

GLOBALIZATION OF MISSION SERIES

Sorrow & Blood

**Christian Mission in Contexts of Suffering,
Persecution, and Martyrdom**

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**Prefaces by Ajith Fernando
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PREFACES

From Ajith Fernando

The globalization of mission is one of the most exciting developments in the contemporary church. However, to our people in the Majority World, globalization often means the imposing of a Western agenda upon nations with less resources. We must ensure that the church does not fall into that trap. Each segment of the globe should be contributing to the life of the body of Christ. As I think of the contribution from the Majority World, where the church is growing, the first thing that comes to mind is a theology of suffering, because growth is taking place in the midst of suffering.

Suffering, of course, is presented in the Bible as an essential element of the Christian life, especially of Christian ministry. All of us will face some sort of suffering if we are faithful to Christ. I want to focus on the stresses and strains of ministry that come from being committed to people, and then explore how accepting this is very difficult in our cultural milieu. Paul has a lot to say about this from his own life.

- Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day (2 Cor 4:16).
- So death is at work in us, but life in you (2 Cor 4:12).
- As servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses;...hard work, sleepless nights and hunger (2 Cor 6:4–5).
- Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn? (2 Cor 11:28–29).

We may look at these verses with academic interest as good descriptions of Paul's suffering, but there seems to be a cultural block today to accepting these as having much relevance to us. One reason for this is that contemporary middle-class and affluent society in both East and West have in the past been enslaved by a commitment to productivity and profit. People who speak like Paul did in those verses from 2 Corinthians are regarded as driven people who live unhealthy lives and whose families and colleagues suffer because of their insensitivity to their needs; people who are sure candidates for burnout.

Sadly, we have seen this kind of tragedy work itself out all too often in the lives of driven people. Biblical Christians are also driven, but their drivenness is fuelled by the love of God in them (2 Cor 5:14), which is renewed by lingering daily in the presence of God. That prevents the emptiness that causes burnout. This biblical drivenness works with the glory of God as its ambition. It is a "holistic" drivenness. To glorify God we must obey all of God's commands. So a person driven by the glory of God would strive to be a good parent, a

loving spouse, an encourager to colleagues, and a visionary mover for the Kingdom. When you try to do all of those things you end up with the physical and emotional stresses and strains which Paul talked about. But if it is done holistically you do not end up burnt out, and your family members and colleagues don't end up mad at you for neglecting them.

I think, or perhaps I should say, I hope, poorer Majority World cultures are more able to embrace a holistic vision than more affluent cultures. Having not had the history of a scientific revolution which produced a culture that valued single-minded productivity, our people are more adept at being committed to a lot of things at the same time. For example, they may find it easier to combine contemplation with activism. So a holistic life, which includes not only suffering and strain but also joy in the midst of suffering, could be our contribution to world theology. Certainly this was the lifestyle Jesus recommended. Just before his death he said, "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete" (John 15:11). Immediately after that he challenged his disciples to love each other so much that they would die for each other as Christ died for them (15:12–13). Dying for others and joy can coexist in the same person at the same time! Such a person would likely not suffer from burnout.

However we have a problem! Most of the training material read by people in the Majority World comes from the affluent West, and a lot of that training would look at the behavior I am recommending here as unhealthy drivenness. Those who commit themselves at cost to their call would be told that they are disobeying God and be challenged to change their lifestyle. Somehow there seems to be this idea that if you are suffering you are doing something wrong.

The problem is compounded by the mobility of affluent people today. As people keep changing from job to job, from neighborhood to neighborhood, and from church to church, long-term commitments are becoming a culturally rare phenomenon. It is when you stick to your call, however hard it is, that you encounter the type of suffering that contributes to great mission. However, people are used to moving from place to place based on convenience, on the opportunity to be more productive, and on escaping from suffering and unpleasant relationships. So they may move when they are confronted by suffering. Persevering through inconvenience, struggling to be productive against so many odds, taking on suffering, sticking to unpleasant relationships are what combine to produce great mission.

So we need to be careful that globalization of mission does not blunt the rich contribution that the Majority World can make to the world church. Let's teach people to embrace suffering because of their commitments. Books like the one you have in your hand can be used by God to help reverse the trends I've warned against.

Ajith Fernando
Teaching Director, Youth for Christ, Sri Lanka

From Christopher J. H. Wright

My mother was not very pleased at the idea, though she could hardly contradict it. I was in my early teens and the renowned Romanian pastor who had experienced years of solitary confinement and torture under Communism, Richard Wurmbrand, was staying briefly in our Belfast home during a visit to Northern Ireland. Pastor Wurmbrand was urging me to go and serve God in the dangerous places of the world where I might have to give my life for Christ. “After all,” he said, “you have martyr’s blood in your family.”

He was referring to my late Uncle Fred who as a young man in 1935 had followed his older brother (my father, Joe Wright) to Brazil to reach Amazonian Indian tribes with the gospel. On his first expedition up the River Xingu with two other missionaries (Fred Roberts and Fred Dawson—hence their nickname, “The Three Freds”), they were all clubbed to death by Cayapo tribesmen at the foot of Smoke Falls. It would be hard to claim that they were killed because of their Christian faith, since they did not apparently have any chance to share it. They were white men, and the only white men those tribesmen had encountered were violent rubber tappers who tended to shoot Indians on sight. Their reaction to this group of three pioneers was not beyond understanding. But they did die for the sake of their desire to share the gospel with those who had never heard it. By God’s grace, later efforts to reach the Cayapo were blessed with success, and my father and mother met believers among that tribe during a visit in 1965, when my father preached from Uncle Fred’s Bible.

So I suppose I have had a lifelong awareness that suffering and martyrdom is part of the story of God’s people from Bible times to today, and I have had enough encounters with missionary stories not far distant from Uncle Fred’s to feel some personal closeness to those who have gone through it. Our home also hosted some who had been through the horrors of the Simba rebellion in the Congo in the 1960s. Our family marvelled at the simple, unadorned testimonies from ordinary families and frail single women who had witnessed butchery beyond our imaginings, yet who spoke of the unfathomable resources of grace, peace, and strength that had sustained them in the midst of it.

But beyond that, I have to say that I often feel a fraud and a coward when it comes to the issues addressed in this book. I know virtually nothing of suffering for my faith in my own life (I did not follow Wurmbrand’s urging), so who am I to talk about it? All I can do is to keep informed, aware, and prayerful for the increasing number of sisters and brothers in Christ all over the world for whom suffering in one way or another is simply the normal and expected Christian life, and others for whom extreme suffering and degrading death is the gateway to a martyr’s crown. And if I feel tears in my heart for the Lord’s people in such circumstances, what tears must there be in heaven and in the heart of God? May this remarkable encyclopedic book stimulate tears and prayers in due measure, and where appropriate, matching action.

Christopher J. H. Wright

International Director, Langham Partnership International

CHAPTER 1

A GLOBAL SURVEY

Religious Freedom and the Persecution of Christians

Christof Sauer and Thomas Schirrmacher

THE SITUATION OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

The Washington DC–based Pew Research Center, in a late 2009 study, has consolidated all available global surveys on religious freedom. Strikingly, their data and conclusions are very similar to those reported by the Center for Religious Freedom of Hudson Institute (Washington, DC) and the International Institute for Religious Freedom. In sixty-four countries around the globe—a third of all countries—there is either no religious freedom or it is very restricted. Unfortunately these sixty-four countries host two-thirds, or more precisely 70 percent, of the world population. Armed conflicts, where religion was a central factor and where there are more than one thousand dead, were found in twenty-four countries from which 18 million of the world’s refugees have emerged (Pew 2009).¹

Let us examine these sixty-four countries more closely in view of the two largest religions in the world: Christianity and Islam. The only large group of Muslims living in a non-Muslim country with restricted religious freedom is found in India. Likewise, Russia is the only country with restricted religious freedom that has a Christian majority population. Leaving these two countries out of the equation for the time being, the difference between the situation of Christians and Muslims is quickly becoming obvious: the remaining 700 million Muslims who are living in countries with restricted or no religious freedom live in Muslim-majority countries. In contrast, the remaining 200 million Christians who live in countries with restricted or no religious freedom are living in “non-Christian countries” (countries where Christians are a minority). They are mainly spread over predominantly Communist and Islamic countries (and India).

This means that Muslims overall are enjoying much less religious freedom than Christians. However, as they are living in countries where Islam reigns, they only realize this lack of religious freedom if they want to renounce Islam or if they belong to a tradition or sect of Islam not tolerated by their respective state.

1 Some aspects of this essay are discussed in more detail in Schirrmacher 2008.

THE COMPLEXITY OF RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION

Obviously there are vastly differing situations of religious persecution. So how do you define real persecution or discrimination? When is there cause for concern? When the church where you worship might be torched during the service, or only when it is in fact burning? Should hostilities only be called “persecution” when religion is the only factor, or also when religion is only one factor among others?

Violence against Christians ranges from the murder of nuns in India to the torching of churches in Indonesia, from the thrashing of priests in Egypt or the torture of a resistant pastor in Vietnam, to the rejection of children by their own families in Turkey or Sri Lanka if they attend Christian church services.

Or take a country like India as an example: Should one say that all Christians are affected when individual churches are continually burned—as naturally everybody worries who attends church? Or should one say only those living in provinces like Orissa or Karnataka are affected, as they live in the closest vicinity to such terrible events?

Take China as another example. On the one hand, all Christians are affected by persecutions in some way or another. On the other hand, hundreds of thousands of church services are taking place in China every Sunday, and only a few dozen pastors are imprisoned.

PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS WITHOUT PARALLEL

The question arises whether the frequency and the scale of global persecution of Christians justifies us to focus our attention on them. Is it correct that persecution of Christian minorities has globally reached such proportions that this issue is forced to the foreground by its numerical weight when religious freedom is considered?

Hindu fundamentalism indeed also turns against Muslims. But even on a global scale there is hardly a parallel to the fifty thousand Christians in the Indian state of Orissa driven from their homes between 2008 and 2009 and the five hundred people killed in these events.

Brother will deliver brother to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

Matthew 10:21–22

There is equally no parallel to the 100,000 Christians driven away by force of arms on the Maluku Islands of Indonesia during 2000–2001, where several thousands died. In Sudan and Nigeria, very large numbers of Christians died—huge in scale, however complicated

the situation may be in these countries which are divided between Islam and Christianity. The enforced removal of hundreds of thousands of Christians out of Iraq during 2007–2011 is currently without parallel in the world of religions.

In order to find something more dramatic than these twenty-first-century events, one has to return to the persecution of the Jews during the Third Reich or the bloody unrest between Hindus and Muslims during the founding of India and Pakistan. Within the framework of persecution of Christians, one would have to return to the mass murders by Stalin and Mao.

A further example of Christians being greatly affected by persecution has to do with people renouncing Islam. In many countries it is dangerous for Muslims to renounce Islam, no matter whether they become atheists, Baha'i, or whether they join a branch of Islam that is considered a sect by others. It just so happens that most often they become Christians.

WORSENING TRENDS

There are currently three reasons behind the worsening global religious freedom scenario.

First, in the successor states of the Soviet Union, particularly in the Islamic states but also in some of the Orthodox states, initial enthusiasm about democracy, freedom, and religious freedom has given way to increasingly restrictive religious laws. After several years of freedom, the religious persecution and/or persecution of Christians once practiced by Communists in these former states of the USSR has returned; Christians are being oppressed by the respective majority religion or by the control of religion by the government.

Second, two very populous nations which have experienced comparative calm over several decades, India and Indonesia, are returning to oppression. While there was never comprehensive religious freedom in either nation, the adherents of various religions lived together relatively peacefully. In both countries the situation dramatically worsened during the first decade of the twenty-first century. Due to the large size of their populations (India has more than 1.1 billion inhabitants and Indonesia around 230 million), any worsening of the situation in these two nations statistically worsens the global religious freedom score.

Third, religious freedom developments in the Muslim world have not been for the better. The expulsion and emigration of non-Muslim minorities, among them ancient churches which existed there for 1,500 years, have increased. In addition, the Organization of the Islamic Conference is attempting to remove the right to change one's religion from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Pakistan and other countries have requested this change several times already. In recent years, the Human Rights Council of the United Nations has voted annually in favor of declaring defamation of religion an infringement upon human rights. However, Islam is the only religion explicitly mentioned in that text. Global pressure trying to forestall any criticism of Islam is effectively curbing religious freedom.

TYPES AND STAGES OF PERSECUTION

The multitude of types of persecution and human rights violations know no bounds. The more "harmless" among them are common, including ridicule, marginalization, mobbing at work, and the vilification of Christians, their symbols, and their teachings by the media.

Paul Marshall described with insight the usual phases of religious persecution of Christians:²

PHASES OF PERSECUTION

Phase 1: Disinformation

Phase 2: Discrimination

Phase 3: Violent Persecution

² Also see the typology of disinformation, discrimination, and destruction from Godfrey Yogarajah (2008, 85–94).

Initially rumors and disinformation are propagated by the media, public opinion, or word of mouth, which turns public opinion against Christians. When Christians themselves do not have access to public and published opinion in order to rectify this, disinformation is slowly regarded as truth. One striking example is the conviction by the majority of Turks that Protestants in their country are working for the CIA and want to undermine Turkey.

After Phase 1 follows discrimination of Christians as second-class citizens, be it by the state, the bureaucracy, and/or through the community and neighborhood. For example, in China

The Government that denies protection to the Church in that way sets the Church all the more visibly in the protection of its Lord. The Government that abuses its Lord thereby witnesses all the more clearly to the power of this Lord who is praised in the martyrs of the Christian community.

D. Bonhoeffer in "Theologisches Gutachten: Staat und Kirche" (1996b, 529)

the education of the children of Christians might be obstructed. In Islamic countries the economic status of Christians is lowered, and in India social aid for the poorest Dalit is cancelled if and when they become Christians.

From all of this emerges fully fledged persecution which uses various forms of violence, ranging from spontaneous attacks and arson to imprisonment, the death penalty, or murder.

REASONS FOR PERSECUTION

What are the main reasons for the violent opposition Christianity is encountering in many countries? It might be problematic to try to reduce the actions and thinking of millions to a few principles. Nevertheless, we would like to set forth the following theses for discussion:

1. Christianity has by far the largest number of adherents. Therefore it is proportionally more often affected by human rights violations linked to religion.
2. The main growth of Christianity is currently happening in countries which do not respect human rights and particularly deny the right to religious freedom. The most striking example of this is the explosive growth of evangelical and Roman Catholic house churches in China.
3. The phenomenal global growth of Christianity (after all, Christianity by definition is a missionary religion), particularly in its evangelical and to a slightly lesser degree in its Catholic form, occurs in countries with non-Christian majorities. This reality is increasingly seen as a threat to the position of the majority religions and state ideologies.

A quick glance at the statistics reveals that a numerical growth rate larger than that of the population (>1.19 percent) is only found among the three major religions. Hinduism is growing at a rate of 1.33 percent, mainly due to a high birthrate; Islam is growing by 1.78 percent through a high birthrate, economic and political interventions, and in some cases by propagation.

Christianity as a whole is growing by 1.3 percent per year. Evangelical and charismatic Christianity, through its missionary activity, has an enormous growth of 2.9 percent, which counterbalances the reduction of Christianity in the Western world. Through a geographical perspective, it is to be noted that Christianity has doubled in Africa and Latin America since 1970 and tripled in Asia. In each of the "non-Christian"

countries of China, India, and Indonesia, more people go to church on any given Sunday than in all of Western Europe taken together. This enormous growth of non-Western Christianity has led to tensions in these respective societies.

4. Some countries which had been colonized in the past seek to strengthen their own identity through a revitalization or promotion of inherited religious traditions. They increasingly proceed legally and/or violently against religions considered as “foreign.”

For example, in India there is a renaissance of Hinduism rising against Islam, Christianity, and Hindu-Buddhism. In Sri Lanka and Nepal, Buddhism is invoked against Christianity and Islam.

5. In many countries there is an increasing liaison between nationalism and religion, which leads to the oppression of undesired religions in the country.

This is the case in India, Indonesia, Bangladesh, and Pakistan, which together make up one-third of the world’s population. Christianity is seen as a block to nationalism in Turkey and elsewhere. This is an issue on which Islamists and proponents of secularism find a rare point of agreement. Because of such religious nationalism even in some Christian-majority nations, there is no full freedom and equality for all Christians.

6. Christianity as a whole, and particular groups of its representatives, have become voices for human rights and democracy.

Advocacy for the weak and for minorities is inherent to Christianity. While this has always and everywhere been very prominent, it has become a trademark of Christianity. In consequence, Christians have often become targets of opponents of human rights and of violent rulers. Classical examples are found in Latin America and in North Korea. In addition, Christians increasingly have global networks at their disposal, which can be mobilized against human rights violations and can trigger global press reactions.

7. Christianity often jeopardizes established corrupt business interests and their religious toleration.

Drug bosses in Latin America who commission the murder of Catholic priests or Baptist pastors certainly don’t do this out of interest in the religion of their opponents. Rather, the reason is that these church leaders are often the only people standing up for the local farmers and indigenous people, thus getting in the way of mafia bosses.

8. Christianity has experienced a significant transition towards the renunciation of violence and sociopolitical pressure towards content-related persuasion and peaceful mission.

The peacefulness of Christian churches, often manifested as genuine pacifism, has the side effect of inviting violence, as no opposition needs to be feared.

Muslims are globally afraid of US-American retaliation, but usually not at all of the reaction of local Christians. If the governments fail to protect Christians (who, based on their conviction of separation of church and state, have left the monopoly of power

to the state), then believers become fair game. How should Christians in Indonesia protect their houses and families against heavily armed gangs of Islamic Jihadists? Individual Christians have indeed made use of force to protect their families. Which of us who lives in a safe environment would want to criticize them? The Christian churches in Indonesia have finally agreed on nonviolence, sometimes paying a high price for it.

9. The West is hated by the rest, and Christians are often equated with the West.

The reality today is that the West is no longer overwhelmingly Christian, that “McWorld” and pornography really have nothing to do with Christianity, and that churches in the Third World are almost without exception under local leadership. But prejudice and suspicion in these matters seem to have a stronger influence on public opinion than facts. Christians in China are regarded as agents of the USA or the Pope (as a representative of the West), and “Christians” in Palestine are taken as agents of Zionism, despite financial support for Palestine from the West.

