

**NATIONAL LAW STUDENT CONFERENCE, SPONSORED BY QUEEN'S BRANCH OF CHRISTIAN LEGAL FELLOWSHIP (CLF)\* AND CLF NATIONAL AT QUEEN'S LAW SCHOOL**

**Christian Calling to Defend Human Rights panel with Chantal Desloges and Rev. Majed El Shafie**

Hon. David Kilgour, J.D.  
Saturday, March 12: 11:45-1:15pm  
Dunning Hall, Kingston

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At Ottawa's Notre Dame Cathedral, Canadians of origin in more than 38 countries last year participated in Christian Unity Week.

Miriam Adeney of *Christianity Today* reminds us: "...Christians are to love our neighbours. When our neighbourhood expands to include the globe, then we're called to love globally".

In building respect and understanding, no-one needs to sacrifice his or her beliefs; it is an opportunity to enrich all our faiths and cultures. Martin Luther King Jr said it well: "unless we learn to live together as brothers [sisters] we will die together as fools."

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

**Tbilisi, Georgia and First Step Forum**

First Step Forum (FSF) was founded in 2002 as a global network of ambassadors, legislators, journalists, human rights advocates and business people working to encourage religious liberty and harmony to flourish across the world.



Service in Tbilisi, Georgia, with Bishop Songulashvili on Christmas Day (Georgian calendar)

Our annual meeting host in Tbilisi in January was Bishop Malkhaz Songulashvili of the Baptist Church in Georgia. He provided us with lessons about love, suspension of judgment and forgiveness by way of his solidarity with groups in need of compassion

The bishop is not afraid to speak out and stand up for justice. He and others are deeply engaged in the work of interfaith advocacy on behalf of mistreated Muslims, LGBT and other communities within Georgia. As he says, "There was time when inter-religious dialogue and engagement for Christians was a luxury. Now it is a necessity of utmost importance. There is still a chance to build a global community based on mutual respect and affirmation."

### **‘Christianophobia’**

According to the International Society for Human Rights, about 80 per cent of all acts of religious discrimination today are directed at Christians, who were estimated by the Pew Forum in 2011 to number about 2.1 billion worldwide.

On the optimistic side, according to author Paul Marshall, Latin America is now one of the regions where people are most free to practise their faiths. The countries of central Europe have in recent years been largely spared religious persecution. There are many religiously free countries in Africa and among Asia-Pacific nations. Marshall adds, "...South Korea, Taiwan, Japan, South Africa, Botswana, Mali, and Namibia are religiously more free than France and Belgium..."

Open Doors, a Christian organization, publishes an annual listing of countries where people are least free to follow their faith. At the top is North Korea, followed by Iran, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, the Maldives, Yemen, Iraq, Uzbekistan, Laos and Pakistan. Some very brief comments about three on the list and two that are not:

#### **- Saudi Arabia**

Saudi Arabia, with more than one million Christian foreign workers, bans churches and private acts of Christian prayer. The previous monarch permitted his religious police to raid private Christian religious gatherings and to bring members up on charges of ‘blasphemy’. Saudi Wahhabism is no doubt the cause of many international violence problems today. The historian Bernard Lewis has documented this: "... oil money has enabled them (to establish a network of well-endowed schools and colleges) to spread this fanatical, destructive form of Islam all over the Muslim world and among Muslims in the West."

- **Iran**

Dozens of Christians have been arrested and jailed for attempting to worship. Struan Stevenson, President of Europe Iraq Freedom Association, has warned that the regime in Tehran has essentially the same goal as (ISIS) in using violence to create a worldwide caliphate and 'enslave the world in a medieval corruption of the Muslim faith'. He also warns that cooperation between the West and Iran in the second war on ISIS would be 'extremely dangerous' and could trigger a sectarian war between the Shiites and Sunnis that could plague the region for decades. There is also much international concern about approximately 300,000 Baha'is in Iran because they have no legal rights and their entire leadership remains in prison.

- **China**

The regime has long sought to suppress Christians. The number of them attending Party-approved churches appears to be now in the 20-30 million range; 50-75 million are estimated to belong to unregistered 'house churches'. The repression of Tibetan Buddhists and Uyghur Muslims by the party-state in Beijing is also well-known.

