

# *Berne Baby Berne*

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The concept of martyrdom or death for a set of beliefs fascinates and horrifies us in the same moment. Understanding the suicide bomber in Iraq, the suicide bomber in Benghazi or fruit merchant in Tunisia who set himself on fire are relevant topics for any of us. The word martyr was formerly used only in the context of religious martyrdom but in the past few hundred years has also been used in political and military ways. We will explore some examples in each of these areas. Martyrdom in these different settings implies similar determination within the martyr but has vastly different implications for those surrounding the individual. A series of stories about martyrs in these different settings will help illustrate these profound differences.

Several years ago one of our speakers talked about George S Patton and shared one of his famous quotes, “No bastard ever won a war by dying for his country. He won it by making the other poor dumb bastard die for his country.” General Patton was but

one of many brave Americans in WWII who stood up to a horrible evil and defeated it. Many gave their lives in the process.

A revolutionary war martyr/hero familiar to all is Nathan Hale. He is widely regarded as America's first spy and a statue of him graces the CIA campus in northern Virginia. He graduated from Yale with first-class honors in 1773 and enlisted in the Continental Army. He volunteered for an intelligence mission in New York City, was betrayed by Robert Rogers (pretending to be a fellow patriot), and was sentenced to death. The night before the execution he asked for a Bible and a clergyman and both were denied. On the gallows the next day (9/22/1776) he was reported to have said (although there is some dispute) "I only regret that I have but one life to give for my country". He was 21.

In 1776 Thomas Paine published a pamphlet which he planned to call "Plain Truth" but was persuaded by his friend Benjamin Rush to call it "Common Sense" instead. (Benjamin Rush was a signer of the Declaration of Independence and was also known as the father of American psychiatry). Common Sense quickly became a best seller in the colonies (100,000 copies sold in a population of 2 million). In many ways it was his ideas that generated the passion and energy for the Revolutionary War. One of his phrases will be a key component of my paper tonight: "Tis the business of little minds to shrink, but he whose heart is firm, and whose conscience approves his conduct, will pursue his principles unto death."

Our current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are the latest effort by America to call evil in the world by its name and to oppose it. That struggle comes at an emotional price. Every week I see active duty and retired soldiers in my office who have PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) and who nurse wounds that are not very visible but hard to heal. It is gratifying to help those brave persons return to health.

The most bitter and deadly war in America's history is of course the Civil War in the struggle to preserve the Union and to end slavery. The bloodiest week in battle of Gettysburg saw over 7000 killed and 45,000 wounded total on both sides. Lincoln

would note in his Gettysburg dedication address of November 19, 1863 that “The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract.

President Lincoln was invited to speak only 17 days before delivering his epic lines. The dedication ceremony was actually postponed 2 months so the “main” speaker would have more time to prepare his remarks. Edward Everett spoke for 2 hours and delivered 13,607 words before ending with “as we bid farewell to the dust of these martyr-heroes.”

Another example of the military martyr-hero in the Civil War emerged at Harpers Ferry Virginia in the person of John Brown. He tried to steal weapons from the government and foment an uprising of slaves to help in freeing all the slaves. Instead he was captured and executed for treason. Before his death his letters to supporters contained strong themes of spirituality and conviction and raised support in the north and anger in the south. Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote that John Brown would “make the gallows glorious like the Cross.”

The modern suicide bomber is a more convoluted type of martyr. He is at once a military and political and religious martyr (the terrorism trifecta as it were). The overlap of church and state in many Muslim countries as evidenced by sharia laws is truly puzzling for Americans to understand. While our country was founded by those who sought religious freedom there are important examples of religious intolerance early in our history. Only gradually have we evolved to appreciate the clear separation of church and state. Some feel that separation has gone to illogical lengths.

There are countries with large Muslim populations who maintain largely secular government. However many of these are ruled by strong/repressive dictators. The largest example of a democratic country with a Muslim majority is Indonesia.