10. The international character of Christianity and the international relations of Christians are regarded as a threat.

Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil. *1 Peter 3:13–17*

Christians, beyond the citizenship of their country, ultimately feel connected with all “citizens of heaven” as Paul calls them (Phil 3:20). The church in the footsteps of Jesus perceives itself as multicultural and transnational (Matt 28:18). This can be viewed as a threat, just as much as the enormous international linkages through personnel, ideas, and finances. Christians view it as an enrichment that theology has long been internationalized and Christian theologians are in discussion with their peers around the globe. Non-Christians might view the same as an incalculable risk and power factor.

IN CONCLUSION

As this survey has shown, the lack of religious freedom and the prevalence of religious persecution are a widespread global phenomenon that seriously affect a large part of the world's population. Religious persecution is a quite complex and diverse phenomenon which demands a good understanding and careful use of language. The frequency and massiveness of persecution events against Christians nowadays goes way beyond what adherents of other religions suffer. One also has to revert to half a century ago to find events of the same magnitude. Overall, the global religious freedom scenario seems to be worsening. It is important to register and address disinformation and discrimination in their early stages before they lead to overt and violent persecution. Based on a good understanding of the variety of reasons for persecution, intelligent and decisive action by Christians is the call of the hour.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. How would you define persecution and discrimination?
2. What is the trend in your context? Is religious freedom improving or decreasing?
3. Are you able to identify disinformation about Christians or discrimination in your context which have the potential to lead to violent persecution?
4. If there is persecution of Christians in your context, are you able to clearly identify the reasons for it?

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A WOMAN'S WORDS

"Take me with you."

Heads swiveled and eyebrows were raised. Faces scrunched up, perplexed. "Your husband was martyred in that Li village just a week ago," the group leader said kindly, "yet you want to join us on this very risky return trip?"

"Haven't I earned the right?"

The men looked at each other. First of all, Liang was a woman. Second, she was young. Third, she already had suffered severely with the loss of her husband. Fourth, she had no special Bible knowledge. Wouldn't she be an impediment rather than a help?

Still, when the team set out, Liang traveled with them.

Why had the tribesmen killed her husband? They associated Chinese missionaries with centuries of Chinese domination. When the missionaries had walked into their village, the tribesmen had rushed at them, brandishing hoes and rakes and other farm implements, and yelling, "The spirits of the mountains rule our land. You Chinese dogs have been here only five hundred years. You know nothing. You have stolen our land—and now you wish to steal our gods? You will pay!"

Liang's husband was beaten to death.

Now, several weeks later, the church was sending a second mission team. What would they encounter? Surly looks greeted them. But before anyone on either side could open their mouths, Liang took a few paces forward and said clearly, "I am the widow of the man you killed three weeks ago."

Shock appeared on the villagers' faces.

"My husband is not dead, however," she continued. "God has given him eternal life. Now he is living in paradise with God. When he came here to your village, he wanted to tell you how you could have that life too. If he were here now, he would forgive you for what you did. In his place I forgive you. I can do this because God has forgiven me. If you want to hear more about God, meet us under the big tree outside of town this evening."

People listened quietly. Nobody raised a hand against the missionaries.

The team members put their heads together. It was clear that God had given Liang an opening. Maybe she should continue to be the spokesperson.

"What do I know? I am not a teacher. I simply gave a witness," she exclaimed.

"We'll teach you," her father-in-law counseled. "Every day we'll prepare you for what to say."

So when villagers gathered under the tree at the end of the day, Liang passed on what she had been taught that afternoon. After a week and a half, many tribal people had believed. When the mission team departed, her father-in-law stayed to instruct the Christians and baptize them.

Two months later he showed up at the home church with three men from the new Li church. During the service, these young believers gave greetings.

"I am the man who murdered Wang," one began.

There was a hiss of indrawn breath, but the congregation listened as the Li man told how God had forgiven him. He asked forgiveness from God's people, expressed an eternal debt of gratitude, and brought a money gift from the new church to show thanks to the church that had sent them the good news.

CHAPTER 3

CHRISTIAN RESPONSES TO SUFFERING, PERSECUTION, AND MARTYRDOM

Reg Reimer

This chapter will describe Christians' reaction to persecution—biblically, historically, and currently. It includes some responses of the church at large, then how Christians in the trenches of persecution respond to their plight.

RESPONSES FROM THE CHURCH AT LARGE

The global church has responded conceptually to the growing phenomenon of persecution. Globally instructive statements on persecution are periodically made by the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), the Roman Catholic Church, the World Council of Churches (WCC), and the Lausanne Movement. A by-invitation meeting of international leaders on persecution at Bad Urach, Germany, in September 2009 produced a comprehensive statement entitled, “Developing an evangelical theology of suffering, persecution, and martyrdom for the global church in mission.” An excerpted version of the Bad Urach Call can be found in appendix A.¹

While strongly evangelical, the Lausanne Movement is broader and more inclusive than the other communions stated above. The Lausanne congresses are summarized in guidance statements for the church—as in the Lausanne Covenant (1974), the Manila Manifesto (1989), and the Cape Town Commitment (2010). These can readily be found at www.lausanne.org.

The Bad Urach Statement (2009) appears to have contributed to the Lausanne Cape Town statement, as the Cape Town Commitment includes explicit language integrating suffering, persecution, and martyrdom into the theology of mission under the title “The love of Christ calls us to suffer and sometimes die for the gospel.” All three Lausanne statements endorse strategic advocacy for religious freedom as part of Christian witness. Significantly, the Cape Town Commitment, under the heading “Love works for religious freedom for all people,” states, “There is no contradiction between being willing personally to suffer the abuse and loss of our own rights for the sake of Christ and being committed to advocate and speak

1 The full statement, of which I am a signatory, may be found in Sauer and Howell (2010, 21–106).

up for those who are voiceless under the violation of their human rights.” The statements of these organizations reveal a current conceptual response to persecution and suffering in the church.

PRACTICAL RESPONSES

The period of Christian suffering under Soviet Communism gave rise to a number of evangelical organizations whose main purpose was to support and advocate for persecuted Christians. A number of these trace their roots to the remarkable Romanian evangelical leader Richard Wurmbrand. He endured severe persecution during long prison sentences. He was released in an amnesty, and left Romania in 1964. He became an eloquent advocate for the persecuted, founding the Voice of the Martyrs, from which many other organizations have spun off. The Dutchman Andrew van der Bijl, much better known as Brother Andrew, founded Open Doors in the 1960s as well. It has several national branches.

These two prominent organizations are representative of dozens of organizations advocating for the persecuted church. Most of these major in supporting persecuted believers both spiritually and materially, though some have also developed advocacy arms. Many now participate in the Religious Liberty Partnership (see chapter 56 and appendix D). They can be seen as a major response of mainly the Western church (at least until recently) to widespread Christian persecution.

RECENT SCHOLARSHIP

Recent and rising interest in the topics of Christian persecution, suffering, violence, and martyrdom has recently spurred evangelicals to produce a number of books on these topics.² Glenn Penner (2004) wrote a comprehensive biblical theological study of persecution and discipleship. Charles Tieszen’s contribution (2008) looks at reevaluating how religious persecution is understood.

Three volumes edited respectively by Harold Hunter and Cecil Robeck (2006), by Keith Eitel (2008), and by Christof Sauer and Richard Howell (2010) together contain the contributions of forty-four separate authors, including important voices from the Global South. In 2008 the International Institute for Religious Freedom launched the *International Journal for Religious Freedom (IJRF)*. Ron Boyd-MacMillan’s *Faith that Endures* (2006) is, as the book’s subtitle suggests, an essential guide to the persecuted church for popular audiences.

All of these works deal substantively with the topic of this chapter: how Christians respond to repression, especially persecution. Today these phenomena are a rising tide.

THE RESPONSES OF THE PERSECUTED

What follows is an attempt at categorizing the main ways Christians respond to repression and persecution. This can help the presently persecuted understand what other believers have done before them and help churches who are able to support the persecuted to do so wisely.

2 See reference section of this chapter for full bibliographic information on these books.

A common and useful paradigm or taxonomy used to describe how Christians respond to persecution is to say they either (1) flee and escape it, (2) patiently endure it, or (3) stand up and advocate against it. Homiletically one could say the responses are flight, fortitude, and fight. Under these main category headings, I will more fully describe Christian responses to persecution.

It is necessary to understand that the persecution of Christians is almost never for religious reasons alone. Glenn Penner has pointed out that “when the kingdom of God invades the kingdoms of this world” (2004, 162), Christians are persecuted also for political, cultural, economic, social, and psychological reasons. Reasons for persecution are often complex and combined. Sadly, this leads some secular observers and political leaders, who have little understanding of the centrality of religion for most people in the world, to overlook the foundational religious reasons for persecution.

But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake.
Luke 21:12

The forms of Christian response to repression and persecution are also determined in part by the sources of the persecution. Main sources today are radical Islam, Communism, religious nationalism, and secular humanism (Boyd-MacMillan 2006, 123–42).

It is also important to consider that persecuted Christians belong to churches. In many situations, Christians will formulate their responses to persecution in concert with one another. It is my observation that too often persecuted Christians are thought of chiefly as individuals.

The common responses to persecution are to:

FLEE OR ESCAPE

Understandably, Christians do not wish to suffer the deprivations, pain, or even death that result from persecution.

A case could be made for dealing with recantation under a separate heading, but I will deal with it here. That is, persecutors sometimes offer a way of escape in trying to persuade or force Christians to recant their faith.

For example, in Communist Vietnam, government-sponsored campaigns against ethnic-minority Christians demanded Christians sign a statement agreeing to return to traditional animistic beliefs and practices. Sometimes these Christians were forced to participate in animistic rites, such as drinking the blood of ritually sacrificed chickens to prove their sincerity in recanting. Converts from Islam are routinely pressured to return to that faith, and according to some brands of Islam, face death if they don't. In India, Dalits, who have sometimes converted to Christianity in large numbers, have been gathered by hostile Hindu leaders in mass meetings to reverse their conversions.

In Vietnam, anti-Catholic pogroms began in the seventeenth century and continued into the nineteenth century. During these, even those who succumbed to unimaginable pressure

and did recant their Christian faith were branded on the forehead with the words *ta dao* (heretic). Though they avoided death, they were never able to escape the opprobrium of having been a Christian.

Forced recantations present serious theological and pastoral problems. Those who sign a statement or, under great pressure, indicate that they recant yet continue to believe in their hearts often suffer deep guilt for having publicly denied their faith. Is there space in the Christian family for those who must truly live as secret believers? Much wisdom and discernment is required of those who pastor people forced to make such choices. And those who observe from afar ought simply to withhold judgment.

In some extreme cases, it must be admitted, persecuted believers buckle. They deem the costs too high. They capitulate and stop practicing their faith.

Others escape by fleeing from persecution. From Bible times onward, some severely persecuted believers have deemed it necessary to flee for safety or at least to reduce persecution.

On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.... Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. *Acts 8:1,4*

This has happened countless times in church history and continues to the present day.

The persecution of God's people has a long and venerable history in the Old Testament (Schirrmacher 2008, 37–39). But most well known is the persecution

in the book of Acts and the dispersion of the church in Jerusalem. Persecution of the apostles and the scattering of the followers of Jesus resulted in bringing the gospel to new areas, adding to the believers, and multiplying churches.

When disciples were scattered they did not go underground but continued their bold witness. They accepted that their hardships were part of the grand strategic plan of God to grow his church and spread his Kingdom (Penner 2004, 155–67). The pattern of persecution leading to scattered Christians who then evangelized and grew the church, which in turn spawned more persecution and more scattering, has been repeated through the centuries. The apostles did not view their suffering of harsh persecution as a reason for pity, but rather as an opportunity to encourage the church. After being stoned nearly to death, Paul returns to town, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22) [NIV 1984-unless otherwise noted].

As well, Old Testament prophets, Jesus himself, and New Testament apostles often fled persecution and danger with God's blessing. They found shelter until they could fight another day, or, in Jesus' case, until his “time had come.”

For more on how persecution has often led to the flight and migration of Christians and the spread of the faith, there is no better source than Kenneth Scott Latourette's monumental seven-volume *A History of the Expansion of Christianity*, published between 1937 and 1945.

In recent years, heavy persecution of Christians in the Muslim Middle East and some North African countries has led to their steady flight to other lands and the depletion of the church

in their homelands. This push was exemplified by graffiti seen in Libya. It read, “First the Saturday people and now the Sunday people.” If present trends continue, it is feared that some countries in the region may become Christian-free within a generation.

In Vietnam, some thirty-five thousand Christian Hmong have fled persecution in the Northwest mountainous region during the last decade, moving 800 miles south to the Central Highlands. Some nasty persecution has followed them, but on the whole they deem their new location as somewhat better. At the same time some Montagnard minority Christians in the Central Highlands have fled persecution for neighboring Cambodia. In this case, Christians have fled both internally and across a national border to escape repression for their faith.

The most recent report “Persecuted and Forgotten?” (2011) by the British branch of the Vatican-endorsed organization, Aid to the Church in Need, calculates alarmingly that three-quarters of all religious persecution in the world is against Christians! It would be a worthy study to find out how much this extensive persecution contributes to the 45 million refugees recognized by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). By any measure, the flight by Christians from persecution remains a major way they respond to their lot, and the numbers are growing.

How can the church respond to the needs of those Christians who flee persecution? In one example, organizations which help resettle refugees in Western countries look for sponsors. Using the “first to the household of faith” principle, Christians may in this way help fleeing brothers and sisters to resettle and start new lives. There are also a number of Christian agencies which specialize in service to refugees. While they usually serve all regardless of faith and are worthy of support for that reason alone, sometimes they also become aware of the special needs of fleeing Christians.³

ENDURE PATIENTLY

By far, most Christians who suffer “for Christ’s sake” would fit into the category of believers through the centuries who have had no choice but to stay put and endure persecution. And, not coincidentally, the New Testament Scriptures have much more to say on this topic than on fleeing persecution or advocating for the persecuted.

In sum, Scripture is clear on the inevitability of suffering for Christ’s sake and the call for patient endurance in it. Jesus, in John 15:20 said, “Remember the words I spoke to you, ‘No servant is greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.” And Paul, in 2 Timothy 3:12 says, “In fact everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” These unqualified statements make clear that persecution for the followers of Jesus is both inevitable and normative.

Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. *James 1:12*

Further, the epistles have volumes to say about how to face the promised suffering and persecution. Paul, in Philippians 3:10, writes of “the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings.” Peter speaks of “suffering for doing good” (1 Pet 3:17). James writes of “patience in the face of suffering” (5:10).⁴

As I have written elsewhere, “Mysteriously, it is sometimes through persecution, suffering, and martyrdom that God spreads his glory and his name, making them expressions of both Christian spirituality and mission” (Sauer and Howell 2010, 330).

Hebrews 13:3 clearly enjoins us to “remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.” Such remembering calls us to risk-taking activity and is not a mere cognitive exercise.

As indicated above, a whole raft of agencies has emerged in the last half century to minister to the persecuted church.⁵ This is as it should be. However, the relationship between the hurting and the helping members of the body is not a one-way street, as anyone who has worked with the persecuted church will attest.

An equal if not more pressing question is what the persecuted church has to teach the rest of us. The persecuted church is living in a very New Testament and early church context and has much to share with the overly rational and sometimes spiritually flabby churches of the West. Boyd-MacMillan (2006, 303–49) says the reservoir of experience of the persecuted is a huge and untapped resource to provide the church-at-large with models of risking faith and habits of holiness.⁶

ADVOCATE AGAINST IT⁷

After the miraculous events during Paul and Silas’ imprisonment in Acts 16 which led to the jailer’s salvation, the apostles’ release was ordered. But Paul is not content with mere freedom. He says, in effect, to the officer letting them go, “They slapped us around and stuck us in jail without a trial even though we are Roman citizens, and now you just want us to slip away? Don’t you think those who abused us should face the legal consequences?” Acts 21–23 provides further examples of how a persecuted Paul appeals for his legal rights as a Roman.

And so today, many Christians are persecuted in violation of the laws of their own nations and in violation of international treaties signed by their governments. God has given governments the mandate to provide peace, justice, and order.⁸ Those abused have every right to ask for and expect justice. If no one advocates for them, the persecutors will be emboldened to multiply their abuses.

4 The matter of suffering for Christ’s sake is more fully covered in the opening chapters of part 3.

5 Lausanne Occasional Paper No. 32, “The Persecuted Church,” has a chapter cataloging various kinds of ministry to the persecuted church (44–59).

6 Excellent excerpts from Boyd-MacMillan’s book on this topic appear in part 4, chapter 57.

7 I have written an entire chapter on advocacy. See part 4, chapter 59. Also in part 3, chapter 38 I relate my personal advocacy experience.

8 See subsection “What are governments for?” in part 4, chapter 59.

Advocacy can take place on many levels. First, we can pray to our heavenly Father who advocates with the very highest authority. Second, the persecuted themselves or those closest to them can advocate on humanitarian and legal grounds, though most often this is not successful. Specialists or lawyers in the country of persecution can often speak up for the persecuted, but this too is often a risk.

International advocates who specialize in legal advocacy can often help because they know the particular vulnerabilities of persecutors in law. Such advocacy is most effective if advocates have ample and accurate information and they are well coordinated and connected in the advocacy network. In my opinion there is much need in the persecuted church support community for the development of advocacy specialists and for effective coordination.

There is another kind of advocacy that some find difficult to deal with. In some places where Christians and Muslims have coexisted peacefully for a long time, radical Muslims from afar have incited gratuitous violence against Christians. In some Nigerian and Indonesian locations where civil authorities have been unable or unwilling to defend them and halt the violence, Christians have defended themselves, and in rare instances even retaliated.

Faced with the wanton destruction of their churches and personal property, the kidnapping and rape of their wives and daughters, and the wholesale murder of their communities, they believe they are left with no other choice. I have spoken with burdened Christian leaders who survived such attacks and asked me the heart-wrenching question, “What should we do when they attack like that by night?” This question is worthy of serious theological and ethical reflection, and careful answers.

Advocating for the persecuted cannot be expected to end persecution. But it is an essential part of our witness to the gospel to stand up for those made in his image and abused for Christ’s sake.

