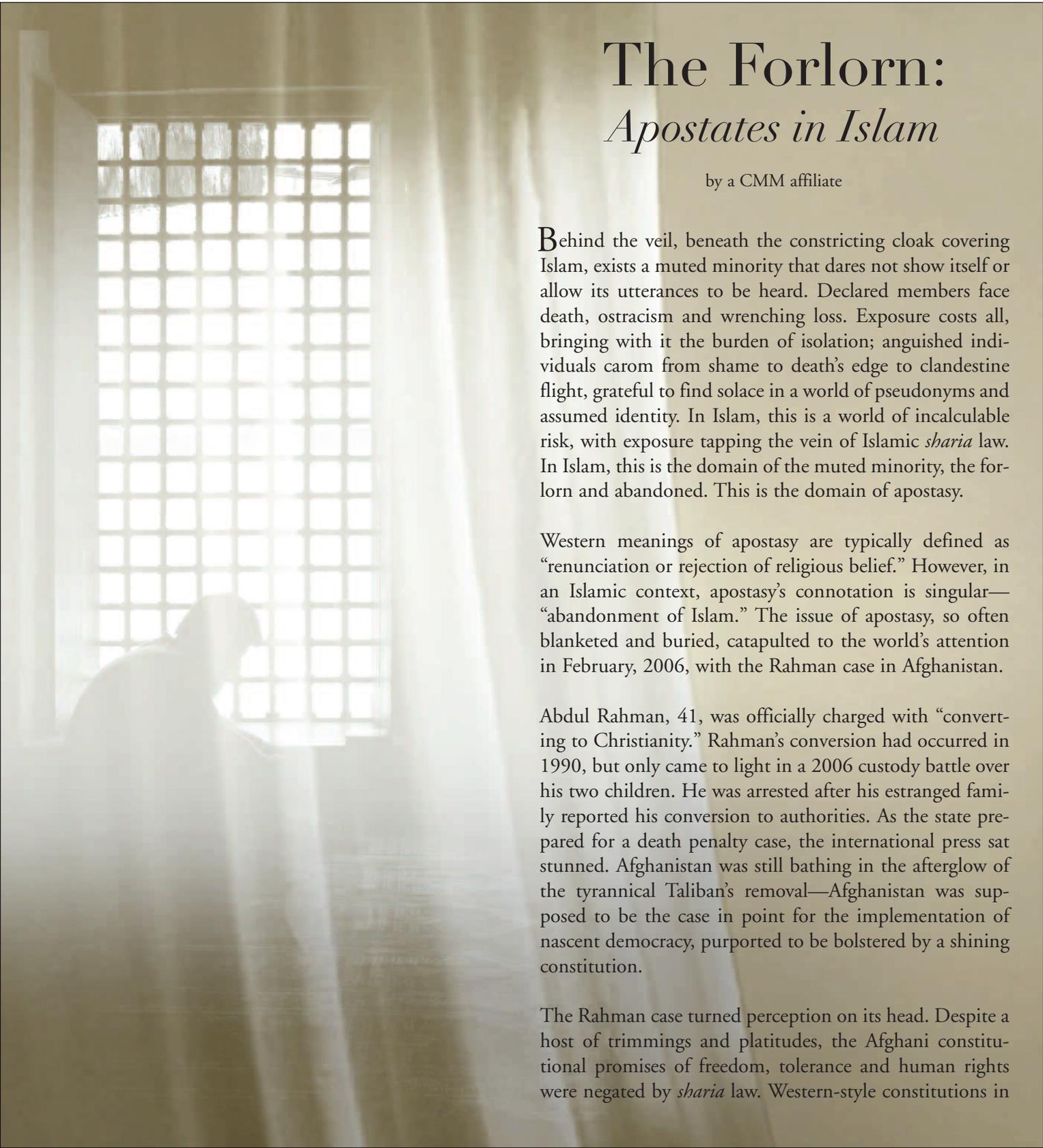




INTERCEDE

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The Forlorn: *Apostates in Islam*

by a CMM affiliate

Behind the veil, beneath the constricting cloak covering Islam, exists a muted minority that dares not show itself or allow its utterances to be heard. Declared members face death, ostracism and wrenching loss. Exposure costs all, bringing with it the burden of isolation; anguished individuals carom from shame to death's edge to clandestine flight, grateful to find solace in a world of pseudonyms and assumed identity. In Islam, this is a world of incalculable risk, with exposure tapping the vein of Islamic *sharia* law. In Islam, this is the domain of the muted minority, the forlorn and abandoned. This is the domain of apostasy.

Western meanings of apostasy are typically defined as “renunciation or rejection of religious belief.” However, in an Islamic context, apostasy’s connotation is singular—“abandonment of Islam.” The issue of apostasy, so often blanketed and buried, catapulted to the world’s attention in February, 2006, with the Rahman case in Afghanistan.