A bombing by an al-Qaeda in Kuta, Indonesia nightclub in 2002 killed 202 people. Three brothers connected with the bombing were caught and put on trial. Despite a

vigorous defense by their team of lawyers they were found guilty and sentenced to death. They asked to be beheaded but were shot instead. Their lawyers stayed faithful to their clients and promised to file suit against the Indonesian government for religious discrimination. When the bodies were returned to their home village they were greeted by signs “Welcome Home Martyrs”.

A large percentage of Christians would agree the Bible is collection of ancient texts written by many authors and assembled after much debate at the Council of Nicene. A core tenet of Muslim faith holds that the entire Quran was told to Mohammed straight from the mouth of the angel Gabriel. There is therefore little tolerance for a literary critique of the Quran. There is no official English translation and only the Arabic version is the reliable one.

The 17 persons who carried out the 9/11 attacks on our country also wished to be known as martyrs. They left videos to say goodbye, to outline their beliefs, and to encourage others to follow them. They were also examples of the religious/political/military models of martyrdom.

Some martyrs such as Socrates stir up philosophical and political arguments without the intent to harm others at all. Socrates was a great teacher and an advocate of posing questions to sharpen the debate and to educate. He also was a great critic of his government and exposed its ineffectual and corrupt nature. He was officially convicted of corrupting the youth of Athens but very likely his powerful skills in exposing flaws in the government were primary in his conviction. He just asked too many questions!

The last words of Socrates before dying from the hemlock were “Crito we owe a cock to Asclepius. But you pay up and don’t fail to take care.” Some feel the offering to Asclepius was an attempt to escape deadly effects of Hemlock. Socrates thought the body imprisoned the soul and only after death could one be truly free

Mohandas Gandhi helped the nation of India achieve independence from the British Empire through a consistent version of leadership involving civil disobedience. He is honored as the father of the nation each year on October 2. He believed one can and must resist tyranny through nonviolent and mass civil disobedience “satyagraha”. This concept is built on “ahimsa” or total nonviolence. He also believed in civil rights and hoped that all races and religions could get along peacefully in a free India. However, during the process toward freedom there was wide violence between Muslim and Hindi in the scramble for power and property. Gandhi went on a hunger strike to protest the violence and may have helped to wind that down but perhaps 1 million persons died in the fighting for independence and the division of the country.

Gandhi was gunned down while on the way to prayers in 1948. He died without property or wealth or any title but millions attended his funeral to pay tribute. The crowd included Pope Pius, President Truman, Chiang Kai-shek, the Foreign Minister of Russia and the President of France among others. A friend who attended the funeral said it was one of his most frightening moments ever. The crowd was so large, so densely packed that he feared for his life.

Nathuram Godse was the assassin of Gandhi and said at the trial: “His (Gandhi’s) activities for public awakening were phenomenal in their intensity and were reinforced by the slogan of truth and non-violence which he paraded ostentatiously before the country. No sensible or enlightened person could object to these slogans. In fact there is nothing new or original in them. They are implicit in every constitutional public movement. But it is nothing but a dream if you imagine the bulk of mankind is, or can ever become, capable of scrupulous adherence to these lofty principles in its normal life from day to day. In fact, honor, duty and love of one's own kith and kin and country might often compel us to disregard non-violence and to use force. ... *The accumulating provocation of thirty-two years, culminating in his last pro-Muslim fast, at last goaded me to the conclusion that the existence of Gandhi should be brought to an end immediately.*”

One student of Gandhi, Martin Luther King studied his methods and tried to use these principals in the civil rights movement in America. King said “Christ gave me the goals and Mahatma Gandhi the tactics.” Rosa Parks used civil disobedience and refused to go to the back of the bus in order to focus attention on black inequality in a quiet but brave way. The civil right marches kept the issues of injustice in front of the American people in a way both dramatic and disquieting. King finally fell to an assassin’s bullet as Gandhi also did. Both men certainly had their own significant character flaws – they were not perfect human beings.

