

**CHRISTIANITY IN TODAY'S WORLD**  
**Hon. David Kilgour, J.D.**  
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In the past twenty years, we (Chinese) have realized that the heart of your culture is your religion: Christianity. That is why the West has been so powerful. The Christian moral foundation of social and cultural life was what made possible the emergence of capitalism and then the successful transition to democratic politics. We don't have any doubt about this."

-An anonymous Fellow of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, quoted in *Civilization: The West and the Rest*, by Niall Ferguson (2011).

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The conclusions from a decade-old national census by Statistics Canada dealing in part with the state of religion across our country revealed that seven out of ten Canadians then identified themselves as Roman Catholic or Protestant. Almost 13 million claimed to be Roman Catholic; 8.7 million self-identified as Protestants. The number who said that they were simply "Christian" had more than doubled from the 1991 census to 784,000.

Reg Bibby in *Restless Gods* sets out how Canada's faith communities can build on an emerging religious renaissance which he and others are documenting. Bibby refers to the congregational expert Lyle Schaller and his argument that a new religious experience is taking place in both Canada and the U.S. Schaller's list of indicators of this trend includes:

- change in many worship services from dull to exciting,
- a new era in religious music,
- laity more involved in ministry,
- growing interfaith cooperation, and
- priority given by adults and teens to prayer groups.

The book by Phillip Jenkins at Penn State University, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, argues that present global trends of Christianity will have an impact on the world similar to major religious movements such as the Reformation. For Jenkins, the twenty-first century will be seen as a period in history when religion will replace political ideology. Christianity will have a major impact on the world's belief systems.

Christianity is growing with phenomenal speed in Africa, Asia and Latin America. In Africa, according to the *World Christian Encyclopedia*, the net increase of Christians on the continent is an astounding 8.4 million a year, or 23,000 persons a day. Put another way, there were about ten million African Christians in 1900; in 2000 there were 360 million.

In highlighting this surge, Jenkins notes: "By 2025, fifty percent of the Christian populations will be in Africa and Latin America, and another 17 percent in Asia." In other words, the centre of gravity of the Christian world will be deep in the Southern hemisphere: it is there already. The typical Christian is now a young Nigerian woman, a

hard-working Chinese or a Brazilian city dweller. Our faith is no longer primarily a Western religion.

Despite the spread of Christianity to almost every corner of our world, injustices against Christians continue. A 2011 Pew Forum study on Religion estimated that Christians are today being persecuted in varying degrees by governments or fellow citizens in many of the world's independent countries. Another estimate is that approximately 105,000 Christians are murdered yearly because of their faith. This means about one Christian is killed every five minutes somewhere. One estimate I saw indicated that about two-thirds of those persecuted for their faith around the world today are Christians.

Miroslav Volf of Croatia argues in his book, *Exclusion and Embrace*, "there can be no peace among nations without peace among religions. Since religious peace can be established only through religious dialogue... reconciliation between peoples depends on the success of the inter-religious dialogue. For reconciliation to take place, the inscriptions of hatred must be carefully erased and the threads of violence gently removed.

### **Niall Ferguson**

Niall Ferguson, professor of history at Harvard and senior research fellow at Jesus College, Oxford, in his book cited at the start of this talk asserts that "it was a very specific form of Christianity – the variant that arose in Western Europe in the sixteenth century – that gave the modern version of Western civilization the sixth of its key advantages over the rest of the world: Protestantism – or, rather, the peculiar ethic of hard work and thrift with which it came to be associated."

### **Pope Benedict/Cardinal Ouellet**

Let me say a word about the announced retirement of Pope Benedict. All Christians pray that His Holiness enjoys a serene retirement. Wouldn't it be splendid if his successor could come from Africa, Asia or the Americas? What about Canada's hockey playing Cardinal Ouellet?

Ferguson examines the correlation between work patterns and religiosity, pointing out, for example, that according to the World Values Survey (2005-2008) only eight per cent of French and Germans attend a church service at least once a week, compared with 17 per cent of Brits, 36 per cent of Americans, 44 per cent of Indians, 48 per cent of Brazilians and 78 per cent of sub-Saharan Africans. "(Many Europeans) will roll their eyes at the religious zeal of the American Bible Belt – not realizing that it is their own lack of faith that is the real anomaly."

