

# A cry for help

## Torture of Christians must be dealt with



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Adam Yauch and the Beastie Boys won't be holding benefit concerts for this any time soon. Rage Against the Machine probably won't be raging against it in the near future.

Yauch and the other Beastie Boys have done a good deal in helping to expose the persecution of Buddhists by the Chinese government through Free Tibet concerts and the like. But there is another kind of religious persecution that is occurring in larger numbers and often in a more horrifying context throughout many parts of the world.

In spite of the lack of publicity and outcry on the part of celebrities and rock stars, the issue of Christian persecution around the world is one that must be addressed and dealt with.

The heavy persecution of Christians in some countries is not often heard of in the United States. Nonetheless, the evidence of persistent persecution is quite strong. A resolution in Congress that passed in September 1996 stated that more Christians have become martyrs in the 20<sup>th</sup> century than in the past 19 combined.

Indeed, there have been numerous reports of widespread torture, killing and imprisonment of Christians in dozens of countries. The countries that have produced the worst and most disturbing acts of persecution are China, Sudan, Pakistan, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Vietnam, Cuba and Nigeria.

Just a few examples of this persecution are enough to make one wonder why this issue has not been addressed more frequently in our country. One example: Amnesty International reports cases in China of Christian women hung by their thumbs from wires and beaten with heavy rods, denied food and water and shocked with electric probes. Jeff Jacoby, a syndicated columnist with the Boston Globe, has offered other examples in past columns. He has written: "... for millions of Christians in other lands, fear is ever present. Never before - never before - have so many believers in Jesus been persecuted for their faith."

Jacoby has given the example of Christians inhabiting the Nuba Mountains in Sudan. He reports Nuba women are systematically raped by Arab soldiers in order to produce non-Nuba offspring. Jacoby goes on to write that there have been reports, including those by Catholic bishops, of crucifixions of Christians carried out by the Sudanese army.

Sudan's Islamic government also has engaged in a policy of forcible conversion. Some Christians in Sudan have resisted conversion and, consequently, have been denied food and medicine. Christian children are reported to be stolen from their homes and sold into slavery by the thousands.

In Pakistan, the government recently has passed a blasphemy law that forbids any speaking or acting out against the prophet Mohammed. The punishment for violators is death. A 12-year-old Christian child was sentenced to death under this law and was freed only after increasing international pressure. The child is now in hiding because of the bounty Muslim terrorists have placed on

his head.

But perhaps the most frequent and bloody cases of Christian persecution exist in China. In the nation that serves as home to the second largest number of Christians in the world, there are continual reports of beatings and murders of those who worship in the underground house church movement.

Nina Shea, director of the Puebla Program on Religious Freedom, has stated in various speeches that "thousands of Christians are in gulags there, imprisoned because they dared to read the Bible, preach or sing hymns in public."

She has said Chinese leaders see Christians as their biggest threat to political stability. Indeed, the draft of the 1996 House resolution noted Chinese leaders have called underground evangelical and Catholic congregations "a principal threat to political stability."

Nevertheless, the U.S. government, well aware of the countless human rights abuses in China, has done nothing. In fact, its response has been to renew Most Favored Nation trade status to China, where the United States buys eight times more from the Chinese than the Chinese buy from the United States.

This policy, despite arguments of constructive engagement, only seems to condone the actions of the intolerant Chinese government. In the past, the United States held sanctions against the communist states of the former Soviet Union and eastern European countries, Cuba and South Africa, so why do we now insist upon free trade with communist China? Isn't the oppression of freedom displayed by the Chinese government and the heavy persecution of Christians, as well as Buddhists, enough to bring some kind of official condemnation from the United States?

Apparently not. President Clinton, who promised in his 1992 campaign to end MFN status with China, has gone back on his word since then (surprise) and enthusiastically renewed it. The government isn't the only institution showing indifference to worldwide Christian persecution. American churches, the institutions that should be most upset by the abuses of fellow

believers, has remained, for the most part, deafly silent.

The issue was first brought to national attention not by church leaders, but by Michael Horowitz, a member of the Hudson Institute, and A.M. Rosenthal, a columnist for the New York Times. Both men are Jewish, and both question the silence of most Christians on the subject.