Between standing up for their rights and readiness to suffer for Christ’s sake the persecuted sometimes choose but often have no choice in their response. Whatever that response is, they deserve the understanding and support of the rest of the body of Christ.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. How can the conceptual responses of the global church (as, for example, in the statements of the Lausanne Movement) become much better known in local churches?
2. Are you familiar with some of the recent scholarship on the topic as described by the author? Can you add to the list?
3. Are the three main “responses of the persecuted” mainly descriptive of history or are they also prescriptive for the present and future?
4. Are there other appropriate responses to persecution not captured in the author’s broad paradigm?

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CHAPTER 8

DELIVER US FROM EVIL

Biblical-theological Reflections

Rose Dowsett

Hand cut off ... killed by bomb under his car ... detained without trial and left in metal container till he died ... gang raped for being Christian ... church burnt down ... taken by armed gang and not seen since ... not allowed to register children in school or themselves for work ... Bibles destroyed ... shot in the head as he left prayer meeting ... children abducted for forcible conversion to majority faith....

Reports such as these, well documented, are not tales from the distant past. They are all current and can be replicated over and over again. They come from all over the world, too, though overwhelmingly from Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. Europe and America produce their own chilling stories. For these our brothers and sisters, suffering, persecution, and even martyrdom are no abstract theories to be debated, but the immediate context within which every day they must bear witness to the Lord Jesus Christ.

It's a normal Sunday morning in London. A service of one of the largest congregations in Europe is in full swing. Several thousand people, mostly African and Afro-Caribbean, listen enthralled as the senior pastor thunders out his message. "Bring your offerings! Make them big! Empty your pockets! If you give and give and give, then the Lord promises you that you will be rich, that you and your kids won't get sick, that you'll be driving a big car.... Give, and God will reward you a hundredfold!" The auditorium rings with "Praise the Lord!" and "Hallelujah!" and "Yes, Lord!" The stewards stagger under the weight of the money collected, though most of those present are, in fact, in very poorly paid jobs, or unemployed, or migrants and asylum seekers. Many of them have experienced the violence of war, rape, famine, or forced displacement from their ancestral lands. Many are HIV positive, or already have full-blown AIDS. Their stories are painful. "The pastor's message gives me hope," says one young man. "Jesus is going to deliver me from all my problems!"

On the one hand, there is persecution, martyrdom, and great suffering; not simply the suffering that is endemic in a fallen, groaning world, but specifically suffering that is a direct consequence of faithful Christian discipleship. On the other hand, there are parts of the church which teach that God's promised *shalom* encompasses the here and now in such a way as to ensure health, wealth, and safety for any Christian walking in his will; to miss out on these things is evidence of lack of faith and obedience.

The fact is that there are vibrant believers who can be found in both these categories (and of course there are many between these poles). It is not easy to harmonize these very different beliefs and experiences. There are committed Christians who prosper (in every sense of the word), and there are committed Christians whose lives are lived entirely within the boundaries of acute poverty, chronic sickness, and unjust suffering.

THE TEACHING OF JESUS

It is true that Jesus healed many sick people and that he expected his disciples also to be able to cast out demons and heal the sick as signs of the Kingdom (see, for instance, Mark 16:15–18). It is also true that in Matthew 6:28–34 Jesus links faith with provision of food and clothes: “Seek first [God’s] kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matt 6:33).

Yet a far stronger thread in Jesus’ teaching is of a more sombre character. He insists that persecution will be inescapable for his disciples: “All men will hate you because of me. . . . When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another” (Matt 10:22–23). Or again, “They will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. This will result in your being witnesses to them” (Luke 21:12–13). In both these instances, persecution and suffering are directly linked to testimony to unbelievers.

Even more fundamental, and integral to authentic discipleship, is the command to “take up your cross and follow me” (Matt 16:24); that is, identifying with, and sharing the experience of, the shame and unjust condemnation and suffering of the Lord in his death at Calvary is absolutely central to being a Christian.

THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS

It is no accident that one of the most powerful messianic prophecies, found in Isaiah 52:13–53:12, is entitled, “The suffering and glory of the servant.” Suffering and glory are inextricably intertwined. Today we are able to see that every last detail of that prophecy was fulfilled in his life, death, and resurrection. The Son of God did not come in wealth and power and earthly triumph, but in weakness, rejection, and suffering. “Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light,” says Jesus (John 3:19–20). The more his light shone, the greater the hatred of his enemies, and the more committed they became to destroy him.

Well, says Paul, the one who “was rich beyond all splendor” chose “all for love’s sake” to embrace poverty and powerlessness and to submit to a cruel death; “Your attitude should be the same” (Phil 2:5–11). At the very heart of our faith is sacrifice, supremely of the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” Followers of Christ must also, in response to and imitation of that once-for-all perfect and complete sacrifice, voluntarily live in a mindset and practice of sacrifice, offering up our lives in the mundane and the extraordinary, in the love of God, and in service of our fellow human beings. If that leads to the literal laying down of our lives, so be it.

THE EXPERIENCE OF THE CHURCH

Very soon after Pentecost, the first Christians entered the furnace of persecution. Stephen was the first among many who gave their lives as martyrs (Acts 7:54ff.), but already others had been beaten and suffered for bold witness to the identity of Jesus and to the significance of his death and resurrection. After Stephen's death, the whole of Acts has the recurrent motif of the persecution that disciples experienced wherever they went. It was consistent rather than sporadic, though not continuous in any one place. The Epistles, especially those of Peter, refer frequently to the prevalence and depth of suffering for the name of Christ. We know that many of Jesus' closest earthly friends died as martyrs. There must have been many more, names unknown to us but recorded in the Lamb's book of life.

God did not spare his own Son; he also does not spare us; God's children must suffer, but eternal communion with God and with Christ awaits them, a glory in comparison with which all the sufferings of this time are nothing (Rom 8:17).

D. Bonhoeffer in "Examenklausur: Wie urteilt Paulus über die irdischen Leben?" (1992, 356)

The first centuries rapidly produced a long list of those who died bravely because they refused to recant their faith or to give to Caesar the honor which belonged alone to Christ. Eyewitness accounts circulated—for instance, of the torture and death of the saintly old bishop Polycarp, of the martyrdom of the young mother Perpetua and her slave girl Felicitas—and these testimonies inspired many contemporaries and others down through the centuries to stand fast even in the face of diabolical treatment and finally death in the cruellest ways imaginable.

It was not always quite like that. There were many, too, who could not face the suffering, and turned away from Christ. That, too, has been the pattern down through the centuries. At times, as Tertullian wrote, "the blood of the martyrs is seed," and the harvest was many who came to faith. At other times, in the face of persecution the Christians became divided among themselves, or compromised, or returned to their old religions.

In the twenty centuries of the church, and wherever the gospel has been taken, there has been a similar story: hostility and violence against those who have brought the faith, and yet some whose hearts have been opened by the Holy Spirit and who have become believers; a beachhead for the gospel—the ebbing and flowing of faith. There are very few places indeed where the gospel has come to a people group without resistance or without messengers and early converts suffering. Some church traditions, especially the ancient churches, commemorate many of those who have suffered or died in the cause of the gospel as "saints," so that the annual calendar reminds their people over and over again of the cost of faithful witness to Christ.

THE SUBVERSION BY CHRISTENDOM—AND THE NEW REALITY

When Constantine in the early fourth century fatefully adopted Christianity as the protected religion of the Roman Empire, the church became seduced by power, wealth, and ease. There were of course always those who retained their prophetic voices, and especially those pioneering at the frontiers who continued to lay down their lives. But from then onwards it became increasingly easy for Christians, of whichever tradition, to expect protection from

the state from persecution. All too often, the example of the church was not that of sacrifice but that of protecting its own interests. It was a short step to sanctioning violence to achieve or maintain dominance in the name of the Christian faith.

For most of its history, the church expanded territorially by wielding power rather than righteousness, on the back of political empires. Yet, in the sovereignty of God, imperialism itself has always been an ambiguous phenomenon, and there is plenty of biblical testimony to God's willingness to shape and use even wicked empires for his own purposes of grace or judgment. So, especially when we look at the modern missionary movement of the past two hundred years, there have been pluses as well as minuses, as empires have opened up by force or commerce parts of the world previously untouched by the Christian faith. Further, the motives of huge numbers of missionaries are beyond dispute: they did not cross the world in the cause of empire, but genuinely in the cause of the gospel. In some cases, as in India, it was for a long time with Western power pitted against them, not enabling them. In other cases, as in China in relation to the opium trade, it was missionaries who led the fight against their own governments' appalling policy and practice. Large numbers sacrificed their lives, through illness or violence. Many suffered rejection by their own families "back home." Untold numbers buried their children in foreign soil.

Many of the churches of the Global South thus have an ambiguous heritage. On the one hand, there may have been a point in the past where Christianity sheltered under some foreign political power, or indeed may have become entwined with national political power. On the other hand, Christians have often been at the forefront of prophetic protest against the corruption of power within and beyond the church, and have suffered and given their lives as a result. Today, a growing percentage of Global South churches have no connection with past imperial powers, but have developed independently. Sadly, they do not necessarily dissociate from worldly power and patterns of leadership spawned by Christendom rather than flowing from biblical revelation. We all (not just Northerners!) struggle with fallenness.

Now, in the early years of the twenty-first century, the Northern churches, especially those of Europe, are discovering all over again what it means to live without state protection. Indeed, with secular humanism as the default position for European governments, administered with varying degrees of aggression, Christians in many European countries face persecution for their faith in a way that is more akin to the pre-Constantinian church than anything that has happened since. It is not likely that Europe will return to the bitter, bloody wars between rival sectors of the church that followed the Reformation, but increasingly European Christians will find themselves having to choose between following Christ and keeping the law. It has been suggested that in Europe evangelical Christians are the least protected religious community of all, with their so-called human rights and conscientious convictions consistently overruled by those of other groups. Once again, like the early Christians, we will face starkly the question: "Are you willing to suffer, and if need be go to prison or even die, in faithfulness to Christ?" And, in the face of injustice and suffering, how will we respond? Seeking to retaliate, insisting on our rights? Or, like the Lord Jesus, will we give ourselves to sacrifice rather than self-protection? Will we fight for the gospel rather than for ourselves?

COLLISION WITH OTHER WORLD RELIGIONS

European problems, at least for the moment, are of course trivial in comparison with those of many other world situations.

The weight of the world's population lives in Asia, which is also the heartland of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam, as well as (today's) Communist regimes. Along with North Africa and the Middle East, the countries of Asia (apart from the Philippines) are dominated by faiths other than Christianity, and Christians are usually a small (though not necessarily insignificant) minority. In most of these contexts, Christians have always known the reality of persecution.

But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either. *Luke 6:27–29*

In some places, Christians have been able to live peaceably side by side with those of other faiths. Loving service and integrity of life have enabled genuine clear testimony to the uniqueness of Christ without leading automatically to general hostility. Nonetheless, in recent years, on the one hand, Christians have been seen as a threat to national identity (usually closed tied to the dominant religion, even in a country technically under secular administration) and, on the other hand, more militant forms of those other faiths have emerged. Few governments have the will or the ability to curtail the activities of the latter. Politicians, police, and military may all sympathize with the militants, and will do little to protect Christians even if their constitution requires it. In some countries, especially Islamic ones, conversion to Christianity (or another faith) is illegal.

It is for this reason that in some contexts, again especially in the Islamic world, Christians have been struggling with very deep and complex questions as to how they live out their faith. Christians are not called deliberately to court persecution unnecessarily. Just as the council of Jerusalem affirmed early on, led by the Holy Spirit, that Gentiles did not have to become Jews before they could become Christians, so Global South Christians are right to insist that they do not have to become European or North American in the way they express their discipleship. Faith in Jesus should not look “foreign” in a way that extracts people from their own culture without due cause. At the same time, the gospel will always be counter-cultural anywhere in the world as it collides with human fallenness and with the religions and worldviews that the Bible insists to be delusions stemming from the suppression of God's revelation (see, for instance, Paul's argument in Romans 1, or the majestic assertions of Isaiah 45:18ff.). If there is to be persecution and suffering, let it genuinely be through resistance to God's truth, not through our cultural clumsiness.

Especially difficult is the current debate as to how far believers within a very hostile environment can remain within their old religious and cultural observance in order to avoid persecution. For instance, how far along the C1–6 spectrum can believers in Jesus align and be authentic disciples? At what point do they need to be distinct from the Islam, or Judaism, Hinduism, or Buddhism, from which they come and within which culturally they are still embedded? How far is it possible to be a believer in one's heart without outward dissociation from former religious and cultural allegiance? Is it sufficient to see this as a pragmatic

(and pragmatically very realistic) way of avoiding an otherwise likely martyrdom, or at the least the cost of being outcast by family and society? Some would argue that remaining an insider gives opportunity to witness to Christ and is therefore justified. Others believe that it involves a level of compromise that is not compatible with true faith.

The early church divided sharply, too, over an arguably parallel situation: whether or not, to preserve one's life, one could outwardly conform to observation of emperor worship while not worshipping him in one's heart. Far more recently, in the middle of the twentieth century, under Japanese military occupation, Korean Christians disagreed sharply over whether or not to obey edicts that they must comply with Japanese emperor worship. In China, Christians are still deeply divided over whether or not they should belong to government-sanctioned churches—the Three-Self Patriotic Movement churches—or whether authentic faith means they must belong to house churches. As it happens, Christians in both streams have experienced persecution and even martyrdom in the last half century, and that particular story has not yet ended. The divisions in the early church led to bitterness that shadowed centuries. Many Korean Christians are still not reconciled. If nothing else, this should remind us very soberly that Christians in the furnace of suffering may reach different conclusions, and that while sometimes, historically, persecution has produced a harvest of faith, at other times it has sown deep divisions and also led to defections from the faith.

No wonder that the Lord Jesus taught us to pray, “Lead us not into temptation (i.e., testing, trial), but deliver us from evil.” In the face of the experienced reality of suffering of so many of God's people, the prosperity gospel looks obscene.

CONCLUSION

The Apostle John, in his magnificent vision that we know as the book of Revelation, tells us that those who gather round the throne of the Lamb of God are those who have come through great tribulation. The final victory over sin and evil is secure. In the meantime, we need to pray for those around the world being called upon to suffer at the present time, that they may know the grace of God to be faithful. And for those of us whose experience is at present far more comfortable, pray that we may be willing to pay the cost of witnessing far more prophetically into our fallen cultures.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. How would you respond to a friend who is convinced by prosperity gospel teaching?
2. In your culture, in what ways do you think Christians need to be more bravely countercultural? If they were, what might be the consequences?
3. Where persecution has caused deep and painful divisions between believers, what practical steps could be taken to bring about reconciliation?

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CHAPTER 12

REFLECTIONS ON THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL

Femi B. Adeleye

INTRODUCTION

The “prosperity” or “health and wealth” gospel is one of the fastest growing different “gospels” spreading across denominations. This gospel asserts that believers have the right to the blessings of health and wealth and that they can obtain these blessings through positive confessions of faith and the “sowing of seeds” through the faithful payments of tithes and offerings. Although the Bible affirms that God cares enough to bless his people and provide for their needs—and although there are legitimate ways to work for such needs to be met—this gospel often makes the pursuit of material things and physical well-being ends in themselves.

The prosperity gospel focuses primarily on material possessions, physical well-being, and success in this life: which includes abundant financial resources, good health, clothes, housing, cars, promotion at work, success in business, as well as other endeavors of life. The extent of material acquisition and well-being is often equated with God’s approval.

THE HERMENEUTICS OF THE OFFERING

I once asked my cousin why he had not gone to church on a Sunday. He answered by telling me that in response to his pastor’s preaching he had donated his Volkswagen car to his church, expecting God to replace it with a Mercedes Benz. After some months, when his miracle car did not materialize, he thought God had disappointed him. He stopped going to church. I told him that God had not disappointed him. Instead, he had been misled. My cousin had been attending a prosperity preaching church and had been taken in by the offering time.

In the past, the worship hour (or two) in most churches has centered on the proclamation of the Word. The sermon is preached in all solemnity. Today in many churches, at least in the non-Western world, the focus is now the “offering time.” It is popular to say, “Offering time is blessing time,” not least because for many it is investment time. The offering is often regarded as sowing, which looks forward to significant returns. The Word itself is often twisted to back the centrality of offering time, and in some churches there is a minisermon to urge the congregation to give. One would not worry as much if this took place just once

during the service. Sometimes there can be as many as five or six different collections taken in a single service.¹ One simply feels a sense of the flock being fleeced bare.

SCRIPTURAL TWISTING

From this writer's observation, the most popular verse used in motivating or mobilizing the congregation to give is Luke 6:38, which says, "Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you" (NKJV). This verse is quoted with relish and often backed by a minisermon on the benefits of giving. The verse is, however, often quoted out of context. Luke 6:38 is found in the context of Jesus' teaching on love and mercy and how we relate to and treat others. The full paragraph begins in v. 37 with "Judge not, and you shall not be judged: condemn not, and you shall not be condemned: forgive, and you shall be forgiven" (KJV). Following in God's example, love and mercy should produce a hesitation in judging others as believers realize that God will treat them in the way they have treated others. The passage is therefore first and foremost about relationships—not treating others or judging them in the way we do not want to be judged, for in this regard, "with the same measure that we use, it will be measured back to us."

The text is neither about giving to God financially nor expecting returns for what we give. It has more to do with loving and forgiving as well as being of service without expecting anything in return. This has, however, been twisted to indicate that God will return in double or hundredfold whatever one gives in offerings. It is common for several collections to be taken in a single service. Songs like "I am a millionaire" and "Let the poor say I am rich" became popular in anticipation of God's reward with material blessings. Positive confession is encouraged for good health, wealth, and other blessings.²

Very few people who use this passage as a basis for collecting offerings refer to the unusually strong words of the Lord Jesus on wealth in the same chapter. For example in Luke 6:24–25 Jesus says, "But woe unto you that are rich! For you have received your consolation. Woe unto you that are full! For you shall hunger. Woe unto you that laugh now! For you shall mourn and weep" (KJV). Matthew 7:1–5 actually helps to throw more light on the Luke 6:36–39 text. Both passages focus on human relationships.

