



# Praying in Jesus' Name Becomes Like Crossing a Minefield

Dr. Bruce Sidebotham

Public prayer in Jesus' name has become a career issue in some professions. The city of Great Falls, SC, will be appealing a federal court decision that prevents them from starting meetings with prayer in the name of Jesus.<sup>1</sup> Franklin Graham, who says, "I know of no other way of praying except in the name of Jesus Christ,"<sup>2</sup> evoked a firestorm of criticism at President Bush's inauguration.

Christian leaders such as R. Albert Mohler, Jr., president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, praise courage like Graham's saying, "No Christian minister who understands the Gospel can reduce prayer to public relations."<sup>3</sup> Others, for instance Rebecca Alpert, associate professor of religion at Temple University, dislike public prayers in Jesus' name, because "when praying in public, there is an obligation to speak to everyone."<sup>4</sup>

A popular television commentator two years ago mused, "In an era of political correctness and tolerance, well, why should Jesus be off-limits?"<sup>5</sup>

Military-wide, chaplains and commanders from lieutenant to general are wrestling with this contradiction. From my own experience among Muslims, I will offer some insights and some practical suggestions.



This controversy revolves around the prepositions "with" and "for" and the question, "Is public prayer offered *with* the audience or *for* the audience?"

In Indonesia I prayed *among* Muslims, and I prayed *for* Muslims, but I never prayed *with* Muslims. We always had good relations, because we had no confusion over our relationship. Oftentimes at weddings, funerals, building dedications, and family gatherings to which I was invited, a Muslim cleric would pray. With shoes off, legs folded, eyes open, and palms upward, I respectfully blended in, listening and praying silently on my own. Everyone knew I was a Christian. The cleric was leading his flock in prayer. They were praying with each other but not with me, nor I with them. Ours was a "for" relationship. They performed publicly before me, and I performed silently before them.

On other occasions, I visited Muslims in hospitals, heard from friends of difficulties they were experiencing, and grieved with families who had lost loved ones. Not once did anyone turn down my offer to pray for them in Jesus' name. Hands folded, eyes closed, and head bowed, I prayed *before* them, but not *with* them. Not knowing Jesus, they could listen but could not follow. I was their intercessor, not their leader, and they were always pleased that I had cared for them in this way.

Public prayer in Jesus' name at events like command changes, memorial services, and staff meetings will not be controversial when organizers and participants understand the difference between praying *with* and praying *for* and adjust their expectations accordingly. In such pluralistic public settings a more proper

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**I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father (John 14:13).**



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introduction is not, "Let us pray," but "Now I will pray," with the implication that those of like faith can follow along, and those with a different religion can just listen.

Problems arise when someone unrealistically decides that everyone in an audience of mixed faiths needs to participate, because, although people with different gods and different mediators can pray *for* one another, they cannot pray *with* one another.

The commandment, "You shall have no other gods" (Exodus 20:3), means I cannot lead or follow in prayer through any other than Jesus Christ, "for there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5).

So what can I do for public prayer when asked to leave out the name of Jesus? I perceive that I have five options.

Option #1: I can refuse and either pray in Jesus' name anyway or not pray at all.

Option #2: I can explain the difference between praying *with* and

praying *for* and request I be allowed to pray *before* the audience in Jesus' name rather than be required to lead them as participants in a prayer against my conscience.

Option #3: I can disguise the name of Jesus with one of his titles or descriptions concluding with something like, "in the name of the Alpha and Omega" or "in the name of the one before whom every knee will bow." God and Christians in the audience will understand through whom the prayer is offered. Antagonists may or may not be accommodated.

Option #4: I can replace the name Jesus with a more "inclusive" term and pray, for example, "in our Savior's name." Christians in the audience will understand this to be Jesus, but non-Christians may understand this to be someone or something else.

Option #5: Instead of leading prayer against my conscience, I can facilitate members of the audience in praying silently according to their own belief system. In this option, I would not actually pray but would



rather conduct the silent prayer of groups and individuals according to their own respective faiths. Elements to be orchestrated would be posture, opening, suggestions, and then the closing.

So which of these is my favorite? Based on the situation, it would be the one which best simultaneously preserves both my testimony and the opportunity to testify.

So do not be discouraged. With these principles and possibilities, both at home and abroad, we can continue advancing the cause of Christ through the minefield of public prayer.

#### NOTES

1. Alex Chadwick, *Day to Day* (NPR); 08/09/2004.
2. Marion Callahan, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*; 08/21/2002.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Hannity & Colmes (FOX News); 08/05/2002.



## Malaysian Court Discriminates Against Malays

Sarah Page

Religious freedom has become a hot topic in Malaysia, sparked by a decision made in the Kelantan *Sharia* Court in late July.

The four Malay Muslims at the center of the debate first applied to change their religion in 1992. Since the Malay constitution defines all Malays as Muslims, all four were arrested and given a 20-month prison sentence.

In August 1998, the four formally renounced Islam before a commissioner of oaths, attempting to sidestep the *sharia* court system. However, according to a report by the World Evangelical Alliance Religious Liberty Commission, the Kelantan *Sharia* Court then charged them with contempt in the year 2000 for refusing to attend "repentance" classes which were part of their original sentence.

The four were then sentenced to three years at an Islamic rehabilitation camp. Appeals to the Kelantan High Court were rejected.

Through this ruling, the court successfully avoided setting any precedent on the issue of apostasy, or conversion out of Islam.

Haris Mohamed Ibrahim, lawyer for the four, told reporters from the *Asia Times*, "We hoped the courts would resolve problems individuals are facing, but the court declined to answer this landmark issue."

