tricked and manipulated into supporting the war. In a way, the stories of Christian persecution under Communism became suspect: they were now seen as possible tools of deceit even if they were true. Few wanted to hear about it anymore.

Certainly, reticence and doubt about martyrdom's place in the Church has not been the only factor in the decline of the Faith in West, not even the most important. Today the men and women who are called to follow in the footsteps of Vincent Capodanno and other ministers have many impediments thrown in their paths. There is little that Christian churches can do about the external forces, other than to accurately describe them and their warped progeny, but as churches they can certainly be true to themselves and to the memory of those who stayed steadfast in faith despite all. Please God that *The Field Afar* and other such films serve these ends.





## Br. Rene Stockman FC

In September 2017 a story exploded in the Christian media: “Murderous Monks”, “Monks to Pope: Nah, We're Gonna Keep Killing People” were just a sample of the headlines seen. One columnist wrote “I remember laughing and guffawing over a character in one of those ridiculous Dan Brown novels that featured an albino monk assassin. An albino monk assassin?! Can you imagine? Oh, how I mocked this terrible slander of Catholics...Ahem. My guffawing has met an abrupt end as I can only still say, ‘Dan Brown, there are no albino monk assassins. They're Belgian’”.

Anyone who had followed the details of this story on the internet knew that these articles were only barely true, and defamed innocent Christians, including a monk by the name of Rene Stockman. The secular media might well have intended this. Here are the facts in more detail:

1. The religious community of monks in question is the Brothers of Charity, which two centuries ago founded a now-worldwide chain of hospitals for the mentally ill. Their motto is *Deus Caritas Est* – God is Love.
2. The Belgian hospitals were not operated directly by the Brothers, but by a corporation called the Brothers of Charity Group. Only three monks sat on the corporate board: the majority were laypeople including the chairman and former economics professor Raf De Rycke, and former European Union (EU) President Herman van Rompuy – although their identities were not reported in the secular media. It is this board that approved a pro-euthanasia policy before the end of April 2017; the language of this policy text was carefully couched in a parody of the language of Christian charity.
3. The Superior General of the Brothers of Charity, Br. Rene Stockman, publicly denounced this policy in April, and hinted that at least one monk did support the new pro-death policy: “[secularization is] poisoning the congregation”. After the hospital board refused to revoke its decision Br. Rene called upon the Belgian bishops to intervene; after the appeal of the Belgian bishops to the board was ignored he asked for Vatican intervention.
4. Br. Rene published a document in May 2017 stating the position of his community’s leadership. The document attacked the policy text with an eloquent Christian defense of the dignity of the mentally ill and their right to life:

First of all, it is worth noting that the [policy] text has no references to Biblical grounds or to Christ whatsoever. Of course, this has far-reaching consequences... In mental suffering, man's existential dimension is affected, which is why psychiatric patients very often ask questions about the meaning of their lives and whether it would still be useful to go on living even though they are not terminally ill or will not die soon. This is the reason why suicide regularly occurs in mental suffering. This is where psychiatric care and therapy come in to work on that and to try to give the patient a new life perspective by any means available or possible to develop... Looking back on our rich history in psychiatric care, we find that brothers and the staff have always sought to treat, cure, heal patients in ever-better ways and with new methods or, if there was no cure, they would stay close to them. So now...[are] they going to take part in suicide from now on and call it 'euthanasia therapy'? It is as if we were helping a patient, who is on the verge of the abyss to take the leap of death, by giving him a little push. That is unworthy of the Brothers of Charity...

5. In August 2017 the Vatican issued an order to the Brothers of Charity: repeal the new policy or else all monks must sign a document denouncing the new policy. Pope Francis later stated his support of the Vatican order, as did the Belgian bishops. No such order was given to the lay Catholics on the board.
6. Br. Rene and the Brothers of Charity leadership responded to the Vatican order with a supporting document. In it Br. Rene wrote that hospital staff members – certainly including monks - had reported to him that patients had expressed fear that they will be killed, which confirmed the monks' collective opposition to the new policy:

...where does a board of directors of an organization that specializes in mental health care, but made up of jurists and economists, and without a single expert in the field, get the knowledge to give its opinion on such a matter? Some of them, with all due respect for their person, have never had first-hand experience with a psychiatric patient, let alone cared for one or treated one. And have they listened to the many objections that were raised exactly by these experts in the field, and which they continue to raise, or are they stuck in their ideological discourse, supported by a few enlightened ethicists and caught up in social trends...When



those in charge of the Organization now openly claim to follow Jesus while distancing themselves from the vision of the Vatican, the Belgian bishops, and the General Administration of the Congregation of the Brothers of Charity because, supposedly, in their eyes, they ‘live far removed from reality’, then they are sadly mistaken and this is more about pride, arrogance, and ideologization at the expense of the lives of those most in need of care. Let us call a spade a spade: euthanasia is still killing a fellow human being, even if it happens with the utmost due care. How in the name of God is this supposed to be compatible with our charism of charity, the charism of life?

7. As an aside, about this time former EU President Herman van Rompuy was outed as a board member in a tweet by Belgian citizen and Catholic University of America canon law professor Kurt Martens. Hours later van Rompuy replied with a tweet that read “The time of ‘*Rome has spoken, the matter is settled*’ is long past”. This gratuitous attack on the Catholic Church by one of its leading albeit nominal members was quite an illumination of the situation and showed where the real responsibility for the conflict had lain.
8. As the Vatican deadline neared Br. Rene stated that if the hospital board did not reverse the policy then they would be sued to force them to declare they are not Catholic and deny them the use of the ‘Brothers of Charity’ name. He also stated if any of the brothers refused to sign the letter upholding Catholic teaching against euthanasia, “then also we will start the correct procedure foreseen in canon law”, most likely their removal from their religious state. Any such renegades would be monks no longer.

Does this sound like real “Murderous Monks”? Hardly. It would appear that the major Christian media outlets had missed the facts regarding the composition of the hospital board and its longtime legal separation from the actual Brothers of Charity religious community. It had not helped that Br. Rene appeared to be a kind man, and so the media preferred to quote his more conciliatory words regarding “talks” and “dialog” to wrongfully infer he might tolerate the policy, and less so those words that demonstrated his true determination. At worst there were up to three monks who voted for this un-Christian conformance to the modern world, and the large majority appeared to oppose it and were in full accord with their church’s corrective mechanisms.

The worldwide imposition of euthanasia on more and more people is not a small story: it has been a major concern in the Christian media for decades. The massive “Murdering Monks” reaction proved this is not a small story. So why were these details missed?

- It should be expected that today’s Christian writers understand the basics of modern corporate structures, governance, and their use by church agents such as dioceses, eparchies, and religious communities. Many if not most reporters are employed under such structures. It is perplexing to think about how the correct details of this dimension of the story could have been missed.
- It appeared that the slow dribble of the facts of the story into the public view was a factor. Weeks passed between articles. Later articles often omitted facts that had been disclosed in earlier articles. Continuity was lacking.
- The board and the secular media may have encouraged the confusion regarding the status between the board and the religious community so as to deflect accountability and to weaken the monks’ community in the eye of the public. Why were the lay members [i.e., those who were not monks] not disclosed, especially a former EU President? Most Belgian articles that quoted chairman of the board De Rycke’s defense of the new policy never identified him by name, and often not even his title. Why? This trend went unnoticed by the Christian media. There is something very dark in this dimension of the story, in this deceitful shifting of responsibility that is almost as dark as euthanasia itself.
- The apparently less-than-optimal translations into English were a factor.