As for the work implications, Ferguson notes that between 2000 and 2009 the average American in a job worked just under 1,711 hour a year, whereas the average German worked just 1437 hours-16 per cent less. The average Japanese still works as many hours a year as the average American, while the average South Korean works 39 per cent more, with residents of Hong Kong and Singapore working roughly a third more hours than Americans.

*Civilization* also discusses the astonishing rise of Christianity in China. According to separate surveys by China Partner and East China Normal University in Shanghai, there are today about 40 million Protestant Christians across China, compared with only about

half a million in 1949. "Some estimates put the maximum even higher at 75 or 110 million. Include 29 million Catholics, and there could be as many as 130 million Christians in China. Today, indeed, there may already be more practicing Christians in China than in Europe. Churches are being built at a faster rate in China than anywhere else in the world." With a population of 8 million, the city of Wenzhou, south of Shanghai, has the reputation of being one of the most entrepreneurial centres in China. The residents also have 1,339 churches in their city despite the ongoing harassment and much worse done to Christians across China.

As so often throughout history, committed Christians, members of many spiritual communities and others with a strong ethical commitment can act as brakes upon forces that threaten to overcome civilizations. We believers must place a high value on the empathy, kindness and numerous other qualities associated with Christianity and other faiths. Our lives must manage to remind others that there is a Redeemer for our "tormented public and private world."

The famous words of Jesus, "Love one another as I have loved you" (John 13, 34-35), link explicitly love of God and love of neighbour. The two great commandments, found in both the New Testament and the Hebrew Torah, are one. Love of God is love of neighbour; love of neighbour is love of God

Should Christians each in our own way and space not attempt to do what the Apostle Paul and millions of lesser-known believers have done through the ages? We could use C.S. Lewis as a model for our age. If Lewis was the twentieth century's most influential Christian author, was he not also, as Dorothy Sayers put it, "God's terrier"? Believers in any situation should be terriers too. Each day presents new opportunities for you as Christian law students, and for us all to be doggedly in the pursuit of these qualities.

But what exactly does it mean to follow Jesus today? Having observed Christians over many years, I'm constantly struck by how varied, yet essentially similar, their answers to this question are likely to be. Women, men and older children everywhere who have a personal relationship with Jesus/God read the Bible, pray and attempt in their daily lives to be points of light wherever they are.

The New Testament holds up a church which exists primarily for the sake of non-members. Some parishes fall short here, but many have enormous outreach in their communities. Churches across Canada and the world are involved in shelters for the homeless, ministries to street people, safe places for abused women and food banks to name only a few. The international work of L'Arche founded by Canadian Jean Vanier is especially effective. The late Henri Nouwen of Toronto's L'Arche community wrote often about lonely abandoned people without others to love them. Nouwen wrote of a young minister who had nothing to offer an old man facing surgery except his own loving concern. "No man can stay alive when nobody is waiting for him," he wrote. All of us - Christian law students, priests, ministers, and laity, can fulfil this role of drying tears for others.

### **Christians in Community**

But let me return to workplaces and homes. How are we to interpret what Jesus says in the Gospels in our daily lives? The standard Jesus sets for us is far beyond any personal or human ethic-loving enemies, doing good to those who persecute us, going the extra mile.

Heroic Christians around our world are living out His ethic by the power of His life in them.

People with whom we rub shoulders ought to see in us God's message of kindness and unconditional love for the human family with all persons of equal value. Allow me to describe the attributes of some individuals who practise devotion to God and are living out the gospel in remarkable ways:

### **Diane Morrison**



Diane Morrison, raised on a farm in western Quebec and a graduate of McGill, retired last month as Executive Director of the Ottawa Mission. Her heart for the homeless is legendary. In 1990, she first began to volunteer by scrubbing walls. "Nobody would talk to me", she says, when she began volunteering. How things have changed. By the time of her retirement, so many people

wanted to talk to her every day that it took her up to half an hour to get from her car to her office. Her mission website reports about the transformations of many men who come to the mission are deeply inspiring.

Diane's successes had myriad consequences. One was that the donations increased from about \$360,000 in 1993 to about \$7 million last year. Its clients are grateful daily for the wide range of transformative programs it supports (cooking training, education upgrading, substance abuse, chapel services, etc). Another was the building of her beloved Hospice, still the only one for the homeless in Canada. The legacy she leaves is one of hope, integrity, compassion and humanity—all rooted in her Christian faith.