Since the ruling, Malaysians have debated the issue in public forums and newspaper editorials questioning the jurisdiction of *sharia* courts and whether Malay Muslims have constitutional rights to choose their own religion.

A letter posted 28 July on the Malaysiakini website commented,

"Our federal constitution under Article 11 guarantees and affords its citizens the right to chose and practice the religion of his or her choice. But the *sharia* court doesn't seem to think that this right of choice extends to Malay Muslims."

Under the provisions of *sharia* law and the Quran, an apostate could be sentenced to death. This makes it almost impossible for Malay Muslims to convert, since they must first apply to the *sharia* court for permission to change their religion.

Courts are reluctant to grant this permission, since ethnic Malays are considered Muslims from birth. The same does not apply to other ethnic groups, for example ethnic groups in the states of Sarawak and Sabah, who are predominantly Christian.

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# Rwanda Holocaust Has Lessons For Elsewhere

Peter Hammond

Ten years ago, one of the most dreadful campaigns of mass murder ever was unleashed upon Rwanda's Tutsi people. In just 100 days, more people were slaughtered with machetes and clubs than died from atomic weapons in all of history.

At the time, world media attention was focused on South Africa's first "One Man, One Vote" elections. When the genocide was launched on 6 April 1994, most African correspondents were in South Africa covering the elections. The MRND (Mouvement Revolutionnaire National pour le Development) government orchestrated the genocide, mobilizing the French trained Presidential Guard, the army, the gendarmes and civil administrators to slaughter the Tutsi minority.

Central to the MRND strategy was sowing confusion to disguise what was happening. They imposed a news blackout, cut telephone links, established a network of roadblocks and imposed a nation wide curfew. These measures kept people in their homes and prevented most from fleeing. By cutting communications and restricting travel, they isolated their victims and stifled reporting.

Following the assassination of the president, by surface to air missile, the MRND launched a campaign of disinformation. It portrayed the killings as a spontaneous outbreak of tribal violence, thus representing the mass killing of defenseless people as "war." It played the humanitarian card by pleading for emergency aid. All this was a smoke screen to conceal state sponsored genocide.

Many foreign aid workers unwittingly assisted the disinformation campaign with ill informed comments like: "Everyone is killing everyone!" and "The tribes are killing each other again."

Having killed opposition politicians, national journalists, human rights activists and others

who might have accurately reported the cold-blooded mass murder campaign, the MRND continued to misinform others by portraying the violence as spontaneous rage in response to the assassination of the president.

International attention initially focused on the plight of foreigners. Camera crews were, understandably, only prepared to travel with international troops – whose mission was to evacuate foreigners. This further slanted the incomplete picture portrayed to the world. The murder of ten Belgian soldiers on 7 April only heightened this preoccupation with evacuating foreigners. The Belgians may have been murdered precisely to make the evacuation of foreigners the international priority and to further encourage withdrawal of the UMAMIR (United Nations Assistance Mission to Rwanda).

This disinformation strategy succeeded spectacularly. To this day, most people worldwide do not understand what happened in Rwanda or why. That is why, after my mission to Rwanda, I produced a compact book to expose what happened and to explain why this systematic slaughter was unleashed. *Holocaust In Rwanda* analyzes events leading up to the violence and details lessons we need to learn.

This holocaust uniquely exposes the disgraceful role of liberal church leaders, gun control, and media manipulation. Rwanda was a gun free zone. The organizers successfully manipulated and intimidated the media into vilifying the targeted Tutsis so that masses of Hutus were mobilized to kill their neighbors. The French government scandalously provided assistance,

training, and weapons to the rampaging faction, and their military expedition to create a safe zone ended up providing sanctuary for many architects of the genocide.

My book examines the challenge presented to the Christian church. The marauders did not merely kill people in churches, they killed church workers – pastors, ministers, priests and nuns. However, the most shocking aspect of the anti-Christian mass

murders was how many of the killers were trusted church members. Some priests, nuns and ministers were even directly involved in the genocide! Several heads of denominations betrayed their Tutsi congregations and co-workers into the hands of the killers.

These bishops and ministers are an indictment upon our seminaries and church councils. Those who do not wholeheartedly love the Lord Jesus Christ and his Word are not qualified to be spiritual leaders. The Rwandan Holocaust exposes a superficial and self centered easy-believism that masquerades as the Gospel. Compromise and cowardice helped facilitate the catastrophe.

Most importantly, *Holocaust In Rwanda* presents lessons and foundational principles for preventing such atrocities from reoccurring. At the end are Biblical principles which are not only important for Rwanda but for every society which values life and liberty.

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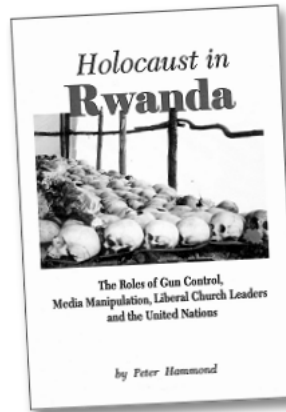
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level, and a willingness to serve. Singles and married couples are encouraged to apply, but super-Christians who have it all together need not bother (Frontiers doesn't think the latter exist.)

Frontiers will help Gap team members raise support for living and travel expenses. Candidates must attend a one month orientation preparing them for spiritual growth, team-building, peacemaking, cultural adaptation and communicating with Muslims.

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director: Dr. Bruce Sidebotham  
mailing address: P.O. Box 26396, Colorado Springs, Colorado 80936-6396  
e-mail: [bside@oprev.org](mailto:bside@oprev.org), phone: (719) 572-5908, fax: (775) 248-8147, Web Site: [www.oprev.org](http://www.oprev.org)

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