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publications worldwide for an international  
readership for the purpose of discerning the  
obedience of faith*

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## Editorial

Students of church history are well aware that the early centuries of the church have been known as the 'age of persecution' but what is becoming clear is that persecution is a major problem at the present time as well. In fact, reports indicate that more people were martyred for their faith in Jesus Christ in the 20th century than in all the previous nineteen combined. More people died in circumstances related to their faith, about 100 million, in the 20th century than in all the wars fought in that time combined.

The main reason for the rise in persecution, especially over the past several years, seems to be the exponential growth of Evangelicals in places such as Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa and Asia. These are the same areas of the world where Christians are experiencing discrimination, harassment and persecution at the hands of those with power. Reported incidences of persecution have actually increased since the fall of Communism in the former USSR. In these and other countries, believers feel they have been silent too long and because they feel a new sense of support from fellow Christians, they are now publicly stating their belief in Jesus, and are willing to risk the repercussions coming from their public declaration.

It is easy enough to recognize the seriousness of this state of affairs, but it is another matter to live constantly in this context. So theological reflection on persecution and religious liberty must be highly conscious of this existential situation and listen to those who are involved in it. We have tried to reflect these criteria in this collection of papers.

The opening article by Johan Candelin embodies the insights and perspectives of the World Evangelical Fellowship's Religious Liberty Commission (RLC) of which the author is the director. A sister body to the WEF Theological Commission which publishes this journal, the RLC has been in existence since 1992 and in that time has effectively promoted the cause of religious freedom within the global evangelical community and beyond. One of the most prominent activities of the RLC is the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church (IDOP) held in November each year. The material which appears under the heading 'By the power of your name' was prepared by the RLC for the 1999 and 1998 IDOP.

Much of the work of the RLC and other similar bodies is taken up with reporting the incidence of persecution and background information about these developments. An authoritative survey of the situation at the present time is provided by Roger Marshall, respected commentator and Advisor on Religious Freedom to the World Evangelical Fellowship. Transmission of information about persecution and religious liberty has been greatly assisted by the speedy and widespread communication now available on the Internet. John Roxborough, a missiologist who has taught courses on Minority Christianity, offers an introduction to this vast amount of material and provides a valuable guide on how to interpret and use it for research and prayer, for creating greater awareness of the problem and developing constructive responses to it.

The next two articles move into the area of reflection. France Quéré, a free lance author, approaches the subject in terms of unity and community with Christ. Then Joseph Tson seeks to develop a biblical understanding of martyrdom, keeping in mind his own experiences as a pastor of a Romanian church who was exiled by his government; he has since continued to work for the welfare of the church of his homeland.

Taking a broader view, Thorwald Lorenzen, formerly Professor of Systematic Theology and Ethics at the International Baptist Theological Seminary, Rüschtikon, Switzerland, examines the question of human rights from a Christian perspective.

Finally, we turn to a related area of concern with Allison Howell's engaging report and reflection on the process of reconciliation in Northern Ghana when missionaries and local Christians faced the deep rooted problems that the degrading history of the British slave

trade has left. It is a model of sensitivity, insight and courage, which as she notes, could be well emulated by people in many other analogous situations.

These articles confirm the observations of missiologist Peter Beyerhaus of Tübingen, Germany who points out that while persecution has reached new heights in recent times, it is nevertheless part of the essence of the church, reinforcing its solidarity and unity, and as such, can bring great blessing upon it (*Diakrisis*, June 1999 pp. 131–141). Freidrich Graber has pointed out that martyrdom functions as a sign of faith. In fact, it is next to the Word as a testimony to faith which comes to its fulfilment in death for the sake of God and his truth. The martyr's death is the ultimate confession of faith in the sovereignty and grace of God and in the overwhelming value of eternal life in comparison with all earthly goods. So persecution, and ultimately martyrdom, is the greatest protest against earthly powers who seek to subjugate people's bodies, minds and souls; it is especially important when the church is being silenced and can no longer meet to celebrate and proclaim the gospel. The fear of the One who is able to destroy body and soul in Hell overcomes the fear of those who can kill only the body ([Mt. 10:28](#)) (*Diakrisis*, June 1999 p. 142)

*Particular thanks is expressed to John Candelin, Mark Albrecht and John Roxborough for their assistance with this issue.*

David Parker, Editor.

# The Message of the Cross And the Cross of the Message

Johan Candelin

**Keywords:** Persecution, power, discrimination, freedom;

The eternal message of the Bible is the message of the cross of Christ. The cross is the hallmark of evangelical theology and the core of its proclamation. Yet the pages of the Bible, from Cain and Abel all the way through to the revelation on the island of Patmos, tell us that the message itself has a price—its own cross to bear.

Western Christianity has lost sight of this price, both in its words and its deeds. In our increasingly consumer-oriented Sunday services any talk of suffering or sacrifice for Christ is omitted or ignored for fear of driving people away. In a self-centred, pleasure-driven and independent generation such talk is easily considered unappealing, uncomfortable or even alarming. Even Bible institutes and seminaries have not escaped the trend; few church leaders today are trained to teach on what it means to suffer for Christ.

In many developing countries the situation is the reverse. Suffering for one's faith is not only a distinct possibility, but also a proven sign that that faith is genuine and penetrating. A Sudanese pastor has expressed it this way: 'The cross [pendant] that I wear around my neck will surely mean death for me if I meet [Muslim] soldiers from the north. But I am prepared to die for Him who died on the cross for me.' He has watched his father die for the gospel, and knows that faith will carry a person through the doors of suffering into eternity.

At Jewish weddings the bride and groom each drink from two cups, the cup of love and the cup of suffering. The symbolism is beautiful and a powerful lesson to us Christians. We gladly drink together with Jesus from the cup of love but are wholly unacquainted with the cup of suffering. In revival meetings in the West, many rise from their seats to receive blessing, but how many would stand up if it meant risking their lives? For those of us who are familiar with spiritual life in the persecuted church it is clear that the revival and renewal we so badly need in the West will come from there, not from Hollywood. The persecuted church is a praying, witnessing and growing body with a vital message for anyone who will listen.

## PARADIGM SHIFT

One reason the number of suffering Christians has risen in the last forty years is a radical paradigm shift in evangelical Christianity. In 1960, two thirds of the world's evangelical Christians were in North America and Europe and one third in the developing and Third World countries. Today the reverse is true. Although the number in North America and Europe has not decreased significantly, in the developing and Third World countries it has shot up to account for two thirds of the total.

As it is in these countries that human rights are most at risk or do not exist at all, it is hardly surprising that the number of suffering Christians is rising. According to Dr Paul Marshall, one of the world's leading authorities on religious persecution, 200 million Christians throughout the world live in daily fear of secret police, vigilantes, or state repression and discrimination. Evangelical Christians find themselves in the line of fire because Christianity by its very nature means spreading the Good News about Christ, planting new churches and reaching areas untouched by the gospel. In a country like Sri Lanka, city churches such as those in Colombo can function without interference, whereas those planted in rural areas are often stoned or otherwise destroyed. The phenomenal church-planting underway, for example in Asia, can lead only to increased persecution sooner or later, and the evangelical churches should prepare themselves to function as members of the worldwide body of Christ. Otherwise we will be, as Brother Andrew has so aptly expressed it, 'artificial members of the body—a wooden leg, a plastic arm, a glass eye'.

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF PERSECUTION

Persecution appears to pass through three phases: disinformation, discrimination, and finally persecution itself. *Disinformation* begins more often than not in the printed press. Its intent is to create public contempt for Christians by spreading misleading information about them and their activities. They are sometimes labelled as terrorists, foreign agents, traitors, or enemies of the national culture and tradition. A public that is constantly fed such disinformation and lacks a deeper understanding of Christianity easily becomes party to discrimination because it seems the right thing to do, particularly where national identity is involved. In India nationalism is intricately linked to Hinduism, in Sri Lanka to Buddhism, and in Pakistan to Islam. Anyone practising another faith cannot possibly, in the eyes of the local nationals, be a true citizen. Furthermore, in countries that have suffered centuries of colonisation, Christianity is brandished as its principle tool and as such something to be abhorred. It is easy to understand in this context why Christians have been set upon in Indonesia when one reads what the press has written about them.

*Discrimination* relegates Christians to a 'second-class' citizenship in their own country, simply because of what they believe. If no action is taken against discrimination, the fine

line to *persecution* is easily crossed. Its victims are subjected to physical and mental abuse, imprisonment, and death.

The advantage of recognizing the three-phase development is the possibility to take timely and appropriate action before all three phases run their course.

## **WHY CHRISTIANS ARE STILL PERSECUTED**

In the ninth chapter of the book of Acts is the story of a man who made himself an instrument of disinformation, discrimination, and finally persecution against Christians. He is a good example of how persecution can be carried out in the name of another religion. His name was Saul of Tarsus, and the words Jesus spoke to him on the road to Damascus, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' ([Acts 9:4](#)), have much to say about persecution in our time. Persecution against Christians is persecution against Christ himself. Just as his body was abused in Jerusalem, today it is abused worldwide. The reason is a spiritual one: Satan uses people to try to stop the spreading of the gospel about Jesus Christ. The warfare is spiritual and must be waged with spiritual weapons, primarily prayer.

There are other reasons too. In many countries, the church stands for the only foundation of truth in a system built on lies. The church in Poland in the 1980s became the battering-ram that brought about the fall of communism. The role of the church in standing up for the weak and the outcast and preaching human dignity and equality awakens fear in the hearts of many who wield power. At the same time, because they know that the church is a global body with a strong network, many do permit some form of official church—as long as it can be controlled. This was the case in the former Soviet Union, and is true of China today.

Many of us in the 'free world' have no idea of what living in such circumstances is like. We would do well to think carefully before offering 'advice' to those who do. Many Christians, for example in North Africa, are strongly tempted to move to the West, thereby draining the country of the very instruments God would use to further his kingdom. The best possible missionaries are those who were born and raised in the land.

## **AWAKENING**

Excitingly, there are clear signs of awakening. Increasingly, governments that consider human rights important are recognizing that Christians are the most persecuted minority on earth. The United States leads the way, with a special Ambassador for Religious Freedom, Dr Robert Seiple, whose role is to monitor religious rights worldwide. The governments of Australia and Germany are not far behind. All too often, the evangelical church has isolated itself and not informed those around it of the dire situation many of our brothers and sisters face. This too is changing. Increasing numbers of churches are praying for and offering concrete support to the persecuted church.

The International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church (IDOP), launched by the World Evangelical Fellowship's Religious Liberty Commission several years ago, has been instrumental in promoting awareness. In 1999 it was estimated that over 300,000 churches in 130 countries would take part on November 14. The material specially prepared for the event is available in several formats: as a website ([www.Worldevangelical.org/idop](http://www.Worldevangelical.org/idop)), as e-mail ([candelin@kolumbus.fi](mailto:candelin@kolumbus.fi)) and as a hard copy. In the United States their material can be ordered at [www.persecutedchurch.org](http://www.persecutedchurch.org).