Abdul Rahman, 41, was officially charged with “converting to Christianity.” Rahman’s conversion had occurred in 1990, but only came to light in a 2006 custody battle over his two children. He was arrested after his estranged family reported his conversion to authorities. As the state prepared for a death penalty case, the international press sat stunned. Afghanistan was still bathing in the afterglow of the tyrannical Taliban’s removal—Afghanistan was supposed to be the case in point for the implementation of nascent democracy, purported to be bolstered by a shining constitution.

The Rahman case turned perception on its head. Despite a host of trimmings and platitudes, the Afghani constitutional promises of freedom, tolerance and human rights were negated by *sharia* law. Western-style constitutions in

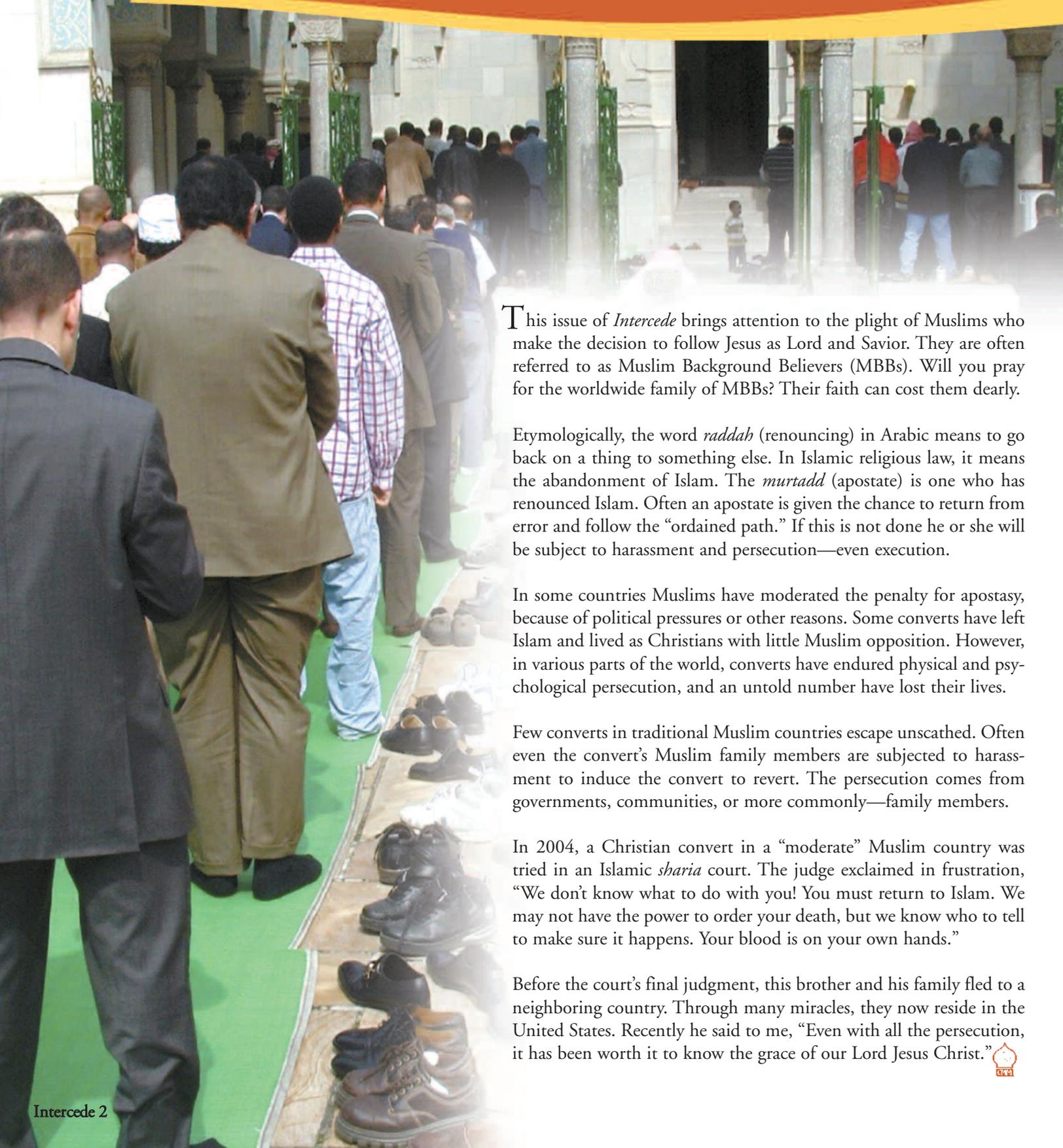
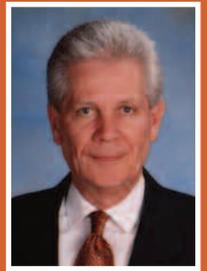
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Until All Have Heard

How then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? –Romans 10:14

Jim Bennett, Director
Center for
Ministry to Muslims



This issue of *Intercede* brings attention to the plight of Muslims who make the decision to follow Jesus as Lord and Savior. They are often referred to as Muslim Background Believers (MBBs). Will you pray for the worldwide family of MBBs? Their faith can cost them dearly.