But, it also appears that there has been a certain lack of incredulity with many Christian reporters, which raises an interesting possibility: it may be that the obvious increase of anti-Christian pressures in recent years has started to exact a mental toll on us. Perhaps we have become too willing to believe in the powers that are arrayed against us and their demonstrated ability to seduce and co-opt Christians and Christian institutions, and so we tend to not clearly see those who still fight for us with truth and Christian forbearance, such as Br. Rene Stockman. Perhaps we need to renew, in every sense of the word, our trust in God.

# Virginia Prodan

Michael was an assassin.

By 1988 Michael had killed or tortured to death numerous people at the behest of the Securitate, the Romanian secret police. He was amply compensated for his work, and performed it with great pride. While ordinary Romanians struggled to survive under the Communist economy, Michael was able to buy nearly anything he wished. He knew that as a highly trained and ruthless member of the security apparatus he was valued and appreciated by his superiors.

One day something unusual happened. His supervisor took him to the Communist Party Palace and said he was to meet President Nicolae Ceausescu, who was about to leave on a foreign trip. Michael had never met the President before, and was greatly honored. When they met the supervisor explained to Ceausescu that Michael's new assignment was to kill Virginia Prodan. Ceausescu's eyes lit up with "intense hatred" and his lips curled up in a "sinister smile" as he contemplated the elimination of the Evangelical Christian human rights attorney and mother of two young girls who had become a major irritant to his regime. Ceausescu nodded his approval, and Michael left with the intention to kill Virginia later that day.

That day had been very long for Virginia Prodan. Her Bucharest apartment had been raided at 4:30 AM by Securitate officers who accused her of harboring contraband including U.S. dollars. She was able to prevent them from planting false evidence and they left three hours later after frightening her daughters and ransacking the apartment. When she left her home she was detained and taken to Securitate headquarters, where she found several of her clients standing in a line awaiting interrogation. Her wave to them was slapped down. During interrogation she was threatened with death if she did not sign a document that purported – because she was not allowed to read it – that she would no longer defend Christians in the courts. Her refusal was met with her face slammed into the desk; the demands, refusals, and blows were repeated until the document was soaked in her blood. She was threatened with the abduction of her daughters. Virginia kept praying for her interrogators, and she prayed that she would have the strength to love them. She was then escorted past her horrified clients and released. Not one of her clients gave into pressure: all refused to collaborate against her.

Virginia went to her office and attended to her wounds. She spent the rest of the day working on her cases. When closing time came her secretary announced as she left that there was one last client, and so Virginia welcomed Michael into her office.

Michael had toyed in his mind with how he would kill Virginia. He decided that he would not strangle her but would frighten her with his gun. He pulled it out and said she would now die because she had not heeded the government's warnings. Virginia realized there was nothing she could do. She was alone with her assassin. And then she remembered, she was not alone. God was with her, regardless of the outcome.

Virginia prayed that she would say the right words to Michael; the exact words she used are recorded in her book *Saving My Assassin*. She used both Christian and humanistic arguments, but found that the humanistic logic, while true, had no effect. The Christian truths were different: Michael listened. After some time Michael left her office in tears; his life was saved from retribution for his failure only because in his grief he lost control of his automobile and was hospitalized following the crash. They met again, years later in Texas where Virginia had resumed her legal career following her exile, and Michael told her how he had become a Christian and a pastor.

How did Virginia survive? As she later wrote, "I should be dead".

Obviously, one factor was Michael's decision on his method, which left her free to speak.

Another may have been that her prayers during her interrogation earlier that day had prepared her. The fervor of her love toward Michael during her confrontation with him may have been all the stronger for it. Her visible injuries may have only enhanced her honest appearance.

Another factor is that Michael's visit with Ceausescu may have paradoxically prepared him to hear the Gospel from Virginia's lips. He saw evil, face to face, and he could not help but contrast that evil with the love he saw and heard in Virginia. It seems as if cosmic forces came to full opposition in his person for one moment, and he felt the power of that conflict. He knew that Virginia spoke the truth when she told him he had to choose which God he would follow, Ceausescu or the true God of the Bible.



The last factor is, of course, that God wanted to save Michael. Virginia herself gives all credit to God for Michael's conversion, but 'conversion' is not really the right word. Michael experienced a *re-birth*. He was no longer the same person after he heard Virginia's testimony. He saw what he truly had become, and he repented. It would seem that Virginia Prodan is not only an able Christian attorney, but she also had been a midwife in Michael's rebirth by the Holy Spirit. Let us all joyfully thank God for her service and witness and inspiration.

Please read ***Saving My Assassin*** for the full details of this miracle of the Spirit, this essay can only serve as a study guide.

Virginia may be contacted via <http://viriniaprodanbooks.com/>

## Fr. Douglas al-Bazi

When the Islamic State conquered the Nineveh Plain in August 2014 and drove hundreds of thousands of Iraqi Christians to flee for their lives, most headed for the Kurdistan region of Iraq. Seven hundred found refuge at St. Elias Church in the Ainkawa suburb of Erbil. The pastor, Fr. Douglas Joseph al-Bazi, a Chaldean [i.e., not Roman] Catholic priest who himself was a refugee from persecution, opened the churchyard to the refugees and began to organize a refugee camp.



**Courtesy Aid to the Church in Need**

The necessities of life for these people became Fr. Douglas's concern. The refugees needed to be sheltered and fed. Their spiritual needs also required attention, and Fr. Douglas knew that Christian faith would support them. When asked on September 29, 2014 about his efforts he replied "Just think about their spiritual life - how can they live like this? But as Christians, we have to get inside the pain. Christ said, 'Carry your cross and follow me.' So if we take that cross, perhaps in 20 years' time, we will say it was a time of opportunity because we did believe". An interesting view: no belief, no faith, would yield no opportunity, spiritual or otherwise.

Opportunity always remained high on Fr. Douglas' list of concerns. He became very concerned with the educational and cultural growth of his new parishioners. Solicitations for books, sheet music, instruments, and even people to volunteer as tutors were all made by him. Some clergy were critical, but on June 19, 2015 he had a reasonable answer for them:

Some priests have asked me if I'm mad, saying that people are dying and you are buying books...but when they grow up, I want them to say that when we entered persecution, that is the time I started learning French, that is the time I learned to play guitar...We believe kids are our future, and teenagers, the girls, the females especially, are our next future. If we lose them we are going to lose the community.