In Papua New Guinea, children have been gathering spontaneously to pray for other children who suffer for their Christian faith. The saying, 'Change everything to prayer, and

prayer will change everything' could not be truer than here. A pastor in the underground church in Cambodia writes that without the knowledge that Christian brothers and sisters were praying for him, he would never have had the strength to survive. Dr Hristo Kulichev from Bulgaria, who spent several years in prison, says: 'In prison I realised that we have the mightiest weapon given to us by God—prayer!'

## WHAT CAN WE DO?

Many good organizations support the suffering church today, and are worthy of all our support and encouragement. The Evangelical Alliances have their own network through the WEF Religious Liberty Commission, which has observer status at the UN Commission for Human Rights. This offers a unique opportunity to speak up on behalf of those who cannot. The Religious Liberty Commission provides information on the suffering church through the Religious Liberty E-mail Conference (to subscribe, contact [Marksmail@compuserve.com](mailto:Marksmail@compuserve.com)) and website ([www.Worldevangelical.org](http://www.Worldevangelical.org)), coordinates the IDOP in November, and keeps a network of over 2000 parliamentarians informed around the world.

Every local church that calls itself Christian has an important responsibility which it cannot ignore. Dr Jun Vencer, International Director of WEF, writes: 'More than ever, the church needs to be vigilant in safeguarding religious freedom.' In order to help, each local church can choose a person to monitor the situation and report back to the pastor, who can then lead the church in concrete, strategic prayer. Churches that have done this report how God has blessed them through their contacts with the persecuted church. No longer is the persecuted church a distant concept; for them it now has a face with a name, and it creates a spontaneous need for contact. Suddenly, we see brothers and sisters around the world who love the same cross that we do, and we understand that the least we can do is the most we can do: Pray.

### Some Bible References on the Persecuted Church

[Gen. 26:12-33](#); [Ex. 17:1-7](#); [1 Sam. 20-27](#); [1 Sam. 22](#); [1 Ki. 18:3-4](#); [1 Ki. 18:10-19:2](#); [2 Ki. 6:31](#); [2 Chr. 18:12-26](#); [2 Chr. 16:7-10](#); [2 Chr. 24:20-22](#); [Job 1:8-12](#); [Job 2:3-7](#); [Ps. 31:13](#); [Ps. 59:1-4](#); [Jer. 26:20-23](#); [Jer. 37:1-38:13](#); [Dan. 3](#); [Dan. 6](#); [Mt. 14:3-13](#); [Mk. 7:1-16](#); [Lk. 22:63-24:7](#); [Acts 4:1-31](#); [Acts 6-7](#); [Acts 8:1-3](#); [Acts 9:1-9](#); [Acts 12:1-2](#); [Acts 12:3-17](#); [Acts 14:19](#); [Acts 16:16-24](#); [Rev. 1:9](#).

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# *By the Power of Your Name*

## **The International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church**

**Keywords:** Prayer, persecution, suffering, martyr, religious liberty, toleration, conversion;

### **INTRODUCTION**

The International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church (IDOP), held in November each year, is a rallying point for Christians and others to stand behind those who suffer for their faith by providing prayer support and the direction to appropriate kinds of advocacy. It was commenced by Religious Liberty Commission of the World Evangelical Fellowship (WEF RLC). It is now supported by a coalition of organizations, including Christian Solidarity International, Jubilee Campaign, Open Doors and Release International, regularly attracting observance by more than 100,000 local churches in at least 130 countries. The IDOP Mission Statement is, 'Awakening followers of Christ and concerned others to the plight of persecuted Christians, calling the Church to compassionate prayer and action'.

Christian persecution is hardly new and can be traced to Christianity's beginnings. Jesus Christ himself was martyred on the cross, and the early church faced widespread persecution. While Jesus was on earth, he bore witness to the battle between God's kingdom and the temporal kingdoms of earth.

Modern-day persecution is well-documented, despite some reports to the contrary. In over sixty countries, according to an official US State Department report (1997), Christians face the reality of massacre, rape, torture, mutilation, family division, harassment, imprisonment, slavery, discrimination in education and employment, and even death simply for what they believe. Paul Marshall states in his book, *Their Blood Cries Out*, 'This plague affects over two hundred million people, with an additional four hundred million suffering from discrimination and legal impediments.' In fact, according to leading authorities, there have been more people martyred for their faith in Jesus Christ in the 20th century than in all the previous nineteen combined. Research carried out by the WEF RLC indicates that more people have died in circumstances related to their faith in this century than in all the 20th Century wars combined.

The main reason for the rise in persecution, especially over the past several years, seems to be the exponential growth of Evangelicals in places such as Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa and Asia. These are the areas where Christians are experiencing discrimination, harassment and persecution at the hands of those with power. However, reported incidences of persecution in the former USSR have actually increased since the fall of Communism. Believers there feel a new sense of support from fellow Christians around the world and so they are now publicly stating their belief in Jesus, willing to risk the repercussions that may follow.

This introductory note and the following sections are taken (with permission) from material prepared by the WEF RLC for the 1999 IDOP and are presented here for the information of readers of *Evangelical Review of Theology* in support of the theme of this issue of the journal. The *Prayer from Egypt* was prepared for 1998 IDOP.



## **RELIGIOUS LIBERTY—THE FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN FREEDOM**

by Dr Jun Vencer,  
International Director, World Evangelical Fellowship

The most fundamental of human freedoms is freedom of conscience or religious liberty. Christian theology is grounded on the biblical assertion that God created man and woman in his image and made them moral agents. They are intrinsically clothed with dignity and value. They were given the gift of choice as the defining distinctive in creation. The abuse of that freedom resulted in the fall of man and woman, and evil entered our world. Instead of unity and harmony came hatred, racism, division, injustice and wars.

Reconciliation with God in Christ by his Spirit is humanity's only hope. It is in this context that everyone should have the possibility to publicly worship God and to liberate and restore man and creation to their rightful place.

Evangelicals everywhere should promote and preserve religious liberty—for everyone, regardless of colour and language, or belief or unbelief in God. As evangelicals we are committed to promote freedom for all to practise religion, yet forthrightly define the limits of our tolerance, beyond which we have to say no and make our stand even if it should lead to martyrdom.

In the world today, hundreds of thousands of Christians suffer for their faith. In many lands people are denied the right, under threat of penalty or death, to proclaim or hear the gospel, change their religion, or be part of a new community of faith. They are marginalized and powerless, and no one dares take up their cause.

We need to speak for them and stand in solidarity with them. In Christ, all believers are one. To turn a deaf ear to the cries of the persecuted church or look the other way to avoid the ugly sight of their sufferings only makes atheists of us all. Let us bring our people to a greater awareness of the needs of persecuted Christians, pray for them, and reach out, individually or in concert with WEF and others, in practical help to them. In doing so, we serve Christ our Lord.

The WEF International Day of Prayer is a concrete programme to bring about awareness to the cause of the persecuted church worldwide. In our advocacy for religious liberty, we are supported by two pillars: First, the fact that Christ is Lord of the church. Second, that the powers that be have been defeated. Christians everywhere, unite in prayer for the persecuted church. We ask you also to support the projects presented in this material.

## **OUR MOST EFFECTIVE WEAPON**

by John E. Langlois  
Chairman, WEF Religious Liberty Commission

When he was in prison, the apostle Paul wrote that 'our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms' ([Eph. 6:12](#)). It is all too easy to think that our struggle is with the men and women who are doing the persecuting. They are doing so because they are blinded to the truth. We must pray for our fellow believers who are suffering persecution that the Lord will give them strength to proclaim the gospel

to them and to reflect the love of Christ to them in all situations, even when in great distress. It is impossible in human strength alone.

Paul asked the Ephesian church to do this when he wrote: 'Pray in the spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should' ([Eph. 6:18](#)). His good witness in jail in Philippi resulted in the jailer and all his household turning to Christ and being baptized. We too can pray that not only will the persecutors stop persecuting but that they will accept Christ. Paul was very conscious that this was possible because he too, a fanatic persecutor, was confronted by the risen Christ on the road to Damascus and yielded his life to his service. This year, pray that the persecutors may have a 'Damascus road experience'.

Today the worldwide Christian church numbers many millions of people. WEF represents just a part of it, representing 150 million Christians in over 100 countries through their national evangelical alliances. As we come together to pray for each other, we are joined by the wider body of Christ, with the assurance that the effectual fervent prayers of believers are of great value to God. Even demons fear and tremble when they see the weakest believer on his knees. Satan will tremble on this special day when he sees millions of believers praying. He knows better than we do that our most effective weapons are spiritual. And he knows how often we fail to use them.

## **WHAT I LEARNT IN PRISON ABOUT PRAYER**

by Rev. Dr. Hristo Kulichev, Bulgaria

What can a man do confined within the walls of a prison cell? Freedom is taken away from him as well as the opportunity to attend services in church. He has no right to read the Bible. His watch and pen are confiscated along with any tiny bit of paper with which he could relieve the monotony of his stay in the cell. This is the intention of those who have imprisoned him, so that they may exert mental pressure and break down his resistance.

Under such circumstances, the only thing no-one can do is take away the opportunity to pray. I realized that when I needed prayer most, God deprived me of the chance to do anything else. In my loneliness I could be in constant fellowship with God—the only source of power in my life. In prison I realized how cunningly Satan works in our life when we have freedom, keeping us busy with all kinds of things that give us less time to pray.

In prison I came to know that God can satisfy our needs in two different ways—by giving us what we pray for and by delivering us from the need for which we pray. In prison, especially during times of questioning, food is scarce. I was hungry most of the time, and like others thought mostly about food. Then I prayed, 'Lord, you fed five thousand people with five loaves of bread and two fish. Here there is only one of me, so even crumbs will be enough.' God did not give me more bread, but he did free me from the feelings of hunger so that they no longer occupied my mind.

I had the practical experience in prison that the more eager and specific my prayers were, the quicker and more clearly God answered them. During a meeting with the examining magistrate, he asked me whether I would like to see my wife, and together with her decide on who my advocate would be. I was thrilled. I waited impatiently for the meeting—perhaps today, perhaps tomorrow, maybe in the morning or afternoon. The days passed in futile expectation. I realized I was losing my mind, and told myself it was all part of the magistrate's wily plan to destroy my peace of mind. Then I prayed, 'Lord,

deliver me from anything egotistical. I leave everything in your hands. Please take care of my family and of me. Help me remain faithful to you.' He gave me his peace and a bliss that never left me during all my days in prison.

There were fifty to sixty other prisoners in the cell. Every morning and evening I knelt by my bed and prayed. One day the person in charge of the room told me in front of everyone: 'Hristo, the chief said not to pray in the room any more.' 'Let him say it to me', I answered. Several days later the chief called me and asked me:

'Were you informed not to pray in the room?'

'Yes.'

'Then why do you go on praying?'

'Because I am a Christian and a pastor. I am here not because I am a thief or a robber, but because I serve my God in preaching the gospel. Praying is one of the ways to serve God.'

'In this way you are making propaganda.'

'I must pray to my God, and I'm not interested in how other people look at it', I told him.

'Then we should isolate you in a separate cell,' he said.