Etymologically, the word *raddah* (renouncing) in Arabic means to go back on a thing to something else. In Islamic religious law, it means the abandonment of Islam. The *murtadd* (apostate) is one who has renounced Islam. Often an apostate is given the chance to return from error and follow the “ordained path.” If this is not done he or she will be subject to harassment and persecution—even execution.

In some countries Muslims have moderated the penalty for apostasy, because of political pressures or other reasons. Some converts have left Islam and lived as Christians with little Muslim opposition. However, in various parts of the world, converts have endured physical and psychological persecution, and an untold number have lost their lives.

Few converts in traditional Muslim countries escape unscathed. Often even the convert’s Muslim family members are subjected to harassment to induce the convert to revert. The persecution comes from governments, communities, or more commonly—family members.

In 2004, a Christian convert in a “moderate” Muslim country was tried in an Islamic *sharia* court. The judge exclaimed in frustration, “We don’t know what to do with you! You must return to Islam. We may not have the power to order your death, but we know who to tell to make sure it happens. Your blood is on your own hands.”

Before the court’s final judgment, this brother and his family fled to a neighboring country. Through many miracles, they now reside in the United States. Recently he said to me, “Even with all the persecution, it has been worth it to know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.”



Muslim World News



Eritrea

CHRISTIAN DIES IN MILITARY JAIL

An Eritrean Christian died in prison, four and a half years after the Eritrean regime jailed him for worshipping in a banned Protestant church. From the southern port city of Assab, local Christians confirmed the death of Magos Solomon Semere at the Adi-Nefase Military Confinement facility just outside Assab. According to one source, Semere, 30, died “due to physical torture and persistent pneumonia, for which he was forbidden proper medical treatment.” He had reportedly endured a long period of severe illness in the months prior to his death. A member of the Rema Church, Semere had first been jailed in the fall of 2001, when he was arrested for evangelizing and starting worship meetings with six other Christians. “The government gave hard-labor work punishment to believers for preaching the gospel and starting fellowships,” a Christian once jailed in Assab with Semere told *Compass*. “If they persisted, they would be kept imprisoned for ‘violating’ the government law.” Semere had been released after 18 months in prison, only to be re-arrested three months later with a large group of Protestants caught worshipping together in July 2002. When Semere became seriously ill, the source said, he was told to sign a statement

renouncing his faith in order to get medical treatment. “He refused to do so,” his former jailmate said, “but three other people signed, and they got released.” Despite all the government warnings delivered to Semere, his former fellow prisoner said, “Magos was determined to obey the Lord rather than men.” Semere’s death is the third known killing of a Christian for his faith since last October. On October 17, 2006, Eritrean security police tortured two Christians to death, two days after arresting them for holding a religious service in a private home south of Asmara. Immanuel Andegergesh, 23, and Kibrom Firemichel, 30, died from torture wounds and severe dehydration in a military camp outside the town of Adi-Quala.—*Compass*

Pakistan

WOMAN STANDS TRIAL FOR INSULTING MUHAMMAD

Pakistani officials have relocated the trial of a Christian woman accused of blaspheming Muhammad, to prevent violent demonstrations. Judge Rao Abdel Jabar has agreed to preside over the blasphemy hearing against Martha Bibi Masih in the district capital of Kasur, 45 kilometers (28 miles) south of Lahore, defense lawyer Ezra Shujat said. Police arrested Masih in the early morning hours of January 23 after a violent mob stormed her house in the

village of Kot Nanka Singh. The riot was prompted by claims that Masih made insulting remarks about Islam’s founder—a crime punishable by death under Pakistani law—during a quarrel with a neighbor. Masih remains behind bars in Kasur’s district jail, while her husband and five children have gone into hiding to avoid a revenge attack. “They are afraid and worried now,” said Shujat. “They can’t work anywhere.”—*Compass*

Nigeria

STATE’S POLICIES SAID TO STRANGLE CHRISTIANITY

As soon as Christians in the capital city of Nasarawa state tried to rebuild a Reformed Church building that Muslims burned down two years ago, more than 200 Islamists attacked the workers. The rebuilding came to a halt, and the Nasarawa state government banned reconstruction of the facility. “I personally witnessed the attack on the workers at the reconstruction site of the church,” said the Rev. Jerry Modibo, chairman of the Christian Association of Nigeria, Nasarawa state chapter. “The Muslims were chanting, ‘Death to Christians, death to infidels. This town is for Muslims, we don’t want Christians here.’” Banning church-building, he said, is just one way Nasarawa is stifling Christianity in the central Nigerian state.—*Compass*

Muslim countries are semantic pitfalls, containing hazy provisions, each firmly embedded in Islamic law. Afghanistan's constitution was no exception.