Some also use 3 John 2, which says, "I pray that you may prosper in all things," as a mandate for the prosperity gospel. However, what does the apostle mean by prosperity here? A careful study of the meaning of this text as intended by the writer would reveal that the word used for *prosper* in English comes from the Greek word *euodoo*, which means "good road, route, or journey." Hence what the writer actually says is, "I want you to have a good and healthy lifelong journey." The words do not necessarily refer to riches or wealth. Why would John, a witness of the life of Christ, say, "Above everything else, I want you to be rich or wealthy"?

1 I was in a church recently in Lagos, Nigeria (September 21, 2008), where there were six different collections for various purposes, including one for freedom from fear.

2 I have observed this in Gabriel Oduyemi's Bethel Chapel in Lagos, Nigeria, as well as in other churches.

The reference to abundant life in John 10:10 is also often used as a prop. However, the term used for life here is *zoe*, a word indicating “life in the spirit and soul,” rather than *bios*, which is used to refer to physical, material life. When read as intended, Jesus is saying, “I want you to have an abundant life in spirit,” not riches, cars, houses, designer clothes, etc., as is often emphasized in the prosperity gospel preaching.

The hermeneutics of this gospel raises more questions than it answers. For instance, does it affirm and point people to the cross? Is the lifestyle of those who benefit from the teaching consistent with the ethos of the cross of Christ? One thing is certain—Jesus did not preach or teach a prosperity gospel! All he taught that referred to earthly possessions came as warnings to us. For example, he very clearly says, “Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses” (Luke 12:15). Unlike our modern-day preachers, Jesus warned against the deceitfulness of riches (Matt 13:22). He in fact refers to it as “unrighteousness mammon” (Luke 16:9). As an end in itself, money has the tendency to compete for our loyalty that belongs to God. It has the tendency to become an idol that rules our lives. This is why Jesus warns against relating to money as we relate to God. “No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon” (Luke 16:13).

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. *1 Peter 4:12–13*

One may ask if there is anything wrong with material prosperity. Not necessarily. Very often material prosperity is related to physical and emotional well-being, and this is largely God’s will for most people. In the Old Testament, God blessed Abraham and several others and made them materially prosperous. God also gives the ability to produce wealth (Deut 7:16–18). We also serve a God who desires and promises to supply all our needs according to his riches.

The challenge is that many churches have not adequately addressed how we are to acquire material prosperity and to what extent. One would suggest that there are various approaches which may include through hard work (“If a man will not work, he shall not eat”—2 Thess 3:10); through advanced planning, which includes saving the rewards of hard work through investments and other good money-growing options. Other ways may include shortcuts such as stealing, gambling, speculating, begging, or borrowing. The church ought to provide adequate teaching on these matters. However, this is often not the case, as many churches only work hard at presenting shortcuts like the seed-faith principle, hundredfold blessing, “pressed down, shaken together,” and the idea of “sweatless victory” or “sweatless success.”

TRACING THE ROOTS

The roots of the prosperity gospel are easily traceable to the televangelist culture in the United States. The same context which nurtured the rich Christian heritage dating back to the eighteenth-century revivals and twentieth-century evangelical tradition is the same that has spread the prosperity gospel to other parts of the world. Lamenting this development several years ago, Gordon Fee says:

American Christianity is rapidly being infected by an insidious disease, the so-called “wealth and health” gospel—although it has a very little of the character of the gospel in it. In its more brazen forms . . . it simply says, “Serve God and get rich” . . . in its more respectable—but pernicious—forms it builds fifteen million-dollar crystal Cathedrals to the glory of affluent suburban Christianity. (cited in McConnell 1990, 170)

From its American roots, the prosperity gospel has today spread to virtually all parts of the world.

Through the health and wealth gospel, the church in many parts of the world—Africa, Europe, and even the Middle East, as well as nations within Eastern Europe and Asia that were once under the yoke of Communism—has been invaded by a celebrity culture that has little space or room for the cross of Jesus Christ. Many people in the church want to live for Jesus without renouncing material greed. The pressure from the world of celebrities and popular culture is so strong that many people in the church want to live for Jesus without renouncing material greed.

SOME SHORTCOMINGS OF THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL

The shortcomings of the prosperity gospel include the tendency to distort the mission of Jesus from primarily coming to save us from our sins to coming to make us rich. While some preach that Jesus has come both to save people from their sin and make them rich, it is rare to hear preaching on repentance or salvation from sin in prosperity gospel circles. Furthermore, this different gospel fails to see that all forms of giving to God are primarily acts of worship. Instead it teaches that tithing or giving to God is an investment that must yield some returns. It pressures people to give with wrong motives, suggesting that we must have returns or rewards here and now in material form. Importantly, the gospel distorts the person of Christ and misleads people by teaching that Jesus was materially rich. While Jesus was not destitute, we know from Scripture that he was not as materially prosperous as the health and wealth teachers make him out to be. The prosperity gospel also often feeds on the greed of its teachers at the expense of the needs of their followers. There is further the tendency to spend more energy raising money than on working to present the true gospel or nourishing the spiritual health of God’s people. This suggests that money is more important than people or the urgent task of evangelism.

IS THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL GOOD NEWS FOR THE POOR?

While the prosperity gospel often wears the mask of advocacy for the poor, it is hardly good news when in most situations the shepherds are fleecing the flock. In response to diverse schemes of manipulation, the poor who sow the seed are not the ones that get richer. The leaders and pastors wear better suits, drive better cars, and acquire bigger homes.

There is a deep sense of injustice and immorality when one considers the severe plight and vulnerability of the poor. Some of those who keep sowing to the prosperity gospel can hardly afford regular meals or other basic essentials like shelter or school fees for children. Why should any follower of Jesus support a gospel that tends to align much more with celebrity

culture in depriving the poor of the dignity and respect they deserve? Rather than appreciate their endurance of living, often in subhuman conditions, or working to redeem or improve their situation, some preachers connive with popular culture to dangle unrealistic shortcuts to prosperity. While advocacy for the poor and poverty alleviation has become a multi-billion dollar business, the poor in many contexts can hardly be said to be benefiting. This is not only an affront to the poor but to God as well.

The prosperity gospel is nothing less than seduction into a false delusion. It is an unrealistic solution to the challenges of daily life, at least in my African context, and it contradicts biblical teaching on work by offering shortcuts to material success. Besides, it reduces God to the “genie in the bottle,” whose main task is to respond to human manipulation. To embrace it is to fall into the peril of the love of money that Paul warned Timothy against in 2 Timothy 3:1–5. To be indifferent to its impact is to be more earthly than heavenly minded. It is to forget that the Kingdom of God is not of this world and to assume that it is primarily meat and drink. A common argument is that the prosperity gospel works. The question is, who does it work for? For those giving or those receiving? Importantly, one must also ask what becomes of many who have become disillusioned with the real gospel as a whole because they have sown their faith-seed but have not seen the anticipated fruits.

HOW THEN SHOULD WE RESPOND TO THIS GOSPEL?

It is important to recognize and take seriously the fact that the prosperity gospel is primarily about money and that it contradicts both the life of Christ and the purpose for which he died on the cross. This false gospel elevates money to compete for a space in our lives that only God deserves. If the love of money is the root of all evil, the love of material property, mansions, and other accumulations in the dragnet of money must follow closely after. We are increasingly defined, not by who or what we are, but by what we have or own. In very easy ways—more subtle than we often think—any of these can become idols that dim our view of God and diminish our passion for him.

The French theologian Jacques Ellul in his book *Money and Power*, argues that “money is power, a spirit, a would-be God, a rival master” (cited in Petersen 1987, 33). Furthermore, he distinguishes between money and wealth. For him, “wealth consists of those good things of God’s creation that are meant for our enjoyment. Money is the world’s way of amassing those things, hoarding them, assuring that you can have more tomorrow, dividing people according to its arbitrary rules. Money does not merely tempt, it engulfs. It spins its web around people, forcing them to its service” (33). Even if we don’t agree with Jacques Ellul, his position is not too different from that of Jesus who summarily concludes, “You cannot worship both God and mammon” (Matt 6:24).

There are few people today who can speak as authoritatively as Jim Bakker on the prosperity gospel. In an interview with *Charisma* shortly after his release from jail, Jim Bakker admitted that he had been building a 1980s-style tower of Babel to make a name for himself (1997). His tower of Babel was a multimillion-dollar business that had a 30 million-dollar payroll and more than 2,200 employees. Bakker has since repented and apologized for the PTL scandal. In the interview with *Charisma*, Bakker says:

While I studied Jesus' words, I couldn't find anywhere in the Bible where he said anything good about money. And this started to prick my heart. Luke 6:24 says, "Woe to you who are rich," Jesus talked about the "deceitfulness of riches" in Mark 4:19. Jesus told us not to lay up treasures on earth in Matthew 6:24. In Luke 12:15, he said: "Watch out, be on your guard against all kinds of greed. A man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." (1997, 33)

Secondly, I suggest that we need to take the plight of the poor seriously enough to reject this gospel and work at better ways of meeting their needs over offering false shortcuts. We all should be concerned enough to feel a sense of pain to see a part of the church drifting away from sound doctrine in this way. Instead of working to alleviate the plight of the poor, this group not only consents to their marginalization but manipulates Scripture to do so. Some have turned the sacred space of the pulpit into a shrine of mammon worship. The injustice and idolatry of greed is what made our Lord use such strong words against the rich. And when sacred territory was profaned by the same idolatry, we see the only record of the Lord expressing his anger physically in the temple.

Thirdly, it is worth taking seriously the truth from Uncle John Stott that "life, in fact, is a pilgrimage from one moment of nakedness to another. So we should travel light and live simply" (1990, 246).

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. How has the prosperity gospel twisted Scripture related to giving and receiving, and what kind of fruit have you seen in your own context? How can we help those who have become disillusioned by these expectations?
2. What advice has Jesus given about seeking material wealth? When is our attitude to material prosperity healthy and when does it become dangerous?
3. What have the practical results of following this gospel been for the poor in Africa? What would be a better way of responding to the needs of the poor?

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CHAPTER 19

FROM ASIA MINOR TO CONTEMPORARY TURKEY

Suffering, Persecution, and Martyrdom in History and Geography

Carlos Madrigal

THE CEMETERY OF THE CHURCH

The land, history, and peoples of Asia Minor remain to this day as extraordinary witnesses to the deep scars, challenges, and sufferings of the church throughout the ages. Outside of the Holy Land it is hard to find another place in the world where so many significant events of the Christian faith have converged. This is the land known as “the cradle” of the church. It is where the first Gentile church was founded, thus inaugurating the universal church. It is where the first missionary church began, hence initiating the church’s global expansion. And finally, it is the home of all seven churches of Revelation which foreshadowed and today exemplify the glories and hardships of the earthly church.

However, this land that witnessed the extraordinary vitality which pioneered the church through the centuries has now become known as “the cemetery of the church.” Unfortunately, Christianity has been virtually eradicated today from this soil. So, what exactly happened in this span of twenty centuries? What caused this decline? The answer: innumerable sufferings, persecutions, and martyrdoms.

Asia Minor is the home of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers which watered the garden of Eden; of Mount Ararat, where the ark rested; of Haran, Abraham’s native land; of Tarsus, the birthplace of Paul; of Syrian Antioch, the first missionary church; of Patmos, where John was exiled; of Galatia, Bithynia, Iconium, Thrace, and Cappadocia; and finally, of the seven “candlesticks” of Asia Minor. At this point it would be good to remind ourselves that none other than the Lord himself can blow out the candlesticks of the church, and that no one but the community of believers has a responsibility to keep this flame alive. Nor must we forget that the Lord is the one who “will rebuild the ancient ruins,” “restore the places long devastated,” and “will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for

generations,” bringing salvation, joy, and justice to all peoples (Isa 61:4,10).¹ As a worker with over twenty-five years of experience in the field, I believe great lessons must be learned from the devastation experienced in these lands. We must take them to heart and equip ourselves for the great spiritual restoration to come.

AN EPISTLE FOR ASIA MINOR

What roles have adversities, persecutions, and massacres played in Asia Minor? What lessons stand out? I would not want to make a simplistic or cold review of all historical facts—which would not be possible—but rather tell some “inside” stories (i.e., the *Acta Martyrum*) of the suffering and therefore, the victorious church! What better stage to echo the words of the Apostle Peter and identify with “your brothers throughout the world [who] are undergoing the same kind of sufferings” (1 Pet 5:9). Peter wrote these words specifically to the “scattered” churches in Asia Minor: “Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia” (1 Pet 1:1).

In the book of Revelation, the Lord speaks to the seven churches of Asia Minor which are threatened from both outside and inside forces. He speaks to them with words of warning or praise; but there are only two churches that he does not reproach: Smyrna and Philadelphia. He only uses words of approval and encouragement with these communities. Why? They are the only two churches that are trying to survive by engaging in efforts to overcome persecution. One church (Smyrna) suffers the persecution of their preachers and evangelists (i.e., speakers of the Word), and the other (Philadelphia) suffers a defamatory persecution against the proclamation of the gospel. The Lord has no words of reproach for those who are faithful in the midst of suffering. They are not perfect people or communities but they bear the “mark of Christ on their bodies,” and this glory completely overshadows any of their defects. This gracious treatment towards sufferers was true then and has continued to be true throughout the entire history of the church.

We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. *2 Corinthians 4:8–10*

Today we live in a world and see a church that is ever more obsessed with the eradication of pain from everyday life in favor of its welfare. In contrast, the first churches lived to eradicate evil from the world regardless of sacrifice. Which of these two positions fits better with the purpose and message of the gospel? Ending suffering is one of the objectives of the gospel, but it is a collateral purpose, if I may say so, and not the central objective. Seeking healing, comforting the depressed, praying for provision, and pursuing happiness are all aspects of living the gospel, but if all we want is a life without diseases, without adversity, and of continued success are we not drifting somewhere else? If our desire of ending suffering makes us desist from any task that requires sacrifice, are we not imprisoned by ourselves and are we not shunning the major difficulties we face in proclaiming the gospel in the world’s most challenging areas?

¹ In places like Turkey, the spiritual application of such passages as “blessings for all peoples” is easily distorted by people that want to see a hidden imperialist agenda in these statements, as if our objective was to strip them of their land. Nothing is further from the truth! In reality, this type of commitment to add a political content to the gospel’s message is another form of persecution. It is a way of exerting an intimidating pressure on the legitimacy and freedom of Christian thought.

In contrast, if we assume that the task of the church is fighting evil in the world regardless of the sacrifice required, then the words of Peter to the suffering believers in Asia Minor become very significant: “Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because whoever has suffered in his body is done with sin” (1 Pet 4:1). We must arm ourselves with the kind of mental attitude found in Hebrews 12:4 if we want to recover a worldview of our mission against “sin” and “evil,” even if this means it will cost us suffering and maybe the shedding of our own blood. It is not that we should seek mortification and suffering as a goal itself, but it is time we rediscover the ultimate cost that we will face when pursuing the Kingdom legitimately. The aim is to overcome evil, the cost is sacrificial self-denial.

THE SEEDS PLANTED BY DIOCLETIAN

During the first three centuries of church history, the Roman Empire led ten major waves of persecution against the Christian faith. Such was the state of persecution in the lands of Asia Minor that Ignatius Martyr, bishop of Antioch (AD 68–107), coined the following famous phrase: “I am God’s wheat, and I need to be ground by the teeth of wild beasts [of the Roman circus] that I may be found the pure bread [of Christ]” (*Epistle to the Romans* VI,1). Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna (AD 74–155), said to his executioner: “Eighty and six years have I served him (Christ), and he never did me any injury: how then can I blaspheme my King and my Savior? You threaten me with fire which burns for an hour, and after a little is extinguished, but are ignorant of the fire of the coming judgment and of eternal punishment” (*Martyrdom of Polycarp*, ch. 9,11). Then came the famous statement of Tertullian (AD 160–220): “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.”

Persecution did not erase Christianity. However, in spite of persecution, or perhaps because of it, Christians survived the Roman Empire itself. Between AD 303 and 313, Emperor Diocletian ordered and approved (perhaps instigated by Galerius) the last and most devastating of the imperial persecutions which took place in Asia Minor. It is said that half of all the martyrdoms of the entire Roman era occurred between those dates.² Both Eusebius, in his *Ecclesiastical History* (n.d., 2–3), as well as Lactantius, in *Death of the Persecutors* (n.d., 1–5), report this same fact. This wave of persecution was so intense that Diocletian raised a column with the inscription: “The name Christian is extinguished.”³ Today, in the place of his palace in ancient Nicomedia, stands the city of Izmit in modern Turkey.

In 1998 the Lord led us to start work in Izmit (not to be confused with “Izmir” or Smyrna). After a year of church planting we decided to look for a building that we could use as a

2 The eighteenth-century historian Edward Gibbon reduced the number of casualties during the Great Christian Persecution to a maximum of 2,000 and suggested a total of 4,000 for the entire imperial period. Historians now say that you cannot determine an exact number, the numbers being considered range from 10,000 to 100,000 martyrs: “Judging from the calculation of L. Hertling one could estimate that during the second half of the first century (Nero, Domitian) the martyrs would be about 5,000; during the second century (Septimius Severus, Decius, Valerian, Aurelian) about 20,000; and the late third and early fourth century (Diocletian, Galerius, Maximinus Daja) some 50,000. This calculation would give us the number of approximately 100,000 martyrs during the persecution of the Roman Empire” (Gomez 2001, 104–5).

3 “Extincto nomine Cristianorum” (Harold 2008, 58). There is also talk that a coin was minted with the inscription: “Diocletian emperor who destroyed the Christian name.”

church and would be affordable in our limited economic options. On August 17, 1999, an earthquake measuring 7.4 on the Richter scale devastated the city. More than thirty-five thousand people died within forty-five seconds! Our building immediately became a center of distribution for humanitarian aid sent by evangelical organizations around the world. The church was not damaged, but several of our neighboring buildings collapsed. Underneath these collapsed buildings appeared the remains of Diocletian's palace! Of all places in a city inhabited by over a million people, unbeknownst to us, we had planted the church on top of the palace that had shed the most blood of martyrs throughout the history of Rome. Was it coincidence or providential guidance? If we remember Tertullian's maxim—"the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church"—the answer does not offer much doubt! This small, faltering church remains there today, struggling against all odds to succeed.