But both King and Gandhi had the courage to focus the light of truth on serious problems and in both cases the brilliance of that light ignited the passions that snuffed out their lives.

Albert Einstein said of Gandhi “Mahatma Gandhi's life achievement stands unique in political history. He has invented a completely new and humane means for the liberation war of an oppressed country, and practised it with greatest energy and devotion.” The two exchanged numerous letters. At the end of 1999 Time Magazine named Einstein the person of the century and Gandhi as runner-up. The United Nations designated October 2, Gandhi’s birthday as the International Day of Nonviolence.”

King was the youngest ever to receive the Nobel Peace Prize. Gandhi was nominated five times but never received the prize. His last nomination was just months before his assignation. No Peace Prize was awarded that year with committee remarking “there was no suitable living candidate.”

After the death of Martin Luther King on April 4, 1968 there were riots and looting and burning in numerous communities across our country. Many suggest Indianapolis was spared some of this turmoil because of a speech Robert Kennedy made here in town on the night King was shot. Some of you may have seen the incredible holographic reproduction of that speech down at the Indiana Historical Society building.

Indianapolis was spared these fires but the phrase “Burn Baby Burn” first came into the popular vocabulary in the mid 60’s. The R&B disk jockey Magnificent Montague would shout “Burn” whenever excited by a song. The Watts rioters would shout “Burn Baby Burn” as they created chaos in the streets.

In recent months we have seen the eyes of the world focus on a new generation of martyrs and revolutionaries.

Mohammad Bouazizi was a fruit salesman in Tunisia and an unknown until he set himself on fire<sup>1</sup> on December 17, 2010 as a protest against government practices. He had been selling his wares on the street that morning and the police confiscated his cart because he was selling without a license. He went to the governor’s office to complain and to get his cart back but could not find anyone who would listen to his complaint. He insisted on being heard and was hit in the face by a woman staffer so he went outside and set himself on fire. Within hours a crowd had gathered to protest his treatment and to protest the repressive regime. Bouazizi died three weeks later and within another week the repressive president of 23 years, Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali, left the country when the army told him he had to go. The US had issued strong statements about excessive violence against civilians 24 hours before the President fled.

Within days the demonstrations spread to Egypt. Abdou Abdel-Moneim Jaafar, a 49-year-old restaurant owner set himself on fire in front of the Egyptian Parliament. The atmosphere for change had been increased by the largest terrorist event in 4 years. The New Year’s day bombing of a Coptic church left 21 Christians dead and over 80 wounded. President Mubarak blamed foreign influences and in fact al-Qaeda in Iraq had threatened Egyptian Christians two months earlier. The Coptic population in Egypt stands at about 10% and is reduced by half from earlier years.

After only three weeks of riots in Egypt President Hosni Mubarak had to step down and his power was assumed by the army.

On 3/19/2011 Egyptians went to the polls for the first time in almost ½ century to pass constitutional amendments granting new personal freedoms. They emerged with purple thumbs held high but nervous that new democratic process could be hijacked by the Muslim Brotherhood, the largest and best organized political party and the one most likely to demand a government operating on Sharia law. The Coptic Christians opposed the new amendments—fearing the new democratic rules would largely enable the Muslim brotherhood to get power and institute new restrictions on religious freedom.

The uprising in Libya began a few weeks later. One hero of the rebellion was Mehdi Mohammed Zeyo<sup>2</sup>. This 49 yr old supply clerk for one of the oil companies witnessed the death of dozens of young protesters in the center of Benghazi. He helped carry away the bodies and bury them and his outrage grew daily with the increasing violence. On the morning of February 20, 2011, he carried two large canisters of gasoline to his car and placed them in the trunk along with a large tin container of gunpowder. He drove through a square filled with protesting persons, flashed them a V for victory sign and headed for the gate of the security base. As expected the military opened fire on his car and it exploded in a huge blast which tore open the gate allowing the protesters to stream inside. Later that night the base fell to the opposition and the town of Benghazi became the center of resistance to Gadhafi. Medhi left behind two teenage daughters and a wife of 21 years who was heard to say “I’m so proud, and I’m so sad.” On his computer screen Medhi left a piece of paper saying “We are from God and we return to God.”