Fr. Douglas had also come into conflict with his church leadership. His bishops had expressed their desire that their flock not leave Iraq for America, Australia, or Europe. These bishops went largely unheeded. Christians who could leave did leave. There were now more Assyrian Christians in Chicago than in Iraq. Fr. Douglas could not help but take their side, as seen in this December 29, 2014 comment:

I care about my people. I don't care about the 'Middle East.' The Middle East for almost 2,000 years has been the same. It's the same war, the same conflict. So, why do I have to put my people inside that war? Why?...I am angry because I know Islam very well. In Baghdad they blew up my church. I drove by three bombings, and twice my car was destroyed. I got shot in my leg by an AK-47 – by Islam, and they kidnapped me for nine days [during which he lost teeth from beatings with a hammer – Ed.] ...You know who represents Islam very well? The Islamic State. They are the true Islam. So if someone says, 'No, they do not represent Islam, Hamas does not represent Islam, Hezbollah does not represent Islam.' Who's left then? Come on guys. Come on. Wake up. You know, stop saying those stupid things – it's just stupid. What for? If I lose the last drop of our blood [by encouraging Christians to stay], what is the point of that?

While this comment can be seen as a critique of some church leadership or of Muslims, its main targets are the well-meaning Westerners who intend to protect innocent Muslims with the “true Islam” defense. This intent, as Fr. Douglas showed, is ultimately dishonest, because it is Muslims themselves who decide what is “real Islam” and who may belong to the Ummah, the Muslim community. The truest statement would be that the Islamic State is the true Islam, and the thousands of Muslims who fled from the Islamic State along with their Christian neighbors and who suffered with them in refugee camps are also the true Islam. Everyone in this story needs prayer, Fr. Douglas, his parishioners, all refugees, and even the members of the Islamic State who cannot now understand why “the girls, the females especially, are our next future”.

**Postscript:** By 2019 Fr. Douglas al-Bazi had joined the Assyrian diaspora outside Iraq. His superiors in the church decided to send him to a Chaldean Catholic parish in Auckland, New Zealand. On March 15 of that year Fr. Douglas was thrust into a complete role reversal for him,



after an Australian white supremacist shot 91 Muslims at a mosque and an Islamic community center in Christchurch, killing 51. This priest who 'knew Islam very well' sent a floral arrangement with an Arabic inscription of support to a nearby mosque in Auckland, and calmed his fearful parishioners with the following words:

I am still shocked, me and my people, how this could happen here in New Zealand...we fully understand as Iraqi people, especially Christian, we really understand, because we are survivors of genocide, systematic genocide...There is a lady in my community - they beheaded her son in front of her. Another man, they killed his parents in front of him...I told them, no, this is not the time to be scared. It is the time to be united...I don't know what we can do for those [mosque] survivors, for those relatives, the only thing we can do is pray for them and say, 'This is not New Zealand'.

## Lin Zhao



There are no documents that prove the tyrant came to visit the 'little girl', nothing available, but she told her mother and sister about it during a brief medical parole. In their great fear they demanded she say no more of it. Why did he come? Poetry? He loved poetry, and likely knew of her talent, of *A Day in Prometheus' Passion*, or of *Seagull* with its theme of resurrection. Desire? He had 200 concubines, and even desired his son's wife to the point he did not tell her of her husband's death in one of his wars until a year had passed, so perhaps. Curiosity? Perhaps he wondered why the 'little girl' who had helped kill his enemies was now his enemy? But perhaps he came just to gloat. He now held sway over almost a fourth of humanity, had defeated his domestic foes and stymied the Americans in Korea, and killed up to 50 million of his own people in the largest famine in history while promoting an autarchy that diverted rice to make alcohol fuel for his nuclear missiles. He told her "I refuse to believe I can't subdue you stupid little girl!"

Lin Zhao would have bristled at the label 'little girl' although she was young and slight of build. Born Peng Lingzhao, she took the *nom de plume* Lin Zhao for her writings. At the time of her first arrest she had been a dedicated Communist for almost ten years. As an idealistic teen she had written propaganda for the land reform teams that killed 2 million 'Rightists', actions that she witnessed and supported. She began to doubt her leaders only in 1957 after her friends were arrested in a purge – some just to make the tyrant's arrest quotas - and were sent to the countryside during the great famine, some never to return. She herself was punished as a Rightist but remained in the city due to her frail health. She had been baptized at her Methodist secondary school shortly before her conversion to Communism, and she returned to her Christian faith in the three years prior to her 1960 jailing.

At her arraignment she was so outspoken against Communist injustice that the judge questioned her sanity. Once jailed she was continually beaten and tortured, and when denied ink she decided to follow an ancient Chinese tradition by writing in her own blood, eventually losing all feeling

in her fingers. Her knowledge of Christianity must have been limited to her brief exposures at school and an occasional worship service; consequently her writings began not as carefully measured Christian thoughts but as flaming denunciations of the evils she saw. In later years she called for God's wrath to be poured from the sky, even if she was consumed. However, she was aware of the command of Jesus to love one's enemies, and so she wrote of her persecutors:

As a Christian...I have come to see more clearly and deeply the many terrifying and shocking evils committed by your demonic political party! I grieved and wept for them!...Yet even when I touched the darkest, the most terrifying, the bloodiest, and the most savage center of your power - the core of evil - I still glimpsed, I did not completely overlook, the occasional spark of humanity in you...Then I cried in even greater anguish! I cried for your blood-smeared souls, which are unable to rid themselves of evil and are dragged by its terrifying weight ever deeper into the swamp of death...as I write this, hot tears are rushing into my eyes.

Lin Zhao's writings showed signs of mental disarray as the beatings and tortures continued. She would cry out in her written prayers "No, No! God will not let me go insane. As long as I live, he will certainly keep my senses, as he knows my memory!", and they would then resume their lucidity. It is possible she imagined the tyrant's visit, but she accurately prophesized the tyrant's unleashing of the Cultural Revolution that would kill another 2 million. Just once she heard a voice say "Rise, my child, and go fight the battle for me". Though not Catholic, she wrote a letter to the Vatican pleading that "holy and righteous churches" come to view the hundreds of thousands of Chinese suicides [including her father's, just days after her arrest] as lesser evils than those of their persecutors, and to have Masses said for their souls. In her last letter to her mother she wrote in contrition that while she had no blood on her hands she was "splashed with some blood". These letters of course went straight to her file.

In May 1966 Lin Zhao told a friend she expected to be executed; the order was secretly given in late 1967, but knowledge of it was kept from her until the date of execution. Her jailers tired of her shouted witness of the regime's crimes to the other inmates and to the public who passed the prison, so in her last months they moved her to an emptied floor and fitted her with a rubber mask to muffle her voice. On April 29, 1968, Red Guards stormed the prison hospital, pulled her

IV line, and dragged her out as her doctor hid trembling in his office. She was gagged and forced to stand wearing her hospital gown in the prison auditorium while the revolutionaries screamed their hatred. She was then dragged behind the auditorium and shot dead. Lin Zhao was 35. A policeman appeared at her mother's home and demanded payment for the bullet.

In 1981 Lin Zhao was 'rehabilitated', and by a miracle, perhaps thanks to official admirers of her poetry, her prison writings were released in 1984 to her sister. Thousands, perhaps millions, of Chinese have read them since their publication in 2013.

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There are no documents that prove the tyrant personally ordered the death of the 'little girl' who he could not subdue, nothing available, but it is known he issued this 'supreme instruction' regarding the believers he made into martyrs: "There certainly will be those who refuse to change till they die. They are willing to go see God carrying their granite heads on their shoulders. That will be of little consequence".

