

PRAY
AND ACT
FOR
PEACE
IN IRAQ



**Prayer for Peace
after the arrest of Radovan Karadžić
for crimes against humanity and war crimes in Bosnia**

O God,
this man
of the bristly brows
and fierce retorts
who played his folk music
while Sarajevo burned
and families perished—

how he affected such a jaunty, debonair presence
on the international stage,
pretending that evil in measured doses
was just a normal, civilized response
to crimes imagined and real
inflicted against his own aggrieved minority people
stuck in remote corners of a rural, war-torn land—

while thugs and snipers rampaged
into quiet hamlets where good neighbors
had built trust and cooperation across the ethnic boundaries
for generations and centuries,
tested and strained at regular intervals,
but always rebuilt, with patient proverbial endurance—

and while we watched the flickering images of CNN
with horror and dismay and revulsion,
and the world's mighty leaders dickered and dithered
and entertained warlords for “peace” talks in Switzerland
until the flowers of many civilizations
were stripped from their Balkan branches
and the park trees chopped for firewood in the siege
and the cobbled marketplace ran red with lifeblood from rocket attacks—

Oh my God!
Must we stand by, complicit consumers of such news,
spectators of misery while wickedness runs rampant?
When will your justice run down those market streets like a river,
when will your people's cries for mercy turn hearts away from violence,
when will your deliverance arrive where needed most?

Continued...

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And then the fighting ebbed away, and flowers grew on graves,
and refugees trickled slowly back,
and the trail of the most wanted ran cold.

And now he pops up again thirteen long years later,
after hiding in broad daylight,
posing as a charmer and a healer,
pontificating at conferences and elaborating theories out of thin air.

Would it have been better that he might have escaped into oblivion,
like so many crooks and politicians before and since?
Might the families of Srebrenica have been any less grieved
if his paths had never returned to the spotlights with painful memories?

These things we cannot know.

But I can admit a glimmer of wild hope that true repentance may yet
track this flamboyant offender into his comfortable confines
at The Hague.

May he meet the kind of justice he failed to provide to others,
the innocents who suffered on his own side and among his enemies.

Lord, in your mercy and your justice
you are much larger than my puny imagination—
surely you can yet redeem and bring toward healing
the multitude of painful agonizing wounds
that stretched across that Balkan territory.

But God it still stings
when a witness tells the BBC
how this quack “produced these charms and amulets,
apparently they offered some kind of protection,
and one of them looked like a Christian cross,
but the tips of this cross were actually bullets.”

Have mercy, Lord, for we are sicker than we know.

*N. Gerald Shenk, and his wife Sara Wenger Shenk served in the former
Yugoslavia under auspices of the Mennonite church. They lived for two of
the nine years in Bosnia (1979-81)*