

# Taking the Pathetic Out of the Prophetic

☒ Thirty years ago, prophetic ministry dramatically altered the course of my life. God sent a seasoned prophetic woman all the way from Israel to Dallas in order to have a three-minute telephone conversation with me via a radio program.

This encounter completely changed my career and life expectations and thrust me into ministry. It is an example of the power of true prophetic ministry—something that is desperately needed in difficult times.

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## When God Sings

☒ “The voice of the Lord is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the Lord thunders over the mighty waters. The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is majestic. The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars; the Lord breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon. ... The voice of the Lord twists the oaks and strips the forests bare. And in his temple all cry, “Glory!” —Psalm 29:3-5, 9

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## Thirsting for Fellowship

**Psalm 143:1-12** In this psalm David said, “I spread out my hands to You; my soul longs for You like a thirsty land” (v.

6). Recently we have gone through a severe drought where I live. As I looked on our land, I saw cracks in the earth, and they seemed to be crying out, "Fill me, fill me." The earth was cracked because there was no moisture to spare it from the burning rays of the sunshine. David was going through a dry time, and the land of his soul felt parched, dry and cracked for lack of the rain of God's Spirit.

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## No Forced Mediation for Rifqa Bary, Florida Pastor Under Fire for Helping Runaway Teen



An Ohio judge ruled Tuesday that Christian convert Rifqa Bary does not have to meet with her Muslim parents as part of a possible reconciliation plan.

Magistrate Mary Goodrich of Franklin County Juvenile Court in Ohio denied Mohamed and Aysha Bary's request to force their 17-year-old daughter to participate in mediation, the *Columbus Post-Dispatch* reported.

Image: AP Photo/ George Skene

Bary has refused to have contact with her parents or siblings. She said she has post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) because of her ordeal and is not ready for mediation with her family. She is working with a counselor to determine if she has PTSD.

The teen will also be allowed to receive Christmas cards, letters and other messages from her supporters despite an

attempt by her parents' attorney to block such "third-party correspondence." Mohamed and Aysha Bary's attorney, Omar Tarazi, had filed a motion asking that all third-party communication be directed to Franklin County Children Services. He withdrew the motion Tuesday without explanation.

Bary ran away from her home outside Columbus, Ohio, to Orlando, Fla., in July, saying her Muslim father threatened to kill her for converting to Christianity. Her father denies that allegation, and a Florida law enforcement investigation found no evidence to support her claims.

The teen was returned to Ohio in October, where she has been living in foster care. She seeks to remain in foster care until she turns 18. A hearing in her dependency case is scheduled for Jan. 19.

Meanwhile, Orlando pastor Blake Lorenz is under increasing scrutiny over his role in getting Bary to Florida. Lorenz and his wife, Beverly, met the girl through a prayer group on Facebook and sheltered her for nearly three weeks before she was placed in foster care.

In an affidavit filed in Ohio this week, a former administrator at the Lorenzes' church, Global Revolution Church, said several lawyers told Blake Lorenz that transporting the teen across state lines was unlawful.

In his sworn statement, Brian Smith said Lorenz and another church member bought Bary a bus ticket under a false name. Smith said Lorenz asked him for church money to pay some of the teen's expenses, including the cost of a bed and a disposable cell phone, the *Orlando Sentinel* reported.

Smith claims Lorenz refused to call Florida's Department of Children and Families when police and others advised him to report that the teen was living with him and his wife.

Lorenz told the *Sentinel* he was not worried about Smith's

claims and that the truth would prevail. His attorney, Mathew Staver of Liberty Counsel, called Smith a disgruntled ex-employee.

“There’s a lot of allegations in that affidavit that I know personally are not factual,” Staver told the *Sentinel*. “I’ve known the Lorenzes for 20 years. The last thing they would do is intentionally violate the law.”

Smith denied that he was disgruntled and said his statement is truthful based on the information he was told.Â

The Florida Department of Law Enforcement told the Orlando newspaper it has completed its investigation into the pastors’ role into Bary’s flight to Florida. A decision on whether or not the Lorenzes will face charges has not been made.

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# Pastors Conspire Against Commercializing Christmas

✘ While many Christian leaders campaign to keep Christ in Christmas by going after retailers who use the words “Happy Holidays” instead of “Merry Christmas,” a group of pastors are waging a different kind of culture war.

Now in its fourth year as a rising movement, Advent Conspiracy challenges church members across the nation to fight against the commercialization of Christmas by replacing consumption with compassion.