THE FRUITS OF PERSECUTION

During the reign of Diocletian, a soldier of the emperor's personal guard named Georgios was ordered to participate in repression. Instead, he chose to publicly declare his Christian faith and oppose the imperial decision. An enraged Diocletian ordered his torture, and he endured it without uttering a single complaint. He was subsequently executed. Georgios was beheaded outside the walls of Nicomedia (Izmit) on April 23, 303. The testimony of his suffering convinced Empress Alexandra and an anonymous pagan priestess to convert to Christianity. They too would eventually join Georgios in martyrdom. Today this martyr is known as Saint George.

The history of persecution in places like Nicomedia and Cappadocia, though initially a seeming blow to the survival and expansion of the church itself, are illustrative of how persecution and martyrdom revitalized the church and were ultimately epic victories over all the powers of evil. It is through this history of suffering that the ultimate goal of the gospel was fulfilled.

On the one hand, these persecutions would prove to be the seeds of the great artistic heritage found in the churches carved into the caves of Cappadocia. On the other hand, these histories would bring about one of the most influential stories in popular consciousness: the legend of Saint George and the Dragon. Both of these cases, beyond their anecdotal and mythical aspects, make it clear that any sacrifice made by faith ends up being the seed needed for the restoration and revitalization of believers.

The last and bloodiest of all the persecutions in Rome soon led to the eventual recognition of the Christians in the empire. Gradually, however, a new and more terrible form of persecution ensued: that of Christians against Christians, and of Christians against other religions. This movement would reach its peak with the Crusades and the Inquisition. These new persecutions were even more terrible because they were done in the name of Christ! This is an episode that we cannot avoid if we want to understand the situation in Asia Minor following the fifteenth century. Although the Crusades may seem like an item that has nothing to do with our topic, we cannot nor should we ever stop mentioning them. The Crusades have left deep, unhealed scars throughout the Middle East. Moreover, this wound is not just in the

historical memory of the Muslims, but also of our fellow Orthodox, Armenian, Nestorian, and Coptic Christians.

While my Turkish friends often mention the Crusades and the Inquisition as two sides of the same coin, I say that “we, the Protestants” were as much victims of this persecution as were Jews and Muslims (that is, by the Inquisition); we cannot ignore or walk away from these two scourges of “Christianity.” Moreover we must acknowledge the atrocities done in the name of Christ and ask forgiveness for them. Only then will we have the authority to denounce any other injustice. If persecution causes humiliation and pain, forgiving and knowing to apologize—even if you are the victim—dignifies and heals. Ultimately, it makes us participants in his glory (1 Pet 4:14) and a herald of his fair trial to come (2 Thess 1:4–6).

The day we begin assuming that the role of persecution falls within the outcomes of divine providence, we stop being victims and become victors. This change in mentality, in turn, also helps us celebrate his liberation in advance. Several years ago the following words of the suffering Jeremiah taught me this valuable lesson: “It is good for a man to ... offer his cheek to one who would strike him, and let him be filled with disgrace. For men are not cast off by the Lord forever. Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unflinching love” (Lam 3:27,30–32).

Martyrdom has its most far-reaching effect when those who suffer persecution grant a full pardon to their persecutors. This, ultimately, helps to spread the seed so that it is truly effective: “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.... Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went” (Acts 7:60,8:4).

TOWARDS CONTEMPORARY TURKEY

Following the rapid spread of Islam in the eighth century, in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century the religious setup and map of the Mediterranean world drastically changed. While Constantinople, capital of the Byzantine Empire, fell into the hands of the Ottomans (1453), the last capital of the Umayyad Caliphate, Granada, was reconquered by the Catholic Kings (1492), and consequently Muslims were expelled from the Iberian Peninsula (1502). Luther nailed his ninety-five theses onto the door of Wittenberg (1517), while the Ottomans expanded their empire practically to the gates of Vienna (1529).

The Ottoman Turks grouped different populations according to their millet (i.e., ethnic nationalities). These “nationalities” were determined by religious denominations. Apart from the ruling Muslim millet, several other “nationalities” included the Jews, the Armenians, the Catholics (there was even a Protestant millet in the nineteenth century), and finally the Orthodox millet, the highest millet after the Muslims. These “nationalities” enjoyed a good degree of autonomy and were governed by their religious leaders. This system remained the same until the time when nationalism began its push for independence during the nineteenth century.

First, with the independence of Greece and later, with the wave of Balkan independence on the brink of World War I (i.e., former Yugoslavia, Albania, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria), the Christian millet or “nationalities” began to be seen as treacherous forces eager to support

the West and end the rule of the Ottoman Empire. This situation created waves of suspicion, and with it came a sense of urgency “to crush the enemies installed in our backyard.”

In 1915, under the guise of preventing an uprising, the Armenians were forced to evacuate their lands in eastern Turkey and the consequence was that they suffered unprecedented destruction along with their exodus. The Armenians took the brunt of ethnic suspicion. This latest massacre had claimed 300,000 victims, according to some, and up to 1.5 million lives, according to others. What Turks remember, however, is the perception of “betrayal” of these millet groups towards their empire. These suspicions were confirmed when in 1919 the Ecumenical Patriarchate hailed the Greek army’s invasion of Western Anatolia. From that moment onward, the Patriarchate and ethnic minorities became known for many Turks as the “fifth column”;⁴ that is, a group of infiltrated traitors.

Although we cannot delve into details here, this very rapid analysis will be useful to understand the trigger for what is remembered in modern Turkey as “black September” or “the events of September 5 and 6” in 1955. It was a time when public psyche was deeply disturbed by the conflict in Cyprus. Assaults, looting, murder, and rape ravaged the central districts of Istanbul where Christian and Jewish minorities and their businesses were concentrated. The events were triggered by a false story about a bomb explosion that supposedly had taken place the previous day in Thessalonica (Greece), in the house where Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Turkish Republic was born in 1881. As a result, a mob stormed and razed for nine hours straight more than five thousand premises of the Greek minority population. Jewish and Armenian minorities also suffered (Güven 2005). The mob was encouraged by some organized groups who were responsible for locating homes, businesses, churches, and cemeteries in these communities (Koçoglu 2001, 25–31). Some 11 to 15 people died (depending on sources), and there were 30 to 300 wounded; between 60 and 400 women were raped (Sword 2009). This further accelerated the emigration of ethnic Greeks (or *Rum*, in Turkish) from Istanbul, whose Greek minority population declined from 135,000 in 1924 to about 7,000 in 1978 (Kuyucu 2005, 361–80).

While these unjustifiable events were not acts perpetrated against Christians as a direct result of their faith, but rather due to chauvinistic and ultranationalistic reasons, they do provide us with a framework that aids us in understanding the reactions against Christians and attempts to spread the gospel in today’s modern Turkey.⁵

A NEW BEGINNING

Not until after the 1960s did evangelical work in Turkey restart, after a lapse of half a century trying to survive unnoticed. There was virtually nothing left of the revivals of the late nineteenth century. Turkey, or what was then the large area of Anatolia belonging to the Ottoman Empire, had at one point witnessed many revivals among ethnic minorities of Christian origin. The sons and daughters of these revivals either lost their lives in the events

4 In Turkish *besinci kol*; i.e., espionage and sabotage forces aiming to overthrow the Turkish state.

5 All evangelistic activity, or proclamation and defense of the Christian faith, is understood by some sectors as illegal proselytism and therefore as another strategic branch of the “fifth column.”

of the century that followed or fled to other regions and continents. Today these remnants are still scattered throughout Europe and the Americas.

In the 1980s, however, an unheard-of phenomenon emerged: Turks of Muslim background began to convert to the Christian faith and started to form small “Turkish Protestant churches,” where the word “Turkish” meant “ethnic Turks” and not Christian ethnic minorities. In the 1990s they began trying to obtain legal recognition in a country that declared herself secular and unprejudiced to all religions, but in practice viewed Christians as a threat. By the late 1990s, these Turkish converts began to appear on television debate programs; they were courageous witnesses of their faith and suffered all kinds of criticism. In 2005, the State Security Commission identified what they called the three major threats against the Turkish state as the following: Kurdish terrorism, Islamic fundamentalism, and the proselytism practiced by missionaries (“İç Güvenlik Strateji Belgesi” 2005). News articles began to emerge about “thousands” of hypothetical underground churches hidden in homes, which came to be called “pirate churches.” Speculations that billions of dollars were used to buy land and recruit native missionaries by deceiving young misfits through promises of financial compensation created a climate of global fear and psychosis against Protestants. This fear culminated in the statements of the former first lady Rahsan Ecevit, of a secular-left party, in a press release in 2005: “Our religion is wasting away... In our country, churches have infiltrated apartment buildings. Some citizens become Christians due to various interests. Unfortunately, the authorities turn a blind eye to all this... I do not want to be governed by camouflaged sects. I want my country back.”⁶

In a culture where discourse about “invisible enemies that want to overthrow the state” created psychosis, children who were five or six years old in the mid 1990s grew to adulthood under the “threat” of “illegal” proselytism and under a state which identified missionaries as “public enemy number one” (declaring that it could not do anything to combat them). Some of these young men were literally indoctrinated with the need to save the homeland from the intrusion of Christianity and they became “cannon fodder” for ultranationalist sectors that incited them to murder.

HARASSMENTS

According to the Pew Global Research on “Global Attitudes” dating from 2008, the country in recent years with the largest growth of hostility toward Christians has been Turkey.⁷ This contrasts with the Turkish public opinion that there is complete religious freedom in this country. Is there an explanation for such a dichotomy?

On the one hand, freedoms are guaranteed on paper and the average Turk naturally accepts the presence of native Christians; their only real concern is to make ends meet, to pay their mortgage, and to pay for their children’s schooling. On the other hand, both the educational systems and much of the media transmit a worldview on international developments

⁶ *Radikal* newspaper, January 3, 2005.

⁷ “In 2004, about half (52 %) of Turks gave Christians an unfavorable rating; today roughly three in four (74%) hold this view” (<http://pewresearch.org/pubs/955/unfavorable-views-of-both-jews-and-muslims-increase-in-europe>).

in terms of a Christian crusade. This creates fear towards the idea that Christianity might be expanding in their homeland. This feeling causes both private and personal reactions as well as organized pressures, either by radical groups or sometimes by public authorities. This hostility can translate into a wide variety of actions, ranging from verbal abuse to physical assaults and arrests at the slightest complaint about anything “Christian.” Molotov cocktails have been launched at churches, and death threats and murders have even taken place. But before we consider the specific cases of martyrdom, let’s try to explore some of the environment that faces evangelical work on a day-to-day basis.

The most systematic of these harassments occur when authorities apply the “letter” of the law to Christians, while in other cases easily “turn a blind eye.” Thus, pastors have been fined, according to a law banning religious manifestations in public (TCK 529), for leading the “public” worship service of their church, when many mosques on Friday often invade the streets and nobody objects to anything. Native Christians have been fined thousands of dollars for alleged violation of a data protection law for writing and visiting Bible correspondence course contacts. Sometimes places of worship are closed on the grounds that they are illegal because they are not registered in the zoning code. One church was raided because “there was a lead” that it had a hidden arsenal. The police sometimes request lists of church members or require the identification documents of new attendees. There are foreign families who are deported for “working illegally” when in reality they were voluntarily aiding the leadership of a local church in Turkey. A foreign pastor was threatened with deportation for going to another church outside of the one that employed him to preach. Through the usage of bureaucratic excuses, a church was penalized for hosting refugees lawfully in the country. One church building was threatened to be demolished for allegedly failing to comply with anti-earthquake regulations. Anyone who tries to preach the gospel openly is stopped, claiming a breach of public order. These actions are always justified with explanations like “we only abide by laws,” which makes it very difficult to prove that there is a systematic policy of attrition and assimilation.

Turkey remains a paradise of contrasts and contradictions, and we should not ignore that it is the only country with a Muslim majority which allows the presence of public communities composed of converts from Islam. It is also the only Muslim country that contemplates the legalization of church buildings, although the process is proving to be very arduous and costly.⁸ Whenever a situation has been brought to the courts, although a lengthy process, the state has decided in favor of rights and freedoms. Turkey is also the only Muslim nation that sponsors debates on national television between Muslim and Christian theologians (that, of course, discuss the corruption of the Christian faith),⁹ and yet it tolerates the presence of radio and television channels that proclaim the gospel. This land can be both a haven of peace and a powder keg ready to explode.

8 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7gCZ_Y9YcfA.

9 http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xd62l9_haberturkoznel-subtitles-eng-93mb_lifestyle.

The emerging native church, however, is not wavering in its Turkish identity nor its desire to serve its country, and continues to persist today in its attempts to achieve an officially recognized place in society!

TODAY'S MARTYRS

As we have seen above, every act of aggression has its period of gestation. We should not ignore the spiritual causes leading to persecution, but neither should we ignore those economic, social, cultural, or political causes that also have an impact on the spiritual, and vice versa. These have, in recent years, led to another black page in the history of Asia Minor.

Elsewhere in the world, Christians in many other circumstances live dramas that are much more tragic. But the Turkish case is unfortunate as it is a nation that prides itself on being an example of tolerance and freedom in the Islamic world, worthy of being imitated by others. In practice, however, Turkey is airing a message which states that “infiltrated enemies” are to be eliminated. Those who do not subscribe to this speech think that Christians should remain silent and not provoke the masses and instigate their prejudices. The prevailing idea in public opinion is that “the victims would not have encountered a tragic event if they had not sought after it.” Unbelievably, the victims are the ones that end up being declared guilty of disturbing what some have called the “Pax Ottomana.”

But who are the ones that are really disturbing the peace? Forgive me, for I cannot write dispassionately about these issues that have affected me so closely. The alleged disturbers of peace were actually messengers killed for preaching peace in word and deed.

Since 2006, seven Christians have been killed atrociously and there have been other failed attempts. I use the word “atrociously” because they were cruel, premeditated murders, including torture in some cases.

On February 5, 2006, Andrea Santoro, a Catholic priest in Trabzon (the Black Sea coast), died after being shot twice in the head while praying on the pews of his church. His crime? Trying to rescue some prostitutes from their ignominious life and annoying some individuals due to his integrity and enviable testimony. His murderer was justified on the grounds of the offensive Muhammad cartoons.

On January 19, 2007, a born-again believer and Armenian journalist, Hrant Dink, was shot dead in the entrance of the Armenian newspaper office in Istanbul. Why? Because he sought after ways to reconcile Armenians and Turks by courageously making both parties face the facts and not deny them systematically.

On April 18, 2007, three Protestants were tortured and murdered in a publishing house in Malatya (southeastern Turkey). Their throats were slit. Two of them were Turkish converts from Islam—Necati Aydin, 36, and Ugur Yüksel, 32. They were the first martyrs of the Turkish church (in the ethnical sense). The third—Tilmann Geske, 45—was a German citizen. Their crime? Distributing Bibles, celebrating Christmas in a hotel with friends and relatives, and preaching the gospel to those who were interested.

On December 16, 2007, Adriano Francini, a Catholic priest, was stabbed and injured in Izmir. Fortunately, he survived. The day before the event, the aggressor had called our church office in Eskisehir (Anatolia). The Turkish pastor in Eskisehir, who had been beaten a couple of years ago after attending a similar call, apologized and hung up the call. The aggressor then decided to call the following address in Smyrna. Apparently he had a list of church addresses from the Internet. His justification? He had been influenced by a Turkish TV series (*Kurtlar Vadisi—Valley of the Wolves*) that shows Christians as conspirators against Turkey.

On July 20, 2009, Gregar Kerkelink, a German tourist who left the Saint Anthony of Padua Catholic church in Istanbul, was stabbed in the middle of the street by an assailant who claimed to have woken up that morning wanting to kill a Christian.

On June 3, 2010, Bishop Luigi Padovese, apostolic bishop of Anatolia, had his throat slit by his driver in the city of Iskenderun (near Antioch, in southeastern Turkey). After the murder, the murderer climbed to the roof and cried, “*Allah’u ekber*” (“Allah is great”—this was also shouted by one of the gunmen mentioned above), and then shouted, “I’ve killed the devil!”

In a country where the immediate and predictable impulse is revenge, the relatives and Christian friends of the victims, in all of these cases, forgave the murderers and testified of Christ’s love for them. I knew all of these victims either personally or through acquaintances, except for the German tourist. It is difficult to describe the emotions one experiences when these things happen to people that are close to you. It is a mixture of agony and exultation. Therefore, I want to honor the lives and deaths of these martyrs with three testimonies which have tearfully marked my life since then. All three testimonies illustrate the spiritual triumph that lies behind these earthly tragedies.

The first of these “testimonies” is the biblical text that was painfully read amidst praises to the Lord at the funeral of Father Santoro by his companions in the bishopric:

I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me. (John 12:24–26)

The second is the reflection of Hrant Dink’s widow, Raket—a believer committed to the Lord. On January 23, 2007, she read her text which still reverberates in the ears of people nationwide during the massive funeral held for her husband in Istanbul:

I know there was a time in which the murderer was a baby. What force of darkness is it that can turn a baby into a murderer? This is what we have to question ... because only love alone will enter heaven.

The third is a poem written by one of the martyrs of Malatya, Necati Aydin, in premonition of his own death:

I have given my address to death
So it finds me without distress;
Do not think that I feared it,
That I shy away from facing it...
Let death be close to us!
Is she not ever present?
I'm leaving without a farewell
To those who have loved me so well.
I leave without satiating my soul enough
With beauty, goodness, truth, and love...
So I run every moment,
To achieve at any moment,
The ultimate goal: eternity. (Aydin 2008, 12, 46)

CONCLUSION

What do we learn about suffering, persecution, and martyrdom with respect to the specific case of Asia Minor and its long and complex cultural history? In my view, this lesson can be summarized in three brief thoughts:

From a cosmic perspective, the church is not of this world and cannot rely on a comfortable life, nor should it seek it. The church's central struggle should not be to avoid persecution, but to preserve the values of the gospel. When these central ideas disappear, sooner or later the testimony or "candlesticks" might disappear as well.

From a historical and sociopolitical perspective, no one is without fault and no one can cast the first stone. We should not form sides but learn to put ourselves in each other's shoes, like Jesus did in his incarnation. Despite all injustices, we must learn to love hostile societies and overcome all hatred with forgiveness; by this, I do not mean that we should remain silent or justify these hostilities.

