

The Shia: *Islam's 120 Million Minority*

by a CMM affiliate

In a display reminiscent of a tribal blood-fest, a Shia Muslim crowd of several hundred gathers near Tehran, preparing to offer homage to martyrdom. It is the tenth day of the Islamic month of *Muharram*, and the *Ashura* festival has begun. The thud of metal on flesh reverberates as men whip their backs with pointed lengths of chain. Others strike their heads with knives or razors, slapping their chests and chanting to the point of collapse. White ceremonial garments are soaked in blood. Women hold young boys high, their scalps split in the same manner as their fathers. The throng revels in these frenzied acts, the primal pitch and surge ending in absolute exhaustion.

These scenes from the Shia Muslim *Ashura* festival produce a visceral response to the Western eye, the gore

resembling a macabre passion play. In recent years *Ashura* dramas have become so bloody and repulsive, the Iranian government has requested they be toned down.

For most Shia Muslims, this is not mayhem, but reverence and commemoration. This is *Ashura*. This is a vital act of minority Islam—the Shia minority of at least 120 million across the globe.

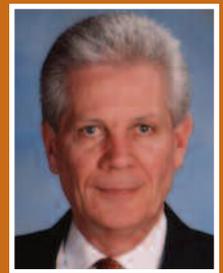
Islam often champions itself a religion of unity, a monolith of belief. The Qur'an even warns the faithful away from fracture. When a Western observer notes thousands of Muslims kneeling in prayer or congregating in Mecca, the apparent harmony takes on an almost palpable form. However, upon deeper examination, Islam contains genuine divisions and rifts, the most distinct



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

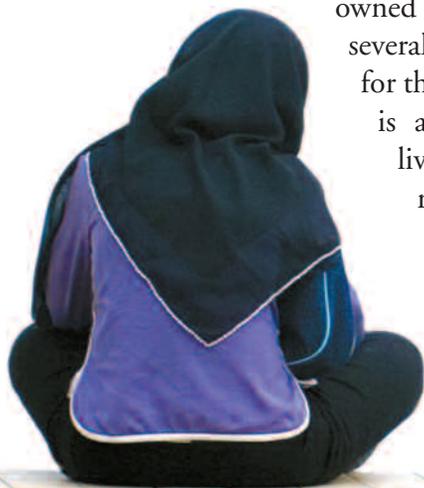


Several people have asked me recently, “What is the difference in Shia and Sunni Muslims?” For several months Shia issues have occupied our newspaper headlines and television screens. Tension runs high with regard to Shia Iran’s nuclear ambitions. In Iraq, the Shia majority wields unusual power.

Who are these people? Are they orthodox Muslims? What do they believe? What makes them different from Sunni Muslims? The writer of our lead article has done a fine job tackling these questions for us. Please take the time to absorb this important article. It will help you understand some of today’s most crucial news headlines. More importantly, I believe the article will prompt you to offer up serious intercession on behalf of the largest Muslim minority.

I recently spoke to a group of pastors in a Central Asian country; most of them were from Muslim backgrounds.

Some of the pastors have been disowned by their families and several have been imprisoned for their faith. Police scrutiny is a regular part of their lives. They have few material possessions, but they have an abundance of faith. They are fearless, and are extraordinary church planters.



From Central Asia I traveled to Eastern Europe to meet with another superb group of church planters. Most were graduates of a CMM-sponsored Institute of Islamic Studies (IIS). Their church planting ministries take them into a 99.9% Islamic context in the Middle East. How encouraging it was to meet these high quality men and women! They are full of joy—and though they live in dangerous situations, they are anxious to return to their house church planting efforts.

My last stop was in Western Europe. How challenging to see high-rise apartment buildings in Amsterdam—jammed with thousands of Muslims. Near the Muslim enclaves, CMM partners with a Bible college to sponsor an annual IIS. Pray that out of the Amsterdam IIS many will be called to reach out to the nearby Muslim neighborhoods and communities.