In 2005, Rick McKinley, pastor of Imago Dei Community in Portland, Ore., and his pastor friends were privately bemoaning the upcoming Christmas season when they came up with a radical idea to change the way their congregants celebrate Christmas.

The group came up with a four-pronged approach to returning Christmas to its original purpose that involved worshipping fully, spending less, giving more and loving all—especially the “least of these.” The church leaders urged members to bypass the typical overspending on gifts and maxing out credit cards, and instead focus on donating money to support humanitarian work and other worthwhile projects.

Since Advent Conspiracy’s inception, more than 5,000 churches have been involved in donating millions of dollars to various causes, such as the movement’s choice cause of digging wells in developing countries through a ministry called Living Water

International.

“[Advent Conspiracy is] generating income in the multiple millions of dollars,” says Living Water President Jerry Wiles. “It’s a very effective way of getting people involved and creating awareness there is a global water crisis and that people can do something about it.”

McKinley admits initially some believers were unsure about what to do in exchanging the gift of presence for presents. “Some people were terrified,” he says. “They said, ‘My gosh, you’re ruining Christmas. What do we tell our kids?’”

But after reassuring their members they were not advocating total abstinence from gift giving, the pastors said congregants began to participate in various projects.

“Christians get all bent out of shape over the fact that someone didn’t say ‘Merry Christmas’ when I walked into the store,” McKinley says. “But why are we expecting the store to tell our story? That’s just ridiculous.”

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## **Not by Might, nor by Power, but by My Spirit**

**Zechariah 4:1-5:11** We sing a song in our church based on this scripture. This song is saying it is not by our own might or strength that we do God's will. It is by the might and power of the Spirit that we are able to do anything for the Lord on this earth. The Holy Spirit is the might and power of God. The Holy Spirit manifests God's works and wonders on this earth, and these wonders and works reveal God's might and power. We can only see the wind by watching the trees rustle their leaves and sway to and fro. God's Spirit manifests God's power and might throughout the earth and also through our own lives. We are vessels of the Lord created to contain His Spirit. We have to remember, however, we are not to keep this treasure to ourselves. We are to manifest God's glory (His might, light and power) to others by allowing the Holy Spirit to rustle us, to stir us up and to pour the oil of His anointing from these earthen vessels to all those we encounter throughout the day.

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# Christmas Season Attacks Worry Christians in India

✘ With at least two violent attacks and alleged “reconversion” of more than 1,700 Christians in the week leading up to Christmas, a sense of fear is growing among India’s minority Christian community.

On Sunday, Hindu extremists attacked a church during worship in western Maharashtra state’s Sindhudurg district and a Christmas exhibition in Gwalior city in central Madhya Pradesh state. The following day, extremists claimed having converted over 1,700 tribal (aboriginal) Christians “back” to Hinduism in western Gujarat state.

“Christmas is a favorite time for violence against Christians in India, as it intimidates the Christian community at large,” said Dr. John Dayal, member of the government’s National Integration Council, headed by Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

Dayal pointed out that the first mass attack on Christians in India took place in Gujarat’s Dangs district during Christmas in 1998, setting the stage for future attacks through the season.

“Then Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee [of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party or BJP] went to see the damage [in Dangs], but instead of commiserating with the victims, he called for a national debate on conversions,” Dayal said. “That political philosophy has been behind the festive season attacks on the Christian community.”

The Rev. Anand Muttungal of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Madhya Pradesh said the attacks around Christmas could be a reaction to increased and favorable coverage of Christians and churches in newspapers and television channels during the

festival season.

“Rightwing extremists cannot tolerate this, and they cannot stop it either,” he said. “So, in frustration, they launch attacks.”

On Christmas Eve of 2007, eastern Orissa’s Kandhamal district witnessed a massive spate of anti-Christian attacks that killed at least four Christians and burned 730 houses and 95 churches.

### **Arson in Madhya Pradesh**

The assailants in the Dec. 20 attack in Madhya Pradesh state have been identified as members of the extreme rightwing outfit *Bajrang Dal*. Muttungal said members of the Hindu extremist group shouted Hindu slogans and burned artwork depicting biblical scenes at an annual Christmas fair organized by the Catholic Church in Gwalior city.

The mayor of Gwalior had inaugurated the two-day fair on Saturday (Dec. 19), and it was organized with due permission from authorities, he said.

“The incident has spread panic among Christians in the state,” reported *Indian Catholic*, a news portal run by the Catholic Church in India.