How wrong he was, as he was in all else besides worldly reward and power. In heaven and on earth, Lin Zhao's life is one of great consequence thanks to the faith and honesty and tenacity that she carried within. The tyrant's heirs and successors know this well: today her gravesite hosts a video surveillance camera to record the many who visit to honor her.

# Adele Dirsyte

## *Jesus wept* – John 11:35

When we Christians consider the word *sacrifice*, we innately know the broad outlines of the meaning of the word. We understand the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross, and of His martyrs. We understand the sacrifice of a life of service and ministry to the Church. We understand the sacrifice of family members to each other. We understand children born, kitchen burns, long hours away at work, old age brought early. We understand health impaired as missionaries. We can even understand death from persecution.

But the sacrifice of one's sanity? That would seem to be a thing too hard to ask.

The modern world, like the Church, asks that we follow its commandments, but they are not the same. Instead of "Love one another as I have loved you" it offers the popular "I AM" from which all else is derived. This is not the "I AM" of the truest but still woefully inexact description of God, heard from the burning bush on Sinai and from Jesus as He stood before the Sanhedrin. It is the "I AM" of the human self, the autonomous imperial *me* that is the basis of modern law, consumption, and desire. Euthanasia has grown in the modern world in large part as a dark affirmation of this *me*-ism, for if *I* were to disappear in a mental or neurological illness, then *I* would no longer exist.



Adele Dirsyte  
Courtesy angelorum.lt

The story of Adele Dirsyte tells us the modern world is wrong

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Adele Dirsyte was a teacher and charity director in Vilnius, Lithuania. During the Second World War she helped hide Jews from the German occupation. After the Soviets returned she continued to do the same for people trying to escape arrest and deportation to Siberia, but she was caught on March 6, 1944. She was sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment on November 11, 1944, and then sent into the Gulag labor camp system in the summer of 1947.

She arrived at a camp in Komi, possibly Ukhtpechlag, near the Arctic in European Russia. The cold, hunger, work, and lack of medical care all weakened her. But she spent her free moments in conversations on Christian faith and organized prayer meetings.

Adele was transferred in the summer of 1949 to Ozerlag or Tayushetlag, near Irkutsk in eastern Siberia, when she and the other women spent long hard hours in railroad construction. In the winter of 1950 she was moved to another Arctic camp in Kolyma in the far east, then in the summer to a camp at nearby Magadan, possibly Sevvostoklag. While in Kolyma she began to compose a small book (4 by 7 centimeters and 40 pages) with fabric covers decorated with ornamentations: the *Prayer Book for Girls Exiled in Siberia* [sometimes republished as *Mary Save Us*]. Her health continued to fail.

One day Adele discovered she could obtain the Eucharist from a priest at a nearby camp. She became the person who would carry and distribute Communion in the women's camp. Soon the guards discovered her actions from their informants, and she was beaten in a cold underground cell. She never stopped. Her ministrations continued and the beatings continued. During 'hygienic processing' the other women noticed the extensive bruising on her body and her missing teeth, and they came to see that Adele had been selected for a slow death. Adele refused to confirm their anger and asked them to pray for the guards because they were poor people.

During the late autumn of 1953 Adele disappeared. She was taken to a punishment cell, initially for a week, but did not then return. In April 1954 she returned to the Magadan camp. She had been extensively tortured, but she hardly spoke about it, only once mentioning the cruelty by which half of her hair had been pulled out. Most of the time her efforts to talk about her experience would end in convulsions and cries for her parents. Near the end of the year she was sent to the psychiatric ward of the camp hospital. Adele's friends brought her food but she refused to eat, sincerely telling them they needed it more than she. She wasted away, and no fellow believer saw her die. A death certificate with her name was issued on September 26, 1955 in Khabarovsk. She was 46 years old.

This is a most difficult story of deep sorrow and pathos. Adele Dirsyte appears to us as tragic figure. Nothing is sadder than her delusion of food scarcity which led her to sacrifice her life for her friends when no sacrifice was needed. She could not have foreseen the price she would pay

for her commitment to Christ and the sharing of His real food with others. Yet notice how even after the loss of her sanity she still maintained her concern for others. Adele still loved and cared even after the Adele everyone knew had been taken away. If there is a unique moral to this story for us today it is that one does not need a great mind to be a great soul.

May Adele be granted consolation and joy for all eternity.

May we all be granted the privilege and joy of her eternal company.



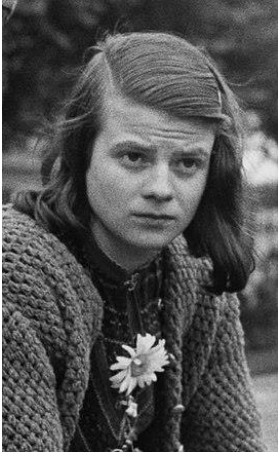
**Mask of Sorrow, Magadan, Russia**

**Courtesy Sergey Kovalev**



# Sophie Scholl

*...and you will be dragged before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them and the Gentiles. When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you at that time; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. - Matthew 10:18-20*



Munich, Germany, February 22, 1943. Three young friends were hustled into a courtroom by the Gestapo, the secret police. They had been arrested days before for circulating anti-Nazi leaflets. The room was packed with Nazis.

Two were young men, medical students and German Army medics. One, Christoph Probst, was married with three children. The other was Hans Scholl, a brilliant former Hitler Youth. The third was his sister Sophie, a dedicated nursing student who loved children, conversation, swimming (she was known to nonchalantly swim across

rivers just to continue a hike), and music. They were not ideologues or revolutionaries. They were just friends who were revolted by German war crimes and inspired by German clergy and academics who shared their revulsion. They were Christians, or soon would be.

The trial began with examinations of the prisoners. The judge, Roland Freisler, belittled Christoph Probst and in turn Hans Scholl; he then called Sophie Scholl to the stand and berated her.

She stared back at Freisler, and spoke against the murder of the Jews, adding "Shall we be forever cast out from all humanity?" Freisler, who was one of the 15 men present at the January 1942 Wannsee Conference - where the German bureaucracy delineated the roles and responsibilities for the murder of millions - replied "A master race doesn't care". Sophie cast about for words:

Your master race really wants peace. It wants human dignity to be respected again. It wants God...compassion...empathy...

The angels must have sung, though no one heard.

Freisler, for once at a near loss for words, quickly shut down the examination. During the final statements Sophie did not plead for leniency. She prophesied that Freisler would "soon be standing where we stand now", though that would not come to be: he would die almost exactly two years later in an American air raid on his Berlin courtroom, before the end of the war could ensure his arrest.

The angels must have sung, though no one heard.

The three friends were found guilty and sentenced to death. They were hustled back to prison, where they were shocked by the revelation that they were to be denied the customary time for an appeal, per order of the highest authority in Berlin. The executions would be only hours away. They prayed and were visited by clergy.

Hans and Sophie met their parents. Her mother Magdalena said "Now I will never see my little girl come through our door again...Remember Jesus". Sophie answered "We will meet again soon. In eternity". A few minutes later a newly baptized Christoph Probst said nearly the same to the Scholl siblings.

The angels must have sung.

Sophie was brought before the prosecutor, who announced that 'justice' was to take its course. She calmly stared him down with an odd small smile and a look in her eyes that might have been a knowing pity. The black curtain parted behind her, she was lain on the table, the blade fell.

