

**Love of God and Neighbour
A Prayer Breakfast, Ottawa
David Kilgour
Dec 6, 2017**

Dalai Lama



Several months ago, the Dalai Lama, the world's best-known and best-loved Buddhist, joined the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in criticizing Buddhist nationalist attacks on Burma's Rohingya ethnic minority. His Holiness said Buddha would have helped Muslims fleeing violence. "(He) would definitely give help to those poor Muslims. So still I feel that. So very sad." Certainly, my experience with Buddhists from differing origins in Edmonton and elsewhere would indicate that they would be firmly on the Dalai Lama's side.

Despite terrible violence against Muslims and other faith communities internationally, it appears that about 80 percent of those harassed or persecuted around the world for their religion today are Christians. Pew Research estimated several years ago that Christians then numbered about 2.1 billion. Approximately one-tenth of them were then being persecuted in varying degrees by governments or fellow citizens in 131 of the world's almost 200 independent countries. Approximately 105,000 Christians are murdered yearly because of their faith.

Fortunately, there are peaceful countries of differing majority faiths. Paul Marshall notes that Latin America has become one of the most religiously free regions. The nations of central/eastern Europe have in recent years been largely free from such persecution, as have many in Africa and several in Asia. During the siege of Sarajevo in the '90's, for example, by self-described Christians, many Edmonton residents of Christian, other faiths, and no faith demonstrated at city hall about the treatment of Muslims in Bosnia. Later, some of the same individuals gathered to protest the treatment of Christians in Pakistan. An attack on one faith community somewhere often becomes one against all of them.

While the world continues to grapple with the issue of persecution of Christians and other faiths, democratic governments must protect our own religious minorities, and ensure that all can worship, live, and work without fear. The protection of the freedom of conscience and speech distinguishes open societies from closed ones. Os Guinness, author of *The Global Public Square*, is an eloquent voice for religious freedom, or 'soul freedom' as he terms it, because he includes the rights of secularists as well as those of faith. He sees this freedom as key to the maintenance of an open public square in which all can live with civility and harmony. Part of that liberty is the right to change one's religion.

Jane Alexander



Jane Alexander is the Anglican Bishop of Edmonton. Interestingly, as a child she was reportedly forbidden from attending any religious classes at school by her father. It was not until she was 25 that she was baptized with her eldest child. After moving to Canada with her family in 1990, she worked as a professor in educational psychology at the University of Alberta. She was ordained as a priest in 2001 after earning her masters of theological studies from Newman Theological College. She then worked in many parishes in the diocese of Edmonton and was elected bishop in 2008.

Mark and LaRee Pickup have lived in Beaumont for 30 years. As friends for almost 40 years. I watched aggressive multiple sclerosis take him from a healthy and athletic person to electric wheelchair dependent. He was forced into medical retirement from the Canada's public service at 38 and sank for a time into a clinical depression. At a point, he emerged to use it to witness to the value, sanctity, and dignity of every life, including people with profound disabilities.



He came to the belief that there is an underlying theme of salvation that invokes love and the natural dignity of human life. His path to this was Christ's commandment to love one another. He believes that if we love Christ, our hearts will ache with compassion for humanity. For Mark, the *inward* expression of love

toward God is a reflection and spiritual refining of his image within us. The *outward* expression toward other people of God's love should encourage the natural human dignity that was theirs from their beginning when life began and the image of God was endowed upon them.

He has spoken across North America. His blog *HumanLifeMatters.org* has more than 635,000 page-views from across North America. He has received numerous awards for his work, including the Monsignor Bill Irwin Award for Ethical Excellence and a Governor General's Medal for community service.

Kim Phuc



One of the National Prayer Breakfast speakers in Ottawa was Kim Phuc, whose photograph as a young Vietnamese girl running from napalm was judged in Japan to have been the most important photo of the entire 20th century. She now lives in Canada and her biography, *The Girl in the Picture*, was written by Denise Chong.

Kim Phuc spoke on reconciliation and how after she became a Christian she could forgive all who had caused her grief, including the American who authorized bombing near her home. She has a special place in her heart for children, heading up the Kim Foundation International, a private charitable organization dedicated to providing funds to support the work of international organizations that provide free medical assistance to children who are victims of war and terrorism.

Romeo Dallaire

Retired General Romeo Dallaire is a Canadian national hero for his work as commander of the U.N. peacekeeping mission during the 1994 Rwandan Genocide. He was one of few officials who acquitted himself well throughout the entire 3-month ordeal, although he still insists on blaming himself. His personal courage and that of his tiny band of U.N. peacekeepers, while so many other foreigners were 'turning tail', seemed anchored in the Great Commandment. Dallaire himself told a National Prayer Breakfast, "There must be God because I have shaken hands with the devil." He most recent book, *They Fight Like Soldiers, They Die Like Children*, is about the plight of the estimated 250,000 child soldiers used by military and paramilitary organizations today across the world.