Just recently, CMM personnel have completed: (1) A Muslim Evangelism Training School program in the Philippines, (2) A Muslim Evangelism Training School program in Indonesia, and (3) A Muslim Evangelism Training School program in El Salvador.

Last, please pray for a Muslim background believer that I will call “Brother M.” Just yesterday I learned that if he chooses to return to his home country, the threat of death will hang over him. Few of us can relate to that kind of threat. Kindly breathe a prayer of protection for this brother.



Muslim World News



Indonesia

Police in Indonesia announced that seven suspected Islamic terrorists have confessed to beheading three Indonesian schoolgirls in Poso, on the Indonesian island of Sulawesi, in October 2005. Five men were arrested on May 5 in Tolitoli regency, Central Sulawesi. The Jakarta Post identified them as Apriyantono, alias Irwan; Arman, alias Haris; Asrudin, Nano and Abdul Muis. “Two of the arrested men were involved in the murders,” national police spokesman Brig. Gen. Anton Bachrul Alam told reporters. “Another was detained for carrying ammunition, while the other two were arrested as accessories to the crimes.” Two additional suspects have not yet been publicly identified. Theresia Morangke, 15, Alfita Poliwo, 17, and Yarni Sambue, 15, were beheaded early in the morning of October 29, 2005 as they walked to a Christian school in Poso district. A fourth girl, Noviana Malewa, 15, received serious injuries to her face and neck but survived the attack.—*Compass*

Iran

A convert Christian jailed in northern Iran was released and reunited

with his family. The family of Ali Kaboli, 51, continued to decline comment on the reason for the long-time Protestant believer’s arrest or any conditions of his release by police authorities in his home city of Gorgan. But sources told *Compass* a hefty bail was posted to the court for Kaboli’s release, indicating that a formal case could be pending against him. Kaboli was arrested without explanation on May 2, 2005, from his carpenter’s workshop in Gorgan. A former Muslim who converted to Christianity as a teenager, Kaboli hosted house church meetings in his home and traveled in the Caspian Sea region as an itinerant evangelist. Under Iran’s strict apostasy laws, Kaboli could face death for converting to Christianity 35 years ago.—*Compass*

Saudi Arabia

Ten Saudi Arabian police armed with wooden clubs raided a private Christian worship meeting in the city of Jeddah, arresting four East African citizens leading the service. 100 Eritreans, Ethiopians and Filipinos were gathered for worship in a home when police entered the meeting, wooden clubs in hand. The startled worshippers brought

chairs to seat the policemen, who sat and waited for the three-hour worship service to conclude. None used their clubs or physically mishandled the worshippers. “Actually, some muttawa [religious police] came to this gathering about two weeks before,” a local source told *Compass*, “but they did not do anything.” After the weekly service finished, police arrested four leaders of the group. They were jailed in the Terhil (Deportation) Center, and guards have since permitted an acquaintance to bring them all a change of clothes. A Christian who spoke with the detainees by telephone reported they were “doing fine, with okay morale.” But he said he did not know how they were being treated, or if they were undergoing interrogation. Usually the Saudi government deports expatriate Christians caught conducting worship meetings in their homes. Under the kingdom’s strict interpretation of Islamic law, public non-Muslim worship is prohibited, although members of the royal family insist that Christians are free to worship within their own homes. Last year five East Africans were detained for a month for leading a private Christian worship service in Riyadh.—*Compass*

The Shia: *Islam's 1*

continued

between Sunni or mainstream Islam, and Shia Islam.

Shi'ism is the largest minority branch of Islam, constituting 10-15% of the total Muslim population of 1.2 billion. Despite minority status, Shia Islam wields formidable power. Iran, the standard-bearer of Shia Islam, is home to 61,000,000 Shi'ites; 93% of Iran's total population. Pakistan (26,700,000) and Iraq (11,000,000) contain the second and third largest Shia populations.