The drama played out to a Western audience shocked by the severity of the Afghan courts. International leaders and aid organizations found themselves pumping in millions of relief dollars to a government keen on Rahman's prosecution and a populace spirited to see Rahman's execution. The case took on a surreal specter when high government officials entered the fray: 1) The attorney general publicly called for Rahman to be hanged 2) The chief prosecutor demanded the death sentence 3) The chief judge insisted on death unless Rahman recanted.

After initially pledging not to intervene, Afghani President Hamid Karzai put an end to the bizarre spectacle, allowing Rahman to seek asylum in Italy—but only after Rahman was declared unfit to stand trial. In essence, to avoid the *sharia* death penalty, Abdul Rahman, charged with believing in Jesus Christ, was deemed mentally ill.

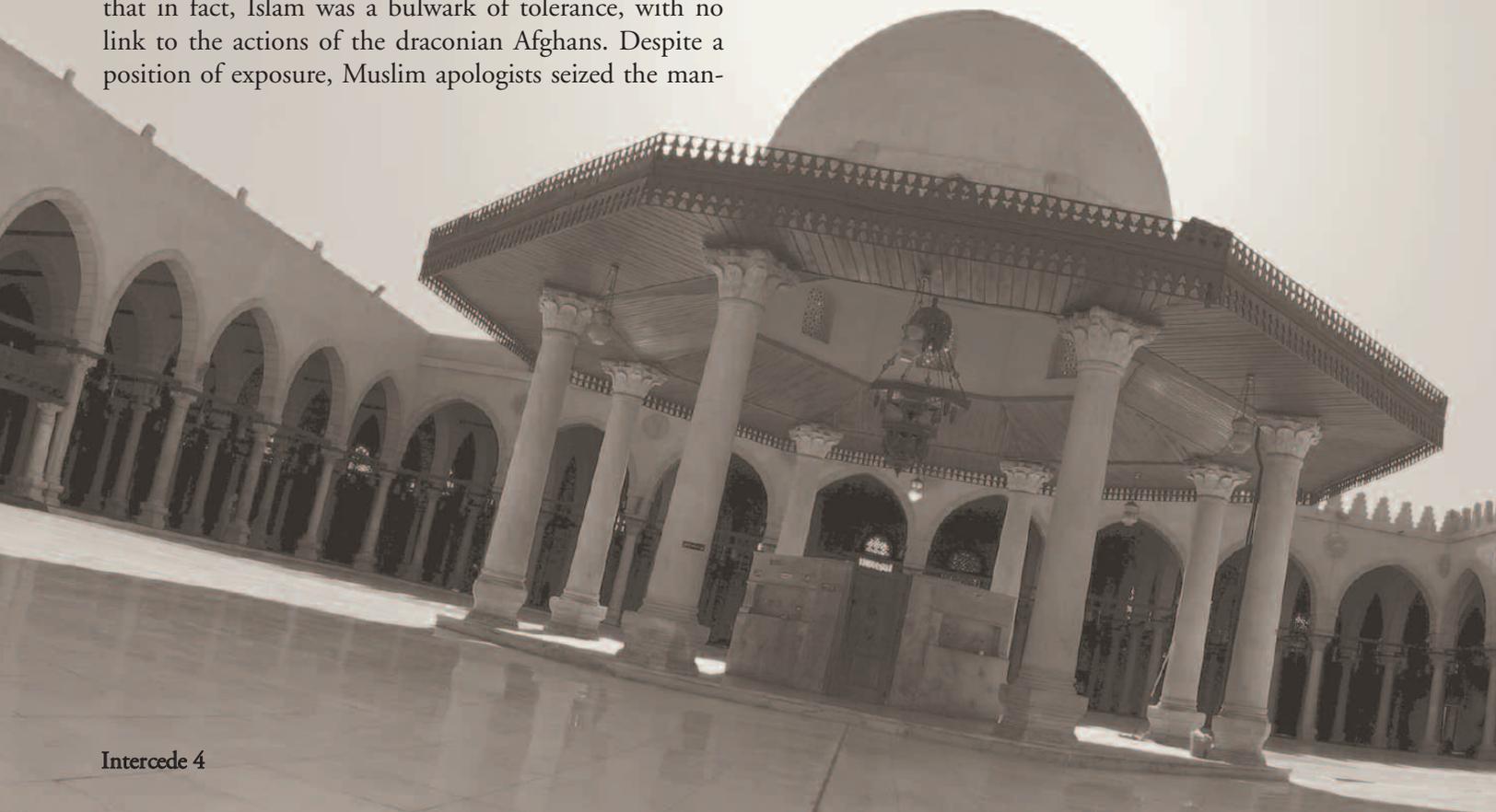
And so it began; what should have been a seminal moment in the West's regard of Islamic apostasy, instead became an object lesson in the reversal of simple truth. Islamic apologists and pundits assured the American public that the Rahman case was—anomalous. Scores of representatives from Muslim political organizations asserted that in fact, Islam was a bulwark of tolerance, with no link to the actions of the draconian Afghans. Despite a position of exposure, Muslim apologists seized the man-