### **Roméo Dallaire**

Roméo Dallaire, a national hero for his work during the Rwandan genocide of 1994, was one of the very few officials from any government who acquitted himself heroically throughout the entire four-month ordeal, although he still insists on blaming himself. Dallaire has been quoted as saying, "There must be God because I have shaken hands with the devil."



In 2010, Dallaire, who founded the Child Soldiers Initiative (CSI), launched Zero Force, a movement aimed at secondary school students and undergraduates to recruit 2.5 million young people around the world to engage in activism against the use of child soldiers. He has faith in your generation, which he calls "the activist generation without borders" because you can communicate with anyone in the world via access to technology. He urges you to exert your political will. "The youth of the nation hold the balance of power in this democracy. Don't tell me you don't have a voice—you're just not using it."

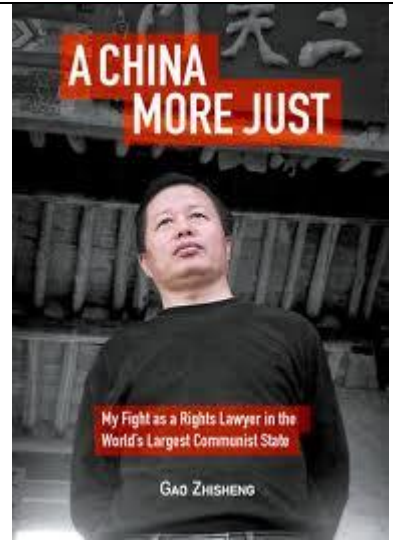
**Kim Phuc**



The 1972 photograph of Kim Phuc as a young Vietnamese girl running from napalm (which touched about 40 percent of her body) was judged in Japan to have been the most significant photo of the entire 20th century. She now lives in Canada and her biography, *The Girl in the Picture*, was written by Denise Chong of Ottawa. Phuc speaks often on reconciliation and how after she became a Christian she was able to forgive all who had caused her grief, including the American who authorized bombing near her home. She also met with John Plummer, the pilot who dropped the bomb which hit her – and forgave him.

**Gao Zhisheng**

Gao Zhisheng, a twice Nobel Peace Prize-nominated lawyer, is often called "the conscience of China". A decade ago, he was named one of China's top ten lawyers. He became a Christian after attending a Beijing house church in 2005, concluding, "In addition to physical needs, (people) also (have their) equally important spiritual needs..." He gained worldwide acclaim for his pro bono legal defense of workers, evicted farmers, dissidents and the disabled. The Party wrath was released, however, when Gao started defending Falun Gong practitioners. It began with the removal of his permit to practise law, an attempt on his life, a police attack on his family, and a cessation of any income. It intensified when Gao launched nationwide hunger strikes for equal dignity for all Chinese. Mr. Gao's younger brother and his father-in-law were permitted to visit him in prison on January 12th - the first confirmation in nine months that he was still alive.



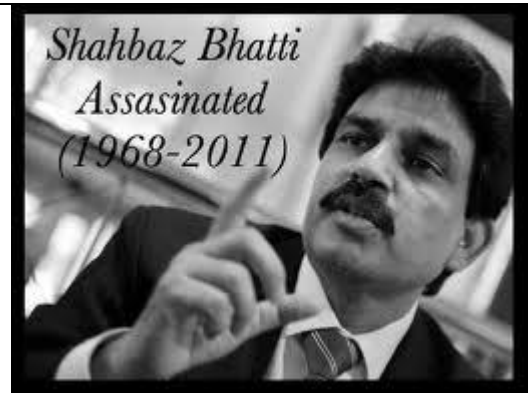
**Brizuela de Avila**



"Mayu" Brizuela de Avila was the highly-respected foreign minister in the government of El Salvador from 1999-2004. "God", she feels, "gives talents to everyone; the more one has the greater the responsibility to be a 'beacon' for Him". At every meeting where we were both in attendance, her contribution was profound, including the signing of the Democratic Charter by Organization of American States (OAS) foreign ministers on 9/11/01 in Lima about an hour after the second plane hit the World Trade Tower in Manhattan. An example of Mayu's own grace occurred when she was invited to speak at an OAS student forum in Edmonton. While there, she wanted to meet the Salvadorian community and a meeting was arranged at a church. She insisted on arriving early so that she could greet each person as they arrived. She saw God in each of the refugees who had fled her war torn country.