History

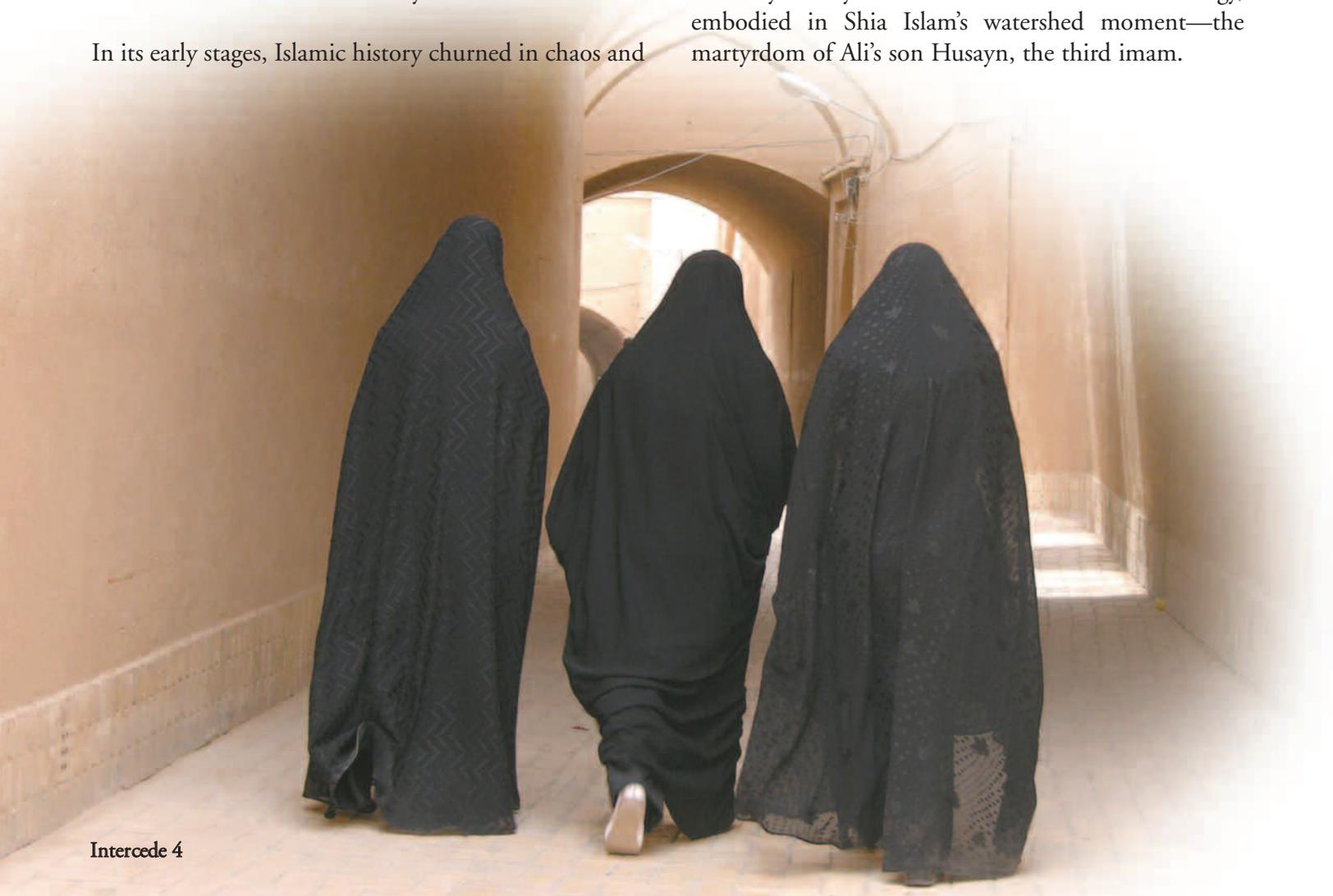
The Shia/Sunni wedge dates back to 632 A.D., the time of Muhammad's death. Since Muhammad left no concrete plan of succession, the majority of his closest followers selected Abu Bakr as caliph, a temporal ruler of the *ummah* (Muslim world). However, a strong minority of Muhammad's followers staunchly believed that Ali, his son-in-law and cousin (and thus a blood relative) was the rightful successor. This faction became known as the '*Shiat Ali*' or 'Party of Ali.'