The portal quoted Archbishop Leo Cornelio of Bhopal as saying that the attack “is a matter of serious concern for Christians, especially when we are preparing to celebrate Christmas.”

Three of the attackers were arrested, and two of them were sent to judicial custody by a local court.

Also on Sunday, around 60 men barged into the New Life Fellowship (NLF) church in Kankauli area in Maharashtra’s Sindhudurg district and beat the pastor, his wife and a few other Christians, according to NLF Pastor Atul Bhole. The

church meets at the privately owned Anant Hotel in Kankauli.

“The attackers, all men, accused us of converting Hindus,” the 37-year-old pastor told Compass. “Then they beat us, including my wife, with their hands and legs. My back is still in pain.”

The attackers were allegedly led by a local leader of the Hindu extremist *Shiv Sena* party, identified as Vaibhav Naik. Also taking a lead role in the attack was a local leader of the ruling Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), Rupesh Nagrekar.

The NCP is part of the ruling state coalition with the Congress Party. As policy, both parties renounce the Hindu nationalist ideology of the opposition *Shiv Sena* party and its ally the BJP. But involvement of local leaders of the two “secular” parties is not uncommon in Maharashtra.

An official from the Kankauli police station said police were on the lookout for the attackers, and that they would be arrested soon.

A Christian from the NLF church said police were initially reluctant to take action against the attackers.

“The police warned us against ‘conversions,’ as if the allegations made against us were true,” the Christian said. “Only after Dr. Abraham Mathai from the Maharashtra State Minorities Commission intervened did the police show interest in prosecuting the attackers.”

### **‘Reconversions’ in Gujarat**

Following these two attacks, yesterday (Dec. 21) Hindu extremist group *Shree Sampraday Seva Samiti* (Service Committee of the Hindu sect *Shree Sampraday*) claimed to have “reconverted” 1,747 people to Hinduism in Gujarat state’s Surat city, reported *The Times of India* newspaper.

“The camp to reconvert tribals, who had embraced Christianity, was held in the city for the first time, and nearly 5,000

people from Maharashtra and Gujarat participated in the ceremony," the newspaper reported.

About 10 Hindu priests chanted mantras at a fire ritual, around which sat those willing to "get back" to Hinduism, it stated, adding that participants were given a meditation word and sacred thread to mark their "reconversion."

"We organized the event in Surat to promote Hinduism in urban areas," one of the organizers, Yashwant More, told the newspaper. "We have a series of events planned in the near future to hold such reconversion camps in urban areas of Gujarat. In January, events are planned in Vadodara and Silvassa."

Gujarat has an anti-conversion law, known as the Gujarat Freedom of Religion Act, which mandates all those seeking to convert, as well as clergy involved in any "conversion ceremony," to seek prior permission from district authorities. No permission was sought for the event, noted the newspaper.

Christians complain that anti-conversion laws, in force in four other states including Madhya Pradesh, have been enacted only to harass Christians and are rarely used against Hindu nationalist groups.

Sociologists say that India's tribal peoples, who have long practiced their own ethnic faiths, are not Hindus. Hindu nationalists are active mainly in tribal regions to "Hinduize" local villagers and repel conversions to other faiths.

Many reports of "reconversions," however, have been found to be false. In 2007, Hindi-language daily *Punjab Kesari* reported that four Christian families in Nahan town, in the northern state of Himachal Pradesh, had "reconverted" to Hinduism. But a fact-finding team of the All India Christian Council revealed that none of the members of those families had ever converted to Christianity.

More than 80 percent of India's 1.1 billion people are Hindus; Christians make up a meager 2.3 percent of the population.

Opposition and attacks will not dampen the spirit of Christmas, said Dayal.

"The birth of Christ is a harbinger of salvation, and this salvific promise goads us on to celebrate Christmas without fear," he said. "We will not be cowed, or scared, or intimidated into retracting from our faith and from celebrating the birth of the Messiah."

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## **Christians in Vietnam Hold Another Historic Christmas Celebration**

✘ For the second time in 10 days, Protestant history was made in Vietnam Sunday when 12,000 people gathered for a Christmas rally in Hanoi.

The event, which took place in the large square in front of the entrance to My Dinh National Stadium in the heart of Hanoi, was said to be 10 times larger than any prior Protestant gathering in history in northern Vietnam. On Dec. 11 in southern Vietnam, an estimated 40,000 people attended a Christmas celebration in Ho Chi Minh City (see "Unprecedented Christmas Gathering Held in Vietnam").