'Whatever you decide. I am a prisoner and I have no right to choose the place of my confinement, but wherever I am, I shall pray.'

'What do you pray for?' he asked quite unexpectedly.

'For different things—I have been separated from my family for months now. They don't know where I am, nor I where they are. I pray that God may take care of us. You know that the conditions in the prison are hard. I pray that God may give me strength to endure everything with patience and not to grumble.'

'How long is your prayer?' he continued.

'We do not have written prayers. My prayer is over when I have said to God everything I want to.'

'Write down all this in a report and give it to me.'

I wrote the report as asked, and continued to pray without further problems. In prison I realized that we have the mightiest weapon given to us by God—*prayer*.

## **CONVERSION TO CHRIST IS COSTLY**

**By Rev. Richard Howell,  
General Secretary, Evangelical Fellowship Of India**

The statement by Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, 'I do not accept the contention that people are being converted by force' (TOI) has cleared the air and is a real step forward in restoring the confidence of the minority community. His statement affirms what all who have been converted to Christ instinctively know: How can inducement or force be the ends to follow the One who commanded, 'Love your enemies and pray for them that persecute you'? And yet, conversion to Christ is not without cost—it is costly.

Christ demanded of his followers self-denial, love and service to God and humanity, especially to the poor and the downtrodden. He modelled, as he washed the feet of his disciples, that any power that we may have is for the service of others. He cleansed the lepers and rehabilitated them to become participatory members of the society. By asking for a drink of water from a 'dalit' Samaritan woman, he crossed the racial and sexual barriers, establishing new principles for social relationships. It is demonic if Christians, who believe in Jesus, practise the discrimination of the caste system within the church. Jesus denounced hypocritical lifestyles, equating them with whitewashed graves—which may look good on the outside, but inside are filled with dead men's bones. Jesus also taught the rejects of society profound spiritual truths. He told the woman, 'God is Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in Spirit and in Truth.' In his person he revealed the character of God by his words and works. Even in his crucifixion he saved a dying thief and forgave those who crucified him. Didn't Mrs. Gladys Staines do the same when her husband Graham and sons Philip and Timothy were burnt to death? Graham served lepers [in India] as his Master had commanded to love. It was possible because he had been converted to Christ internally and was willing to pay the price. Conversion is a personal, responsible act under the grace of God.

### **Christianity Was Born in Suffering**

The Roman authorities initially regarded Christianity as a branch of Judaism, and extended legal protection. But the violent hostilities of the Jews themselves made the distinction very evident, and the persecution of Christians in Rome under Emperor Nero in 64 AD made the split between Christianity and Judaism permanent. Emperor Nero's insatiable desire to 'modernise' Rome led him to burning Rome, and the Emperor who was worshipped in Rome blamed the Christians for the fire and burnt Christians at the stakes as torch lights. Nero revelled in his lust for power while Christians sang on the burning stakes. By AD 90 the mere fact of being a Christian had become a cause for punishment. By the time Pliny was the governor of Bithynia (111–113), Christianity was already viewed as criminal but the persecution was not so severe at this stage. Marcus Aurelius (161–180) strengthened laws against strange religions (176) and initiated a sharper period of persecution which extended into the beginning of the reign of Commodus (180–192). Always illegal, and with extreme penalties hanging over it, the Christian profession involved constant peril for its adherents, yet the number of actual martyrs in this period appears to have been relatively small compared with those of the third and fourth centuries.

### **Why Were They Persecuted?**

Christians were charged with atheism and treason: atheism, because they gave up worshipping their former gods. Refusal to participate in the mandatory emperor worship constituted their treason. Today Christians are not charged with atheism, but we can worship only one God revealed in Jesus Christ. Christian understanding of God is determined by the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. For an experience to be called Christian it must have the face of Jesus on it. And the experience of Christ can be communicated rationally.

As for the charge of treason, the contribution of Indian Christians to nation building in the area of education and medical health speaks in volumes, especially considering the minuscule minority Christians are in India.

During the time of Justin Martyr (110–165), the rulers of the land actively abetted the persecution of Christianity. Inciting mobs to attack Christians was an integral part of this strategy. To all the accusations the best answer of the Christians was their consistency in

loyalty to Christ, and their superior morality as judged by the standards of society about them. Love and service of God and humanity is the best defence against accusations.

### **The Attraction of Christ**

Justin Martyr, who wrote much in answer to the charges of atheism, treason, cannibalism and promiscuity against Christians, was born in Flavia Neapolis, a city of Samaria, around AD 114. After trying various systems his elevated tastes and refined perception made him a disciple of Socrates and Plato, searching after some kind of knowledge which would satisfy the cravings of his soul. At last he became acquainted with Jesus Christ, being at once impressed with the extraordinary fearlessness which the Christians displayed in the presence of death, and with the grandeur, stability and truth of the teachings of the Bible. What Plato was feeling after, Justin Martyr found in Jesus Christ.

The angels had sung at the birth of Christ: 'Good will to men'. This song had been heard from successive generations, breaking forth from the lips of sufferers on the crosses, among lions, and amid blazing faggots. Here was a nobler stoicism that needed interpretation. Not only those boasting of a loftier intellectual sphere, the professors; but thousands of men, women, and children, withdrawing themselves not at all from the ordinary and humble lot of people, were inspired by it, to live and die heroically sublimely—exhibiting a superiority to revenge and hate entirely unaccountable, praying for their enemies, and seeking to glorify their God by love to their fellow men. Justin settled in Rome as a Christian teacher. While he was there, the philosophers, especially the Cynics, plotted against him, and he sealed his testimony to the truth by martyrdom.

## **HOW CAN WE SUPPORT EACH OTHER IN THE BODY OF CHRIST?**

### **A Bible Study by Dr. Abdul Menes Noor, Cairo**

When we begin reading chapter 12 of the book of Acts, we exclaim, 'What a sad beginning!' But when we continue reading, our hearts become full of glorious joy. The beginning says that king Herod arrested some church leaders, intending to persecute them. He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. When he saw that this pleased the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. After arresting him he put him in prison intending to bring him up for public trial. But the chapter ends with Peter released miraculously and Herod dead. This is a demonstration of the wise saying, 'Weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning' ([Ps. 30:5](#)). What happened to turn sadness into joy?

#### **Prayer**

'The church was earnestly praying to God for Peter' ([Acts 12:5](#)). Sometimes we think that prayer is what the weaklings do because they can do nothing else. But prayer is a tremendous power. It works. That is where we all should begin. Had it not been for prayers lifted to the Throne for me, I would not have lived till today. I appreciate hearing from people all over the world that they are praying for me and my church. This is why we are like the burning bush. 'Though the bush was on fire it did not burn up' ([Exodus 3:2](#)). When Satan sifts us as wheat we need to hear that prayers are lifted up for us, 'That your faith may not fail'. And we 'can strengthen our brothers' ([Lk. 22:31-32](#)).

What kind of prayers were offered up by the early church fathers? There is a model prayer in [Acts 4](#) which the church lifted up after the release of Peter and John from the Jerusalem jail.

What a victorious beginning we find in this prayer! They lifted up their hearts to the One whom they knew to be the Sovereign Lord and the Creator of the universe (v. [24](#)) They praised and glorified him. Then they built their prayer on Divine promises and quoted from the second Psalm. They held an analogy between the past and the present. Those who stood against the Lord in the past were defeated. Those who are standing against Jesus now will meet the same end. God's victory, then, is their portion because they belong to him. They were sure that what was happening to them was in God's hands. The church's opponents were doing what God's power and will had decided beforehand for them to do. And of course, he wills the best for his children (vv. [25-28](#)).

The petitions they lifted are a wonderful example of what the oppressed should ask. For their persecutors they asked the Lord to consider their hearts. For themselves they asked for boldness to witness. For all the people they asked for miracles of healing in the name of Christ.

What a prayer! They were bold. Pastor Wurmbrand of Romania, when preaching from my Cairo pulpit, taught me that when we are scared the world scares us more. But when we are not scared the world becomes scared of us. How great was God's commandment to Jeremiah, 'Get yourself ready! Stand up and say to them whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, or I will terrify you before them. Today I have made you a fortified city' ([Jer. 1:17, 18](#)). He still gives us the same order and the same promise.

As a result of the [Acts 4](#) prayer, the place was shaken. The praying group was filled with the Holy Spirit. They spoke the word of God boldly.

I once asked myself, why do I often preach from [Acts 12:11](#) 'The Lord sent His angel and rescued me' but I never preach on [Acts 12:2](#) 'James ... put to death with the sword'? Didn't the church pray for James? Why does Heaven's answer seem so negative? Jesus had prepared the room of James in the Father's house, while Peter's room was not yet ready ([John 14:2](#)). The Father had seen that James' ministry was completed, while Peter's was still incomplete.

Were the early believers disappointed because God did not answer their prayers for James positively? I do not think so. Their [Acts 4](#) prayer shows that their main petition was for boldness and miracle performing to witness to Jesus' power. This petition was always given! We pray for all the persecuted Christians. When some of them are tortured, or slain by the sword, or shot by bullets, we know that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church. We also know that the time of their crowning has come when they die.

### **Divine Interference**

The story of [Acts 12](#) tells us that James was released to heaven. As for Peter, it says that the angel of the Lord appeared and a light was shining in the cell. The angel broke Peter's chains. He lovingly reminded him to put on his clothes and sandals. Then he asked him to wrap his cloak around him and follow. The angel opened the prison gates and led Peter to safety. What a wonderful care for small details. What a loving kindness that was! Jesus says that even the hairs of our heads are all numbered ([Matt. 10:30](#)). Each hair has a number, and the total is also recorded!

We ask our sisters and brothers to pray for us and to trust that our sovereign God always interferes. Some of us will meet the end of James and others that of Peter, but the room in the Father's house is well furnished, or on its way to be furnished!

Thank you for your prayers. Praise God for your care for the persecuted Christians. Praise him for your confident faith.

### **A Prayer from Egypt**

Father God,

We are honoured to belong to You. We are Your little flock and it is Your good pleasure to give us the kingdom. Therefore help us to rejoice, not to lament.

You know that we are a minority, because You said that we are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. So help us season the world and make our light shine brighter.

You know that we are under pressure, so protect us from putting our light under a basket or a bed, but on a lampstand.

You know that some of us are scared, so help us be encouraged to encourage them. Affirm to us again that You are on the throne and that Yours is the kingdom, power and glory for ever.

Help us love our persecutors and forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.

In the precious name of Jesus, Amen.

# Present Day Persecution of Christians

Paul Marshall

**Keywords:** Persecution, freedom, discrimination, nationalism, human rights, United Nations

While touching on other religions, I will focus on providing a brief overview of the current persecution of Christians worldwide<sup>1</sup> Let me say at the outset that the suffering or death of any human being of any or no religious faith is equally as offensive to God and demeaning to us. Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, Bah'ai and others are also persecuted. However, apart from having become an issue in U.S. foreign policy, the current persecution of Christians worldwide is massive and still under-reported. Therefore I believe it deserves particular attention.