Sofia Yaqub and Mohammed Jawaid



Two friends of Muslim faith in southeast Edmonton wrote about their faith for this talk, but for time reasons I'll only quote one of them:

Yaqub: *We grew with the belief that a Muslim's life is to serve God and everything you do should be to please Him. In Islam, there are two kinds of obligation: to God (e.g. saying prayers 5 times a day. God may forgive you for neglecting it); to other human beings, His creations (if you wrong a person, God will not forgive unless that person does.). Our religion teaches us to respect each other and...it then it should never be the source of hurting others. It should bring out the best in us.*

More than other thing, you can please God by being useful to God's creatures, service to humanity, by supporting social justice

Be grateful no matter what. God knows best.

-Nothing happens without God's will

- Wealth and privileges are gift from God and comes with great responsibility (e.g. to use a portion of it to help the underprivileged).

-One has obligation towards their family, relatives, community, larger community, environment, God's other creations.

I feel all the above makes sense and gives purpose to life.

Monsignor Bill Irwin

The late Monsignor Bill Irwin was tireless in his devotion to any group or individual in need. He touched so many lives, helped so many people, that his message of love and compassion resound to people of all languages, faiths, and no faith. The work that he did with Catholic Social Services, Catholic Charities, Sign of Hope Society, to name a few, is vast. In the true spirit of Albertans, Bill has been up before dawn, and long after dusk, planting a crop that extends far beyond the horizon. It is one of love and goodwill that will continue to nourish this community and countless others long after this generation of workers have retired.



Shahbaz Bhatti



Shahbaz Bhatti, Pakistan's Minister for Minorities, assassinated in 2011, was aware of the dangers he faced; some of his friends in Canada urged him not to return to his country about a month before he died. A few years earlier, I'm told he led a group of Christian aid workers after an earthquake struck his country. They found a house where 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. The 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.

"Mayu" Brizuela de Avila

"Mayu" Brizuela de Avila was the highly-respected Foreign Minister 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, we both attended in the hemisphere, her contribution was profound and unique, including the signing of the Democratic Charter by Organization of American States (OAS) foreign ministers on 9/11/01 in Lima.



As an example, she was invited to speak at an OAS student forum in Edmonton. Her message to our students transmitted her faith and positive attitude on life, encouraging them to excel in their daily lives. While here, 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 every one of the political refugees that had fled her war-devastated country at the time. She sees work as a path to sanctity, a path to serve her country, her region, her fellow citizens, and God.

Gao Zhisheng



Gao Zhisheng, often called "the conscience of China", received a second nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2008. He had become a Christian after attending a Beijing house church in 2005, concluding, "In addition to physical needs, (human beings have) equally important spiritual needs..." He later gained international acclaim for donating his lawyers' skills to defend evicted farmers, miners, underground Christians, dissidents, and disabled persons.

His public criticism of persecution of the large Falun Gong community, a traditional exercise group with a spiritual component (www.endorganpillaging.org), triggered weeks of torture. It stopped only when he agreed to "confess" in a false article saying that the Beijing party-state treated his family well and that Falun Gong had tricked him into writing a letter to the U.S. Congress. Shortly after his release for a brief period, Gao wrote a letter detailing his ordeal and

authorized its release to the public in February 2009, even though he had been threatened with death if he spoke publicly about the torture. His latest book, *Unwavering Convictions*, is co-published by the American Bar Association and is featured on my website (www.david-kilgour.com)

Living our Faith

Having observed faith communities around the world over many years, I'm constantly struck by how essentially similar are all their answers to the question of how we can live our faiths today. Many women, men, and youth attempt in their daily lives to be points of light wherever they are.

Grace – God's love for all humanity– merits the final word. It is the one thing that only faiths can provide in a world which craves it the most. Grace can bring transformation and hope. As Philip Yancey expressed in his book *What's So Amazing About Grace?* it is hunger for grace that brings people to any place of worship. "I rejected the church for a time because I found so little grace there," he writes. "I returned because I found grace nowhere else." In a world filled with 'ungrace,' we believers should seek to dispense grace wherever we find ourselves.

"We must learn to live each day, each hour, yes, each minute as a new beginning, as a unique opportunity to make everything new. Imagine that we could live each moment as a moment pregnant with new life. Imagine that we could live each day as a day full of promises. Imagine that we could walk through the new year always listening to a voice saying to us: "I have a gift for you and can't wait for you to see it!" Imagine." - Henri Nouwen.

Let me close with this observation: The ministry of an unknown man in the furthest reaches of the Roman Empire lasted only three years and appeared to end with his execution.

According to John's Gospel, even his half-brother James did not believe Jesus was the son of God until he met with him face to face after his resurrection. St Paul records that post-resurrection encounter in 1 Corinthians 15:3-7. Like so many of us, James needed to discover—to encounter—the amazing grace of Jesus. Now twenty centuries later people across much of the world worship him. It is something for all of us to ponder.

Merci.