

Today's Martyrs

Resources for understanding current Christian witness and martyrdom

Meditation – 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 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. He 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 14th 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.