The angels sang, and she must have heard, and then her brother, and then their friend Christoph.

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Why do we live?

Simply, we live to live. To seize the day. To spend each moment in mindfulness of the others around us and of our inner souls. To do what God would want done, in the ordinary and the extraordinary. To enjoy creation. To endure suffering. To love. To follow Jesus Christ.

To inspire songs for all eternity.

# Hans Scholl

*Amen, I say to you, tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God before you. When John came to you in the way of righteousness, you did not believe him; but tax collectors and prostitutes did. Yet even when you saw that, you did not later change your minds and believe him. - Matthew 21:31-32*

The general outlines of the anti-Nazi White Rose German resistance movement are well known. A group of college and medical school students, and one professor, wrote anti-Nazi leaflets under Christian humanist motivations, and paid for it with their lives. The six publishers were Sophie Scholl, Hans Scholl, Christoph Probst, Alexander Schmorell, Kurt Huber, and Willi Graf (a seventh would die just for collecting money for Kurt Huber's impoverished widow, and the Jewish wife of their benefactor would die in Auschwitz).



Interestingly, it has become known that there had been some sanitization of the White Rose history in the immediate postwar era. The first revision came when it became known that Professor Kurt Huber was both a Protestant and an ardent Nazi who opposed Nazi policies that he saw as destructive, such as those based on totalitarianism and rampant militarism.

In 2009 the British historian Frank McDonough created a major stir with the release of the first biography of Sophie Scholl which made unrestricted use of her writings. He revealed that as a teen Hans Scholl had nearly been prosecuted in late 1937 for having homosexual involvement with another teen in a prohibited youth group. Had the prosecution proceeded he certainly would have been sent to a concentration camp; he was saved only because the judge considered Hans to be so Aryan that the accusation was unbelievable. The Scholl family lovingly accepted him home. There was no repeat of the incident, though girlfriends always said he was distant.

After 2009 history would be again rewritten. Suddenly Hans' Christian motives in his efforts against Nazism were largely dismissed. For example, McDonough claimed that his anti-Nazi sentiments began at the time of his 1937 arrest (thus linking his anti-Nazi sentiments to the time of the disclosure of the homosexual incident), but it is well documented that they began earlier with his disenchantment as a Hitler Youth over the conformity and anti-intellectualism he saw at

a September 1936 Nuremberg rally. The homosexual liberation movement of our era has continued to diminish Hans' Christianity and to appropriate him as their martyr.

Can this be true? The White Rose Fourth Leaflet of July 1942 strongly says no. Co-written by Hans Scholl and Alexander Schmorell, it made eloquent and grounded use of the language of apocalyptic Christian eschatology:

...Every word that comes from Hitler's mouth is a lie. When he says peace, he means war, and when he blasphemously uses the name of the Almighty, he means the power of evil, the fallen angel, Satan. His mouth is the foul-smelling maw of Hell, and his might is at bottom accursed. True, we must conduct a struggle against the National Socialist terrorist state with rational means; but whoever today still doubts the reality, the existence of demonic powers, has failed by a wide margin to understand the metaphysical background of this war. Behind the concrete, the visible events, behind all objective, logical considerations, we find the irrational element: The struggle against the demon, against the servants of the Antichrist. Everywhere and at all times demons have been lurking in the dark, waiting for the moment when man is weak; when of his own volition he leaves his place in the order of Creation as founded for him by God in freedom; when he yields to the force of evil, separates himself from the powers of a higher order; and after voluntarily taking the first step, he is driven on to the next and the next at a furiously accelerating rate. Everywhere and at all times of greatest trial men have appeared, prophets and saints who cherished their freedom, who preached the One God and who His help brought the people to a reversal of their downward course. Man is free, to be sure, but without the true God he is defenseless against the principle of evil...

Is this evidence of a worldview that dramatically excluded the Christian? Of course not. Did Hans give little input for this text? Given that his last word at his execution was "Freedom!", it would seem not. Incidentally, this use of 'freedom' in the Fourth Leaflet is highly sophisticated and accurate from the viewpoint of Christian theology.

It is a matter of historical record that Hans was fascinated with the public opposition to Nazism by Catholic bishops such as Clemens August Graf von Galen, Konrad von Preysing, and Josef Frings, to the point where his original motive to obtain a mimeograph machine was to copy their homilies, rather than publish his own leaflets. Later, the Lutheran prison chaplain who spiritually

supported Hans before his execution heard him express a desire to convert to Catholicism; he told Hans such a conversion right then would likely further upset his parents, and in charity Hans agreed. The idea that Christian ideals did not greatly motivate Hans is absurd, despite what today's activists would prefer.

However, there is another side to this controversy. Some Christians have in effect sided with these activists: they have been quick to disown Hans Scholl as a Christian due to his homosexuality. Given the undeniable facts of his faith in Christ, is this reasonable? Again, no. It is certainly and unfortunately true that people with strong libidos (that is, most of us) of any orientation can have difficulty adopting the Christian life, but it is also true that Hans followed Jesus “in the way of righteousness” better than most people of his time and place. As such he should be an inspiration to all of us. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that a ‘gospel’ that would exclude him would also have to exclude prostitutes and tax collectors, and that would hardly be Christian after all.



**White Rose Memorial, Munich, Germany**

**Courtesy Gryffindor, Wikimedia Commons**

# Saint Harambe

*Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. - Matthew 5:11-12*

In the Beatitudes Jesus speaks of the blessedness of persecution in terms of insult and false witness. He does not mention indifference. Indifference to the Gospel is mentioned in other verses, but it is not seen in the context of persecution. Perhaps this is as it should be, but the modern preference for the “whatever” of indifference can often be seen as an enabler of persecution.

On May 28, 2016, a 3-year-old child entered a gorilla enclosure at a zoo in Cincinnati in the U.S. state of Ohio, where he was captured and dragged by a curious full grown western lowland silverback gorilla named Harambe. The zoo was forced by the circumstances to save the child from further harm by killing the gorilla. The episode, and the public (often hysterical) reaction, was widely reported in the media.

The Newsbusters web site followed this episode with an article maintaining that the gorilla story received six times the media coverage than has been given to the February 2015 beheading of 21 African and Egyptians Christians in Libya by the Islamic State. Newsbusters commented that animal interest stories always receive more media coverage than Christian persecution stories.

Another analysis of contemporary priorities could be performed by checking the Harambe petitions on the change.org web site. Over a hundred could be found. Many petitions were [hopefully] obvious pranks that called for the gorilla’s canonization or even resurrection (!), but others were more sober and attracted large followings. Here are some results:

Make a memorial for Harambe – 20,918 supporters

Safer conditions for animals confined in zoos – 24,655 supporters

Support “Harambe’s Law” – 214,780 supporters

Justice for Harambe – 510,977 supporters

By contrast, here is the sole petition for the martyred Christians:

Commemorate 21 Martyrs of Libya – 482 supporters

Christians should take a good look at those numbers, and realize their true position in this indifferent world.