## Shahbaz Bhatti

Shahbaz Bhatti, Pakistan's Minister for Minorities, was assassinated two years ago. Earlier, he led a group of Christian aid workers after an earthquake struck the country. They found a house where the roof had fallen and a man was trapped underneath. Bhatti helped him get out and then noticed slogans on the walls against Christians, such as "Kill the infidels." Bhatti asked the man what sort of facility it was. His answer was in effect that it was a training location for Al-Qaeda. The man added, "And you came here to save my life?" "Yes," Shahbaz replied,



"Christianity is all about saving lives." For Bhatti, it was also about speaking up for all of Pakistan's religious minorities until the day of his death. .

## Jim Wallis

In his *The Soul of Politics-Beyond 'Religious Right' and 'Secular Left'*, Jim Wallis of Washington finds the approaches of both liberals and conservatives inadequate to the challenges the world faces and that a new political consensus that fuses social justice with personal responsibility is called for in both our countries and elsewhere. Here are a couple of things that caught my eye in *Soul*: what Wallis found in the Bible made him sensitive to injustice, whether male supremacy, growing economic inequality, homophobia, and the growing ecological catastrophe. He thinks America's civic virtues of civility, justice and citizenship are being replaced by divisions along lines of race, ethnicity, class, gender, religion, culture... resource scarcity and division into a world of perpetual conflict.

## Philip Yancey

The American writer Philip Yancey thinks parishes should ideally be "God's neighbourhood bar, a hangout like the television show Cheers for people... a place where you can unwind, spill your life story, and get a sympathetic look, not a self-righteous leer." Can anyone disagree? The suggestion has been made that AA in its' meetings is very close to the early Christian Church.

Grace, God's love for all of humanity, merits the final word. It is the one thing that only the church can provide in a world which craves it the most. Grace can bring transformation and hope. As Yancey expressed in his book, *What's So Amazing About Grace?*, it is hunger for grace that brings people to any church. "I rejected the church for a time because I found so little grace there," he writes. "I returned because I found grace nowhere else."

The above examples humble us and we may feel insignificant in their shadow. But let's not forget that small gestures of selfless love can change the course of history. Something as small as our attitude at work or study places and with colleagues. Nothing is more off-putting than a sour classmate, workmate or colleague, whereas someone who is serene and hopeful is magnetic. If we are to be effective witnesses for our faith in our workplaces, much is demanded of us. Good and authentic interpersonal relations must be under constant re-examination in case we are hurting someone's feelings by thoughtless words or deeds. Perhaps our thoughtfulness and care in our relationships will lead others to ask about the hope that is in us, and the God who inspires us.

## Conclusion

Christians have similar answers as to how we can live our faith today. We all believe in a patient, loving God who calls us as Christians to a human relationship of respect and tolerance with neighbours of different faiths (or no faith at all).

Martin Luther King Jr. wisely stated, “unless we learn to live together as brothers [sisters] we will die together as fools.” In building stronger relationships and a deeper level of respect and understanding among other faith communities and with persons of different languages and cultures, we do not need to sacrifice beliefs; instead, we should view it as an opportunity to enrich our faiths. People with whom we rub shoulders ought to see in us God’s message of kindness and unconditional love for humankind. One does not need to travel abroad to make a useful contribution towards inter-faith dialogue. It needs to begin at home as a community.

Karen Armstrong’s book, *The Case for God*, notes: “The point of religion (is) to live intensely and richly here and now. Truly religious people are ambitious. They want lives overflowing with significance...Instead of being crushed and embittered by the sorrow of life, they (seek) to retain their peace and serenity in the midst of their pain...They (try) to honour the ineffable mystery they (sense) in each human being and create societies that protect and welcome the stranger, the alien, the poor and the oppressed.”

Jesus himself chose the prophetic words of Isaiah to capture his own life-calling. He has come to preach good news to the poor, to set the captives free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour. This gripping imagery is that of the Jubilee, of that great biblical counter-cultural call to overcome injustice and lift up the downtrodden and the powerless. Such a society is ours to create as we walk in his steps. May your love of God guide you as you complete your studies and go on to create such societies.

Thank you.