From a missiological perspective, persecution is an unavoidable traveling companion. Jesus said, "If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also." The church should not be sedated with a "feel good" theology centered on avoiding pain but should be awakened to bring the gospel to places of high risk; even if this means that a cross is waiting for us at the end of the journey.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What percentage of the text in the New Testament written in or for Asia Minor includes the themes of suffering, persecution, and martyrdom? Does this figure correspond to the interest given to the topic in theological circles and or in the daily practice of Christians?
2. Is the theme of "suffering, persecution, and martyrdom" an issue only for the early church or for those parts of the world facing persecution? Is it valid for the churches that have managed to settle down and earn a respectable place in society? According

- to 1 Peter, how should these “settled down” churches act or how much should they get involved?
3. If this subject is equally valid and important for every church, Bible school, ministry, or contemporary Christian organization, how much should suffering, persecution, and martyrdom affect our cosmology, our participation in the sociopolitical arena, and our approach to missions?
 4. How can one measure “success” in the context of suffering, persecution, and martyrdom? If in certain contexts there is no exponential growth taking place and we only witness adversity, is this an indication of failure? Should the missionary movement, in such cases, leave its mission field in favor of other regions or contexts that are more “productive”?

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CHAPTER 23

THE FIRST CHRISTIAN MARTYRS OF JAPAN

An Asian Case Study

How Chuang Chua

From its earliest beginnings, the church has often faced the daunting prospect of having some of her members pay the ultimate sacrifice for keeping the faith. This is hardly surprising in light of the biblical truth that the church is founded on the very death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The church as the body of Christ is indeed no less than the body of Christ crucified and raised. Jesus could not have been clearer in saying, when he exhorted his disciples to take up their crosses and follow him, that suffering, even to the point of death, is to be a hallmark of authentic discipleship (Mark 8:34–37). In a similar vein, the Apostle Paul taught that to be baptized with Christ is to be baptized into his death (Rom 6:3). Many Christians, especially in places where freedom of religion is guaranteed, interpret these biblical passages in an almost purely metaphorical sense. Exegetically this is not wrong since the metaphor of death does pertain to a spiritual reality that is central to what it means to be a follower of Christ. On the other hand, for many other Christians, in times past as well as today, the physical reality of persecution and death is a constant threat. Indeed, these believers draw strength and comfort from their reading of Jesus and Paul that the church is theologically a “martyr-church” (cf. Hovey 2008, 23–41). For these suffering brothers and sisters, suffering and death are a mark of identification with Christ and his church.

The paradox of martyrdom is that it unwittingly gives the seemingly powerless church a voice to bear the message of faith and salvation to the very people that seek to silence it. It is a powerful witness that transcends time and space, such that even today we can still hear the voices of these Christian martyrs reverberating not only from a distant past, but also from lands unfamiliar to us. Yet their message is a common one—one that testifies to the faithfulness of God and the truth of the gospel. In this chapter, we shall listen to one such voice from the martyr-church from Japan, a voice lifted up to God in unison by the historic crucifixion of the twenty-six martyrs of 1597. In particular, we shall listen to the last words of two of the martyrs—in the form of a sermon and a letter—and reflect afresh on what it means to bear the ultimate witness for Christ.

JAPAN'S ENCOUNTER WITH CHRISTIANITY

Christianity came to Japan in 1549 with the arrival of three Jesuit missionaries and four lay companions, led by the Spanish-born Francis Xavier. It was Japan's very first encounter with Christianity, and a most dramatic one.¹ For by the time all-out persecution broke loose in 1614 under the Tokugawa government—less than seventy years after the launch of the Christian mission by Xavier—there were no fewer than 300,000 baptized Christians in the country.² Nagasaki, a city on the southern island of Kyushu, became so predominantly Christian that Luis Cerqueira, the second bishop of Japan, proudly referred to it as the “Rome of the Far East” (Fujita 1991, 9). Christian growth spread northwards along the populated coastal regions, both east and west, right up to the southern edge of what is today's Aomori prefecture. Historian C. R. Boxer was so impressed with the phenomenal growth of the church in Japan between 1549 and 1650 that he coined the phrase “the Christian century in Japan” of the title for his seminal work on the Jesuit mission to Japan (1967). Equally awed by the achievements of the Jesuits is Andrew Ross (1994, 87), who hails the Society of Jesus as “the creative force in the growth of the Japanese Church.”

Yet in spite of the spectacular growth of the church, following Tokugawa Ieyasu's edict to expel all missionaries from the country in 1614, the church was ignobly persecuted, and thousands of Christians were martyred. For the next 250 years or so, during which Japan closed her doors to the rest of the world, the physical presence of the church would be all but eliminated.

THE TWENTY-SIX MARTYRS OF NAGASAKI

While there had always been intermittent instances of local persecution, the Jesuits had by and large enjoyed free rein, even official patronage at times, during the first twenty-eight years of their ministry in Japan. Within just a quarter of a century, the church had grown to be a highly visible social and cultural institution, thanks to the Jesuits' top-down strategy of evangelizing the territorial samurai warlords.

“But be on your guard. For they will deliver you over to councils, and you will be beaten in synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them.” *Mark 13:9*

On July 25, 1587, without any prior warning, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, the supreme military commander of the newly unified nation, issued an edict to banish all foreign missionaries. While the edict took the church completely by surprise, it was never quite enforced, resulting in only three out of the 120 or so Jesuit priests leaving the

1 Some have suggested that the Nestorians' presence in Japan predated that of the Jesuits by at least three hundred years, but the evidence for that is ambiguous at best. It is true that Nestorian relics are found in Japan, but these were unearthed from the tomb of the envoys from Kublai Khan who were executed in 1280 (see Saeki 1951, 444–47) as well as from the tomb of five men captured and executed during the failed Mongolian invasion in 1281 (see Natori 1957, 12–16).

2 Exact figures are notoriously difficult to establish. C. R. Boxer (1967, 197), in all probability relying on the 1605 report of the missionary Fernão Guerreiro, reports the presence of “a Christian community of about 750,000 believers, with an annual increase of five or six thousand.” Mark Mullins (1998, 12) suggests that the ratio of Christians to non-Christians then was “probably several times higher than what it is today.” The population of Japan at that time was somewhere between 15 and 20 million.

country and an influential Japanese Christian samurai being forced to give up his land and property. In all probability, the anti-Christian edict was Hideyoshi's way of expressing his distrust of the church which he had come to view as the vanguard of Portuguese imperialist expansion. Ironically, six years after the issue of the edict, Hideyoshi allowed another missionary order, the Franciscans, to enter and work in Japan. It is obvious that the Franciscans, who came from Spain, were welcome as a means of counterbalancing what was perceived as the growing political influence of the Portuguese Jesuits.

However, a particularly significant event happened three years after the Franciscans' arrival in Japan, an event that would precipitate the first martyrdom in the Japanese church. On October 19, 1596, a Spanish vessel *San Felipe*, on its way from Manila to Acapulco, ran aground on the southern island of Shikoku after being driven by a storm. The ship was richly laden and well armed. When a high-ranking government official was sent to investigate the ship and confiscate its cargo, the officers of the ship protested and apparently invoked Spain's military might as a threat.³ Whether an actual threat was meant or not, the encounter between the Japanese official and the Spanish crew yielded disastrous results, for when the official conveyed a report of the incident to the Japanese court, the incensed Hideyoshi promptly confiscated the ship and ordered the execution of all the Franciscans in Japan. However, for practical reasons, and also apparently because of the influence of the Christian warlords, Hideyoshi chose instead to display his sovereign power by executing twenty-six Christians right in Nagasaki, the heart of Japanese Christianity.

At first, twenty-four Christians were arrested, almost randomly: three Japanese Jesuits arrested in Osaka, six Franciscan missionaries in Kyoto, and fifteen Japanese Christians seized from the Franciscan hospital in Kyoto. Having their left ears cut off, the Christians were paraded through the streets of Kyoto and then sent off on a five-hundred-mile forced march in the cold of winter to Nagasaki. En route, two more Christian prisoners were added. The journey to the execution site took a whole month.

Among the twenty-six martyrs of Nagasaki—as they are famously known—were five teenage boys, the youngest of whom was barely twelve. There was also a father and his fourteen-year-old son. The prisoners were allowed to write letters, some of which have been translated and preserved. Thomas Kozaki, the fourteen-year-old, wrote this letter to his mother:

Dear Mother,

With the gracious help of God, I am writing this letter to you. According to the written sentence, we, twenty-four of us including the padres, will be crucified in Nagasaki. Please do not worry about father Michael and me, for we shall soon meet in Paradise. We will be waiting for you. Even if you are not able to find a padre before you die, as long as you feel deep remorse for your sins and be thankful for the abundant grace

³ There are at least two different accounts of what actually transpired: the Jesuit view and the Franciscan view (Fujita 1991, 133–39). But even in the more defensive Franciscan account, the ship's pilot was said to have shown the Japanese official a map of the world that depicted the vast territories colonized by Spain, and on this map the country of Japan appeared “smaller than a thumb” (134).

of Jesus Christ, you will be saved. As everything in this world will come to naught, please be diligent so as not to lose the perfect glory of Paradise. No matter how you are treated by others, please exercise great patience and treat everyone with love and kindness. Please make every effort to ensure that my little brothers Mancio and Philip are not handed over to unbelievers. I will pray to our Lord for you, dear Mother. Please give my greetings to everyone I know. Let me ask you again not to forget this one important matter, that you immerse your heart in profound contrition for your sins. For even Adam was able to be saved from his sin of turning against God because of his subsequent remorse. May God protect you.

Thomas.⁴

The party of twenty-six finally reached Nagasaki on February 4, 1597. The following morning, they were led to a small hill overlooking the city of Nagasaki, where they were tied with ropes on wooden crosses. Iron clamps were placed around their wrists and ankles, and a straddle piece was placed between the legs for weight support. Attached to the shaft of a lance planted before the twenty-six crosses was the written death sentence personally issued by Hideyoshi. The sentence read:

I have ordered these foreigners to be treated thus, because they have come from the Philippines to Japan, calling themselves ambassadors, although they were not so; because they have remained here so long without permission; because in defiance of my prohibition they have built churches, preached their religion, and caused disorders. (Moffett 2005, 85)

Paul Miki, a thirty-three-year-old Japanese Jesuit brother preparing for ordination, and known for his eloquence of speech, converted his cross into a pulpit from which he delivered this stirring sermon:

All of you who are here, please listen to me. I did not come from the Philippines. I am a Japanese by birth, and a brother of the Society of Jesus. I have committed no crime, and the only reason that I am put to death is that I have been proclaiming the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ. For this I rejoice, and regard my death as a great gift of grace from the Lord. As I come to this supreme moment of my life, please believe me that I have no desire to deceive you. But I want to stress and make it clear that man can find no salvation other than through the Christian way. Christianity teaches us to forgive our enemies and those who have harmed us. I therefore forgive the Supreme General (Toyotomi Hideyoshi) and everyone who has had a part in my death. I do not have any ill feelings towards the General at all. On the contrary, I deeply yearn for the General and all my Japanese countrymen to become Christians.⁵

An eyewitness described Miki's cross aptly as "the noblest pulpit he had ever filled" (O' Malley 2007, 38).

4 The original letter did not survive, but a copy is kept in the Museum of the Twenty-Six Martyrs in Nagasaki. An early Portuguese translation of the letter is kept in the Vatican.

5 The transcribed Japanese sermon is kept at the Museum of the Twenty-Six Martyrs in Nagasaki.

As late afternoon approached, the executioners took up their positions, one on each side of every cross. The prisoners were given one last chance to renounce their faith, but all resolutely declined. On signal, the executioners pierced both sides of each person's body with a long spear up through the left and right ribs toward the opposite shoulder. Paul Miki was heard to have prayed, "Lord, into your hands I commit my spirit. Come to meet me, you saints of God" (Yuki 2002, 14). Most of the twenty-six martyrs died almost immediately. Those who did not were given another thrust to the neck to give the *coup de grace*. The bodies were left hanging on the crosses for nine months.

FURTHER PERSECUTION AND THE CLOSING OF JAPAN'S DOORS TO THE WORLD

Thinking that the public spectacle that he made of the twenty-six Christians was sufficient to curtail the influence and growth of the church, Hideyoshi did not follow through with his original order to execute all the other Franciscans. In June the following year, Hideyoshi died unexpectedly of dysentery. In the respite that followed, the church saw remarkable growth. Bishop Cerqueira reported that Jesuit baptisms alone over the next two years numbered about seventy thousand (Moffett 2005, 85). The martyrdom of the twenty-six Christians obviously had the opposite effect of what Hideyoshi had intended, for it fueled the spiritual passion of the church to a new degree, inspiring many more to follow Christ.

The growth of the church was unfortunately short-lived. Civil war broke out in 1600, in which the Tokugawa family defeated the heirs of Hideyoshi. Ieyasu, a staunch Pure Land Buddhist, then established the Tokugawa shogunate that was to rule Japan for the next 250 years or so. Believing that Christianity was subversive to his government, Ieyasu issued his infamous anti-Christian edict in 1614 that outlawed Christianity. All missionaries were to be deported and all churches closed. Every Japanese person was to be officially enrolled with the local Buddhist temple. Christians who refused to renounce their faith were to be tortured and killed. Ieyasu's edict was mercilessly implemented by his son and grandson who succeeded him as shogun. On the hill in Nagasaki where the twenty-six Christians were martyred, many more were executed. Over the next thirty years, "the entire Christian population was systematically burned, strangled, starved, tortured, or driven underground" (Moffett 2005, 90). Things came to a head in 1637 when the farmers in the Christian province of Arima revolted against the religious persecution and economic deprivation imposed by the authorities. Fighting under banners with small red crosses in what is now known as the Shimabara Rebellion, the embattled villagers managed to hold out for three months until their supplies ran out. The Tokugawa forces, numbering some 120,000, then overran and slaughtered virtually all twenty thousand villagers, including women and children. Convinced that the rebellion was instigated and supported by the Portuguese in an attempt to take over the country, the Tokugawa government enforced a self-imposed policy of national isolation in 1639. With this, the Christian century in Japan came to a tragic end. And Japan was to remain a closed country until the middle of the nineteenth century.

SOME MISSIOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

Now that we have heard echoes of a voice from the martyr-church in sixteenth-century Japan, let us now reflect briefly on what we can learn from this episode in the history of the Japanese church.

In the face of ferocious persecution, the courage of the martyrs seems almost unnatural. Thomas Kozaki's letter to his mother and Paul Miki's sermon from the cross give us two pieces of insight as to the source of their indomitable spirit. First, both Kozaki and Miki held to the unwavering faith that salvation is to be found in Christ alone. The priceless treasure of salvation, when grasped and experienced personally, will not be exchanged or compromised, even in the face of death. If it is, as in the case of a theological pluralism that posits different paths to salvation, the church would only lose its martyr-witness. For who would be willing to die for what is only one way to salvation? The second point, related to the first, is a consuming vision of paradise. For both Kozaki and Miki, heaven is not an abstract doctrine, but an existential reality against which life in this world becomes a pale shadow. Here is a lesson for contemporary Christians, for many of whom the longing of heaven is blunted by the glittering distractions of the world.

Despite the severe suffering of the Japanese martyrs, missionaries have often wondered why their deaths did not bring about a phenomenal growth of the church, as would be the case later in China and Korea. Some have even gone to the extent of lamenting that the Japanese church, despite its promising start, died along with the thousands who were martyred for their faith. But is it theological to suppose that the church could die at the hands of its enemies? After all, did not Christ promise that he would build his church and that the gates of hell would not prevail against it (Matt 16:18)? In truth, Christ's church did not die in Japan, even though humanly speaking, it seemed to have all but disappeared. The church was not decimated as a result of the martyrdoms, for as Craig Hovey (2008, 34) puts it succinctly, "The dead saints are still members." Indeed, the church of Jesus Christ is a historic body that transcends space and time, comprising those who are living on this earth and "the cloud of witnesses" who have gone ahead (Heb 12:1), and in this sense it could never die. Moreover, in the case of Japan, the church, though relatively small, is still very much alive today; it has indeed outlasted the Tokugawa government that sought to destroy it. It may well be that we have yet to see the full flowering of the fruit of the Japanese martyrs.

However, an important lesson can still be gleaned as to why the gospel did not take root after the church was driven underground. Because of the decrees issued at the Council of Trent (1545–63) that stipulated Latin to be the language of the Mass, and the Latin Vulgate as the only authoritative Scripture for public reading and doctrinal expositions, the Jesuits did not make any serious attempt to publish and distribute Japanese translations of the Bible. Indeed portions of Scripture, including the Gospels, were translated for the use of public ministry, but these were all virtually destroyed in the fire on the island of Takushima in 1563. Ironically, the loss of these materials coincided with the closing year of the Tridentine Council. Consequently, when the missionaries were expelled from the country, Roman Catholicism would suffer a catastrophic blow simply because the church did not have a good, standardized Japanese translation of the complete Bible to nurture the faith of subsequent

believers.⁶ The vernacular principle as an integral part of the cultural translatability of the faith is something that we take so much for granted in missions today, but it proved to be a blind spot for the Jesuits.

Finally, it is interesting to note that the persecution of the Japanese church stemmed from the perception by the governing authorities of the church as a real political threat. This perception seems to be common in other persecution contexts as well. Ironically, the church that seeks to be faithful to Christ and his teaching would not have the slightest desire to usurp political authority from the state. Even Francis Xavier understood this, and early in his ministry, had in fact written a letter back home to plead with the Spanish monarch not to harbor any intention of colonizing Japan (Skoglund 1975, 464). Yet it cannot be denied that there is a political dimension to the gospel—and by extension to the missionary task—that is often not acknowledged but one that certainly needs to be explored. While most missionaries today consciously steer clear of any political agenda, their attitudes and actions are nonetheless shaped by certain political convictions in ways that they are not always aware of. In any case, missionary work, at the very least, calls for an acute sense of political awareness. There is also the great need to exercise wisdom, sensitivity, humility, and cooperation with other missions, especially when working in countries politically and religiously hostile to Christians.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Why do you think that persecution against the church is often politically motivated? Is it possible to carry out mission work in a way that has completely nothing to do with politics? Why or why not?
2. In the light of Tertullian's famous words celebrating martyrdom, "*Semen est sanguis Christianorum*" ("The blood of Christians is seed"), how do you make sense of the virtual disappearance of the Japanese church following its severe persecution by the authorities in the seventeenth century? Is there any necessary relationship between persecution and church growth?
3. How can the church help its members prepare for persecution, and even martyrdom?
4. Read again Thomas Kozaki's letter to his mother and Paul Miki's sermon from the cross. What can you learn from the last words of these two martyrs that will encourage you in your faith journey?