This claim about under-reporting may sound strange in Washington since there has been greatly increased political attention to this matter. However, this attention is of recent vintage, probably beginning at a conference held there in January 1996, and such knowledge and concern is still limited to relatively narrow circles. It is still not a feature on our news pages.<sup>2</sup> The coverage has focused on people in Washington concerned about this persecution rather than on the persecution itself. For all of the coverage of the debate on Most Favoured Nation trading status for China, there is very little attention to what actually goes on in that country.<sup>3</sup> While we have received news of courageous political dissidents such as Wei Jingsheng, the news of the arrests (and torture) of China's leading Protestant house church leaders, with several million followers, has been passed by, as has the current detention of ten Catholic Bishops, with more millions of followers.

## DEFINITIONS

Many terms, such as 'religious persecution,' 'religious freedom,' 'persecution' and 'Christian' are both ill-defined and controversial. The accuracy, precision and meaning of the numbers of those persecuted are equally ill-defined and controversial. There is no way here, and probably no way anywhere else, to resolve all of these questions. But what I would like to do is explain and give some justification for how I use them.

In the following I outline neither the suffering nor persecution of Christians or other religious believers per se. These are far more widespread than what is summarised here, since they, like all other human beings, also suffer through myriad other human failings and evils. Since most people in the world claim some sort of religious identity, then most

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<sup>1</sup> 1. Preliminary surveys are given in Nina Shea's *In the Lion's Den* (Broadman and Holman, 1997) and my *Their Blood Cries Out* (Word, 1997). Similar pictures are given in the U.S. State Department's July, 1997 report on religious persecution and its *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1997* (Feb., 1998). Some of the same material is covered in Kevin Boyle and Juliet Sheen, eds., *Freedom of Religion and Belief: A World Report* (Routledge, 1997).

<sup>2</sup> 2. See Nina Shea, 'Atrocities Not Fit to Print,' *First Things*, November, 1997.

<sup>3</sup> 3. *Newsweek's* June 9, 1997 story cast doubt on the whole matter and, using figures from the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, said there were 2.4 million Christians in China. Even the Chinese government gives figures five times this large for the legal church alone. The *Wall Street Journal's* June 26, 1997 story is headlined 'China Shows New Tolerance for Religion'. Apart from A.M. Rosenthal's columns in the *New York Times*, the prestige media neglect the issue. The developing media spin seems to be that this is a 'Christian Right' matter.



human rights violations of any kind are presumably against religious believers. Hence a survey of such 'religious persecution' would be very close to a world survey of human rights violations. I am concerned not with all forms of persecution of religious people, but with persecution *on religious grounds*. I focus on situations only where a person's religion is a significant component of the persecution they suffer. Hence I do not cover situations such as, for example, Rwanda, whose genocide was ethnically based, nor Iraq, where Saddam Hussein persecutes all without regard to creed, nor Central America or Peru, where the focus is on political opposition to government or guerrillas per se. It must, of course, be added that there are few cases where religion is the only factor: religion is usually intertwined with ethnic, political, territorial and economic concerns. I demarcate religious persecution by asking whether some or all of the oppression and discrimination that people suffer would occur if they were of a different religion.

### **Religious Freedom and Persecution**

By religious freedom I mean what is contained in the United Nations 'Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, 1981' These articles do not contain a clear internal definition of the right to *change* one's religion, only to *adopt* a religion. But, as an authoritative commentator, Natan Lerner, observes, 'There is no doubt, however, that the final text recognises the right to change one's religion or beliefs, to abandon a religion and to adopt a different one. This liberal interpretation is supported by the discussion during the preparation for the Covenant'<sup>4</sup> A new Article 8 was added to reinforce this point. This states that: 'Nothing in the present Declaration shall be construed as restricting or derogating from any right defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights ...' The 1948 Universal Declaration, in turn, states in Article 18 that 'Everyone has the right to ... change his religion or belief ...'

The United Nations Human Rights Committee further emphasised this point in its authoritative 1993 clarification that article 18 (1) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights says 'the right to replace one's current religion' and emphasises 'the freedom to ... adopt a religion (is) ... protected unconditionally ...' and 'cannot be derogated from, even in time of public emergency ...'<sup>5</sup>

Even apart from specific rights of religion, we also need to refer to rights of free speech, since freedom of religion does not exist in a corner but manifests itself through, among other things, the rights of free speech, free expression and freedom of association. The right to propagate one's religion is a right of free expression.

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<sup>4</sup> 4. See Natan Lerner 'Religious Rights under the United Nations' pp. 79–134 of Johan D. van der Vyver and John Witte, Jr. eds., *Religious Human Rights In Global Perspective: Legal Perspectives* (Martinus Nijhoff, 1996) pp. 91f, 115f.

<sup>5</sup> 5. 'General Comment Adopted by the Human Rights Committee Under Article 40, paragraph 4, of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights: Addendum, General comment No. 22 (48) (art. 18)' adopted at 1247th meeting (forty-eighth session, on 20 July, 1993). The 1950 European Convention on Human Rights says in Article 9, 'Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice and observance.' The 1969 American Convention on Human Rights says in Article 12,

'1. Everyone has the right to freedom of conscience and of religion. This includes freedom to maintain or to change one's religion or beliefs, and freedom to profess or disseminate one's religion or beliefs either individually or together with others, in public or in private.'

By religious persecution I mean, in general, the denial of any of the rights of religious freedom. There are also a series of other terms such as genocide, harassment, and discrimination. Except for genocide, none of these terms has any widely agreed meaning.<sup>6</sup>

By discrimination, I mean a situation where people may have basic freedom of worship and other forms of religious freedom, but where the law places them at a consistent civil and economic disadvantage for exercising such freedoms.

### **Christian**

The word Christian can also be used in a variety of ways which can grade into one another. Generally I will use the term to refer to what can be called 'census Christians' or 'nominal Christians.' These are people who, in answer to a question of what their religion is, would say 'Christian.' It says nothing at all about what they actually believe or whether they participate in any real way in the life of a Christian community. Within this group we can also refer to 'active Christians.' These are people for whom their Christian faith is a central aspect of their life and who are committed as much as possible to living out their faith and communicating it to others. It is usually this group which suffers the most intense persecution and who comprise members of 'underground' or 'house' churches. The less committed members are often given more lenient treatment as long as they keep quiet, but they can still suffer significant disabilities. It is usually only the most rigid regimes, such as Saudi Arabia, that make specific efforts to target Christians of all types.

When we turn our attention to those who are actually doing the persecuting, similar complexities may arise. When I speak, for example, of the persecution of Christians it does not necessarily imply, for example, that Buddhists who are persecuting Christians (such as in Burma and Sri Lanka) are doing so for specifically Buddhist reasons, but only that it is Christians that they are persecuting, in a situation where they would not be persecuting others.

### **Religion, Nationalism and Culture**

I have divided the sites of persecution into the Islamic world, the Communist World, Christian on Christian persecution, and then a set of countries situated on the southern flanks of Asia and largely comprising traditionally Hindu and Buddhist societies. There is also the problem of whether we should include persecution in the name of nationalism as a discrete category. However, such a category would take up nearly all of the countries that I discuss. With the exception of fervently Islamic countries like Saudi Arabia, most instances of persecution also involve a government or a community claiming it is defending a nation or a traditional culture from 'foreign religious influence.' This is true for countries as varied as Mexico, Egypt, India, and Vietnam.

Since almost every instance involves nationalism, we then would face the problem of dividing up types of nationalism. In one sense, this is what I have done. The categories of countries can, in most cases, be understood as referring to a symbiosis of particular religious forms with nationalism.<sup>7</sup> For example, the government of Egypt has treated Islam as part of its national character. The Bharatiya Janata Party treats Hinduism ('Hindutva') as the essence of what it means to be Indian. Mongolians treat Christianity as a threat to national traditions. Nearly all of the religious categories I use are interwoven with nationalism.

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<sup>6</sup> 6. For an able discussion of these meanings, see David Rieff, 'An Age of Genocide,' *The New Republic*, Jan. 29, 1996, pp. 27-36.

<sup>7</sup> 7. For comments on this see David Little, 'Studying 'Religious Human Rights': Methodological Foundations,' pp. 45-77 of van der Vyver, op. cit., especially pp. 69f

One particular problem arises with the countries of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. In many of these countries there is a chauvinism which tries to screen out foreign influences. The governments are often simply holdovers, at least in personnel, from the old Communist days. These functionaries, such as, for example, present leaders of the Bosnian Serbs, now use nationalism and religion as a rallying cry to shore up their faltering legitimacy and to install national loyalty. The Bosnian Serb example is a particularly striking case since thugs such as Milosovic in Serbia and Radovan Karadzic and General Ratko Mladic who were thorough-going Communist cadres, now wrap themselves in the cloak of the Orthodox church, though without any obvious manifestation of piety.

Obviously, there is an artificial quality to categorising these as 'Orthodox' instances of persecution. The problem is further exacerbated when we consider Albania, which has combined an authoritarian 'post-communist' government with attempts to use nationalism and Islam in an attempt to reject western, Greek and Orthodox influences. In any case, it should be understood that religious categories are often intertwined with forms of reactionary nationalism. Usually, my categories refer to the general religious identity of specific forms of nationalism.

## **SPREADING THE FAITH**

Many persecutors try to justify their actions by claiming to defend a tradition against 'foreign' or novel ideas. But even apart from the fact that this is no justification for denying human rights, it ignores the nature, geography and history of most religions. Religious beliefs spread and change. Over half of Europe was under Islamic rulers for centuries. We may have forgotten this, but, to the cost of many, the Serbs have not and nor have the Russians.

Changes in religion can be illustrated by Mongolia. According to tradition, Mahayana Buddhism was introduced into Mongolia over 2,000 years ago by Buddhists travelling along the Silk Road. Other religions, including Manichean Christianity, Nestorian Christianity, and Islam, travelled the same route and left their mark on the country. The present form of 'Yellow Hat' Tibetan Buddhism did not arrive until the 13th century, when Kublai Khan, then Emperor of China, named a Buddhist Lama from Beijing as the head of the faith for Tibet, Mongolia and China. The monasteries function in the Tibetan language, look to the Dalai Lama as a spiritual authority and, in the 1990's, have had the ambassador from India as a leading spiritual source.<sup>8</sup>

In short, the current leading religious forces have their seat of authority outside the country and are only the most recent of the successive religions which have had influence. This is not intended as any slight on their legitimacy; it is simply a fact about their history. Despite this, Mongolian governments in the 1990's have sought to prevent further changes and have given legal preeminence to Buddhism. A 1993 law asserted the 'predominant position of the Buddhist religion,' forbade the 'propagation of religion from outside' and 'banned religious activities alien to the religions and customs of the Mongolian people.'<sup>9</sup>

Even claims about 'outsiders,' illegitimate as they are, do not usually apply. Christianity has native adherents in almost every country and territory on the globe.

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<sup>8</sup> 8. Mark Juergensmeyer, *The New Cold War? Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State* (University of California Press, 1993), pp. 117-118.