tle, and the media turned a deaf ear. Rather than peer through an illuminating window into the plight of thousands of former Muslims, pundits lapped up the torrent of bold disavowals; with scarcely a whimper, the Rahman case faded from view.

The Roots of Apostasy

Academics seek to distance apostasy from the death penalty by debating the minutia of chapter and verse. Contextual and semantic smokescreens are effective tools, yet the death penalty for apostasy is securely rooted in Islamic texts, arguably in the Qur'an (4:89, 9:73-74) and absolutely in the Hadith (Bukhari 9:83:17, 4:52:260, 9:84:57, Muslim 3:16:4152-4154, Dawud 3:38:4337-4338). As a whole, the evidence associating apostasy with the death penalty is damning, and not based on dubious or variant texts.

In addition, all four major schools of Islamic jurisprudence (Hanafi, Hanbali, Maliki and Shafi'i) call for death in apostasy cases. Even Al-Azhar University—the herald of Islamic thought, bastion of Islamic law and oldest Islamic university—mandates death for apostasy. The *Sira* (traditional Muslim biographies of Muhammad) details Muhammad's harsh dealings with apostates. It strains credulity when Muslim apologists jump through exegetical hoops to excuse the issue of apostasy and placate a questioning public. Revisionism is indeed intoxicating,



Apostates in Islam

but when facts are laid bare, reality screams out in testimonies of the persecuted across the Muslim sphere.

The Forlorn

For those who wish to argue that Rahman's plight was a rare exception, then they must do so in the face of a mountain of evidence—found in the lives of thousands of Islamic apostates. Let their be no mistake or miscalculation in the severity of reality—it is the twenty-first century, but for a Muslim who leaves all and proclaims Jesus Christ—it could well be the seventh.

Across the Muslim world, from Libya to Saudi Arabia to Pakistan to Indonesia, thousands of Muslims have made the decision to follow Jesus Christ. This group is often labeled as Muslim Background Believers or MBBs. MBBs live on the precipice, frequently forced to keep their Christian beliefs secret.

For MBBs who publicly renounce Islam, the sacrifice is beyond measure. The record abounds with MBB accounts of rejection, loss and flight. The greatest danger to MBBs is not from governments seeking apostasy convictions. Tragically, the greatest danger to MBBs is from individuals, particularly family: father, brother, uncle or cousin. The bitter irony—official proceedings against apostates are rare, as de facto juries (made up of family and friends) serve to mete out punishment.