The persecution of Falun Gong, a nation-wide movement which uses exercises and meditation derived from Buddhism/Daoism, since mid-1999 is less well understood. A 2014 book, *The Slaughter*, by Ethan Gutmann explains how he arrives at his "best estimate" that vital organs from 65,000 Falun Gong and "two to four thousand" Uyghurs, Tibetans, or House Christians were seized in the 2000–2008 period alone. The organs are pillaged and trafficked for high prices to wealthy Chinese and 'organ tourists'.

- **Pakistan**

Christians living in Pakistan comprise about 3.8 million of the more than 170 million population. Many live in fear of its blasphemy law, which carries the death penalty and has been applied arbitrarily against religious minorities in recent years. In 2010, for example, Asia Bibi, a Christian mother of five, was sentenced to death for allegedly insulting the Prophet Muhammad. In 2011, Pakistan's federal minorities minister, Shahbaz Bhatti, was gunned down. A Christian, he had predicted his own death while defending religious freedom for Pakistanis of all faiths.

- **Canada**

Greg Pennoyer of the Canadian think tank Cardus ([www.faithincanada150.ca](http://www.faithincanada150.ca)) recently noted:

*...For more than 450 years, faith has shaped the human landscape of Canada:...it has given shape to a country that stands apart in a world deeply scarred by conflict, prejudice, and brutality... when Canada began its process of Confederation, we were almost exclusively a house of Christian faith... There were, of course, vibrant and abundant faiths among the many First Nations people across the landmass as well. Where they were not actively suppressed, they were cast out by those going about the business of founding a nineteenth-century nation-state.*

What Ottawa and other governments might do:

1. Democratic governments should make trade/investment/aid to offending governments conditional at least in part on the protection of the freedom of conscience and worship for all citizens.
2. While we continue to grapple with the worldwide persecution of religious minorities, democratic governments must do more to incorporate peace and tolerance into the fabric of their societies and continue to protect their own spiritual minorities so that they can worship, live and work freely, without fear.
3. Countries should steward their political resources for effective lobbying. We need coordinated religious freedom advocacy by our diplomatic missions in countries of concern and MPs on anti-religious freedom laws. Government officials should engage in continuous conversations on behalf of voiceless religious communities and individuals.

There is probably a greater need for committed Christians and members of other spiritual communities today than at most other points in human history. Christians and other faith community members can act as a brake upon forces that threaten to overcome civilization. Our lives must somehow manage to remind others that there is a Redeemer for our "tormented public and private world."

### **‘Eating Tears’**

The New Testament holds up a church which exists primarily for the sake of non-members. Many churches across Canada have enormous outreach in their communities; they are involved in shelters for the homeless, ministries to street people, safe places for abused women and food banks to name only a few.

Many are impressed with the work of L'Arche founded by Canada's Jean Vanier. The late Henri Nouwen of Toronto's L'Arche community wrote often about lonely, abandoned, unloved people. He spoke 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 can fulfil this role of eating tears for someone.

Nouwen moved from teaching at Harvard to L'Arche in Toronto. In his book, *In the Name of Jesus; Reflections on Christian Leadership*, Nouwen offers three principles learned from living in community at L'Arche. He felt Christians in leadership need to move from:

- the need to be relevant - to the discipline of contemplative prayer,
- the need to be popular, spectacular, individuals - to the disciplines of confession, forgiveness, community, and
- the need to be powerful in leadership - to the discipline of allowing ourselves to be led and to be guided by theological reflection.

The Christian writer Philip Yancey thinks parish churches should ideally be "God's neighbourhood bar, a hangout like the television show Cheers for people who know all about your lousy boss, your mother with heart trouble ..., and the teenager who won't do what you tell him; a place where you can unwind, spill your life story, and get a sympathetic look, not a self-righteous leer."

No-one can be a Christian alone for long. Parish churches exist primarily to worship God; His reconciling love transcends all differences of nationality, race, age and gender. In the words of Blaise Pascal, "the real strength of Christianity is that it is adapted to all."

In closing, permit me to suggest that one area where Christian lawyers could provide special leadership is in combating all forms of human trafficking. If you want a place to start, read Thomas Schirrmacher's *Human Trafficking: The Return to Slavery*. The final chapter is on what individuals everywhere can do against this scourge.

Thank you.

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Conference theme: "Seeking Wisdom". This text forms the basis for the Queen's Law School motto, Sapientia et Doctrina Stabilitas ("Wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability of thy times").

\* The Christian Legal Fellowship (CLF) is a not-for-profit association of legal professionals, which among other things explores the interrelationships between the practice/theory of law and faith. The CLF has over 575 active members from 30 denominations across Canada.