<sup>9</sup> 9. Abdulfattah Amor, *Special Rapporteur on Religious Intolerance, 1995 Report to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights* (Geneva, December, 1994) p. 62.

There is an almost comic quality in listening to people who assert that Christianity is being spread only by foreigners. This assertion is made even in India, where the indigenous Christian population outnumbers any foreign workers by a factor of some 12,000 to one (actually one of the higher percentages of foreign workers). Current American campaigns against religious persecution are not defences of foreign missionaries. Missionary activity, while certainly legitimate, is an almost irrelevant feature of current repressive trends.

The idea that Christian ideas are being 'imposed' on people is also faintly ludicrous, since in the situations we are discussing, Christians are usually minorities, are often poor and, invariably, the victims of coercion not its practitioners. It is also noteworthy that most of the regimes which repress 'foreign religions' are those governments which repress anything that might weaken their grasp on power.

But, beyond all these considerations, is the simple fact that the people being persecuted are simply exercising their human rights as outlined in any genuine democratic constitution and as defined in international human rights law. These are fundamental human freedoms. There is no law or valid norm that forbids people from believing that their beliefs are true and from trying to share those beliefs with others. This is precisely what democracy and human rights activists, journalists, intellectuals, environmentalists, democrats, and feminists of all stripes do—committedly, persistently and continually. The freedom to express views and to attempt to persuade in the religious field is the same. As Michael Roan puts it, 'the right to hold and assert truth claims is precisely what the freedom of religion or belief is about.'<sup>10</sup> The fact that most of us encounter Jehovah's Witnesses only when they knock on our door at the most inconvenient time is no excuse for failing to realise that they are simply exercising religious freedom and, worldwide, are amongst the most persecuted people.

It is true that many religious efforts can be insensitive and/or intensely annoying to the objects of their attention. Many observers, including Russian and western evangelicals, found the rapid influx of some American organisations into the former Soviet bloc after its political collapse to be both stupid and insensitive. But this is no ground for the legal repression of organisations that upset others. There are no laws against being annoying. Journalists are frequently annoying; often it is part of their job. Human rights activists are annoying. Political opponents, especially radical ones, are annoying. In fact, anyone who challenges a given situation usually annoys people happy with that situation. In any instance where we are tempted to advocate repression of an unpopular religious group, we should ask ourselves whether we would accept similar controls if the group were journalists or were advocating the defence of other human rights. We should be as reluctant to control groups in the religious sphere as we are in any other sphere.

The right to free speech includes a right to be annoying, since if the speech in question never upset or challenged anybody, then the issue of restricting it would never even arise. In the religious sphere as in other spheres, the proper response to annoying people is to criticise them, argue against them, ignore them - or be reconciled to them. But not to imprison or kill them.

There are, of course, instances where attempts to assert beliefs involve coercion or manipulation. But such events involve a minuscule proportion of what is described here. These instances should not lead to any blanket condemnation of, or restriction on, freedom of expression in the religious field. As the U.N. Special Rapporteur notes, 'these instances properly fall under the strictures of good criminal law.' This covers 'respectful

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<sup>10</sup> 10. 'Briefing' on 'Report on Global Freedom of Religion or Belief,' prepared for the U.S. Commission on Cooperation and Security in Europe by Michael Roan, W. Cole Durham and Craig Mousin (The Tandem Project), Minneapolis, September 27, 1995, p. 3.

public order, trickery, fraud, non-assistance, prostitution, illegal practice of medicine, etc. Genuine hazards posed by religious sects are adequately covered by such laws; laws which specifically target smaller religious groups are not needed, and raise dangers of their own.' He adds, 'in the last analysis it is not up to the state or any community to assume the guardianship of the conscience of people or to censure religious beliefs.'<sup>11</sup>

## THE PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS IN THE MODERN WORLD

### Numbers

It is important, at the outset, to say who Christians are since, in North America, there often seems to be an implicit assumption that Christians are white people from Orange County or else dead, white European males. The Christian church is not a European or American phenomenon. From its beginnings, Christianity spread into Africa and Asia. It was in Africa before Europe, India before England, and China before America. Currently, more Christians are engaged in Sunday worship in China than are in all of Western Europe combined. The same is true in Nigeria and Brazil, and probably of India, the Philippines and the country with the world's largest Muslim population, Indonesia.

David B. Barrett gives the following figures (for mid-1998): 1, 970 million 'Christians ... of all kinds'; 1, 850 million 'affiliated church members'; 1, 340 million 'church attenders'; 650 million 'Great Commission Christians' (i.e., 'active Christians'). The first and last of these categories roughly parallel the two meanings of 'Christian' that I described above. Breakdown by continents of 'affiliated church members' (a slightly more restrictive category than 'Christians ... of all kinds') is as follows: Africa—330 million; Asia—290 million; Europe—530 million; Latin America—460 million; North America—220 million; Oceania—20 million.<sup>12</sup>

Since 'Europe' here includes much of Russia, the figures for non-western Christians is somewhat higher. The number of Christians in the 'west'—Western Europe, North America and Australasia—would be about 25–30% of total 'affiliated church members.' The category of 'Christians ... of all kinds' inflates the proportion of Christians in the west compared to the figures for 'active Christians.' 'Member Christians' includes those for whom membership is a formal matter, perhaps simply denoting baptism as a child. While there are people like this in many countries, including the Middle East, Latin America, Africa and Asia, they form a conspicuously large proportion of the European population, where the number of 'active Christians' is sometimes less than 5% of the 'Christians ... of all kinds.' In the rest of the world, where being Christian can create problems, there is less likelihood that anyone who claims a Christian commitment would do so in a purely formal way. If it meant little to them, they are more likely to abandon it rather than face discrimination. This also implies that church attendance and active Christian commitment involve a higher proportion of third world people. Consequently, it is likely that the west contains a fifth or less of the world's 'active Christians.' Even in North America the percentage of churchgoers is highest amongst African-Americans.

In addressing the persecution of Christians, we are not focusing on a peculiarly western or North American matter, but on perhaps the largest and widest manifestation

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<sup>11</sup> 11. Summary of Special Rapporteur's presentation to 'Conference on Freedom of Religion and Belief and the U.N. Year for Tolerance,' London, Sept. 18–20, 1995, given in Michael Roan et al., op. cit. p. 5

<sup>12</sup> 12. David B. Barrett, 'Annual Statistical Table on Global Mission, 1998,' *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Jan, 1998. I have rounded out Barrett's figures to the nearest 10 million.

of religious persecution in the world today. The sites of this persecution are many and varied, but we can group the main trends in four categories.

### **Trends in Persecution**

#### *1. The Islamic Countries*

Many Muslims in North America and elsewhere have legitimate concern that raising the question of Islamic persecution can contribute to already present anti-Muslim and anti-Arab prejudice. They are also properly concerned that the widespread persecution of *Muslims* should not be neglected or slighted. I wish to avoid contributing to either of these dangers and I should point out that most of the Islamic regimes and groups that I cite also persecute moderate Muslims and Muslim minorities. This is also why, in *Their Blood Cries Out*, in more than fifty places, I explicitly point out instances, both historical and contemporary, of Islamic tolerance or where Muslims themselves are persecuted.

But while Islam has in its history often shown far greater tolerance than its Christian counterparts, there are now intensifying attacks on religious minorities, mostly Christians, throughout the Islamic belt from Morocco on the Atlantic eastward through to the Southern Philippines, and this requires systematic attention. This wave of persecution is not limited to but has worsened because of the activities of radical Islamicists. The persecution is of three overlapping types.

The *first* of these is direct state persecution. This takes place in countries such as Saudi Arabia, where any non-Islamic or dissident Islamic religious expression is forbidden. Christian meetings are outlawed and worship services held anywhere other than in the embassies of powerful countries will be cracked down on by the *mutawa*, the religious police, and their members imprisoned. Any Saudi who seeks to leave Islam faces the real prospect of death. This is also true in other gulf states and in North Africa. In countries such as Mauritania, the Comoros Islands and Sudan, this is a threat not only from vigilantes, but is part of the legal code itself.

In Sudan, a major component of the complex civil war is an effort by the Khartoum regime to impose its form of Islam on the largely Christian and animist South and on the Beja Muslims in the East. Over a million and a half are dead. *Shari'a* law is imposed, Christians in refugee camps have been denied food and water unless they convert, children are kidnapped to be raised as Muslim, and there is widespread enslavement of children. There are probably several tens of thousands of slaves in the Sudan. There are slave markets, and a current practice of seeking to sell child slaves back to their parents in order to get better prices.

In other countries, such as Iran and Pakistan, the threat comes from vigilantes or mob violence with greater or lesser complicity by the government. In Iran there are strong indications that, apart from the persecution of the Bah'ai, government death squads have abetted the torture and assassination of Protestant leaders in recent years.

A *second* major category in the Islamic world, and the most widespread, is communal violence. Minorities in the Islamic world are often victimised not by the agents of government per se, but by mob violence, often prompted by radical Islamicist leaders. This is true in Egypt, where the Coptic Church is increasingly subject to church burnings and local massacres. It is widespread in Nigeria, in Liberia, Ghana and the Philippines. One of the most alarming developments is that this violence is increasing. In Pakistan in 1997, one Christian town, Shantinagar, was virtually razed to the ground. Ahmadiya Muslims suffer similar treatment. In Indonesia, which has long been a place of toleration between Muslims, Christians and other minorities, there has been an epidemic of church burnings. In some cases, as in Indonesia, the government (and major Muslim groups) has sharply

opposed such attacks. In others, such as Egypt or Pakistan, *local* authorities have been complicit or quiescent.

A *third* category in the Islamic world is direct attacks by radical Islamic terrorists. In Algeria, Islamicist guerillas opposed to the government have targeted, amongst others, moderate Muslims and Christians, especially priests, monks and nuns. Bishops have been assassinated. This is also true in the Philippines, in Pakistan, in Turkey and in Egypt.

## *2. Communist Countries*

Communism has not disappeared. In China, Vietnam, North Korea, Laos and Cuba it embraces nearly a quarter of the world's population. While the situation in Cuba has eased somewhat in the last couple of years, the situation in the other countries has been worsening. In these countries there may be relative freedom to worship in the state controlled religious bodies, but any religious expression outside these bodies is ruthlessly suppressed. In Vietnam the government continues its crackdown on Buddhists and Christians, especially amongst tribal peoples. In China, Tibetan Buddhists and Uighur Muslims are persecuted, and priests and bishops of the Roman Catholic Church have been imprisoned in the past year in an intensifying crackdown, while several hundred leaders of the Protestant underground church have been jailed, and many have been tortured. The pattern in these countries is that any religious believer who refuses to submit to state control on the choice of religious leaders, seminarians, pastors, priests, bishops, sermon topics, religious organisations and membership lists will suffer discrimination, harassment, persecution and perhaps imprisonment, torture and death.