In its early stages, Islamic history churned in chaos and

disarray. Some 25 years after Muhammad's death, Ali was subsequently elected as the fourth caliph or successor to Muhammad. Ali's death became a benchmark for Islam. For the majority Sunnis, Ali had rightly been elected the fourth caliph. But for Shi'ites, Ali was Muhammad's first countenanced successor. In order to emphasize the legitimacy of Ali's rule, Shias began referring to Muhammad's successor as an "imam" rather than "caliph."

In Shia theology, the imam is not merely a temporal ruler, but an elevated spiritual leader as well—almost infallible. The imam is endowed with special powers to interpret the Qur'an and all other facets of Islam. The Shia maintained their imamate (line of succession) with the stringent precept mandating that the imam had to be a blood relative of Muhammad.

The Shia were born as a persecuted and oppressed minority. Martyrdom lies at the core of Shia theology, embodied in Shia Islam's watershed moment—the martyrdom of Ali's son Husayn, the third imam.



20 Million Minority

from page 1

In 680 A.D., Husayn revolted against the Sunni caliphate and was killed in Karbala, located in present-day Iraq. He was beheaded and his body severely mutilated. Despite Husayn's demise, his death served to cement Shia Islam into a cohesive movement. Husayn's Karbala resting place became the most revered gravesite in Shia Islam, attracting millions of pilgrims to the present. The aforementioned annual *Ashura* festival commemorates the martyrdom of Imam Husayn.

Shia Theology

The mystical enigma of the 12th imam (the Mahdi or redeemer) is the central tenet of Shia theology. In 941 A.D., as a young boy, Shi'ites believe the 12th imam entered a cave in Jamarkan, Iran and vanished. His disappearance is called the Great Occultation. He remains physically invisible, but spiritually present. The story's messianic overtones call for the Mahdi to one day reappear, ushering in peace to a depraved world, and establishing final harmony for the whole of mankind with a view toward creating a perfect Islamic society.

Under examination, the tenets of Shia theology reveal deep differences from its Sunni counterpart. The spectrum of disagreement includes: veneration of saints, canonical writings, caliphate vs. imamate, interpretation of the Qur'an, sexual mores, eschatology—and others points of divergence. During pilgrimage, Shi'ites and Sunnis may congregate together in Mecca, but the truth is many Sunni authorities prefer that Shi'ites not even be allowed to set foot within the confines of Mecca. Some Sunnis even consider the Shia to be heretics, certainly not true Muslims.

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the current president of Iran, consistently espouses Shia theology in his public pronouncements, lacing his politics with Shia eschatology. Mr. Ahmadinejad's bellicosity often raises eyebrows internationally. Many critics would argue that his rantings simply reflect those of a true Shia believer.

From the days of Imam Husayn until today, the Shia/Sunni split has been marked by discord and bloodshed. Even as this *Intercede* issue goes to print, Shias and Sunnis are embroiled in a violent retaliatory

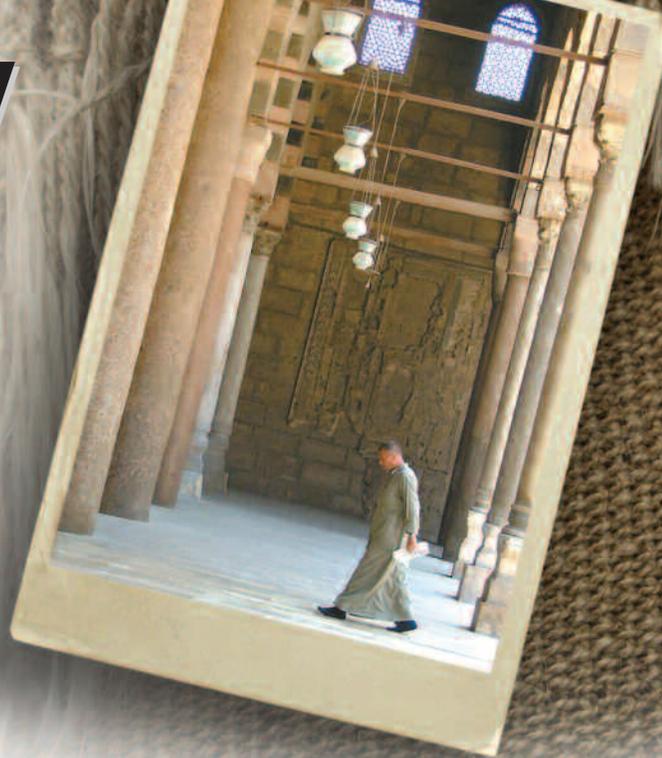
cycle in Iraq, serving as a counterweight to potential progress. Despite many theological similarities to the larger Sunni community, Shia Muslims remain as outsiders, still separated from mainstream Islam and still unable to bridge the chasm of history and theology.