Conclusion

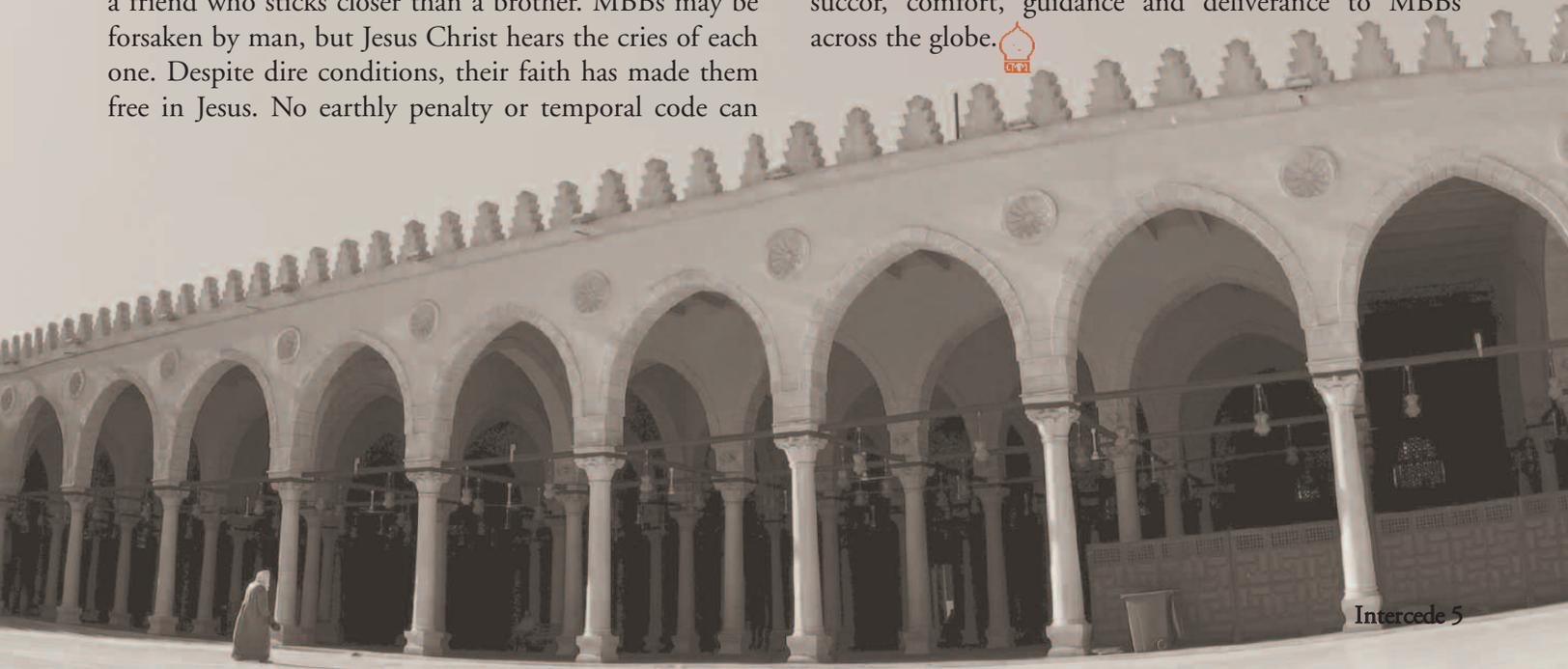
MBBs in Islam remain as outsiders, their circumstances neglected by the world: abandoned, forgotten, forlorn—are all adjectives that could be applied. However, there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother. MBBs may be forsaken by man, but Jesus Christ hears the cries of each one. Despite dire conditions, their faith has made them free in Jesus. No earthly penalty or temporal code can

dim the Gospel light in the heart of man.

Apostasy is a reality of Islam. The perpetual search for revisionist Islam falls short when rubbing against core issues. Traditional Islam, bolstered by the Qur'an, Hadith and *Sira*, takes the day and always has. Regarding apostates, the famed evangelical missionary Samuel Zwemer put it best in the preface to his 1924 book, *The Law of Apostasy in Islam*:

The story is told that Damocles, at the court of Dionysius of Sicily, pronounced the latter the happiest man on earth. When, however, Damocles was permitted to sit on the royal throne, he perceived a sword hanging by a horse-hair over his head. The imagined felicity vanished, and he begged Dionysius to remove him from his seat of peril. Today we read of new mandatories, of liberty, and of promised equality to minorities under Moslem rule; and newspapers assert that a new era has come to the Near East. Economic development, intellectual awakening, reforms, constitutions, parliaments and promises. Does the sword of Damocles, however, still hang over the head of each convert from Islam to Christianity? Is the new Islam more tolerant than the old? Will the lives and property of converts be protected, and the rights of minorities be respected?

Zwemer was writing in 1924, yet his questions resonate in 2007. The sword of Damocles indeed still hangs over apostates. The Church must remain steadfast in earnest prayer for the precious apostates of Islam. The gravity and urgency of their circumstances is only too real. May praying Christians daily remember these neglected brothers and sisters. May the Lord Jesus Christ continue to give succor, comfort, guidance and deliverance to MBBs across the globe.



MOROCCO

Population: 30,000,000

Religion: Muslim 99.85%, Christian .10%

Official Language: Arabic

Peoples: Arab 65%, Berber 34%

Islam arrived in Morocco in the seventh century, carried by invading Arab armies as they crossed North Africa. The indigenous Berbers were nominally Christian prior to the arrival of Islam. The current King, Mohammed VI, is attempting to steer Morocco away from Islamic radicals.

Despite Morocco's status as an official Islamic state, a Moroccan Church is emerging, though small in number and without proper legal protection. Reports of house churches are on the increase. The constitution guarantees religious freedom, but this is tempered by Islamic interpretation of such matters as apostasy and freedom of witness.

