

CRYING FOR JUSTICE Dec 1993

by Shirley W. Madany

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The Kurdish people have had the misfortune to live in a completely landlocked part of the world. Part of their population can be found within the borders of Iraq, Iran, Turkey, Syria and the former Soviet Union. They have been denied nationhood and remember bitterly how close they came to achieving that dream after World War I. But it was not to be. None of the above-mentioned countries would give up any land. It is a major achievement that a portion of northern Iraq is now called Iraqi Kurdistan. This is thanks to the protection and attention given to that area by the United Nations since the Gulf War.

However, this is a small bonus in the face of the horrible suffering experienced by Christian and Muslim alike who populated that area. Two hundred Christian and 4,000 Kurdish villages have been razed by Iraqi President Saddam Hussein. The Christian minority suffers side by side with its Muslim neighbors. A refugee from this area wrote to us from Teheran, Iran. He was responding to a series of Sunday sermons in Arabic based on the book of Job. He wanted to cry out like Job: "How long must we suffer?" He did not have much hope that he would see justice in his day. This man had just learned of the death of his father five years after the event!

Thousands of fractured families exist in refugee camps. The United Nations High Commission on Refugees empties these camps as best they can, sending their human cargo far and wide. We know, because we hear from them. They go to various parts of the world. We have heard from Iraqi refugees resettling in Ethiopia, Finland, Sweden, Canada, and Australia. Most of them speak two languages, either Kurdish and Arabic, or Assyrian and Arabic and now must learn another if they are to succeed in their new country.

A fearless Shiite Iraqi from southern Iraq has written two books on the subject of injustice in his country. His first was *The Republic of Fear: The Inside Story of Saddam's Iraq*. It was published under the pseudonym Samir al Khalil.

His latest book is *Cruelty and Silence*. That title prompted the need for this article. The book was reviewed in the *Wall Street Journal* on April 7, 1993. Now the author uses his real name--Kanan Makiya. The reviewer thinks that the book should be required reading for the Clinton State Department. Makiya's book is a "passionately argued critique of Arab intellectuals' silence in the face of this cruelty; a silence Mr. Makiya characterizes as a vast moral failure of devastating consequences for the Arab world."

The reviewer says that to read this book is like having someone strike a bruise. Pain accumulates as Mr. Makiya details some of the suffering in Iraq today. An estimated 182,000 Kurds were murdered in Saddam's horrific assault on the Kurdish population of northern Iraq.

Apparently Mr. Makiya is attempting to reach an Arab audience with his book, and we in the West become mere spectators. "Silence," he writes, "is a synonym for the death of compassion in the

Arab world....Silence is choosing, ostrich-like, not to know what Arab is doing to fellow Arab, all in the name of a knee-jerk anti-Westernism which has turned into a disease." Cruelty and Silence has been published simultaneously in English, Arabic, and Kurdish.

American Christians are caught in an unfortunate position if they rely only on TV for their news. If the camera cannot get to where a particular action is, then there is no reporting about that event or story. This is the case for the Kurds. They struggle constantly with the fact that they have no voice. When they do speak no one wants to listen.

Years ago, I enjoyed a lively correspondence with an Iraqi girl who was studying in the British Isles. She wanted to be a Christian. Eventually she had to return to her country, and later she wrote from a far northern city. Some time after finding a job, she married and the letters ceased. Often when a Muslim girl marries, she loses the freedom to maintain outside contacts. She had never mentioned that she was Kurdish. She had responded to our Arabic broadcast while she was studying in Britain, about ten years ago.

Early this year I was surprised to receive a letter from a refugee camp in Iraq, written in English. It was Nadine. She wondered if I remembered her and apologized for not writing for so long. "We, the Kurds, have lived through a very bad time and we are still suffering." Her address was a camp within the borders of Iraq! Could we help her? Could the church help her?

I wrote back immediately, encouraging her to be patient. Considering her address, I was confident that one day she would be resettled somewhere in this world. I urged her to keep in touch. I wish I could say that I have had a reply.

Recently we have also been corresponding with another Iraqi who is resettled in mid-western Canada. He is haunted by what he has been through and finds it hard to appreciate the safety in which he now lives, for his heart is still back in his country of Iraq. As he put it: "My body is here, but my heart and my spirit are with my friends and relatives who are living in very hard circumstances. They are facing the lack of food, medicine, gas, etc. under very unstable political circumstances,." In another letter he told us how after 1976 the Iraqi authorities started the destruction of all the villages in northern Iraq, near the borders of Turkey and Iran. They deported the people to new towns built in areas almost like desert, without providing any living resources or accommodations.

In 1978 we wrote an article entitled "Ministering to Minorities." At that time we emphasized how many Kurdish people were listening to our broadcast. We also told how one listener had taken it upon himself to translate our books into Kurdish for his family and friends who did not understand the Arabic language. We have heard recently from Christians working in Kurdistan that our broadcast continues to be a favorite. We have received thousands of letters from the area of Mosul (Nineveh of Bible times).

This description of the agony of Kurdistan would not be complete without the graphic story as told to us by one refugee. It is a story which could be repeated many times over.

"We left our native land in northern Iraq around two years ago, exactly on 31st March, 1991. We were celebrating the first day of Easter. We dressed up for the occasion and went to church in our city of Irbil; I, my wife, and three children, accompanied by my aged mother and my older sister. We had left at home all the special food of Easter: colored eggs, stuffed chicken and many other of the nice things of our land.

Yes, we left for church at dawn as was our custom, and we never went back home. We were attacked (by Saddam Hussein's army - this is a Kurdish area) and found ourselves fleeing on foot without food or drink. Finally we made it to Iran after a long march which took eight days over the Kurdistan mountains and valleys with snow and rain falling on us. The Iraqi army was following us with its huge guns and its air power. My story is very, very long. In fact, we experienced what the Lord mentioned in the Gospel: 'Let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let no one on the roof of his house go down to take anything out of the house. Let no one in the field go back to get his cloak.' Matthew 24: 16-18. We left everything behind, and headed for the mountains. Our faith was strong that we were going to make it, having had communion early in the morning prior to the army's attack. Would you believe it? They attacked us on that Holy Day in a beastly manner with their tanks, their airplanes and other weapons of destruction.

Please forgive me for these words. I just happened to remember those days and could no longer control my nerves and so had to express myself in this fashion. I will write again."

There is a sequel to this story. This man, separated from his family, and alone in a foreign land as a refugee, had been overjoyed to discover his favorite Christian radio broadcast in Arabic. It was a touch of Christian fellowship. We were able to ship him all of our publications immediately and later, much later heard from him that they had been reunited as a family.

We pray that God will sustain the Christians of Kurdistan, small though they are in number, and that He will also work in the hearts of Kurdish nationals everywhere, opening them to the Gospel. With God all things are possible.