## *3. Persecution Due to Religious/ethnic Nationalism*

Christians, like other minority groups, suffer at the hands of combined religious/ethnic nationalism, sometimes at the hands of the state, more commonly by communal violence. Violence and discrimination against minority religious groups is present in Mongolia, Nepal, Sri Lanka, India, Bhutan and Kampuchea and in the central Asian republics which were formerly part of the Soviet Union, especially Uzbekistan. It is a growing phenomenon in Burma/Myanmar. There the SLORC regime, lacking popular support and legitimacy, is trying to wrap itself in a cloak of Buddhism as part of its war against tribal minorities, especially the Rohingya Muslims in the west and the Karen and other tribes in the eastern part of the country, where Christians constitute a large proportion of the minorities.

## *4. Persecution of Christians by Christians*

This fourth category is less a distinct area of religious persecution than it is a collection of persecutions worldwide. But I mention it separately, also to emphasise the point that persecution is not done simply by 'other' religions. In Ethiopia, Protestants and Muslims have been attacked and sometimes killed by mobs urged on by local clergy of the Coptic Church. In the Mexican state of Chiapas, apart from conflicts with the Zapatista rebels, protestant tribespeople (40% of the population) have been driven off their land and killed by local renegade 'Catholic' leaders. In most other cases, the phenomenon is more one of discrimination.

## *5. Discrimination*

Apart from what I have called persecution, there is also widespread, non-trivial discrimination and legal control. For example, India has 'affirmative action' laws to ease the plight of the *dalit*, or 'untouchables.' While groups such as Hindus, Sikhs and Buddhists are included, Christian untouchables (a majority of the 28 million Christians in India) are

explicitly excluded. Similarly, in Malaysia, the 'affirmative action' program for *bumiputras* (ethnic Malays) explicitly excludes non-Muslims, the majority of whom are Christians, but also including Hindus, Buddhists and minority Muslim groups. Sometimes this discrimination can border on the absurd. In Egypt, the permission of the State President (now the Provincial Governor) was required before a church can be built or even repaired. One church, having failed to obtain such permission after one year of trying, went ahead and repaired its toilet. They were fined heavily and the repaired toilet was demolished.

Discrimination is an increasing pattern in Russia, where repressive religion laws, backed by the Russian Orthodox Church, have been instituted at the federal level. Such laws are also widespread, and usually even more repressive, at the local level and there is increasing violence against religious minorities, including Jews, Protestants, Catholics and dissident Orthodox groups. Similar patterns of discrimination against minority religious groups is pervasive in Ukraine, Bulgaria and Romania, present in many parts of eastern Europe, including the Baltics, and growing in many of the C.I.S. states. Meanwhile, several western European countries, including Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Belgium and France are becoming more controlling of what the majority regard as 'sects' or 'cults.'

The categories of state persecution, communal persecution, terrorist persecution, legal control and discrimination can grade into one another, in that those countries which have communal violence are often ones in which there is systemic discrimination, such as in Egypt, Pakistan, Iran, Uzbekistan, Sri Lanka and India.

## OVERVIEW

In the last five years, this persecution has taken place in approximately forty countries, and legal repression and discrimination in approximately thirty countries. Reliable estimates of the number of religious believers in various countries are hard to achieve, and even then are subject to wide variation depending on definition. My best estimate of the overall situation is that, very approximately, 200 million Christians in the world are members of persecuted groups in countries where religious persecution is present involving imprisonment, beatings, torture, mob violence and death. An additional 400 million live in situations of non-trivial repression and legal discrimination. And this persecution is increasing in China, Vietnam, Uzbekistan and parts of the Islamic world, especially Pakistan, Egypt and Indonesia.

Currently there is debate about as to whether this persecution is increasing overall. This question too is subject to statistical and definitional problems. One is whether we mean the percentage of people affected or the numeric total of those affected. Another is which baseline we use for comparison. If we take 1970 as the comparison point then the percentage of Christians being persecuted now is probably less. If we take 1980 it is probably about the same.<sup>13</sup> If we take 1990 it is higher.

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<sup>13</sup> 13. For the year 1980, Barrett gave the figure of 605,000,000 for Christians 'living under political restrictions on religious liberty,' and the figure of 225,000,000 for Christians 'experiencing severe state interference in religion, obstruction or harassment.' These would correspond roughly to what I have called 'discrimination' and 'persecution' respectively. The current numbers would be similar, reflecting both the decrease of persecution with the collapse of many Communist countries and the corresponding expansion of the church and rise of increased persecution in the rest of the world. For 1998, Barrett suggests that the average rate of martyrdom is about 163,000 Christians per year (He defines a martyr as 'a believer in Christ who loses his or her life prematurely in a situation of witness as a result of human hostility.')



If we focus on current trends in the 1990's two things are clear: the current persecution of Christians is both growing both in its worldwide spread and in the number of people affected.

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# **Persecution: Interpreting the Information on the Internet**

John Roxborough

**Keywords:** Persecution, access, reliability, State, context, freedom

## **1 INTRODUCTION AND ISSUES**

The advent of email, the internet and then the development of the World Wide Web have enabled minority groups to tell their stories to a global audience. While governments may interfere with the flow of information, close down sites, and present alternative views, it is difficult for them to prevent access to dossiers and evidence located outside their boundaries. Material on the Web can speak when the subjects of the story themselves may be silenced.

Access to the Web enables minority groups to tell their stories and researchers to locate that information. While there can be no guarantees about the quality of the information, or the critical skills of the researcher, today there is unprecedented access to information about persecution and the responses of concerned groups in other countries. The ability to further disseminate information into the hands of media, politicians and praying Christians is enormous. The challenge remains to seek for quality in what is reported, and exercise discretion in making information public, judgement in analysis and wisdom in determining strategies to ameliorate suffering.

Material on the Web about persecution raises the same questions that have long existed with print media: is this sensationalist, reliable, self-critical, capable of influencing governments, friendly or hostile? What are the assumptions and viewpoints of the writers and those who make their material available? Is there a concern for accuracy about events, people, places and dates? Is the detail more or less specific than the sensitivities of the situation require? As with print, the facility that gets information out also makes it available to those who may use it against minority groups, except that the scope is vastly greater. Concerns about the uncontrolled nature of material on the Web relative to print

also apply, though information processed through known organizations will have been subject to a measure of editorial judgement. Even so, responsibility for interpretation is still very much with the reader. Unmoderated chat rooms and posted discussion material have few controls, and disinformation is also out there to confuse the unwary. Readers always need to ask themselves what is genuine, rather than just plausible, and what may be distorted, even sincerely, by enthusiasm or fear or a desire for vengeance. It is important to recognize integrity, whatever its viewpoint.

Situations of persecution are seldom if ever pure matters of religious discrimination and it does not quite go without saying that Christian compassion extends to suffering in general, not just that related to a person's Christian confession. Attitudes towards Christians are often mixed with issues of class, caste, social and ethnic group, community fears and injustices and their exploitation. People committing acts of persecution or providing a climate of discrimination may be doing little more than acting out the prejudices of media owners, and may see themselves as protecting their own interests or correcting ancient wrongs. The Web enables researchers to be aware of these dimensions as they explore the context and history of persecution. It is also possible to evaluate a range of responses, including prayer, aid, intervention, international political pressure, and publicity.

Christians need to be aware of the different approaches being taken by different groups. Some will align themselves more with one approach than another and that should not be surprising. The Web helps ensure that those outside are not captive to one line of interpretation and that anyone with a computer, telephone line and modem, and an internet account is well placed to make their own judgement.

A number of printed sources help provide a context of interpretation, though their own assumptions and intentions should be taken into account. Some have a tendency to uncritical or sensationalist reporting, others may have been so dry in being factual that gains in objectivity of one kind can lose the emotional dimension of real suffering by real people. It is helpful to make distinctions between different types of situations, and to have a framework for dealing with the difficult fact that those most personally affected may lack understanding about what is going on.

Reasonably balanced in its passion and analysis, and perhaps the most comprehensive general survey currently available is Paul Marshall, *Their Blood Cries Out* (Dallas: Word, 1997). Marshall is concerned to mobilize a broad spectrum of opinion to get religious freedom higher on the United States foreign policy agenda. The International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 and the formation of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom which held its first meeting in June 1999 are fruits of the campaign of Marshall and others.

Marshall's January 1998 article in the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* is also helpful in its analysis and in its distinctions (as between discrimination and persecution, and between pressure from independent groups and that which is 'part of the legal code itself').<sup>1</sup> However, political engagement is not without ambiguity. Not all think that North American concepts of religion and religious freedom are universal,<sup>2</sup> or that politicizing issues is always wise. Marshall appears to have difficulty hearing the

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<sup>1</sup> 1. 'Persecution of Christians in the Contemporary World' *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 22.1 (January 1998), pp. 2-8

<sup>2</sup> 2. Winnifred Fallers Sullivan, 'Exporting Religious Freedom' *Bulletin of the Council of Societies for the Study of Religion*, 28.2 (April 1999), pp. 41-42

significance of some of these concerns.<sup>3</sup> It is important to take note of the unfortunate legacy of 'extraterritoriality' which provided for the defence of Christians by foreign governments in China. Persecution of missionaries was used by the French government as a pretext for their nineteenth century expansion into Vietnam. Today having a foreign government on your case may be helpful, or it may be dangerous. This is not a matter for well-wishers to decide without reference to those affected.

Christians also need to be cautious about a defence of freedom which may carry an assumption about religion being an essentially private matter to which society ought to be indifferent. In our concern to prevent persecution we need to note that any response, including a failure to act, has consequences. The experience with NATO's attempts to help the Kosova Albanians highlights on a grand and tragic scale issues which Christians concerned about fellow believers also have to wrestle with. Our desire to do good is also capable of making things worse.

David Barrett's 'Annual Statistical Table on Global Mission', published each January in the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, includes estimates of the number of Christian martyrs per year. The figure for 1999 was given as 164,000.<sup>4</sup> Barrett's series of articles and his monumental *World Christian Encyclopaedia* are important not only for their figures and their country by country descriptions but also for the way in which his definitions often become de facto standards. The categorization of religious liberty into ten stages between state propagation of Christianity to state suppression is relevant.<sup>5</sup> It will be interesting to see how it is developed in the forthcoming new edition which 'will report on and enumerate every known martyrdom situation in Christian history and identify thousands of martyrs by name'.<sup>6</sup>

Popular attitudes towards minority groups are as important as the declared policy of governments, and the dynamic between these is complex. Government policy may reflect, exacerbate, or moderate populist tendencies. Governments should not always be blamed for the actions of their citizens, and their ability to control situations based on hatred and fear can be limited. On the other hand these same factors can be a route to political power which is difficult to resist.

As well as questions of politics and relative numbers, awareness is needed of the debilitating and divisive effects persecution has on the church. Vernon Sterk provides an analysis of what actually goes on when a Christian community is under sustained pressure. His example is from Mexico, rather than the more usual cases from under communism or in relation to Islam, and his practical advice on preparing the church and identifying appropriate forms of reporting and support is useful.<sup>7</sup> It is sobering to place alongside this the guidelines prepared for the United States Catholic Mission Association

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<sup>3</sup> 3. See James A. Scherer 'To the Editor' and Paul Marshall 'Author's Reply' *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 23.1 (January 1999), pp. 66–67. Scherer was commenting on Marshall's article 'Persecution of Christians in the Contemporary World' in the January 1998 issue.