Gadhafi himself tried to identify with the martyr image. He promised to defend his ideas against foreign interests to “the last drop of blood.” On March 2, 2011, Gadhafi appeared live on TV before a group of his supporters as they shouted repeatedly: "Allah, Moammar, Libya, Allah Moammar, Libya." A woman in the back burst out loudly "You are the soul of Allah, please don't leave us." By March 9<sup>th</sup> Gadafi was criticizing the opposition as misleading Libyan youth by promising them rewards in heaven.

On 3/19/2011 the UN authorized joint military action produced 110 Tomahawk strikes against 20 different sites in Libya to make the skies safe for a no-fly zone.



On 3/20/2011 Gadhafi appeared on TV to proclaim “Every Libyan is ready to become a martyr for his country. We have Allah on our side, you have the Devil.” He denounced the Christian nations who were assuming the “arrogant aggressor” role. He forgot to mention several Muslim nations who also endorsed the UN action. Gadhafi has promised a long war. This time it is the Libyan people who have issued a strong message about the desire for more freedom. Many countries have heard the call and hopefully freedom will emerge for the Libyan people at lower cost.

In the western hemisphere we have Cuba as a country with a long history of dictator brothers. Orlando Zapata was a prisoner of conscience in a Cuban jail and died in February 23, 2010, on the 85<sup>th</sup> day of a hunger strike. He elicited words of support from the EU minister to free all the political prisoners in Cuba. On the one year anniversary of the death President Obama also recognized this political martyr made a call for the release of all political prisoners in Cuba.

We have briefly reviewed military-martyrs and then also some political martyrs. We now turn to the discussion of religious martyrs.

The oldest martyr we have discussed today was Gandhi who died at age 78. We will discuss the youngest next as an example of the religious martyr. Eulalia was a 12 year old girl living in the city of Merida, Lusitania in 302 A.D. She had a strong wish to be a martyr for religious beliefs so her parents took her to a remote village so she would not be noticed by the authorities. But, as teens are prone to do, she escaped from the confines of her parents. She went before the tribunal and loudly proclaimed her belief in “the one true God” and denounced the magistrates and their religion. They pleaded with her to recant the Christian religion but she persisted and so she was beaten, cut and burned.

The word martyr comes from the Greek word “martus” and indicates a person who has witnessed something. The meaning of the word appeared in the Christian literature<sup>3</sup> to

indicate persons who had seen Christ and were so strongly affected they felt obligated to speak about this at any personal cost. By the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. the term began to be used almost exclusively for those who had actually given their lives for their beliefs.

Are there differences between the Christian and Muslim concepts of a martyr? The Arabic word “shahid” is used in the Quran to designate a witness to an event and is also generally translated to the English as “martyr.”

Two important differences exist in how Muslims interpret this concept as compared to Christians. Muslims believe all of life is a struggle (jihad) involving the search for truth and the discovery of what is wrong. Each individual must face this struggle and in the process may face death or martyrdom.

Christians believe that the mediation role of Christ and his heroic struggle is one to be acknowledged and accepted in order to be a Christian. One does not necessarily need to reenact the sacrifice He made. Muslims do not believe in mediation process and thus each person must face the struggle or jihad anew.

New Testament Christians thought that their beliefs could and should cross national boundaries and not be limited by or identified with just one state. Muslims often insist in having the state adopt and enforce Islamic Law (Sharia) with very little freedom of speech or freedom of religion. Any perceived insult to the Quran punishable by death in some countries.