Conclusion

Beginning 30 years ago with the overthrow of the Shah of Iran and the triumphant return of the exiled Ayatollah Khomeini, Shia Islam's image has hurtled backwards at lightning speed. Khomeini's face has become iconic for Shia Muslims, and his likeness is the embodiment of antipathy toward the West. President Ahmadinejad has now seized the mantle, pulling along Shia Islam for a dubious eschatological ride.

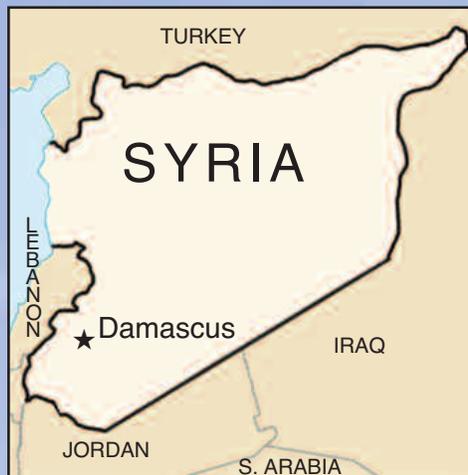
As followers of Jesus, we are called to look beyond the figureheads of Shia Islam, and see 120 million of God's children held in the bondage of Shia theology. The wrenching irony is that while they await a vanished Mahdi—the love of the Savior and Redeemer Jesus Christ has eluded all but a small number of them.

Jesus died on the cross for every Muslim, including every Shia Muslim! Despite the hardened façade of Shia Islam, please join us in praying that through dreams, visions, Bibles, tracts, television and radio programs, and expatriate workers and missionaries—the gospel of Jesus Christ will reach this precious 120 million Muslim minority. 



Country Focus...

SYRIA



Population: 16.5 million
Religions: Muslim 90%, Christian 5%, Other 4.5%
Official Language: Arabic
Peoples: Arab 92%, Other (Kurd, Armenian, Turk, Assyrian, Iranian, Circassian) 8%

Syria gained independence from France in 1946. The current authoritarian Ba'ath party regime gained power in a 1970 coup led by Hafez al-Assad. Assad ran a fierce police-state, dealing radically with opposition from any quarter. Basher al-Assad took over from his father in 2000, easing internal restrictions in Syria, but government support of terrorism and Islamic radicalism continues. Syria is a secular state, but heavily influenced by its Islamic majority. Christians are free to worship within their own community, but are heavily monitored by the Assad regime.

Unreached People Group...

ALAWITES

Location: Syria and Lebanon **Population:** 1.5 million
Religion: Muslim 100% **Language:** Arabic

The Alawites are a Shia sect holding esoteric beliefs starkly opposed to conventional Islam. They believe in the divinity of Ali, Muhammad's son-in-law, and even pray in the name of Ali. Alawites have seven pillars of belief, adding two more to mainstream Islam's five: Jihad and *Waliya* (deification of Ali). Alawites believe in reincarnation and have their own prayer book supplementing the Qur'an, *Kitab al-Majmu*. There is very little Christian witness among the Alawites.



Pray
that...

- ...God will open the hearts of Muslims in Syria.
- ...God will provide opportunity for missions agencies to work with the Alawites.
- ...God will give the Alawites opportunities to hear the truth about Jesus.



JUMAA PRAYER FELLOWSHIP

***PRAYING FOR MUSLIMS
AROUND THE WORLD!***



Friday, September 1, 2006. Please pray

...for a **Christian pastor in Uzbekistan**. During a house meeting, the pastor's home was raided and 32 New Testaments confiscated. He has been charged with "breaking the law on teaching religion."

...for **Iranian Christians**. Pray that despite persecution and increased governmental pressure, churches will continue to grow.
...that **Muslim Background Believers (MBBs) in Ghana** may be better received in churches, and become effective witnesses to their own families.

Friday, September 8, 2006. Please pray

...for **continuing grace and strength for three Indonesian women** sentenced to three years in prison for allegedly trying to convert Muslim children. Their appeal has been turned down.

...for a **couple in an undisclosed location** whose ministry is having a large impact on Muslims. They are under persistent attack and need protection from the Lord.

...for **MBB women of Uganda** who have made the decision to follow Christ. Many are beaten and pressured by husbands who are the first to learn of their conversion.

Friday, September 15, 2006. Please pray

...for **Lina Joy, a Malaysian MBB**. She has been given permission to challenge the government's refusal to change her national identification card from Muslim to Christian. Pray that God would grant her favor.

...for **Christians in Ethiopia**. Muslim attacks on churches and pastors are increasing.

...for **churches in Iraq**. Despite violence and unrest, churches are growing and the gospel is being preached.

Friday, September 22, 2006. Please pray

...for **Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah of Brunei**, as he responds to increasing extremist Islamic influence among his own people.

...for the **many MBBs in Bangladesh** who are discriminated against and treated harshly. Despite being a secular state, Bangladesh is experiencing a rapid rise in militant Islam.

...for **churches in Turkmenistan**. The government is conducting raids on house churches and restricting Christian activity.

Friday, September 29, 2006. Please pray

...for **wisdom for King Abdullah of Jordan**. Pray that his government might be a strong influence for calm in the region.

...for **Somalia**. Mogadishu is once again in the control of Islamic fundamentalist forces, who are threatening to institute sharia law. Pray for the millions of innocent families caught up in this violence.

...for the **continued safety of Abdul Rahman**, the Afghan MBB sentenced to death in Afghanistan. Despite asylum in Italy, he still faces constant death threats.

***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, October 6, 2006. Please pray

- ...for **Christians in Algeria**. The government has approved a law that bans the promotion of any religion other than Islam.
- ...for **MBBs in Turkey**. Despite Turkey's secular government, Islamic fundamentalism is growing stronger, and news from Turkey is replete with accounts of violence and repression against MBBs and Christians.
- ...for the **1.6 million Alawites of Syria**. There has been hardly any Christian witness among this Shia sect.

Friday, October 13, 2006. Please pray

- ...for **50 house churches** planted in Sudan's troubled Darfur region in the last year.
- ...for **southern Thailand**, where Islamic militants from surrounding countries have infiltrated. 1300 Thais have been killed in the violence in the last year.
- ...for the **Muslims of Australia**. Pray for those witnessing to approximately 300,000 Australian Muslims.

Friday, October 20, 2006. Please pray

- ...for **Nigeria**. Trouble continues between Muslims and Christians. Pray for the government as it tries to maintain the validity of the constitution, despite at least 12 northern states declaring allegiance to sharia law.
- ...for **Muslim youths in Paris, France**. The recent riots have revealed the wide religious division. Some outer suburbs are full of young ethnic Africans on the margins of society; a perfect situation for radicals to exploit.
- ...for **four African Christians arrested in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia**, after a police raid during a private worship service. The four men are currently in a Saudi Arabian jail.

Friday, October 27, 2006. Please pray

- ...for **house churches planted in Afghanistan**. Pray that openness since the Taliban's removal may cause many to follow Christ.
- ...for **secret believers in the heartland of Islam** and for those who try to help and disciple them.
- ...for **Christians engaged in prison ministry in the southern Philippines**, sharing the gospel with Muslim prisoners.