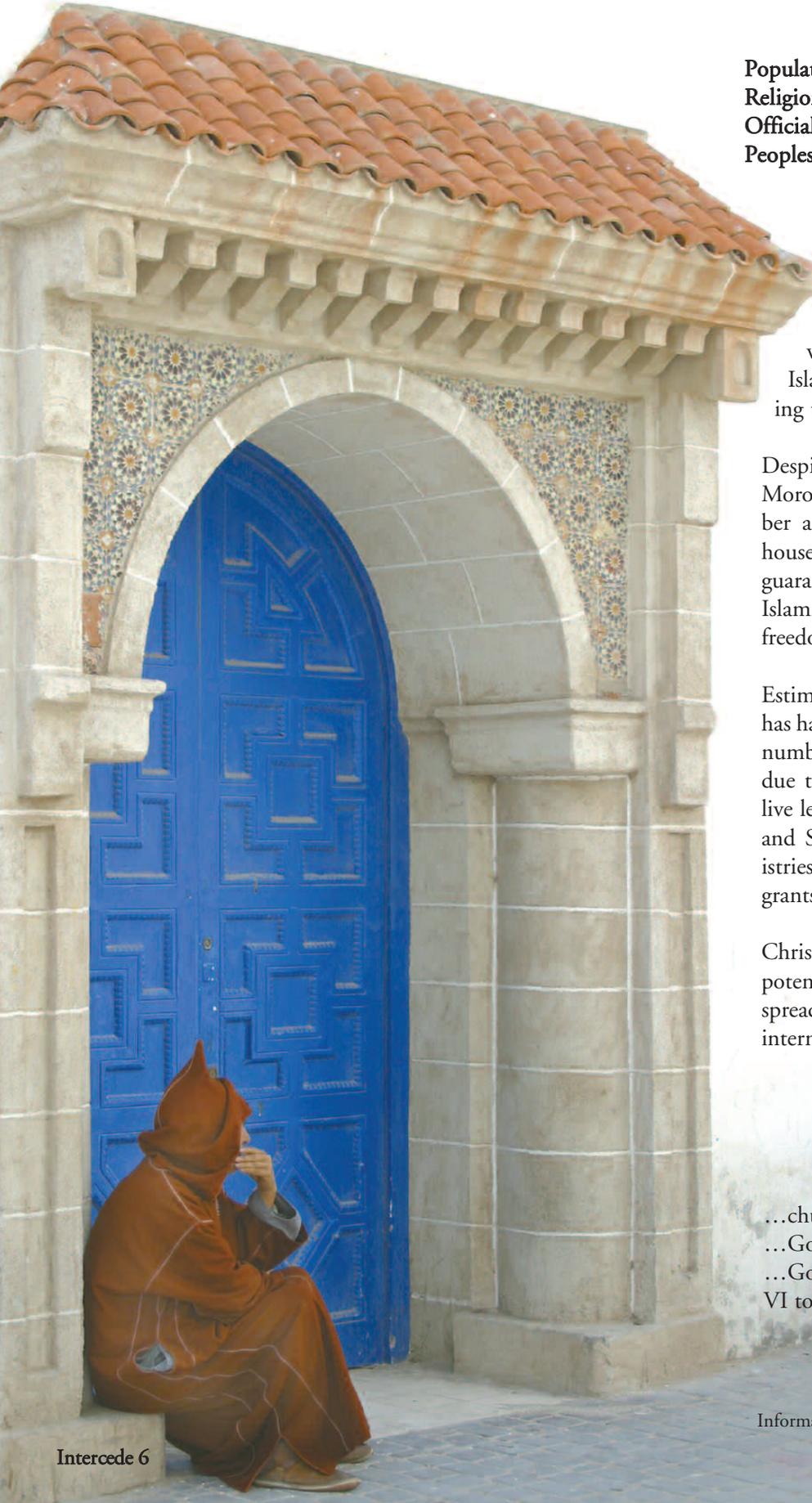
Estimates suggest that only 5 percent of the population has had personal contact with the Gospel. Ironically, the number of Moroccans hearing the Gospel has increased due to migration. Several million Moroccan Muslims live legally or illegally in Europe, particularly in France and Spain. There are several Christian outreach ministries focused on witnessing to North African immigrants in Europe.

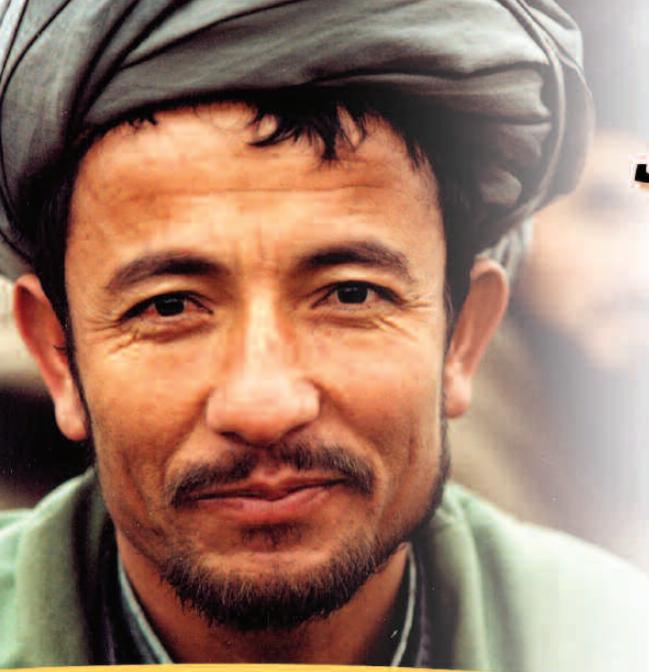
Christian electronic media ministries have made a potent impact in Morocco. Satellite television has spread rapidly, Christian radio has been effective, and internet ministries continue to increase.