<sup>4</sup> 4. David B. Barrett and Todd M. Johnson, 'Annual Statistical Table on Global Mission: 1999' *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 23.1 (January 1999), p. 25

<sup>5</sup> 5. David B. Barrett, ed. *World Christian Encyclopedia* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 777

<sup>6</sup> 6. E. Michael Jaffarian, 'The World Christian Encyclopedia, First (1982) and Second (Forthcoming) Editions', *Missiology* 27.1 (January 1999), p. 32

<sup>7</sup> 7. Vernon J. Sterk 'You can help the Persecuted Church: Lessons from Chiapas, Mexico' *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 23.1 (January 1999), pp. 15–18.

on 'Crisis Management in the Event of Arrest, Disappearance, or Death of Mission Personnel'.<sup>8</sup>

Issues facing the church under persecution require wisdom, not just commitment. Good Christians can take diametrically opposite stances over co-operation with authorities, and it does not necessarily mean that one group is faithful and courageous and the other faithless and weak. It is rather too easy for outside groups to be drawn into polarized debates between different groups of Christians without taking account of what is going on. The tensions of the situation lend themselves to dramatic condemnations which may be understandable in the situation itself, but which do not need to be amplified by those at a distance. If it is difficult for outside supporters to minister to both factions, at least they can avoid making the situation worse. This should be one of the lessons from the experiences with Communist Russia and with the Chinese churches whereby the World Council of Churches supported registered churches and evangelical groups supported unregistered. In the Russian situation Keston College (now Keston Institute) was one of the few which sought to bridge the internal divides and to be fair to the different ways in which people responded. It was not always thanked for its objectivity.

It is helpful if Christians can relate their concerns to human rights in general. Religious and political freedom issues can be quite subtle in ways we do not always appreciate. Different cultures have different understandings of the way in which religious beliefs affect people's relationship to society. The assumptions we carry from our own political traditions and religious experiences may not be as universal as we think. Those whose Christian experience carries them easily into corridors of power do not readily identify with Christians in underground churches and are easily persuaded such groups would be trouble-makers in any country. Those who feel on the margins in their own society find it hard to sympathize with those who submit to state restrictions for the sake of legality and the possibility of some influence with the government.

A desire to obtain freedom for fellow-believers quickly raises issues about the freedoms of those who have a different religion, or whose form of Christianity appears less than orthodox. For Evangelicals it can be a litmus test of our own commitment to freedom if we observe what is happening to groups with which we may not have much natural empathy. The treatment of Moonies in England, Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia, and cults in France and other parts of Europe may stretch our sympathies, but they also provide warning signs for minority Christian groups in general.

Human rights concerns are frequently related to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations. These concerns are wider than issues of religious freedom. The Declaration of Human Rights (note article 18<sup>9</sup>) can be found online without difficulty.<sup>10</sup>

The diversity of information on the Web is confusing, but it also makes it possible to put individual cases in perspective. It is also important to develop personal links through email, and to be aware where different groups are coming from in the cases they present. It is easy to be overwhelmed, but there is an opportunity to be in direct affordable contact

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<sup>8</sup> 8. *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* (July 1985), p. 115f.

<sup>9</sup> 9. Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.'

<sup>10</sup> 10. See also the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights 50th anniversary information kit. <http://www.un.org/rights/50/kit5.htm>

with some particular part of the Body of Christ, be informed in prayer and action, and learn from the persecuted church.

## **2 NEWS BY ELECTRONIC MAIL**

Electronic mail is immediate, it can be sent to defined destinations, its security is greater than the open information on Web sites, and it can be generated and exchanged through older generation computers and modems. Moderators of list servers which distribute compiled reports or share discussion have control over the initial recipients of their mailings. Some groups require a subscription, many just seek donations. Where information is likely to be sensitive, moderators check the credentials of those seeking to obtain information. It is still important for those placing information and writing reports to realize that though there are boundaries to what they write entering the public domain, they are quite permeable. Those who reproduce information need to be aware of how what they say will serve the interests of those referred to. It could be well for there to be some ethical guidelines developed.

Among those who provide email newsletters are Compass Direct,<sup>11</sup> the East-West Church and Ministry Report, Human Rights Without Frontiers, Keston Institute, Open Doors and the World Evangelical Fellowship Religious Liberty Commission. Many of these also have Web sites as noted below.

## **3 INFORMATION ON THE WORLD WIDE WEB**

Material on the Web is in full view of all those with access to the internet. No matter how obscure the site, the world can beat a path to its door. With the aid of search engines like Yahoo and Alta Vista, its contents will be noted and indexed for people to find with little difficulty. While this is usually what is intended, sometimes it may provide more exposure than may have been anticipated.

The Web sites of organizations tend to be concerned with events, campaigns, issues, political and religious motivation, and the support of the reporting organizations. Some provide links to other groups. Some also provide online copies of older reports. What follows here are a selected number of sites relating to security situations in countries, human rights generally, and the persecution of Christians. There are many other sites which originate and reproduce material on the persecuted church. These can be readily located by using a search engine on the Web.

For general information on the security situation in different countries see the United States State Department 'Travel Warnings' and 'Consular Information Sheets'.<sup>12</sup> The United States Government also issues country reports on Human Rights Practices.<sup>13</sup>

### **3.1 Amnesty International (<http://www.amnesty.org/>)**

Amnesty International was formed in 1961. It is directed at defined groups and individuals who are 'prisoners of conscience' and seeks to be even handed in its investigation of countries with a wide range of political and religious systems. Western

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<sup>11</sup> 11. Compass Direct is widely quoted, but does not appear to have a website. It can be contacted by email at [compassdr@compuserve.com](mailto:compassdr@compuserve.com)

<sup>12</sup> 12. [http://travel.state.gov/travel\\_warnings.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel_warnings.html)

<sup>13</sup> 13. [http://www.state.gov/www/global/human\\_rights/1997\\_hrp\\_report/97hrp\\_report\\_toc.html](http://www.state.gov/www/global/human_rights/1997_hrp_report/97hrp_report_toc.html)

governments have found it salutary to also be subject to scrutiny. The Amnesty annual report, news and resources are available online.

### **3.2 Human Rights Without Frontiers (<http://www.hrwf.net>)**

Human Rights Without Frontiers is based in Belgium and has been particularly involved in monitoring the way in which European concerns about cults have spilt over into government action against a wide range of Christian groups which would be regarded as mainstream in the English speaking world. Its material is available in French, English, Italian and German, in print, and by email. Select material is also available on its website.

### **3.3 Institute for East-West Christian Studies (<http://www.samford.edu/groups/global/ewcmreport/>)**

Although the situation of Christians in the former Soviet Union and East Central Europe is much better than it was under Communism, it is still far from ideal, especially for newer denominations, evangelicals and other religious minorities. The reports of the Institute are important for their analysis of the situation and informed practical advice for those contemplating work in the area. Along with its director, Mark Elliott, the Institute moved in 1999 to The Global Center, Beeson Divinity School at Samford University, Birmingham, Alabama, USA. The *East-West Church & Ministry Report* is available in print and as online email editions. The Spring 1999 issue has material on internet resources.<sup>14</sup> Group discounts are available, and articles from earlier issues can be obtained from the website.

### **3.4 Keston Institute (<http://www.keston.org/>)**

Keston Institute was founded by Michael Bourdeaux and for many years was unique in the integrity of its reporting and analysis of the situation of Christians of all denominations in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Its archive of *samizdat* (underground press material), now housed in Oxford, is a major resource. It monitors freedom of religion and researches religious affairs in communist and post communist countries. Sample material is available on its website, and its news service is available by email and print subscription. Keston founded the journal, *Religion in Communist Lands*, now *Religion State and Society*. It also publishes *Frontier*. Books and articles by Michael Bourdeaux, the late Jane Ellis and others associated with Keston are essential reading for understanding the history of Christianity under Russian communism as well as for engaging with the ongoing complexities of religion in countries which continue to operate with a totalitarian mind-set.

### **3.5 Open Doors International (<http://www.solcon.nl/odi/index.htm>)**

Open Doors was founded in 1955 to support the distribution of Bibles into Communist countries in Eastern Europe. It now has a global ministry 'to go where faith costs the most, to equip and encourage Christians who are suffering for their faith world-wide'.<sup>15</sup> Its website includes a World Watch List<sup>16</sup> which ranks countries and tracks changes since it began in January 1993. On a point system, those with less than 10 points are generally considered to have freedom of religion. There are currently 88 countries with points from

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<sup>14</sup> 14. Mark Elliott and Sharyl Corrado, comps., 'Internet Resources on Religion', *East-West Church & Ministry Report* 7.2 (Spring 1999), pp. 12-14

<sup>15</sup> 15. Ministry Highlights <http://www.solcon.nl/odi/whatdone.htm>

<sup>16</sup> 16. See <http://www.solcon.nl/odi/wwlist.htm>

10 to over 80. Muslim and Communist countries provide the most difficult contexts on this analysis. An indication is given of trends, the degree of uncertainty attached to the results, and an estimate of the Christian population in each country. The list is compiled with the aid of a questionnaire which is available on the Web for people to complete and submit.<sup>17</sup> A short analysis is updated from time to time<sup>18</sup> and maps for 1970 and 1995 can be found in the *Atlas of World Christianity*.<sup>19</sup> A recent service from Open Doors USA<sup>20</sup> is a 90 second daily audio 'Frontline World Report'.<sup>21</sup>

### **3.6 World Evangelical Fellowship Religious Liberty Commission (<http://www.worldevangelical.org/noframes/2rlcintr.htm>)**

The story of the development of the Religious Liberty Commission since its formation in 1992 is part of the revival of the work of the World Evangelical Fellowship and has proved one of its most necessary and successful commissions. Its website contains news items concerning the persecuted church<sup>22</sup> and includes material on the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted church.<sup>23</sup> Email news is available to approved subscribers.

## **4 CONCLUSION**

It is appreciated that there are many other groups besides those mentioned here who also have a vital part to play in using the tools of email and the World Wide Web to share information about the persecuted church, to be advocates for relief, and to learn from those for whom faith in Jesus Christ carries a price socially, economically, in education, and even of life itself. I apologize to those who feel they should have been included in this brief article and who are not. Those that are mentioned are representative and serve to highlight some of the issues of interpretation that I have raised. It is hoped that what is shared here increases awareness of the electronic resources available and of the people that it is ultimately all about, and that it contributes in a small way to a better understanding not only of the complexities of being involved, but the necessity of doing so regardless.

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# The Unity of Martyrdom and Communion with Christ

France Quéré

**Keywords:** Confession, martyrdom, faith, suffering, hope, witness, communion of saints

## THE UNITY OF MARTYRDOM

We have seen three periods, and three meanings of martyrdom: the name of Christ, the freedom of the Spirit, and social justice. We separated these ideas only for the sake of clarity and because the historical development prompted us to do so: it is true that some died confessing Christ, others because their conscience would not bend before any human master, and a third group because they were fighting against contempt for and annihilation of the poor.