*And rejoice!*





# Sowing Dragon's Teeth

*Then the dragon became angry with the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring, those who keep God's commandments and bear witness to Jesus.*

## – Revelation 12:16

Argentina has in recent years seen multiple attacks on Christians in the name of liberation. This essay is a simple catalog of such events and a brief consideration of their implications.

- **November 1, 2012:** Fr Alejandro Ruso, the rector of the Metropolitan Cathedral in Buenos Aires, requested that police erect a metal fence around the cathedral to protect it from pro-abortion and anti-clerical demonstrators. The demonstrators had shouted blasphemies against Jesus and threw eggs which hit the building and a priest.
- **September 25, 2013:** Five high school students set fire to a row of pews and the celebrant's chair in St Ignatius of Loyola parish in Buenos Aires and painted anti-Christian graffiti including "The only church that enlightens is that which burns".
- **November 26, 2013:** Bishop Alfonso Delgado led over 700 in prayer at the cathedral in San Juan while it was attacked by pro-abortion feminists, many in a state of undress. The women physically and sexually attacked men who were locked arm-in-arm in a human barrier to protect the cathedral. One of the men, Oscar Campillay, said "[There] was something twisted and inhuman there, almost diabolic, that made one shudder. The attack on our bodies was the least of things. One can only remain in astounded horror seeing what a creature, a child of God, a woman destined to wonderful things, can become when choosing personal degradation, egoism and death against her own nature...It is of public knowledge that sponsoring and logistics [of the feminist event] are provided by the national government through its social ministries...In a certain way, being attacked and persecuted will become an inseparable part of our Christian identity". Another church defender, Roberto Gomez, said "I was always praying for the conversion of the souls of the people I had in front of me...We asked them [the police] to please defend us but they told us that they had orders not to act".
- **October 11, 2015:** Half-naked feminists attacked the Mar del Plata cathedral, pelting parishioners with stones and bottles.

- **September 28, 2016:** Pro-abortion feminists attacked the Neuquen cathedral and defaced a mural of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo. The Mothers of Plaza de Mayo were a group of women who had courageously opposed the Dirty War of the early 1980's military junta in which their daughters and sons disappeared. Apparently sisterhood is not very deep.
- **March 2017:** A feminist demonstration in front of the Tucuman cathedral featured a woman dressed as Mary the mother of Jesus undergoing a simulated abortion.

The reader should not be quick to dismiss this last act, which has become a common idea in some circles. It is in fact just another proof of the growth of the idea that the world would have been a better place if Jesus had been aborted. The corollary to this idea is that His followers also are a hindrance to utopia and should have met a similar 'fate'. Again, do not dismiss this. We live in a world where some advocate a population reduction of perhaps 6 *billion* people to 'save the planet', and even support the Voluntary [for now] Human Extinction Movement.

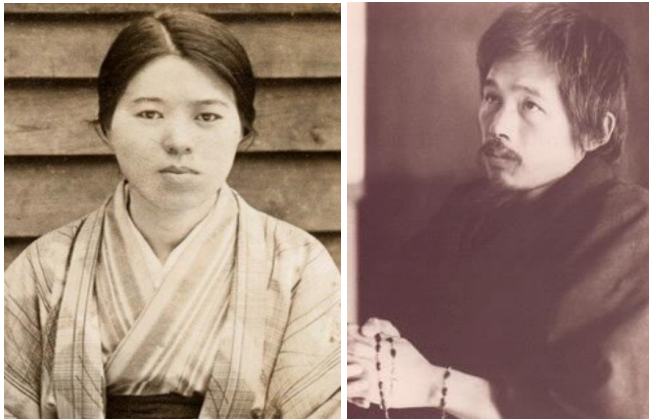
Dragon teeth are being sown in fertile soil, and we cannot predict what monsters may sprout in another 50 or 100 years. Pray, if not for yourself then for your children, or for your grandchildren's grandchildren.

## Dr. Takashi Nagai and Marina Nagai Midori

*Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?” And the king will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these, you did it to me.”*

- Matthew 25:38-41, a favorite passage of Dr. Paul Takashi Nagai

This story might seem unbelievable to modern eyes.



Takashi Nagai was born into a samurai family on February 3, 1908 in Matsue, Shimane Prefecture, Japan. His father was a country doctor, and he was expected to follow in his father's footsteps rather than his own desire to be an artist and writer. He was also attracted to science and medical research, and so he decided to not attend the more

prestigious medical schools at Tokyo and Osaka, but rather the Western-oriented school at Nagasaki.

While Nagai was at medical school his mother had a stroke. He made it home in time to be at her bedside, and her death caused him to begin to doubt his materialist and atheistic education. These doubts increased after he began to read Blaise Pascal's *Pensees*, and again after he took lodging with a Christian family, the Moriyamas. The Moriyama family was descended from the *Kakure Kirishitan*, the Hidden Christians who had resisted persecution and assimilation for three centuries. Nagasaki was the center of the *Kakure Kirishitan* community.

Nagai partially lost the hearing in one ear just days before his graduation, which barred him from practicing most medical specialties, and so he elected to become a radiologist at a time when radiology was not well understood and sometimes claimed the lives of its practitioners.

He was called up by the army for medical duty in China and became repulsed by the harm done to Chinese civilians. During this time he was supported by his landlord's daughter, Marina Moriyama Midori, who gave him a sweater and gloves she had knitted, a catechism, letters, and prayers. Upon his return from China he began instructions to be received into the Catholic Church; one of his catechists, his *sensei*, would be a janitor from his medical school.

**Christianity is all about God's revelation of mystery.**

**– Fr. Matsusaburo Moriyama during his first catechesis lesson with Dr. Takashi Nagai**

Takashi Nagai took the name Paul at his baptism and then married Midori, and they continued to nurture their spiritual lives. He began activities with local Christian charities. His patients included the Polish Franciscan missionary Fr. Maximilian Kolbe, who had established a monastery just outside Nagasaki. Kolbe returned to Poland in 1936, leaving the monastery in the care of others. Midori would sometimes walk there for morning Mass and return home in time to make breakfast.

After the birth of their son Makoto and daughter Ikuko, he was sent on another army tour in China, which only deepened his view that it was an unjust war and that Japanese propaganda were lies in the service of corrupt leaders; still, he became a decorated hero for having volunteered to slip through Chinese lines to get help for his surrounded unit. One incident had a profound effect on him: he had been informed on Christmas Eve 1939 that the Chinese army was expected to capture his field hospital, and so he was ordered to pour gasoline on his patients and kill them so they would not be captured. He spent the entire night on his knees in prayer. In the morning he was told the order had been rescinded.

While he was in China Midori gave birth to their daughter Sasano, but the little girl died soon afterward, and then Ikuko died at about two years of age. After returning to Nagasaki he resumed his radiology research and hospital service, and he and Midori saw the birth of their daughter Kayano. Ultimately he became the dean of the medical school.

***You shall love your neighbor as yourself***

**– Matthew 22:39**

On the day his country announced it was at war with the United States, Dr. Nagai had a ‘presentment’ of the destruction of Nagasaki. He was shaken by the experience.