Pray that...

- ...churches will be planted in every Moroccan city.
- ...God will open the hearts of the Berber of Morocco.
- ...God will influence the government of Mohammed VI to bring about true freedom of religion.

Information from Operation World, 2001 edition and tconline.org.





JUMAA PRAYER FELLOWSHIP

*PRAYING FOR MUSLIMS
AROUND THE WORLD!*



Friday, May 4, 2007. Please pray

...for the Muslims of Russia. By itself, Moscow is home to 3,000,000 Muslims, most without official registration.
...that the increasing political instability in Bangladesh will result in reform and a bounty of Christian witness to Muslims.
...for Albania. Since the fall of communism in 1990, Muslim missionaries have swarmed into Albania, building mosques and offering a variety of financial aid. Pray that Albanian believers would be strong witnesses to their Muslim neighbors.

Friday, May 11, 2007. Please pray

...for Martha Masih, a Pakistani Christian accused of making insulting remarks about Muhammad, a crime punishable by death. She was charged with blasphemy after making the remarks to a neighbor. Her husband and five children have been forced into hiding while she is incarcerated.
...for the country of Yemen. It is illegal for Yemenis to become Christians and Yemen remains one of the least evangelized countries in the world.
...for ten MBB (Muslim Background Believers) youths in Ethiopia, forced to flee their homes following death threats from their own families.

Friday, May 18, 2007. Please pray

...for a growing number of Muslims in Macedonia. Pray that without the religious restraints of Islamic countries, missionaries will take advantage of the religious freedom in Macedonia to reach a large populace of Arab expatriates.
...against the fear that often grips Muslims, hindering many from making a commitment to Jesus Christ, fully aware of the consequences of conversion to Christianity.
...for continued prayer for Novianna in Indonesia, the only one of four schoolgirls to survive a machete attack by radical Muslims in 2005. She has undergone plastic surgery to reduce severe scarring. Pray for her physical and spiritual well-being.

Friday, May 25, 2007. Please pray

...for MBBs in Morocco. Pray that the government will repeal laws restricting Christian activity.
...for Nigerian Christians. Recently, Muslim radicals rampaged in Jigawa state burning 14 churches and looting two. The attacks injured six people and left 16 pastors homeless.
...for God to continue to protect Christian workers in Iraq, as they distribute literature and assist churches.

***I URGE, THEN, FIRST OF ALL THAT REQUESTS, PRAYERS, INTERCESSION AND
THANKSGIVING BE MADE FOR EVERYONE. –1 TIMOTHY 2:1, NIV***



JUMAA PRAYER FELLOWSHIP

*PRAYING FOR MUSLIMS
AROUND THE WORLD!*



Friday, June 1, 2007. Please pray

...for God to work a miracle in the lives of Indonesia's 180 million Muslims.

...for the relatives of an Eritrean Christian who died after 4 years of imprisonment. Magos Semere had originally been jailed for evangelism and starting a house meeting with six other Eritreans. After becoming seriously ill, prison officials offered medical treatment if Semere would sign a statement renouncing his faith. He refused and died in February, 2007.

...for Algeria. Pending restrictions on Christian witness remain unenforced for the moment. Pray for continued Church growth.

Friday, June 8, 2007. Please pray

...for the Gorani Muslims of Kosovo. Pray for Christian witness to this tiny minority of 11,000.

...for radio and satellite broadcasts reaching Saudi Arabia. Pray for a genuine impact in the heart of Islam.

...that legal regulations will leave room for the Church to thrive and grow in Iraq.

Friday, June 15, 2007. Please pray

...for MBBs, wherever possible, to remain within their family and community as witnesses to the love and grace of God.

...for the burgeoning Church in Iran. Pray that despite governmental oppression, the Gospel will thrive in Iran.

...for the Church in Eritrea. Please pray for all those under the oppression of this increasingly Muslim-dominated country.

Friday, June 22, 2007. Please pray

...for believers in Uzbekistan. Unregistered churches continue to be targets for harassment and raids.

...that God will raise up expatriate Christian workers to continue reaching Muslims in the Arabian Gulf.

...for Sufi Muslims in Bangladesh. Pray that through Christian witness, dreams and visions, Sufis would receive a true revelation of Jesus Christ.

Friday, June 29, 2007. Please pray

...for secret believers in Libya. Many risk betrayal or death from their own families and kin.

...for God's hand of protection to remain on church leaders in Iraq as they toil under a constant threat of physical harm.

...for political rulers and leaders across the Muslim world. Pray that through divine intervention, windows of opportunity would open, allowing millions of Muslims to truly have an opportunity to hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ.