

INTERCEDE

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For now we see through a glass darkly... 1 Corinthians 13:12

When Paul wrote these words he was speaking of the glory that will come when we see the Lord face to face. But heaven is not the only thing that we cannot see clearly right now. It is very difficult to get a clear picture of what is happening to the Church in some countries. Iran is one of those countries.

How do we peer through this dark glass and find out what is really happening in Iran? I believe that in order to view the present with accuracy, we must also have a sense of history.

In 1979 an Islamic revolution led to the Shah (king) of Iran being replaced by the Ayatollah Khomeini, a cleric who instituted Islamic law in Iran. He gave the Islamic clergy authority in all legal and political matters. This is known as *valayate faqi*. According to a recent article in Christianity Today:

Only 3,000 evangelicals lived in the country in 1979. Missionaries were expelled after the Islamic revolution, and as many as 90 percent of the churches were closed.... Weekly church services are now held in fewer than 20 church buildings in the country. While there are an estimated 150 house churches in Iran, security concerns often curtail gatherings. Several Christian leaders have disappeared or been murdered, including four Assemblies of God pastors in the 1990s.

By all reports, the Church in Iran is growing stronger and more rapidly than any Church in the Middle East, but it is also suffering a new wave of persecution not seen since the early 1990s. We have heard in the news that the government in Iran is near the point of collapse, but also that it is stronger than ever having crushed all internal opposition. We have heard that the

continued on page 4



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



I remember the first time I met the now deceased general superintendent of the Assemblies of God of Iran. At a conference in Beirut he sang beautifully and spoke eloquently. Under his leadership the Church in Iran experienced steady growth. A fearless leader, he publicly called for the release of Iranians who were unlawfully imprisoned for their “religious activities.” It was a sad day when I learned that this fine man had been murdered. Since his death, many more pastors and lay leaders have been martyred.

Nevertheless, the Iranian Church is growing. In our lead article, we learn that “By all reports the Church in Iran is growing both stronger and at one of the quickest rates of any Church in the Middle East, and is also suffering a new wave of persecution.” Through the years, in addition to those known to have been martyrs, it has not been unusual for Muslim converts to be reported missing—and most are presumed dead. Tertullian’s oft-quoted statement “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church” is applicable in Iran.

There are tens of thousands of Iranian Christians worldwide. Many of those live in Iran and the rest in other nations. There are Iranian churches in the United States, Europe, Cyprus, Turkey, Japan and other countries. Many Iranian Christian expatriates fled because of persecution or became Christians while living abroad and are afraid to return for fear of persecution. Various ministries have helped thousands of Iranian Christians find asylum in other countries.

Iranians abroad are evangelizing their countrymen. Last month I met an Iranian Muslim convert who now pastors an Iranian church in a major Asian city. The joy of the Lord filled this man’s life. When it was his turn to testify, he could hardly contain himself; and it was difficult for him to find a stopping place. He exclaimed that his greatest joy was to lead a fellow Iranian Muslim to the truth about Jesus.

In Iran, close to 50 percent of the population is under 35 years old and many are disillusioned with their government. They want to know “about the rest of the world.”

Will you make a commitment to pray for Iran? Pray for the persecuted. Pray for the Iranian diaspora. Pray for a mighty outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the churches in Iran.





Muslim World News

Egypt

The criminal trial of Shafik Saleh Shafik, the Christian director of a home for troubled Coptic girls was postponed until February 20 in Cairo by the presiding judge in order to summon key witnesses. This Egyptian Christian faces charges of holding a 16-year-old Coptic girl against her will and without her parents' permission, and also of trying to rape her. He claims the case against him is an attempt to close down his recovery ministry among Coptic girls who are being enticed to leave their Christian families and convert to Islam. Egypt's state security police appear to be cooperating with an extremist Muslim group holding the alleged victim in an unknown location. In violation of Egyptian law, police have refused to return the girl to her parents' custody. Shafik, 57, holds both Egyptian and American citizenship. After retiring from his U.S. business four years ago, he and his wife returned to Egypt to minister among poor and disadvantaged youth in the Coptic Christian community.—*Compass*

Iran

A Tehran military court has sentenced Christian pastor Hamid Pourmand to jail for three years, ordering his imme-

diately transfer to a group prison cell in Tehran's notorious Evin Prison. The former army colonel was found guilty of deceiving the military by not declaring that he was a convert from Islam to Christianity. It is illegal for a non-Muslim to serve as a military officer in Iran. Pourmand, a Christian for nearly 25 years, produced several documents in which his military superiors had acknowledged years ago that he was a Christian. "But the court didn't accept them," an Iranian source said. "They said these were false documents." As a consequence of the verdict, the lay pastor of the Assemblies of God faces discharge from the army and forfeits his entire income, pension and housing for his family.—*Compass*

Iraq

Less than 24 hours after armed gunmen kidnapped the Syrian Catholic archbishop of Mosul, 66-year-old Basile Georges Casmoussa was set free. Assailants accosted Casmoussa as he left a parishioner's home near the university, forced him into the trunk of a car and drove away. The Vatican reacted quickly to the abduction, calling it a "despicable terrorist act" and demanding the archbishop's release. Casmoussa was released just before noon and by 2:15 p.m. had arrived

back at his diocesan office. Catholic officials declared that no ransom had been paid for his release. Chaldean Patriarch Emmanuel Delly confirmed that several days ago, a Chaldean priest had also been kidnapped and held for 24 hours and then released. Delly emphasized that such incidents are not "deliberate attacks against Christians," but indications that "Iraq is in a state of chaos."—*Compass*

Pakistan

Anwer Masih has been acquitted of blasphemy in Lahore. Judicial Magistrate Mohammed Gondal ruled that the accusations against Masih were based on hearsay evidence and the police report filed against Masih was nullified because it violated the criminal procedure code. Masih, now 32, was arrested on November 30, 2003. A neighbor who had converted from Christianity to Islam claimed that Masih had mocked his new beard and derided Islamic beliefs. Masih remains in hiding, unable to be reunited with his family because extremists from the Islamic Religious Army have vowed to kill him. He joins over a dozen other Pakistani Christians who, despite their innocence, have been forced to apply for asylum abroad to live under new identities.—*Compass*



IRAN: A GL

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recent earthquake in Bam has opened tremendous doors for a witness of presence in that devastated region of Iran, but that the government is doing everything it can to minimize that presence there. In fact, we have heard so many different reports, it is difficult to know what one can believe.

Many may be aware of the continuing saga of Iran's nuclear ambitions and the determination of the world community to prevent their nuclear capability. Some may have heard reports of Iran's attempted influence on Iraqi elections. After all, the majority religion of both Iraq and Iran is Shia Islam. Some have feared an "Iranian-style" theocracy in Iraq.

Fewer of us may be aware of the attempted broad reform movement in Iran through the election of a "reformist" government headed by President Mohammad Khatami. This movement, though supported by a large majority in the country, fell apart when the ayatollahs who head the ruling Guardian Council in Iran disqualified the vast majority of reform candidates in the last parliamentary elections, including most of those who were already holding seats in the parliament. Those disqualified were denied permission to stand for reelection because they were either un-Islamic or did not support the principles of the revolution which, in a theocracy, are essentially the same thing.

More than 25 years removed from its revolutionary fervor, Iran is now undergoing a tremendous identity crisis. The religious establishment, which was the impetus behind the revolution in 1979-1980 and continues to hold all of the cards, is struggling for its political life. Mullahs (Muslim clerics) have become so disdained that the word "mullah" itself has become a slur. It is not uncommon to hear a taxi-driver talk about "those thieving mullahs" to his passengers.

In a recent Iranian comedy film, *The Lizard*, in order to escape from prison, a thief steals the clerical robes of a mullah who has died. When the thief-in-cleric's-robes escapes from the hospital, he is almost hit by a taxi when the driver intentionally tries to hit him. The movie was a tremendous hit in Iran, but was pulled from theaters due to protests from the ruling establishment. It is now an underground hit.

It is no wonder that so many are angry with the mullahs and many question their faith. The people in Iran are suffering a tremendous spiritual and physical attack at the hands of Islam. Severe social and religious restrictions continue. Although many of those restrictions have been relaxed in the

last few years, they have been brought back with a vengeance as the reform movement collapsed.

Women are forced to wear the *hijab* (Islamic covering). They are not allowed to be seen in public with men other than a close relative. They must have the permission of male family members to marry. They are not allowed to see male doctors, and with a minority of female doctors, their health suffers. Their testimony in court is worth half that of a man's testimony. According to Iran's state-owned newspapers, 66 percent of women suffer from some form of domestic violence, and 70 percent of all women suffer from depression.

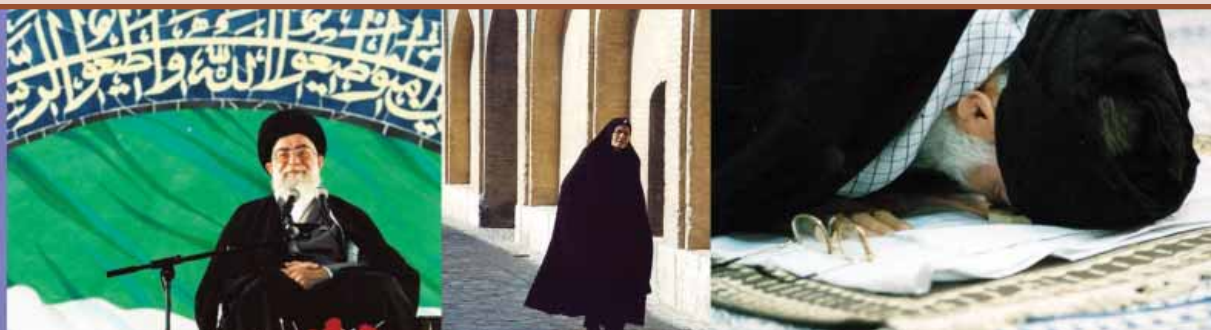
But women are not the only ones who are suffering. The vast majority of Iran's population are young people. They are too young to remember the revolution that established their current government and don't understand the reason behind it. These young people are frustrated by a lack of jobs, few prospects and a government that has strict behavior control.

For a while these young people were so dissatisfied, they revolted by forming peaceful protests, the largest of which took place in 1999 in several cities around the country. However, these protests were quashed, sometimes brutally. It appeared things would get better as the "Reformers" were voted into power in record numbers from 1992 through 1997 and beyond. But the situation did not improve, and the "Reformers" failed at almost every attempt to implement a reformist agenda. This has led to disappointment and then to despondency on the part of many.



THROUGH A GLASS DARKLY

From page 1



The suicide rate in Iran is growing at an alarming rate. Last year almost 1,700 young people between the ages of 15 and 24 successfully committed suicide. This included 283 school students in the city of Tehran alone as reported on Iranian national television. Some of the best selling books in Iran are about suicide and the meaningless of life. The atmosphere of hopelessness in Iran seems almost palpable.

But amidst this hopelessness, the Church has reached out and offered hope to its Muslim neighbors. When a huge earthquake hit the southern city of Bam on December 26, 2003, tens of thousands of people died. Tens of thousands more were injured, and many thousands lost their homes and livelihoods. But the Christian Church in Iran stepped forward and began ministering to the needs of the devastated communities. The Church was also on the forefront of caring for Afghan refugees during the war in Afghanistan.

The reports do not give exact numbers, but it is clear that thousands of Muslims have made decisions for Christ and continue to do so at an astonishing rate. The few thousand believers in 1979 have swelled to hundreds of thousands, and more are coming to the Lord daily. This is happening even though conversion can carry a death penalty both to the one who converted and the one who was evangelizing.

An Iranian pastor told a story about a man who saw a huge cross of light in the sky while praying. This cross came down and lay across his city. He asked God the meaning and the Lord told him to go to the Christian church and someone

would explain everything. The Lord told this man to tell the believers there that the Lord of the Cross had sent him.

Many churches in Iran have guards posted at the doors for security reasons, and people can not get into services without a password. When the guards recognized a Muslim man, they tried to send him to the mosque down the street. But he told them, “No, I don’t want to go to the mosque, I want to come to the church.” They asked him, “Who sent you here?” He replied, “The Lord of the Cross.”

He did not know that this was the question and the correct password to gain entrance to the church. After a long talk with the pastor, this man came to saving faith in Christ and is leading many others in his city to the Lord now.

The Iranian government is not unaware of what is happening. Recently they have begun cracking down on the Christian Church again, imprisoning pastors and paying attention to the house churches. Christians are losing their jobs and businesses for converting to Christ. One man was kept in solitary confinement for a month in a two by three meter cell and beaten and tortured. He was told that he was found guilty of converting to Christianity and the penalty was death. God spared his life, but he lost everything he had and was forced to flee the country with his family.

This type of persecution occurs frequently. The U.S. State Department estimates that between 15,000 and 20,000 Iranians are emigrating every year—some for political and economic reasons, but many due to religious persecution.

Iran is moving to the center of the world stage. Iran is rich in resources and has a large, well-educated population. Yet, there are few countries in which despair runs so high and hope so low. Perhaps no other Muslim country has so many people who have rejected Islam so firmly and embraced the cross of Christ so strongly.

Pray for the struggle of the Church in Iran and the diaspora of Iranians worldwide. Pray that the gospel of Christ will continue to impact Iran, and that the light of Christ will shine freely in this dark place. Pray that the power of Islam will be broken and that people will not just desire political freedom, but freedom that can only be found in Christ.

Although we see through a glass darkly, we pray that soon we will see many Iranian brothers and sisters face to face.





COMOROS



UNREACHED
PEOPLE GROUP

NGAZIJA
COMORIANS

Population: 700,000
Peoples: Ngazija 49%,
Nzwani 43.7%,
Mwali 4.5%,
Makua 1.6%
Religions: Muslims (Shafi'ites)
99.3%, Christian 0.6%
Language: French and Arabic

Location: Comoros
Population: 340,000
Religion: Muslim 99%
Language: Ngazija

The Comoro Islands are a group of four main islands in the Indian Ocean located between Madagascar and the east coast of Africa. The Republic declared independence from France in 1975, but one island, Mayotte, seceded to remain a French overseas territory.

Islanders were unevangelized before 1973. They are strong Muslims, but deeply involved in occult practices and spirit possession. Many young people are disillusioned with Islamic society, which offers so little hope.

Today, Christian witness is still forbidden. Despite suffering intense persecution and not legally being permitted to meet openly, Comorian believers have increased in numbers through the witness of the first convert.

The Comorians (also known as the Mauri or the Mahorais) are a blend of settlers: Iranian traders, mainland Africans, Arabs and Malagasy. Many work as farmers or fishermen and a few breed cattle, sheep or goats.

The physical needs of the Comorians are numerous. Major problems include poverty, disease and hunger. Educational levels are low and only 46 percent of the population is literate. The economy is struggling and unemployment is high. There is a shortage of hospitals and doctors and many suffer from chronic malnutrition.

The spiritual needs of the Comorians are even greater. Though there is freedom of religion on the islands, evangelism is not well received by these Muslims.

PRAY
THAT...

...God will call more workers to share the good news in the Comoro Islands.
...God will reveal himself to these Muslims through dreams and visions.
...God will strengthen, encourage and protect the 55 or so known Comorian believers.



JUMAA PRAYER FELLOWSHIP

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



Friday, May 6, 2005. Please pray

...for a Muslim background believer who has revealed the Islamic agenda for Uganda. Pray for this young man who was badly beaten and for all Christian students and teachers in Uganda.
...for the many Muslims who are coming to the Lord in Ethiopian prisons. Pray that they will be protected in this hostile environment and that those going into the prisons to share the gospel will have wisdom from above.
...for the Church in Indonesia as it continues to reach out to the tsunami victims with the love of Christ and material support. May many find Christ as Savior and Lord.

Friday, May 13, 2005. Please pray

...for the people of the Sahel countries like Burkina Faso who had a plague of locusts that destroyed their harvest. Pray that these people will get sufficient aid from the West in spite of the huge amount of aid going to the tsunami victims in Southeast Asia.
...for the few believers who have remained in Somalia. Their lives are in great danger.
...for fruit in the lives of the Yemeni people from Christian radio programs and satellite television. Pray for the witness of the relief workers involved in education and health programs.

Friday, May 20, 2005. Please pray

...that God will open doors for witness in Saudi Arabia. Thank God for each Christian migrant worker from the West and the Far East and pray for God's protection for them.
...for the outreach to Germany's 3 million Muslims. Several individuals and mission agencies are seeking to share Christ in various ways with these needy people.
...for the protection of two Christian legal advocates for the poor and minorities, such as Christians, in Pakistan and for peace for them and their families in the face of great danger.

Friday, May 27, 2005. Please pray

...for the team of translators and compilers who are working on a study Bible for Turkish believers. Thank God for the thousands of New Testaments that were distributed during the Christmas holiday, but a more comprehensive tool is needed for the continued spiritual growth of the Turkish Church.
...for the 8.6 million Chinese Hui people, the largest Muslim group in China. Pray that the Lord will provide fellowship and witnessing opportunities to Hui believers.
...for the Institute of Islamic Studies being held in Indonesia through June 12. Pray that the Lord will bring participants who are eager to work with Muslims.

***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 3, 2005. Please pray

...for *Afghanistan*, one of the most restrictive countries, where no visible church exists. Pray for Christian radio broadcasts to be heard and for the few courageous believers to be protected and their faith strengthened.

...for a pastor in *Tatarstan* whose church activity has been halted. Pray for safety for this pastor, his family and congregation.

...for the CMM team member who will be teaching an Islamic class at *Zion Bible Institute in Rhode Island*. Pray that many of the students will be motivated to reach out to the Muslim world.

Friday, June 10, 2005. Please pray

...for a pastor in *Iraq* who has been left partially paralyzed by a terrorist attack. May the Lord protect all the churches and Christians who have chosen to remain in Iraq in spite of these attacks.

...for *Nigerian Christians in northern Nigeria* who continue to come under attack. Pray for those who share the gospel, not counting their lives as dear unto themselves. Pray that the state governments will take steps to prosecute attackers.

...for *Muslims in Aceh, Indonesia*, who are receiving aid from Christians as a result of the tsunami. Pray that they will see the love of Christ being exhibited and change their attitude toward Christians.

Friday, June 17, 2005. Please pray

...that many *Muslims in western Europe* will question the validity of Islam in the face of worldwide terrorism perpetuated in the name of their religion and reach out for answers and find them in the claims of Christ.

...for successful evangelism and church-planting among *Turks throughout Belgium*. A French/Turkish New Testament has been printed for distribution in French-speaking areas of the country.

...for unity and spiritual growth of three *Turkish congregations that meet in London, England*. Pray also for God's blessings on a Turkish believer who is considering beginning a meeting in North London.

Friday, June 24, 2005. Please pray

...that the *President and government in Egypt* will act responsibly and bring extremists who terrorize Christians to justice. Several recent incidents have been overlooked, if not condoned, by the authorities.

...for *Suha, a university graduate in the Middle East* who has accepted Christ and is now facing a severe challenge from her family. Pray for God to provide a believing spouse for this young believer.

...for *Christians who live in Kota Baru, Malaysia*. The state government is set to declare this town an "Islamic city" and turn it into a model with Islamic management. Generally, in such situations Christians are forced to live as Muslims.