Local sources said long-requested written permission for the event, titled "Praise Jesus Together," never came in spite of several reminders. But four days before the event was to take place, Hanoi authorities and police told organizers—in words

as close as they would get to granting permission—that they would “not interfere.”

“One can hardly overestimate the importance of such an event in the lives of northern house church Christians,” said one long-time Compass source. “For many, this will have been the first time to join in a large crowd with other Christians, to feel the growing power of their movement, to hear, see and participate in the high quality, and deeply spiritual mass worship.”

The day before the event, Christians gathered near the stadium for final prayer and to help with preparations. Witnesses said the huge public square at the entrance to the stadium was arrayed with thousands of stools rather than chairs—plastic, backless, and bright blue and red. In 10-foot tall letters, “JESUS” was emblazoned on the backdrop to the stage.

Invitations had been sent through house church networks even as official permission for the event was still pending. When church leaders decided to move ahead only days before, Christians were asked to send out mass invitations by text-message, leading some to speculate whether this may have been the largest ever such messaging for a Christian event.

Nearby Christians as well as those bussed from more distant areas began to fill the venue hours before the event. They were not dissuaded by a Hanoi cool spell of 12 Celsius (56 Fahrenheit) with a chill wind. Bundled in thick jackets, their heads wrapped in scarves, they waited expectantly without complaint.

They were not disappointed. Witnesses said the throng deeply appreciated a program of outstanding music and dance, a powerful personal narrative followed by a gospel message and an extended time for prayer for the nation. As at the previous event in Ho Chi Minh City on Dec. 11 that house church Christians had long worked and prayed for, the program

featured music from Jackson Family Ministries of the United States.

In a world of globalized gospel and praise choruses, songs included hymns such as "How Great Thou Art" as well as classic praise songs such as "Sing Hallelujah to the Lord." Witnesses said the music was accompanied by tasteful, emotionally engaging dance. Top Vietnamese artists performed, including news songs by Vietnamese songwriters, and a Vietnamese choir of 80 sang, as did a Korean choir.

A young man in his 30s who now pastors two house churches told the crowd how an encounter with Jesus proved more powerful than the grip of drug addiction. His story, simply and humbly told, proved an effective bridge to a Christmas evangelistic message by Pastor Pham Tuan Nhuong of the Word of Life house church. Then the winsome Pastor Pham Dinh Nhan, a top southern house church leader, gave a disarming but strong invitation to follow Jesus, witnesses said.

Organizers said approximately 2,000 people then poured forward in response, packing the large area in front of the stage.

The final portion of the program included a time of intense prayer for the nation, with pastors confessing and praying for righteousness for Vietnam's leaders, as well as for God's protection and blessing on their land. In their prayers they claimed Vietnam for Christ, witnesses said.

A high point for the throng was the superimposing of a large white cross on a yellow map of Vietnam on the backdrop. As the Korean choir sang a spirited revival hymn, the crowd raised thousands of hands and exploded in sound.

"The sound of crying, of praise, of prayer were blended as one, beseeching Almighty God for spiritual revival in Vietnam," said one participant.

The event was streamed live at for Vietnamese and others

around the world to see.

Until recently—and still in some places—most Vietnamese meet in small groups in homes knowing at any time there could be a hostile knock on the door, a source said.

“None of these groups is registered or recognized by the government,” the source said of the crowd at yesterday’s event. “What you see is Christians standing up!”

In addition to this event and the Dec. 11 event in Ho Chi Minh City, a large public Christmas rally was held by the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (North) at the Hoang Nhi church in Nam Dinh Province on Saturday. Some 2,500 people gathered in the church’s large courtyard, with sources saying 200 responded to an invitation to follow Christ.

In Tuy Hoa, on the coast of central Vietnam, a Christmas program is planned for Dec. 26 in a 4,000-seat theater. Many smaller events are also planned in other areas, part of an unprecedented public display by Vietnam’s Protestants.

At the same time, the freedom for Christians tolerated in large cities has not reached some more remote parts of the country, where ethnic minority Christians live. In Dien Bien Dong district of Dien Bien Province, authorities on Tuesday (Dec. 15) orchestrated immense ethnic social pressure on a new Christian couple to recant. The couple told Compass that police added their own pressure.

“The police said they would beat me to death, and take away all my possessions, leaving my wife a widow, and my children orphans with no place to live,” the husband told Compass. “I folded. I signed promising that I would no longer follow God. I really want to, but it is very, very hard to be a believer where we live, as the officials will not allow us.”