The Christian religion was practiced in a domain quite apart from the secular governments for the first 300 years of its existence. Constantine as Emperor of Rome changed this in a dramatic and dangerous way when he became a Christian and established it at the law of the empire. The combination of church and state in this uneasy alliance existed until the reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century.

Martin Luther was a widely known leader in this movement. He nailed his 95 Theses to the church door in 1517 as a protest to the notion of selling indulgences for the forgiveness of sins. He also stressed the responsibility of the individual in acts of conscience. In the subsequent years the followers of Martin Luther and John Calvin and Ulrich Zwingli joined the concepts of religious reformation with military struggles and reshaped the geopolitical/religious division of Europe. Even though the first 125 years of the reformation saw a dissolution of many Catholic states they were just replaced by new church/state conglomerates dominated by the teachings of Luther, Calvin or Zwingli. These states in turn persecuted the religious minorities in their territories in a new wave of bloodletting.

The clear separation of church and state was mainly advocated by the Anabaptists. This group began in Zurich in 1525 and took the ideas of the reformation in a different direction. They stressed:

- 1) That infant baptism was not sufficient and there was a need for an adult to make an informed decision about Christianity and to be re-baptized (Anabaptist),
- 2) The church and state should be separate organizations, and
- 3) Christians shall never use force, violence, or warfare.

These ideas were all threatening to the government and intense persecution followed for about the first 150 years of the Anabaptist movement. Their refusal to attend the state church or to baptize an infant was easily noticed and resulted in arrest and trial. If the persons recanted they would be let go. Refusal to acknowledge the truth and power of the state church would usually result in beheading, drowning, stoning or burning. As the Anabaptist movement spread through other European countries the persecution followed. Belgium persecution so severe the movement was essentially stamped out there. Most Anabaptists emigrated to America in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The Edict of Berne (Switzerland) of 1659 lists the beliefs held by the Anabaptists and seen as so threatening to the civil government as to be a cause for arrest. Many persons were burned at the stake as a result of the Edict of Berne. The ancestors of my mother

and father both came from the Canton of Berne, Switzerland and they were part of the Anabaptist movement.

The Martyrs' Mirror is the story of Christian persecution from the time of Christ until its publication in 1660. It was first published in Holland by Thieleman van Bracht, a Mennonite pastor. The earliest American editions of the book were in 1749 in Ephrata, Pennsylvania. It took 15 men 3 years to finish the translation from Dutch to German and to print it. It was the largest book printed in America before the Revolutionary war. The version on display here tonight is from 1814 and was passed down through my family and given to me by my mother, Susie Riegsecker. There are Millers and Riegseckers listed that book as martyrs but I have no way of knowing whether they were relatives. The other book I brought along tonight is the Amish songbook or Ausbund. One of the individuals in the Martyrs' Mirror is Hans Haslibacher who is further commemorated in the Amish songbook in a curious way by a song of 35 verses telling us about his final days on this earth.

Pope Benedict grew up in Southern Germany, was a member of the German army but states in his latest book: "Again and again mankind will be faced with the same choice: to say yes to God who works only through the power of truth and love, or to build on something tangible and concrete—on violence<sup>4</sup>." He also addressed the malignant combination of religion and violence by saying "The cruel consequences of religiously motivated violence are only too evident to us all. Violence does not build up the kingdom of God or the kingdom of humanity."

In this season of Easter we need to recall the New Testament story of Jesus, a man who gave up his life peacefully to allow Himself to be martyred. He often drew large crowds and could have mounted a military uprising but chose to live a different life and to surrender to the demands of the crowd rather than strive to become an earthly King.

In Summary:

We have briefly reviewed martyrdom in the context of the religious, the secular, the church and the state, in the military and in nonviolent settings.

For me personally the combination of religious, political and military passions in a single individual bent on martyrdom poses the most frightening image.

The concerted acts of 17 military--martyrs on 9/11 changed our lives in many negative ways. On that fateful morning I was making rounds in the hospital, checking on the status of some very ill patients. As we watched those twin towers engulfed in smoke against the bright blue sky one of my patients was heard to say "Isn't that beautiful!" My thoughts instead were filled with horror and some fear. There was even more bewilderment and anguish as we learned more about the nature of the attackers. More agony as we got drawn into our nation's longest war against an enemy that would not stand up and fight but would send an ongoing stream of suicide religious/military/martyrs to advance their goals.

President Bush led America into an effort to stamp out the connections to al-Qaeda in Iraq and Afghanistan and after spending hundreds of billions we have seen a few results. We saw Iraqi citizens emerge from voting booths with purple thumbs after exercising their rights to vote for the first time in decades. The election results however could not be implemented for many months. A series of religious and tribal disputes paralyzed the country for a long time. Many aspects of Sharia law got into the constitution. The Christians in Iraq are feeling new persecution and are shrinking in number. Clear separation of church and state in Iraq might be a way to decrease violence but the nation does not seem to be ready for that.

We heard Daniel FitzGibbon speak two weeks ago about emerging countries with large Muslim populations who were able to keep Sharia law out of their constitutions. How

can we successfully encourage the nations of the world to keep clear separation between the church and the state?

We discussed the reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> century earlier where the thought of church – state separation was reintroduced to the world by a group of martyrs. At that time the drive toward individual conscience and religious freedom inspired the religious community to draw away from and declare a separation from the civil government.

Perhaps the “Arab Spring” we are seeing now represents a Muslim reformation. The dynamic seems the opposite from reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Currently we see a pattern in Muslim countries where the secular component seems to be leading the way and drawing away from the religious/government structures in order to gain more freedom so that ordinary citizens can enjoy the rule of law. The street demonstrations in Egypt contained many brave and vocal women. It seems unlikely they would want to overthrow the dictator Mubarak only to submit to a strict Sharia based constitution.

For many years the model of leadership in the Middle East has been one of a strong dictator from a ruling and/or royal family who leads the country with an iron hand while broadly endorsing the wishes of a Muslim majority. Some leaders have even given large monies to al-Qaeda to keep the peace. As we hopefully see more separation of church and state in Muslim countries there should be less wish or need to bow to the religious community and especially the ultra religious and/or radical component.

The Muslim reformation is proceeding in fits and starts but we see encouraging signs in countries like Turkey and Indonesia. How will the world community respond to this new phase of Muslim growth? In the last century the percent of Muslims in the world has almost doubled, going from 12 to 22%. (Christians have declined from 33 to 32% of the total)<sup>5</sup> Can religious freedom be preserved for other religions in the face of this powerful expansion? Can America be a model for clear separation of church and state and the tolerance of many religions? Can we progress to a level of broad freedoms for all

and to a state of tolerance and justice where martyrdom doesn't need to raise its painful specter?

We have reviewed several different types of Muslim martyrs. The types of persons and events which elicit martyrdom in Islamic studies are much wider than what we have covered. Martyrdom in Islam by Cook<sup>6</sup> gives a broad review of the various types and how they differed among various divisions and over the course of history.

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<sup>1</sup> Worth, Robert F. (2011-01-21). "[How a Single Match Can Ignite a Revolution](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/23/weekinreview/23worth.html?src=twrhp)". *New York Times*. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/23/weekinreview/23worth.html?src=twrhp>.

<sup>2</sup> Indianapolis Star, 3/1/2011, p A5

<sup>3</sup> Catholic Encyclopedia, Martyrs

<sup>4</sup> Ratzinger J. Jesus of Nazareth. Libreria Editrice, Vaticana, Vatican City. 2011. p 197.

<sup>5</sup> Prothero S. God is Not One, Harper One, 2010, p. 18.

<sup>6</sup> Cook, David. Martyrdom in Islam, Themes in Islamic History. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2007. 206 pp