As the war progressed a shortage of photographic film and the increase of war casualties brought to Nagasaki led him to spend long hours using a fluoroscope, a direct viewing instrument which gave him a massive cumulative radiation exposure. In June 1945, at age 37, he was given a diagnosis of terminal leukemia. His remaining life expectancy was given as one to three years. At the same time the Japanese authorities doubted his patriotism, as they did with all Japanese Christians, and he underwent questioning by the Kenpeitai secret police despite his heroic wartime service. He was bluntly told that upon the expected invasion all Japanese Christians would be interned in concentration camps.

**We said before we married, and before you went to China the second time, that if our lives are spent for the glory of God, then life and death are beautiful.**

**– Marina Nagai Midori, after her husband told her of his fatal illness**

When Takashi Nagai heard that Hiroshima had been destroyed he was sure that a nuclear attack on Nagasaki was imminent, and he sent his children to the family cabin in the countryside with his mother-in-law. Takashi could not in conscience leave the hospital. Midori refused to leave his side. On August 8, 1945 – the day before the attack - he forgot his lunch and returned unexpectedly to their home, now empty of their children, only to find his wife sobbing uncontrollably on the floor before the family crucifix. *She knew*. Due to his air raid duty that night he never saw her again.

Dr. Paul Takashi Nagai was almost killed in the attack on Nagasaki, people just feet from his office died. After days of treating the seriously injured he was able to return to the rubble of his home, where he found Midori’s ashes and a few bones. She had been praying at the moment of nuclear detonation: her glass rosary beads had been fused together in her hand by the heat.

As a result of the explosion he had a severed temporal artery. His surviving colleagues were unable to stop the internal bleeding. By mid-September 1945 he was dying from this injury and from radiation sickness: he had the ‘death rattle’ of Cheyne–Stokes respiration. Midori’s mother brought him some holy water from Fr. Kolbe’s monastery, which had been untouched by the explosion, and asked him to drink it. When he drank he heard a woman’s voice ask that he pray for Kolbe’s intercession, which he did despite having no knowledge of Kolbe’s 1941 martyrdom in Auschwitz. He prayed to God as well. His bleeding immediately stopped and the radiation sickness abated.



**Midori's rosary**

Courtesy <https://www.amicinagai.com/>

Three-fifths of the Christians of Japan would be dead by the end of 1945.

**God concealed within the universe a precious sword...The human race, with this discovery of atomic power, now holds the key to its future destiny. A key to survival or destruction. I believe the only way to the proper use of this key is authentic religion.**

**- Dr. Paul Takashi Nagai, *The Bells of Nagasaki***

Dr. Nagai was invited by his bishop to give a speech in front of the ruined cathedral in November 1945, and he made controversial remarks to the effect that the Christians of Nagasaki should be honored because they were sacrificed so that their suffering would ensure millions would not die in a future war. He made note of the fact that the attacking aircraft were sent to the city of Kokura first, and only weather conditions had prevented the use of the new weapon there.

In a sense the bomber's diversion to Nagasaki was an act of God: given his 1941 'presentment' Nagai could not bring himself to believe it was random.

He lived five years beyond that given to him in his June 1945 diagnosis, until May 1, 1951. During that time he lived in a small hermitage he built near Ground Zero and called *Nyokodo – As Yourself Hall* – where he became an artist and writer. His books and essays on Christianity, love, and the mystery of suffering became known world-wide. *The Bells of Nagasaki* became the first story of the war from the Japanese viewpoint to be allowed publication by the Allied Occupation, and was followed with nineteen other books including *We of Nagasaki*, *Thoughts from Nyokodo*, and *Leaving My Beloved Children Behind*. He was later defamed by Japanese Communists for his Christian writings, but an official parliamentary investigation in Tokyo cleared him of charges that he had invented his story.

***And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.***

**– 1 Corinthians 13:13**

This story might seem unbelievable to modern eyes, in its primal and mythic elements.

Here, a devout Christian with a scientific background knew from a private divine revelation that his city would die, and he stayed with it out of love for his neighbors. His devout wife stayed at his side out of love for him. Together they prayed that this evil *which they knew was coming* would pass them by. Can we believe this? Can we believe in a miracle that gave six more years of life to a nuclear war survivor - *who was already dying from radiation exposure before the attack* - so that he could write books and essays on Christian faith, suffering, and forgiveness? Writings meant even for us today?

This is a story of martyrdom via charity, of strange prophecy, of beautiful, mystical things somehow linked to the hideous, of love joined to a radioactive Cross. It is all true, and seemingly quite beyond our comprehension, unless perhaps we try to see as God sees. As Paul Takashi Nagai and Marina Nagai Midori tried.

# I Saw Satan Fall Like Lightning from the Sky

*He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in truth – John 8:44*

This meditation is named after a verse from the Gospel of Luke, in which Jesus confirms to the seventy-two disciples their authority over the demonic when using His name. These words also signify His personal witness as the eternal Son of God of the fall of Satan. Because these words can also symbolize the beginning of Satan's dominion on earth, the Franco-American philosopher Rene Girard choose it for the title of his book *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, the penultimate book in an anthropological study that *almost* proves the truth of Christianity.



Rene Girard has become famous in Christian circles for his research on the *scapegoat mechanism*. Girard observed that human societies throughout history have relied on scapegoats to maintain social cohesion. Over time social friction grows, and friction eventually triggers violence. The scapegoating of certain individuals or minorities channels such violence in ways that are manageable to the powers and principalities of this world. Individuals who are in competition can put aside their differences and unite against the scapegoat. To be effective, the persecutors of the scapegoat must accept the mass delusion - the lie - that the scapegoat deserves the violence that is directed toward it. Civilization and social order were built on controlled persecution.

According to Girard, the great exception in the ancient world to this mechanism was Judaic culture. While the Old Testament certainly has examples of scapegoating – remember, it begins with Adam's scapegoating of Eve - it also has stories that accurately depict the evil at the center of the process. The persecutions of the prophets demonstrate it. The story of Job certainly showed the process at work, when his neighbors ganged up on him at his time of misfortune. The greatest of such stories is the persecution of Joseph by his brothers, which is resolved by Joseph's ultimate Godly fortune and his forgiveness that denied violence.



In the New Testament we see more examples of scapegoating. John the Baptist died because a palace party was turned into a lynch mob by Herod's stepdaughter. The ultimate example, of course, was the execution of Jesus. Girard pointed out that Luke's observation that "Herod and Pilate became friends" as a result of the Crucifixion is a quite typical example of the 'benefit' of scapegoating.

But then the scapegoat mechanism failed. Jesus rose from the dead after forgiving His murderers. He proved he told the truth, that He was the innocent Son of God. He destroyed forever the delusion that scapegoats are guilty. His disciples, most of whom abandoned Him in fear that they too would become scapegoats (Girard goes even further, maintaining that they themselves felt psychologically powerless under the contagion of violence), would later go to their own deaths as faithful witnesses to the fact that Jesus was innocent. They would preach the words of Jesus which tell us that the righteous take the side of the innocent victims of persecution or circumstance.

This would overturn the pagan world, and eventually a Christian civilization would arise in its place. Scapegoating would still happen, because as Girard would write "We are not Christian enough", but it would become impossible to maintain the lie of the guilt of the scapegoats, at least for long. Eventually a follower of Christ would stand up for the victims, or at least their memory. Eventually even non-Christians would be influenced by this perspective, as Christianity reached around the globe.

