

Pucker up

Feature in the [July 14, 2009](#) issue



Pat Bagley, Salt Lake Tribune

After the genocide: Alice Mukarurinda survived the Rwandan genocide 15 years ago, but Hutu assailants killed her baby, and one of them hacked off Alice's right hand with a machete. The man with the machete was named Emmanuel. He later admitted his crime to Alice and asked her to forgive him. She wondered whether she could do that. But years earlier she had promised God she would forgive anyone who confessed to her. It took her a week of prayer and soul-searching before she could offer Emmanuel forgiveness (*Search*, March/April).

It depends: Mary Pipher tells a story about a visitor asking an old rancher what the people are like in his region. The rancher responded: "What are the people like where you come from?" "They're mean, sneaky rascals," the traveler said. "That's the way they are here too," the rancher replied. Then another man came along and asked the rancher the same question. The rancher again asked the man what the people are like where he's from. The traveler said, "They're great people, honest, kind-hearted and high-spirited." The rancher replied: "That's the way you'll find the people here are too" (*Seeking Peace*, Riverhead).

Win-win: Both the Bible and the Koran vacillate between an attitude of belligerence and one of tolerance toward other religions, says Robert Wright. He thinks he detects a pattern: when a religion's followers feel threatened by another

religion—what he calls a zero-sum situation—they are apt to lash out at the other faith; at other times religions seem to be able to live side-by-side in peace without posing a threat to each other. Something like this latter stance is needed in the Middle East, says Wright. Israelis and Palestinians must come to see that continued strife between them is a lose-lose proposition and that an enduring peace would be a win-win situation (*Time*, June 15).

Bombs-away: Not so long ago neoconservatives like Norman Podhoretz, John Bolton and William Kristol were recommending that the U.S. (or Israel) bomb Iran. Now that there are protests in Tehran against what appears to be a rigged presidential election, some of these same commentators are showing concern for the well-being of the protesters. Blogger Glenn Greenwald says: “Imagine how many of the people protesting . . . would be dead if any of these bombing advocates had their way” (salon.com, June 16).

Wright’s wrong: Jeremiah Wright, President Obama’s former pastor, recently needed to apologize for another statement. In an interview with the *Daily Press* of Newport News, Virginia, he said: “Them Jews ain’t going to let him talk to me.” The remark came in the course of Wright’s statement that Obama should have sent an American delegation to the World Conference on Racism, but didn’t do so out of fear of offending Jews and Israel. Later Wright issued an apology, which read in part: “I misspoke and I sincerely meant no harm or ill-will to the American Jewish community or the Obama administration. I have great respect for the Jewish faith and the foundational (and central) part of our Judeo-Christian tradition” (*Chicago Sun-Times*, June 11).

Guns in church: A Kentucky pastor encouraged his members to wear their firearms to an event at church in June to celebrate the Second Amendment and Independence Day. “We’re just going to celebrate the upcoming theme of the birth of our nation,” said pastor Ken Pagano. “And we’re not ashamed to say that there was a strong belief in God and firearms—without that this country wouldn’t be here.” But John Phillips, an Arkansas pastor who was shot twice while leading a service in 1986, said: “It is unconscionable to me to think that a church would be a place that you would even want to bring a weapon” (AP).

Can we talk about guns? After a shooting like that of a guard at the Holocaust museum in Washington, D.C., politicians are inclined to lament such killings and express empathy for the loss of life. But there’s no political will to deal with the issue

of guns itself, say Bill Moyers and Michael Winship. During his campaign, President Obama pledged his “determination to do whatever it takes to eradicate this violence from our streets, from our schools, from our neighborhoods and our cities.” But there are no policy proposals that will challenge the powerful National Rifle Association on the issue of gun control. Already there are “some 200 million, privately owned firearms in America. Every year there are 30,000 gun deaths and in some years more than 400,000 non-fatal, gun-related assaults” (CommonDreams.org, June 13).

Beleaguered: Christians in Pakistan say they are being threatened with violence by extremist groups claiming to represent Islam. In a number of instances extremists had given them a choice—either embrace Islam or face attacks by suicide bombers. Two masked young men riding motorbikes in the city of Lahore last month threatened to blow up the Rabita Manzil, a complex that houses several Roman Catholic groups, including the church’s communications office (ENI).

Woman in leadership: Salmenna Sedique is the first woman elected president of her mosque in suburban Toledo, Ohio. She is the second woman to serve in that role in any Toledo-area mosque. It’s not really that big a deal for her mosque, she claims. She hopes her election will help overcome stereotypes about Muslims. She admits that women are mistreated in her native Afghanistan, but maintains that Islam has a long history of treating women equally and with respect, going back to the Prophet Muhammad himself. Her role at the mosque is administrative and separate from religious leadership (*Toledo Blade*, June 9).