⁶ In contrast, the Chinese church of the twentieth century grew phenomenally despite the Communists' expulsion of all missionaries from the country in 1949 and the ensuing persecution of the church. This was due, in good part, to the existence of the Union Bible, a good and established translation of the whole Bible in the Chinese script that enjoyed wide circulation since its publication in 1909.

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CHAPTER 30

TRAINING OUR MISSIONARIES TO DIE

A Case Study of Nigerian Church and Missions

Reuben Ezemadu

THE CONTEXT OF LIVING AND WITNESSING FOR CHRIST IN NIGERIA

As I pondered the messages the Lord sent to the seven churches in chapters 2 and 3 of the book of Revelation, I began to notice some similarities in the focus and context of his assessment of each of the churches, representative of the global church with its various experiences of living and witnessing for Christ in the different contexts of our existence. The Lord said to five of those representative churches, “I know your deeds,” which described more of what they were doing or not doing—the witnessing aspect of the church’s existence. But to the church in Smyrna he said, “I know your afflictions and your poverty,” emphasizing more of what they were “experiencing”—the persecutions, imprisonments, martyrdoms, and many other challenges they were facing. To the church in Pergamum he said, “I know where you live—where Satan has his throne,” emphasizing the context of the existence and witness of the church.

The context of living and witnessing for Christ in Nigeria today fits into what the Lord said to the churches in Smyrna and Pergamum: afflictions and poverty, persecutions, martyrdom, where Satan has his throne. The phenomenal destruction of lives and properties of Christians in the northern part of Nigeria at the slightest spark, the burning down of church buildings, the denial of places for building houses of worship in certain Muslim-dominated areas, the discrimination against Christians for employment or promotion by Islamic bigots in government establishments, etc., indeed spell out the above description of the context in which the church in Nigeria exists and witnesses for Christ.

Also, the context within which we carry out our missionary endeavors in Nigeria and Africa is described by the Lord in Matthew 10, which contrasts the challenges, dangers, and hazards of the missionary enterprise with the blessings, securities, and insurances provided by the Lord of the harvest himself. Most of our fields are located in the highly resistant Muslim areas of west and central Africa or the war-torn regions of countries like Liberia and Ivory Coast. Our missionaries have been operating in the face of dangers and in environments and situations fraught with hazards. The Lord himself warned of this when he

gave an orientation to the Twelve and the Seventy, respectively, before sending them on their missionary assignments. He described the fields (whether at home or abroad) as fraught with dangers and warned about obvious costs to be paid by those who have chosen to heed his call and be engaged in his work. He sent them as “sheep in the midst of wolves” (Matt 10:16). He also painted a picture of “a continuum of hazards,” from denial of access, to persecution, arrest, detention, imprisonment (including kidnapping), and ultimately death (Matt 10:14–39). These aptly describe what it is about living and witnessing for him in the context of afflictions and poverty, persecutions, and martyrdom, “where Satan has his throne” (Rev 2:9,10,13).

In his priestly valedictory prayer for his followers in John 17, Jesus also reminded his disciples that the world into which he was sending them was full of dangers and ministry hazards, and he asked the Father to protect them while doing their ministry in the world—not to remove them from the world or even to shield them from those possible attacks (John 17:6–18).

RECEIVING MISSIONARIES IN THESE CONTEXTS

The early missionaries from Europe and North America came into Nigeria at a time when Africa was regarded as “a dark continent” as well as “the white man’s graveyard.” Many of them died due to hostile and harsh environmental conditions, tropical diseases they were not immune to, the savagery of the native Africans, and as victims of intertribal wars. Their toils and tears, sweat and blood watered the soil from which the seed of church germinated and began to grow.

The rise of the spirit of nationalism and revival of traditional religion, coupled with the rise of fundamental Islamic fervency has fueled more recent antagonism and aggression against Christianity. As the fundamentalists and traditionalists gained control of government, they used such opportunities to devise measures and policies which targeted the missionary efforts from outside Nigeria, restricting the number of expatriate missionaries that could come into Nigeria, reducing the validity period of visas granted to those who were already in the country, refusing to extend the validity of expiring visas, deporting some missionaries on false accusation or minor incidences, delaying or totally denying approval for fresh applications for entry and residence visas. These measures, coupled with the dwindling economies of countries from where the expatriate missionaries were coming, led to the exodus of expatriate missionaries and the decline in the number that arrived. Some of the institutions the missionaries had set up (e.g., schools, hospitals, Bible translation centers) were either taken over by the government (and in some cases converted to Islamic institutions in Muslim-dominated areas of Northern Nigeria), or closed down (like the Summer Institute of Linguistics in Jos).

The fallout of these developments had a huge impact on the fledging church. Pioneer church-planting efforts among the remaining unreached peoples of Nigeria either slowed down or were entirely halted. There was a shortage of well trained and adequately equipped workers to continue to nurture the growing church and manage the institutions the national church inherited. The flow of aid and support from sending churches abroad diminished with the continued exit of the expatriate missionaries who were the trusted channels by

which they sent resources. This forced the national church to begin to look inward. It was in this environment that indigenous mission agencies like Evangelical Missionary Society of ECWA, Calvary Ministries (CAPRO), Christian Missionary Foundation (CMF), etc., began to spring up.

For us, the teachings, admonitions, orientation, and insight into the realities of the mission fields and the hazard-fraught context of ministry that the Lord Jesus presented to the disciples in Matthew 10 and Luke 10 were a sufficient manual for training, equipping, and preparing our people to live and witness for Christ in a country, like the churches of Smyrna and Pergamum in Revelation, are full of afflictions and poverty, persecutions and martyrdom—where Satan has his throne.

SUSTAINING THE MISSIONARY ENTERPRISE IN THE CONTEXT OF LIMITED RESOURCES AND POVERTY

We also found Jesus' teachings on "zero-budget" missionary enterprise, God trusting, and faith-based missions support in Matthew 10:9–10, as well as the "feeding and housing" schemes he recommended in Luke 10:5–8 as "antipoverty" measures that sustain our witnessing in the context of poverty. In practice and principle, these have helped our missionaries to continue to reach remote areas and survive very severe poverty conditions. Therefore, we emphasize such measures in the training and equipping of the missionary personnel we deploy to the fields.

INEVITABILITY OF PERSECUTIONS AND MARTYRDOM

The Lord also indicated the inevitability of persecutions and martyrdom (Matt 10:17–23), but assured us the grace to face it all and divine protection. The reality of spiritual warfare is a result of living "where Satan has his throne." There is no way you can live in and witness for Christ in Nigerian society without encountering principalities and powers which operate in so many forms to oppose the work of the gospel. This happens through traditions, customs, traditional rulers, government, institutions, media, etc. These are the wolves among which we are called to live and witness for Christ in the country; hence the need to continue to heed the injunction by the Lord Jesus Christ "to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves" (Matt 10:16 NKJV).

TRAINING TO DIE

Our policies concerning the dangers of being a missionary under the Christian Missionary Foundation, whether on a short-term or career basis, derive from the Lord's own policies as contained in the tenth chapter of Matthew as well as that of Luke.

Since the ultimate price of being in a military institution is death, we too have identified that as the highest price to be paid by any missionary (whether on short-term or career missionary assignment). We "train our missionaries to die" (apologies to Canon Bayo Famonure's book, *Training to Die*). As part of the training, orientation, and commitment to our missionaries, we emphasize the fact that missionary assignments involve risks and hazards and could ultimately lead to death.

Therefore, it is not only that we have built these principles into curriculum for the training of a new crop of missionaries, we have also formulated policies around such concerns, one of which is the “Statement of Commitment to and Affirmation of CMF Policies” which every prospective missionary signs and communicates to their relatives. This statement reads, “A missionary must be prepared to die and be buried in the field of his/her assignment except his/her relatives opt for the retrieval of his/her corpse for burial in their own place of preference, and on their own account.” Such disclaimers are extended to other areas of social responsibilities in light of the complicated and sensitive family issues in our African culture with regard to marriages, extended family relationships, number of children to be born by a couple, etc., as well as the responsibilities for generating and disbursing support.

FACING AND SURVIVING THE HAZARDS OF MINISTRY

In his message to the churches in Smyrna and Pergamum, the Lord encouraged them to be steadfast in the midst of the dangers they faced each day. In the admonitions he gave to the disciples in Matthew 10 and Luke 10, Jesus stressed the fact that poverty, persecutions, sufferings, and martyrdom are the realities of living and witnessing for him in the hostile environments in which they would find themselves always, and he advanced many measures they would employ in order to overcome and survive such. These included the examples cited in the preceding paragraphs: sources of their support, what to eat, where to stay, ministering in teams, connecting with the man of peace, moving away from hostile spots, “being wise

as serpents and harmless as doves.” In his valedictory prayer for the disciples and believers in John 17, he reminded the Father about the hostilities and danger the disciples over the ages were going to face in the world that was antagonistic of the purpose for which he came and had sent his followers. He prayed that the Father should not remove them from the world nor provide

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!” *Luke 13:34*

immunity from the sufferings and persecutions and possible martyrdom they would face. Rather he prayed for their sustenance and unity in the face of all these hazards of their living and witnessing for him in the world “where Satan has his throne.”

We inculcate these measures and principles to our missionaries as we admonish, train, and equip them for ministry in our danger-fraught environments. We encourage them to teach and help new believers to imbibe the same measures and principles, since they face similar dangers just for changing their religious affiliation. We also emphasize a holistic approach to ministry that targets the “whole man” with the whole word of God, which totally liberates and empowers the believer. In many cases the holistic approach creates access to people as well as engenders “peace” and neutralizes hostile postures. We do not ignore the realities of the spiritual battles. We teach and infuse in our people the need to be combat ready and to “fight the good fight of faith” through all manner of prayer and intercession.

EMERGING NEW DIMENSIONS OF THE BATTLE

The progenitor of the hostilities never gives up. In Nigeria, new dimensions of his tactics emerge every day. As the Christian faith grows, he has sown the seed of discrimination and divisions within the body of Christ. Many denominations have arisen along lines of

doctrinal differences and tribal lineages. These engender more severe rivalries and even worse persecutions. The harvest fields have become battlefields for denominational bigots. In certain cases, territories have been declared “occupied” by various groups even before they set their feet on such places. The unity of the body is undermined. The common enemy takes advantage of such to unleash further afflictions, persecution, and sufferings on the battle-weary church “militant.”

The domination of the Islamic faith in certain parts of Northern Nigeria has been exploited by radical Muslims to take over government and stifle the rights of Christians to practice and share their faith in society. Persecution, discrimination, abuse, and affliction of various indescribable dimensions have been unleashed on Christians in many parts of Northern Nigeria. Events that concern the Islamic faith in any other part of the world trigger anti-Christian sentiments there, leading to the wanton destruction of lives and properties of Christians in those areas where Muslims are in majority. The Muslim-dominated security forces and concerned government agencies turn their eyes the other way. Many Christians have been displaced or forced to abandon completely their traditional places of abode due to fierce and sustained attacks. The “Boko Haram” (Islamic anti-Western sentiment) “religious cleansing” wind, that started from the northeastern city of Maiduguri, is spreading in such a ferocious manner that the whole country is under very serious threat. Each day, church buildings and Christian individuals receive their deadly blows through targeted bombings. In it all, the Lamb triumphs and his church will continue to march on!

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. How does Ezedadu describe the context of the church living and witnessing in Nigeria itself and of the fields where their missionaries are being sent? Do our churches face any similar hazards, and do we send our missionaries to such costly contexts of poverty and persecution?
2. Describe the transition from foreign missionaries to Nigerian missionary vision and commitment? How were the Nigerian missionaries trained for facing very difficult contexts in their mission work? What can we learn from them?
3. The situation of Christians in Nigeria has not become any easier lately. What are their main challenges today? How do they face them? How can we support them?

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RAISING THIRTY-TWO GRANDCHILDREN ALONE ON A SMALL PLOT

"I had twelve children," a Zimbabwean woman told Esme Bowers, when Esme came to conduct a workshop for the women's program of the Africa Evangelical Alliance. "All my children were all married. But they all died of AIDS. All their spouses died too. Now I'm left with thirty-two grandchildren to support on a little plot of ground."

Yet, in spite of horrendous burdens, this woman came to Esme's workshop to be trained as a thoughtful Christian leader.

Miriam Adeney, *Kingdom without Borders: The Untold Story of Global Christianity* (2009, 37)

CHAPTER 38

VIETNAM

Not an Accidental Advocate

Reg Reimer

Advocacy for persecuted Christians in Vietnam has been my passion for over thirty years. It has also been a constant activity even as I have served various international ministries.

It was not an accidental development. As a boy I heard my father recount with horror his first living memory. As a five-year-old he witnessed the assassination of his grandfather and uncle in their home by anarchistic marauders who terrorized southern Russia (now the Ukraine) in the wake of the 1917 Communist Revolution. What followed the shooting was equally memorable. His devout grandmother came out of hiding, fell on the bodies of her husband and son, screaming, “There is no God, there is no God!” The next day the two men were hastily buried and the entire village fled.

This part of our family story made a deep impression on me, even though I was to learn that religious persecution was not the whole story. As in other persecutions, the causes were complex.

To learn more I studied Russian history at my university in the 1960s. This led me to discover the remarkable work of Michael Bourdeaux. Through a journal published by Keston College in the UK, he tirelessly documented the terrible persecution of Christians in the USSR during the Soviet era.

In 1966 our family went to serve in Vietnam as missionaries. Eight years later, after the Communist victory (1975), we were forced to leave the country. Both my family history and my study of the ruthless persecution of Christians in the Soviet Union told me Christians in Vietnam would face very hard times. Indeed, they did.

Shortly after the fall of Vietnam to Communism, we were assigned by our mission organization to Thailand to work with refugees fleeing newly Communist Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. Our contacts with arriving refugees, among them Christians, gave us a window into the dark decade which had descended on these countries. It was a story of deep deprivation for all—and heavy persecution for Christian believers.

We gave ourselves to help those fortunate enough to survive perilous flights across treacherous land borders and pirate-infested rough seas. Refugees came regularly but in numbers

manageable by the Thai government with the support of mostly Christian NGOs, until late 1979 that is. Then Vietnam, angered by attacks on its border villages by the Khmer Rouge, overthrew the murderous Khmer Rouge regime. Hundreds of thousand of desperate, starving and dying Cambodians poured into Thailand, for a time overwhelming us all.

In July 1980, over breakfast coffee, I read in the *Bangkok Post* an advertisement for the first Western group tour to the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. I jumped to join. There were eight of us and an embarrassingly impolite British guide. However, not one of us was a tourist. Among us were a journalist, a Red Cross representative, a couple of intelligence agents, and a missionary.

Sunday was a day off on our highly supervised tour. Our government minder looked puzzled when I informed him I wanted to worship with Christians, but he did not say no. There were a few hundred people at worship when I arrived at the large evangelical church on Tran Hung Dao Boulevard. I recognized a significant number of friends and acquaintances. None acknowledged me! During the distribution of the communion elements, I managed through a server to exchange notes with the pastor who preached that day. I knew him well. His return note to me said simply, "Come to the side street beside the church at dusk and follow the directions of an old lady who will be watching for you."

When I came as instructed, I was guided through the back door of the big building, up narrow stairs into a room where four pastors awaited me. After an emotional reunion, I listened as they poured out their hearts concerning the suffering of persecuted Christians throughout the country. Many leaders were in prison, some had died, and many shepherdless Christians were living in fear. When the room fell silent, I asked, "What do you want me to do?"

Immediately, the president of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam, the Reverend Doan Van Mieng, said, "Please, raise our voice in the outside world; we cannot speak for ourselves!"

This request proved to be a seminal moment. It burned into my mind and heart. I knew then and there that I had received another calling, though I had little idea how consuming and complicated it would become. The very next day, I "accidentally" spotted the wife and children of Pastor Mieng's son, a close friend of mine, who was in prison. They stood on a low balcony of a flat as I passed by in a pedicab. Our eyes met, but the situation was such that I could only move my hand in acknowledgement.

That moving moment contributed to my first response. I knew I must help the families of those in prison, so I began to raise money for this purpose. To my consternation, neither my own mission nor a relief organization that I served were willing to pass these donations through their books. They deemed this activity "political." I knew beyond a doubt that I was obliged to help the suffering families and contribute to the care packages they were occasionally allowed to give their prisoner husbands and fathers. I found ways. That experience foreshadowed other evangelical ambivalence and misunderstanding about advocacy that I would encounter.

During the thirty years since that first visit, I have made at least one hundred more to Vietnam. I have learned, often by trial and error, what it is required of an advocate for the voiceless. I have also come to understand that what I have learned in Vietnam has application for others who would understand advocacy or wish to become advocates.

GRADUAL IMPROVEMENT

Before discussing advocacy, let me paint the religious liberty situation in Vietnam. The first decade in a Vietnam united under Communism (1975–85) came to be called “the dark decade.” All Vietnamese ethnic minority pastors were imprisoned, their churches disbanded. Ethnic Vietnamese Christians also suffered hardships and imprisonments. Many Christians ceased gathering for public worship. Small denominations voluntarily were subsumed into the largest, the Evangelical Church of Vietnam South. The situation improved marginally toward the end of this period. Importantly, through intense prayer and a spiritual revival many fearful Christians were emboldened.

During the sixteen years from 1986–2004, religion was ruled in Vietnam by a series of decrees. In 1986 Vietnam announced a period of *Doi Moi* or “Renovation,” which included the decision to abandon much of Marxist economics and to engage the outside world for trade. This political change of perspective helped expose and modestly ameliorate some of Vietnam’s harsh policy and practice regarding religion.

This period also saw the birth and dynamic growth of the house church movement. Denominations multiplied. In Vietnam’s Central Highlands and Northwest Mountainous Region, where Protestant Christianity virtually exploded among ethnic minorities in the 1990s, the authorities devised comprehensive plans to “eradicate” the growing faith, including government programs of brutal, forced renunciations of faith.

The third period may be dated from 2005. Strong international pressure helped usher in some new religious legislation. One policy change promised a greater measure of freedom by registering churches. The new laws also made illegal the large, systematic measures taken to force renunciations of faith. Mercifully they were stopped. By 2010 the nine church organizations that were able to convince the government they had roots before 1975 achieved registration. However, dozens of other organizations representing many hundreds of congregations remain unregistered. The situation has improved, but all churches, registered or not, currently remain under close scrutiny by Vietnam’s large religion management bureaucracy.

Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.
Romans 12:12–14

Vietnam’s Christians affirm that international advocacy was the biggest contributor to positive changes. They plead for it to continue.

In spite of it all, the Protestant movement grew from 160,000 in 1975 to an estimated 1.4 million by 2010. That is 900 percent growth in thirty-five years! In Vietnam it is more accurate to say that persecution came (and still comes) to where churches grow, rather than that persecution caused growth.

ADVOCATING SUGGESTIONS

Following are some strategies and methods for advocating learned over thirty years. I begin with work inside the country, based on the assumption that the advocate has access to it. Next I will explain advocacy in the international arena. Finally I will share personal lessons learned—some perhaps surprising.

IN COUNTRY

1. Establish solid trust relationships with the persecuted believers themselves or those closest to them. This enables an advocate to secure accurate information. Accuracy and detail are absolutely necessary. Nothing derails advocacy or undermines the reputation of an advocate faster than giving out information which becomes readily exposed as sloppy or false. If at all possible, cross-check information with multiple sources.
2. Train local people to be able to discreetly gather information on persecution. Reputable advocacy organizations have developed helpful codes of conduct and model questionnaires.¹
3. Ideally, an advocate should secure the permission of the persecuted Christians themselves before publicizing their cases. In reality this is often not possible. The next best recourse is to secure the permission of family members and/or the local church. Always one should strategize with local Christian leaders who have oversight responsibility.
4. Find international allies in the country. This includes the political officers of Western embassies who are charged with monitoring human rights, as well as international news correspondents of wire services (e.g., Reuters) and TV (e.g., BBC). Sometimes it involves helping set up meetings and interviews for journalists with the victims or families of the persecuted, both for those based in country or who visit from abroad. This work is not for the faint-hearted or impulsive! Great discretion and wisdom is required.
5. International allies can also include Christian business people or missionaries on “creative platforms” who are willing, and indeed must, act with utmost discretion. All such contacts hold more potential if the advocate develops a personal relationship with them. The frequent rotation of international personnel makes this a special challenge. I have over the years oriented many diplomats on persecution issues.

To summarize, the main and difficult tasks in country are to gather accurate information about the persecuted and wherever possible to direct it to people and organizations that can either publish it or use it to apply pressure on the country to change its behavior.

IN THE INTERNATIONAL ARENA

1. Accurate information about the persecuted should be brought to churches worldwide, both for prayer and for other advocacy actions. This can be done through news agencies such as Compass Direct which specialize in persecuted church issues, through

¹ Organizations such as Christian Solidarity Worldwide, Open Doors, Voice of the Martyrs, and others have such codes of conduct and questionnaires. Additionally, Lausanne Occasional Paper 32, *The Persecuted Church*, has a section called “Guidelines on Reporting for Publicity and Advocacy” (95–99). This paper may be downloaded at the website www.lausanne.org.

- denominations related to the persecuted Christians, through organizations which specialize in ministry to the suffering and persecuted church (e.g., Open Doors, Voice of the Martyrs, Christian Solidarity Worldwide), and through international organizations such as the World Evangelical Alliance, which has a Religious Liberty Commission and sponsors an International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church (IDOP).
2. The Religious Liberty Partnership, with member organizations from more than a dozen countries, can also be very helpful in the important task of internationalizing advocacy causes.
 3. Information can also be provided to secular human-rights organizations such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International. Given solid and verified information they will take up Christian persecution cases. Again, personal relationships will greatly help.
 4. Information on individual cases, carefully supplemented by perspective and analysis, is appreciated by departments of foreign affairs of Western countries. These may be provided in writing, but it is even better if one supplements reports with personal visits and builds relationships with country desk officers. The credibility of a field advocate's long experience and regular grassroots contacts is given considerable weight by diplomats.
 5. There are professionals in the persecuted church advocacy community with legal expertise and relationships with key people in intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) such as relevant United Nations and European Union offices. Such advocates are skilled in taking the raw material of field-based advocates and professionalizing its presentation for maximum effect.²

LESSONS LEARNED—SOMETIMES THE HARD WAY

1. An advocate who would speak for the persecuted must first listen carefully. Only when advocates have understood the situation should they offer strategies to the victim or their family members, who may then chose to let their case go forward. Always respect that it is the victims and their families who take the most risk.
2. It is better for an advocate to have a connecting mind-set rather than a centralizing, controlling, or self-promoting one. Trust and discretion among the concerned parties are essential, but when such are established it is best for the advocate to connect the players directly and get out of the middle. This makes practical sense because at any time key advocates may be discovered by the persecutors, or even betrayed from within, hence limiting their work.
3. There is a wide spectrum of advocacy strategies and methods and there is often tension between the extremes. Those who specialize in exposing the evil of persecution can be suspicious of advocates committed to befriending and respectfully engaging the persecutors. The “engagers” can be upset with the “exposers” because exposing by itself is insufficient and can make engagement more difficult. Both strategies are necessary and useful, as are the variants in between. An effective advocate will learn to

2 The UK-based Christian Solidarity Worldwide organization is a good example.

understand, respect, and employ the various advocacy philosophies and methods and not be owned by any one of them.

4. It is hard but necessary to confront those in the advocacy community who publish factually inaccurate, sloppy, or overly sensational reports about persecution. Such reports, which by their nature often get wide traction quickly, tar the whole advocacy community and can severely harm responsible, long-term advocacy efforts.
5. Advocates will encounter nay-sayers and critics. Critics are often elusive and will spread rumors rather than confront the advocate directly. Most are not close to the situation and can be safely ignored. But advocates should be open to legitimate concerns brought to their attention. Even harder than gratuitous criticism is the ever-present possibility of outright betrayal. Betrayers, sadly, can include compromised Christians who have been seduced by authorities with a promise of personal gain if they report an advocate.
6. There is a small but vocal minority in the evangelical community which holds romantic views of persecution and actually opposes advocacy. They argue that because persecution can build faith in the persecuted, and that sometimes persecuted churches grow, that to advocate against persecution is to interfere with God's way of deepening and expanding his church. Such thinking, it seems to me, fails to understand the "image of God" basis for upholding human dignity. Should we passively tolerate evil because God is able to turn evil to good? Would such thinking also wish cancer on people, because sometimes the extremity of cancer causes people to turn to God or deepen their faith?
7. I have found that the severely persecuted themselves, those who have learned deep and salutary spiritual lessons in that experience, are among the first to ask for advocacy intervention for others who are persecuted. They do not wish on others the cruelties they have experienced.

WHAT ARE THE OUTCOMES OF CONSISTENT ADVOCACY?

Here are some outcomes that I have experienced and observed:

1. Advocacy work quickly becomes an exchange. One begins with the noble intention of helping; i.e., advocating, for the persecuted. From my first encounters with the persecuted I always come away humbled and blessed—often feeling I have gotten more than I gave. I have come to believe that we in the West really need to consider and absorb the spirituality that comes out of persecution and suffering, at least as much as the persecuted need our intervention.
2. The advocate can be a bridge builder, helping the church in nations with religious freedom to actualize Hebrews 13:3, "Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourself were suffering." More than a call to cognitive remembering, this means the advocate must be able to guide people toward concrete actions on behalf of the persecuted, not just stir them up to thankfulness for their freedoms.

3. The “ministry of presence,” showing solidarity with the persecuted just by making the effort to be with them, is highly significant. Some years ago some friends in Vietnam were honoring me for my work. I will not forget the words of a brother who said, “Thank you for daring to come to be with us during the hardest times.” I had “done” many things; it was the “being” that was remembered.
4. We were able to put Vietnam on the radar of a range of churches around the globe for prayer, a prime advocacy activity, and for other advocacy work.
5. As a direct result of my contributions to sustained and persistent advocacy, some persecuted Christians were released from prison and others from a mental hospital where they had been falsely detained. The fact that most of these did not know of the role I played in their release did not decrease my joy and satisfaction.
6. Painstaking research, reporting, and analysis over a long time has contributed to diplomatic pressure by Western countries on Vietnam which, as a result, has caused some of its harsh policies and practices toward Christian believers to be modified. It is too early to discuss the details.
7. Some of the same analysis also made its way to Vietnam’s top authorities. Truth was spoken to powerful leaders, and it was apparently helpful to moderates in the Party and government who understand that repression of religion is unhelpful to Vietnam’s goal of becoming a more respected member of the international community.
8. Long and consistent advocacy in one location and the reputation it builds eventually allowed me to help coordinate various organizational advocacy efforts for optimum effect.

Advocacy is long project. It is not a matter of staging one big battle, but rather picking a thousand small ones to contribute to the goal of winning that most precious freedom—to choose one’s beliefs.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What are some of the factors that turned the author into a passionate advocate for persecuted Christians in Vietnam?
2. How is one of the author’s conclusions, that “advocacy is a long project,” supported by his experience?
3. What, according to the author’s testimony and experience, are some of the important characteristics of an effective advocate?
4. Are there lessons here to be learned by missionaries who may not be strongly called to specific advocacy activity, but who want to be supportive of the advocacy cause where they minister?

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WE LOVE OUR NEIGHBORS AS OURSELVES

Jesus called his disciples to obey this commandment as the second greatest in the law, but then he radically deepened the demand (from the same chapter), "love the foreigner as yourself" into "love your enemies." [31]

Such love for our neighbors demands that we respond to all people out of the heart of the gospel, in obedience to Christ's command and following Christ's example. This love for our neighbors embraces people of other faiths, and extends to those who hate us, slander and persecute us, and even kill us. Jesus taught us to respond to lies with truth, to those doing evil with acts of kindness, mercy and forgiveness, to violence and murder against his disciples with self-sacrifice, in order to draw people to him and to break the chain of evil.

We emphatically reject the way of violence in the spread of the gospel, and renounce the temptation to retaliate with revenge against those who do us wrong. Such disobedience is incompatible with the example and teaching of Christ and the New Testament.[32] At the same time, our loving duty towards our suffering neighbors requires us to seek justice on their behalf through proper appeal to legal and state authorities who function as God's servants in punishing wrongdoers.[33]

[31] Leviticus 19:34; Matthew 5:43-4

[32] Matthew 5:38-39; Luke 6:27-29; 23:34; Romans 12:17-21; 1 Peter 3:18-23; 4:12-16

[33] Romans 13:4

CHAPTER 67

A CALL

Accurate Information, Urgent Intercession, Thoughtful Advocacy, and Courageous Action

Faith J. H. McDonnell

Western Christians sing, “These are days of great trial, of famine and darkness and sword,” (Robin Mark, “Days of Elijah”). But for Christians across the globe, this is not a song, but reality. In the persecuted church we confront both great suffering and vibrant faith. We embrace emaciated bodies, see scars and bruises, and hear the weeping of widows and orphans. Knowing their suffering, we can never again pretend to *not* know. We must commit in our personal lives and in the public arena to pray for, speak out about, and act on behalf of the persecuted church.

ACCURATE, COMPREHENSIVE INFORMATION

Intercession and advocacy require accurate, comprehensive information. Today, facts are easily acquired over the Internet, but so are false or exaggerated reports. Stories should be confirmed through several sources.

Alternately, understated facts downplay a situation’s severity. And sometimes euphemisms are used that create a sense of moral equivalency between the persecutor and the victim. Such is the case when Christian persecution is described simply as “ethnic conflict” or when statements such as “abuses have been committed on both sides” lack further explanation or justification.

Some church leaders believe that silence is the best policy. They think that speaking out will exacerbate hostilities. But we must honor the wishes of fellow Christians around the world. Some ask only for prayer. Some ask that we be their voice to the world. Still others publicly ask only for prayer, but privately ask that we raise awareness. These are people with a gun to their head—they cannot cry out. Do not accept silence as proof that all is well.

URGENT INTERCESSION

Accurate, comprehensive information enables knowledgeable and urgent prayer for persecuted Christians. All advocacy should begin, end, and be infused with prayer. The late president of the Institute on Religion and Democracy, Diane Knippers, advised:

Pray not only for a broken heart, but a big heart. Your heart will be broken. You will weep. Sometimes you will be tempted to pull away. You will feel guilty because you

have so much—materially and in terms of freedom—and the persecuted have so little. Pray for a heart big enough to obey the God of the nations. Big enough to embrace a child sold into slavery. Big enough to remember Chinese church leaders. Big enough to play your part in the household of faith.

Aids to intercession:

- Start a persecuted church prayer group and hold an all-night or all-day prayer vigil.
- Include the persecuted church during prayers at church every Sunday.
- Provide bulletin inserts with prayer points.
- During baptisms, pray for Christian converts from Islam and pastors who secretly baptize them.
- Read testimonies from the persecuted church.
- Carry crosses in worship, and pray for the Dinka and other Sudanese who carry crosses.
- Observe the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church each year.
- Collect and frequently update materials on the persecuted church for a church prayer chapel.
- Use a globe, world map, or newspaper in family prayer time.

We pray for the persecuted church because God commands it, because they are our family, and because it works. God answers prayer. Finally, we pray because God changes our hearts and motivates us to action.

THOUGHTFUL ADVOCACY

Today we are not limited to writing letters, as advocates once did to Christian prisoners, prison camp officials, and members of Congress or Parliament (or whatever system of government allows such). We receive and send messages almost instantaneously. And since the passage of the United States 1998 International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA), religious freedom has been enshrined in American foreign policy. Other advocacy resources include the US Commission on International Religious Freedom, created as a result of IRFA and the religious freedom office in the US State Department.

Thoughtful and effective advocates will utilize all of these tools. They will work for the persecuted with churches of all denominations as well as with concerned non-Christians. It was an American Jewish man, Michael Horowitz, who was the catalyst for increased US government awareness of global Christian persecution in the 1990s movement to defend the persecuted church. In addition, several Jewish organizations shared strategies from the campaign to free Soviet Jewry.

Effective advocates will also win the hearts and minds of young people. Start by teaching elementary school children to pray for persecuted Christians and inviting Christians from persecuted regions to come and speak to Sunday schools and youth groups. The message of the persecuted church should also be communicated increasingly through social networking, visual arts, literature, music, drama, dance, and film.

Many young people across America, Europe, and beyond are already active advocates, passionate about justice. American high school and college students have fueled the movement to rescue northern Ugandan children from the Lord's Resistance Army. They have raised awareness about international sex trafficking. And they have been stalwart in efforts to end genocide in Darfur and support peace and freedom in South Sudan. But global Christian persecution is a justice issue as well.

There is no dichotomy between spiritual warfare and political and social advocacy. To those uneasy about political involvement, the Right Reverend Munawar Rumalshah, former bishop of Peshawar, Pakistan exhorts Americans, "Keep on working on Capitol Hill. Keep on raising public awareness of the injustices suffered by Christians." After his congressional testimony, Rumalshah thanked America for fighting for global religious freedom, saying, "In our system I see this as the most effective way to help the persecuted."

COURAGEOUS ACTION

The call for accurate information, urgent intercession, thoughtful advocacy, and courageous action is God's call for Western Christians to stand with the persecuted church. Courage to act comes when the Lord fills us with a passion for the persecuted, a passion exemplified by David and Nehemiah.

David was passionate in his response to Goliath's mockery of the army of Israel in the Valley of Elah, announcing that he had come "in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied." He tells the giant that "the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel" and that all gathered will know "that it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord's" (1 Sam 17:45–47). To Saul and his cowering troops, David declares, "The Lord who rescued me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will rescue me from the hand of this Philistine" (17:37).

Passion for the persecuted church is outrage—holy anger at the affront to the Lord when his people are persecuted. Persecution is evil, always an offense to God. Passion for the persecuted church is also zealotry to not only defend our brothers and sisters but to defend the Lord's honor. It does not honor God when Christians are so apathetic or self-focused that they cannot pray and act for those in his church body who are suffering. And passion for the persecuted church is confidence in the Lord who is able to rescue his people from today's vicious lions, bears, and giants.

Nehemiah's passion gave him boldness to ask King Artaxerxes for permission to go back to Jerusalem and rebuild it (Neh 2:5). Even more boldly, he asked the king for letters to the governors of the regions, permitting him to travel, and to the keeper of the king's forest, asking for free lumber! But Nehemiah had prayed before he made his requests and God directed his actions.

Passion did not cause Nehemiah to act rashly or imprudently, but strategically. He had received permission and provisions from the king. Then he recruited productive, creative people to assist him. His helpers were not fulfilling their usual functions (3:1–32). Priests,

goldsmiths, perfume makers, and women all became construction workers and repairers in order to get the job done.

Passion for the persecuted church is boldness, to ask Western Christians, far removed from the realities in Sudan, Egypt, Burma, Indonesia, China, North Korea, and so many other places, to invest their time, money, energy, and emotions in those places. It means going outside our own comfort zones and helping others to move outside theirs.

Some people are called by God to do “nothing” but pray for the persecuted church. They really *do* pray, and their prayers move heaven and earth. Others, who protest that prayer is their only calling, God may actually be calling to move outside their comfort zone of prayer and

By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. *Hebrews 11:24–26*

act courageously, demonstrating outside an embassy or visiting their member of Congress. We are all called to pray, but our prayer should inspire most of us to courageous action—prayerful action, but action nonetheless.

Before the world and the church, the persecuted church is a testimony to God's grace. In his mysterious ways, God has given us the privilege of standing in solidarity

with his persecuted ones through intercession, advocacy, and action. What will be our testimony before the world and the persecuted church?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What are some principles and some aids for effective intercessory prayer for the persecuted?
2. Discuss the sentence under the “Thoughtful Advocacy” heading which reads, “There is no dichotomy between spiritual warfare and political and social advocacy.”
3. Recall some principles McDonnell draws from the narratives of David and Nehemiah for what she calls “courageous action.”

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