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By the 20th Century the collapse of Christian civilization was already well underway. Ideologies had arisen which thrived on victimization and scapegoats. Nazism conferred victim status on Germans and scapegoated Jews, Slavs and Romani. Marxism scapegoated so-called ruling classes and conferred victim status on nearly everyone else. In *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning* Girard recalled the great secrecy under which the Nazis perpetrated their genocides, and he guessed that had they won the Second World War they would have eventually bragged about their crimes. The unprosecuted murder of millions of scapegoats would have cemented the Nazi ascendancy over Christianity in central Europe, for awhile.

In the end these ideologies failed, providentially so. Rene Girard has written, however, that we are now witnessing the rise of what he called the ‘other totalitarianism’. This new ideology is similar to Marxism in that it usurps the Christian concern for victims. Like Marxism it accuses Christians of having failed to be Christian enough on the behalf of victims. It promises that it will do better, and signals that the eventual anti-Christ will care for us better than anyone. Like Marxism its ethos includes false scientism, but unlike Marxism it also includes the delusions of the pagan world, in its recreations and sexualities, and so that ethos and the alleged failures of Christians will predestine the new scapegoats.

*I See Satan Fall Like Lightning* was published in 1999, and in 2009 (six years before his death at age 91) Rene Girard followed with the essay *On War and Apocalypse* in which he darkly and mystically stated:

Christianity is the only religion that has foreseen its own failure. This prescience is known as the apocalypse. Indeed, it is in the apocalyptic texts that the word of God is most forceful, repudiating mistakes that are entirely the fault of humans, who are less and less inclined to acknowledge the mechanisms of their violence. The longer we persist in our error, the stronger God’s voice will emerge from the devastation.

*Apocalypse* of course merely means ‘hidden things’ of the future. Girard’s assertion of the ultimate worldly failure of Christianity is certainly open to debate, but many statements in the Bible can be read to support an end time in which faith in the Gospel has withered almost – almost - completely away. Perhaps we today on our overheating globe need only to recall the image of our beloved, bloodied Carpenter, carrying the cross to which He will soon be nailed, feeling its texture as He did all wood, already dying from hypovolemic shock as a result of His scourging, and asking the weeping women in the language of His young apprenticeship “If they do these things when the wood is green, what will they do when it is dry?”

# Acknowledgements

# Appendix - Timeline

*But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. – 2 Timothy 3:1*



*The Christian Martyrs' Last Prayer* – Jean-Léon Gérôme (ca. 1863-1873)

36

Judea: Persecution by Saul [aka Paul]

41

Judea: Persecution by Herod Agrippa I

62

Judea: Persecution by Annas II

66 – 68

Rome: Persecution by Nero

ca. 95

Rome: Persecution under Domitian

ca. 107

Roman Empire: Persecution under Trajan

132 – 136

Roman Empire: Persecution by Jews for refusing to join with them in the Second Jewish Revolt against Rome

165 – 177

Roman Empire: Persecution under Marcus Aurelius

202 – 211

Roman Empire: Persecution under Septimius Severus

235

Roman Empire: Persecution under Maximinus I

250

Roman Empire: Persecution by Decius

257 – 260

Roman Empire: Persecution by Valerian

303 – 311

Roman Empire: Persecution by Maximian, Diocletian and Galerius, up to 100,000 killed including up to 20,000 in Nicomedia, Asia Minor

341

Persian Empire: 1,150 Christians executed

361 – 363

Roman Empire: Persecution by Julian the Apostate

375

Crimea: Goths kill 308 Christians

516

Yemen: The Jewish warlord Dhu Nuwas claimed to have killed 22,000 Christians

622 – 750

Middle East, North Africa, Spain: Islamic conquest

ca. 780

Syria: Caliph al-Mahdi ordered the death of nearly 12,000 Christians in Aleppo who refused to convert to Islam

838

Asia Minor: Sack of Amorium by the Caliph al-Mu'tasim, 30,000-70,000 Christians killed; the 42 Martyrs of Amorium were captured and would be executed in 845 for refusing to convert

878

Sicily: Muslims capture Syracuse, more than 17,000 Christians enslaved

960

Ethiopia: Queen Gudit persecuted the Church

981

Spain: Zamora sacked, 4,000 Christians killed

1048

Armenia: Ardzen seized by the Seljuk Turks, 150,000 killed

1064

Armenia: Ani destroyed by the Seljuk Turks, thousands killed and at least 50,000 enslaved

1086

Spain: 2,000 Christian and Jewish soldiers were killed by Almoravid Muslims at the Battle of Sagrajas

1281

China: Leaders of the Church of the East arrested

1338 – 1368

China: Final suppression of the Church of the East

1370 – 1405

Asia and the Middle East: Destruction of the Church of the East in Central Asia by Timur, aka Tamerlane. Up to 17 million people of all faiths died. *This was likely the largest persecution of Christians by non-Christians prior to the 20th century – the exact number of affected Christians is unknown due to the extent of the destruction, but given Timur's hatred of Christianity it was surely a high percentage of the total casualties*

1453

Byzantine Empire: Fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks. Thousands of Christians were killed and 30,000 deported or sold into slavery

1470

Greece: Fall of Negroponte to the Ottomans, 6,000 Christians killed or enslaved

1570 – 1573

Cyprus: Invasion by the Ottomans, at least 56,000 Christians killed or enslaved

Lepanto, Ionian Sea: The Ottoman navy was defeated and 12,000 Christian galley slaves were freed, at the cost of 7,500 Christian dead

1587 – 1639

Japan: Christianity was outlawed and 37,000 Christians and sympathizers were killed in the Shimabara Rebellion

1683

Austria: Siege and Battle of Vienna claimed over 16,000 Christians but the Ottoman forces were defeated

1690

Serbia: Ottoman atrocities caused 37,000 Christian families to flee to Austria

1700 – 1900

Vietnam: More than 20,300 Christians were killed

1780 – 1784

India: Tipu Sultan killed nearly 26,000 Christians and forced 30,000 to convert to Islam including some British officers

1789 – 1799

France: Revolution and the Vendean Revolt claimed 177,000 – 450,000 Christian lives

1791 – 1873

Korea: Over 10,000 Christians were killed in four major persecutions

1821 – 1832

Greece: Up to 130,000 Christians died in the war for independence from the Ottomans

1831 – 1861

Madagascar: Thousands of actual and suspected Christians died in ritual poisoning ordeals

1843 – 1909

Ottoman Empire: Over 380,000 Armenian, Assyrian, and Bulgarian Christians were killed in several waves of persecution

1869 – 1873

Japan: 3,600 Kakure Kirishitan [‘Hidden Christians’] from Nagasaki were sent into internal exile, 650 died

1900

China: Almost 33,000 Christians were killed in the Boxer Rebellion

**1912 – present**

**Across the entire globe: At least 35 million Christians were killed and many more suffered in the greatest cumulative persecution in history**

Note: This timeline does not include the numerous cases of persecution of Christians by Christians, each of which was a denial of the prayer of Jesus that his followers be one [cf John 17:11], and many of which were exploited by non-Christians who desired to injure and wound His Church. It is a fact that much Christian suffering has ultimately been due to a lack of Christian unity in the face of persecution.