

A View from the Pew

by Deacon Greg Kandra

Modern Martyrdom: Part 2

Indeed, I Have Been Put to the Test

Last week I reminded readers of the story of the Iranian pastor and convert Youcef Nadarkhani, who served a prison sentence—and faced death—for refusing to recant his conversion to Christianity. His plight captured the attention of international human rights groups and sparked prayers and petitions around the world. Those prayers and petitions paid off. Youcef Nadarkhani was eventually freed and reunited with his family.

He wrote this letter of thanksgiving to all those who had worked so diligently for his release:

Indeed I have been put to the test—the test of faith which is, according to the Scriptures “more precious than perishable gold.” But I have never felt loneliness, I was all the time aware of the fact that it wasn’t a solitary battle, for I have felt all the energy and support of those who obeyed their conscience and fought for the promotion of the justice and the rights of all human beings. Thanks to these efforts, I have now the enormous joy to be with by my wonderful wife and my children. I am grateful for these people through whom God has been working. All of this is very encouraging.

During that period, I had the opportunity to experience in a marvelous way the Scripture that says, “Indeed, as the sufferings of Christ abound for us, our encouragement abound through Christ.” He has comforted my family and has given them the means to face that difficult situation. In His Grace, He provided for their spiritual and material needs, taking away from me a heavy weight. The Lord has wonderfully provided through the trial, allowing me to face the challenges that were in front of me. As the Scriptures says, “He will not allow us to be tested beyond our strength....”

And he added:

I want to express my gratitude towards those who, all around the world, have worked for the cause that I defend. I want to express my gratitude to all of those who have supported me, openly or in complete secrecy.

Tragically, Nadarkhani’s story is not unique.

The American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ), which spearheaded the campaign to have him freed, lists numerous other Christians facing persecution in Iran.

Pastor Farshid Fathi was sentenced to six years in Iran’s notorious Evin prison. His crime: openly practicing his Christian faith. According to the ACLJ, “The regime argued that his Christian activities were equivalent to ‘actions against national security.’” He was also charged with possessing religious propaganda—at trial, the regime offered as evidence that Pastor Fathi “had Bibles printed in Farsi, had unlawfully distributed Bibles, and possessed Christian literature.”

There is also Pastor Behnam Irani, who was sentenced to six years in an Iranian prison for pastoring a group of converts in his home and sharing his faith with Muslims. The ACLJ says: “Although Pastor Irani was not formally charged with apostasy, the verdict from his 2006 arrest includes text that describes the pastor as an apostate and reiterates that apostates ‘can be killed.’”

Persecution against Christians in some parts of the world is real, immediate and ongoing. We need to remember in our prayers those who suffer so greatly for the faith that we are able to practice openly. We need to cherish our religious freedoms in this country, now more than ever. It is a freedom we can never take for granted.

And we pray to Our Lady Queen of Martyrs, our patroness and our hope. May she offer comfort and hope to all who suffer because they believe in her Son.

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Editor’s Note: For related information and to show your solidarity with persecuted Christians in the Middle East, please visit www.archny.org/persecution-of-christians.