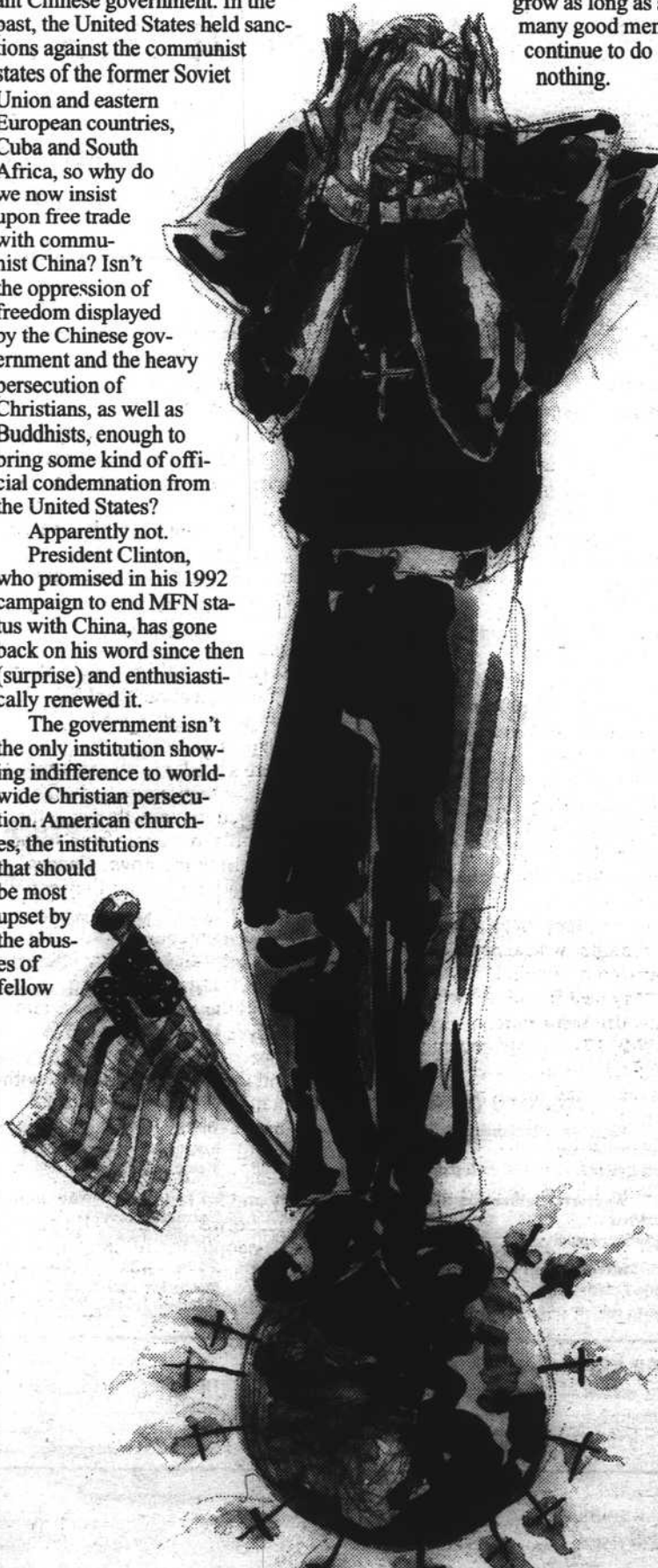
Rosenthal writes in a New York Times column: "If I were a Christian I would complain that Christian leaders, political, religious and business, around the world have failed in their obligations to fight oppression of their co-religionists."

Christian churches, especially Protestant ones, frequently are silent regarding issues they consider to be too "political." Their general taciturnity on issues ranging from abortion to racism has led to common disregard of one of the main responsibilities of the church: protection of the weak and vulnerable.

It is written in the fourth chapter of Ecclesiastes, verse 1: "Again I looked and saw all the oppression that was taking place under the sun. I saw the tears of the oppressed, and they have no comforter. Power was on the side of their oppressors."

This power of the oppressors written about so long ago remains to be very much alive today.

And it will simply continue to grow as long as so many good men continue to do nothing.



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