However, we should go beyond this apparent contrast which dissolves in the profundity of the choices made. Constants appear, if only among the persecutors who have nothing to envy one another for from one age to another in terms of barbarism; they have done all the evil that it is possible to do to human beings. But let us see above all that the different approaches of our martyrs stem from a single centre, belief in Christ, and are constantly interlaced. Who would dare to confess Christ without concern for his or her impoverished brothers and sisters, and without holding his or her head high before Caesar? Who can claim to be free if they do not allow their neighbours to be, because they have no food, and if they do not invoke the supreme dispenser of freedom? Who can believe themselves to be vehicles of justice if they do not attend to the perpetrators of slavery and, taking the side of humanity, do not stand up to the power which takes only its own side; or if they do not serve, in the person of the poor, the figure of the one who made himself poor to crown them with his glory?

### The Service of the Humiliated

Causes cannot therefore be dissociated, and the vast number of the oppressed is always present in the actions, taken of their own will, which lead Christians to martyrdom, even if they do not specifically defend their cause as Christian. Neither Jan Hus nor Polycarp died for themselves; had only their own interests been at stake, they would have taken a

course other than dying. Moreover, we should not believe that they fought for heavenly thoughts, in contrast to contemporary commitment to all humankind.

How could the martyrs of times before ours have avoided commitment? The temporal home of the spirit, if it is that which was thought the only one worthy of honour at the end of the Middle Ages, is at the same time the fleshly body and the human city; and the Lord on whom Christians in antiquity called inhabits the same places. As he said, he is present in each one of us, and specially in the person of the poor. No one in the name of faith or honour can neglect these vast areas of history and human individuals.

Thomas More refused to take an oath which dishonoured his country and looked for the unity of the universal church. Behind the voices that Joan heard was the wounded honour of a nation. The apostolic fathers who left writings before undergoing martyrdom bear witness that they too demanded the bread that was the due of the poor. Ignatius and Polycarp preach 'help for the widow, the orphan, the afflicted, the captive, the freedman, the hungry and the thirsty'. Their presence is part of the design of the God for whom they die. Listen to the prayer which Polycarp uttered before being taken away, in which he commended to God those whom he knew, 'rich and modest, noble and obscure', all equally objects of his paternal affection.

These men accepted suffering because their conviction extended beyond themselves to serve the human community and take its part on earth. However, they differ from our age in that they did not make the prince feel ashamed of the miserable state of the world. In this respect they believe him to be ineffective, distant—as he is—and literally irresponsible. It is to the Christians that he turns in looking after the city, since they have received the light. Since they have received it, should they not give it? So let them build their world, let them mould with full hands this glebe tainted with avarice! Let the church be the first glimmerings of the justice that is heralded.

So, far from taking them aside into the heavens, faith nails them to these kingdoms of the earth, which are promised to the meek to inherit and the love of which they sometimes confess.

### **The Freedom of the Spirit**

The freedom of the Spirit did not wait for the end of the Middle Ages to kindle its little flame, which does not flicker under threat. It is interior to faith, and stamps it with original features.

The first is this: thanks to this freedom, the church has not spoken only through the mouth of the wise. The martyrdom of which it is the cause gives a hearing to the voice of a people, without distinctions of class, fortune, education, age and—something which is more rare—sex. Faith invests men and women born to shadows and silence with an authority which is bestowed only on the powerful. Old men and frail young women show it to Caesar. Neither group, however, are rebels in principle. On the modest stage on which they play their part—the city, their workplace, the ties of blood and solidarity—one can see nothing to hold against them. They show themselves subject to those who govern them, whose institutions they judge to be excellent. However, there remains a diffuse yet stubborn opposition to a power which glorifies itself and makes itself an end in itself; the race of free men professes political irreligion. Down with the cult of the emperors! Let them govern, fair enough, but let them respect the two limits which bound human empires: the heaven above them and the conscience which judges them before heaven. Christian martyrdom is based on opposition to a power which takes itself as an absolute point of reference and closes the world in on itself: faith opens it up on the basis of a principle which surpasses human beings, reduces all its grandeur to the humble rule

which measures them: because they are fallen, subject to error, the world is not their work and they must only serve it.

Christians will still die today without having the claim that 'Caesar is Lord' extracted from them. Originally, there was this superhuman silence which deafened a stunned people, everywhere a free mind which buttressed itself against the folly of the great and haunted their sleep. According to Anouilh, the king says to Thomas More, 'As for you, your conscience is always sitting there among us, in robes of state.' But note what puts the powers at risk: a homily in a chapel, voices whispering in the ears of a country girl, a fragile old man praying in silence.

The fury with which the state rages shows that in spite of the disparity of forces it finds its most redoubtable adversary in independent judgment. That was formerly the case with some wise men. Through Christ it becomes the honour of a people, which affirms, before Alain, that 'the spirit never owes obedience'.

### **Confession of the Christ**

However, in the case of Christians the formula is not quite correct. From outside, their freedom looks like rebellion. Within, it is confused with an obedience made an absolute, which has a name because it has a master, Jesus Christ. 'I look to my judge,' exclaimed Joan, 'who is the master of heaven; yes, I look to my creator. I love him with all my heart.' Polycarp echoes this: 'I have served him eighty-six years.' And in this century there is the same obstinate voice of Monsignor Romero: 'We obey the order of God before that of human beings.'

They all explained themselves. They did not depart from the general spinelessness through personal exhibitionism or in the pride of an elitist intelligence. They simply heard the incessant childlike voice which conscience adopts when it begins to speak. They heard in themselves someone whom they knew and loved. Socrates called it his demon, the Christian calls it Christ. The demon was for Socrates, Christ is for us and for ever. That is the difference.

Moreover their personal drama is lost in the vastness of an eternal design into which they throw themselves without fear and sometimes without displeasure. It is not out of false courtesy that so many of them thank their persecutors who have launched them beyond measure into the infinity of which they have dreamed so much: from this position they regard as negligible the favours or the furies of the earth, and simply await the moment when they cross the threshold of blessedness.

So martyrdom is always *a confession of faith*, secret or expressed. In freedom, the right of conscience does not end up in an individual sufficiency: it goes before God in wonder; the law effaces itself before the legislator to whom the faithful commend themselves and others. For their discretion over the mistakes of others is by no means the least feature of their freedom. They do not accuse; they confront their persecutors, full of humanity, if not of humour. If they protest, it is at the evil done by their brothers, never that which they undergo.

Just as in effect freedom is obedience, the cause of the poor in which martyrdom seems to become secularized is also a confession of Christ. The modern age reveals the light of the kingdom in mutual human expectation, human devotion to the values of solidarity which can take political forms and sometimes seems to become swallowed up in them. This broadening of the Christian vocation should not appear as a break in the tradition of martyrdom: that remains a struggle against the powers of darkness which corrupt the heart. The twentieth-century martyrs refuse to sacrifice men and women to mammon, the new idol of our time. Their combat is also spiritual. They persist in confronting oppressive power; they stimulate independence of judgment, insensitive to the seductions of money

and power, and they flourish above all in faithfulness to service of the most abandoned, where faith contemplates the form of Christ in the present.

### **Risen or Crucified, the Eternal Christ**

On one point modern martyrs part company with their predecessors. But is it a separation? They do not encounter Christ at the same stage of his ministry. The Christians of old confess the risen Christ, already entered into his final glory. This kingdom, which has been inaugurated, supplants historical landmarks and puts the martyrs in these new times. The judgment, the supreme manifestation of the divine omnipotence, makes our texts groan with formidable rumblings. That does not terrify these Christians; on the contrary. Nothing seems to delight them more than to announce the sanctions to which the saints themselves are exposed. The gentle Crispina sincerely believes that God reserves eternal punishment for her if she evades the ephemeral persecution of men. The severity which the martyrs feel that they escape only by suffering is the sign of the values that they defend, hence their contentment. Firmly counting on divine justice, they await it, and their patience, which the oppressors exploited to redouble their barbarities, is in antiquity still a process of justice itself.

Our contemporaries have turned their eyes away from the glory of the heavens, obscured by the sorrow of the world, which is almost infinite. So many millions of people are the victims of poverty, oppression, war, meaninglessness. 'How do we talk of God after Auschwitz?' asks Adorno. In any case it is impossible to celebrate peacefully God's power and even his justice, in the old sense of the term, according to which God awaits the end of the human spectacle to judge his creatures. If he is powerful he should intervene instead of waiting; if he is just he should help instead of judging.

'Only a powerless God can help,' said Bonhoeffer, before Elie Wiesel. Faith meditates on the scourged Christ, the power of love bestowed, that is, of passion and suffering, but without the peril of being destroyed. Faith seeks him among the humble, the scorned in whom he is embodied. The Lord of the twentieth century is the suffering servant of Second Isaiah, with wounded face and hands, which also tend the unfortunates of whom he is so intimately the brother.

God has made himself known in history. He has not asked his faithful to love elsewhere than on the earth where they have met him, nor otherwise than as he loved himself, dedicating himself to the liberation of our humiliated race.

## **COMMUNION WITH CHRIST**

More intimately, in their communion martyrs are united with the body and heart of Christ. In Smyrna, in Santiago, under Domitian and under the colonels, in the arena or in the gulag, the same name is cried out or repeated in silence, a single master: Jesus Christ. For each person it is the thought which arouses and harries as much as it fulfils. The martyrs follow Christ step by step, sharing in what he said, did, and underwent.

### **Suffering**

'Be imitators of him', the ancient preaching recommends. And Jesus himself indicated the nature of the obedience which they had sworn to him: 'If they persecuted me they will persecute you.' So to imitate him is to die. The shedding of blood fully accomplishes this 'imitation of Jesus Christ,' the condition and the reward of which are recalled by Ignatius of Antioch: 'If we are not completely ready, with the help of Christ, to run to death, to imitate his passion, his life is not in us.'

We should examine these last words carefully: 'His life is not in us.' For they go beyond the simple ideal of imitation which good disciples seem to pursue. In being conformed to the life of the saviour, his passion and his death, the martyrs are united with him. 'You will forsake me', Jesus had said to his disciples, who were in effect abandoning him. But those who die in his name do not abandon him. How many have dared to confess, before the pallid faces of the executioners, their swords and their stakes: 'I am not alone'.

The trial of the martyrs binds them to Christ by the sacred bonds of the theological virtues. Here we can see the power of faith. Christ is with them, in them, and constrains them with his love. To her warder, amazed at hearing her groaning in the pains of childbirth, Perpetua replies: 'At this moment it is I who suffer, but then another will be in me, who will suffer for me because I too will suffer for him.'

Taken to Rome to be thrown to the wild beasts, St Ignatius trembles with joy. 'I am God's grain, I will be milled by the teeth of beasts and I will become the bread of Christ.' He becomes a body with Christ, he makes himself the body of Christ. The evocation of the eucharist and, by others, of a baptism of blood, manifests the presence of the dead and risen Christ, who has become indissociable from the one who has suffered for him.

### **Hoping**

But what will be the bliss of the kingdom if Christ is already their companion on earth! Hope constrains the martyrs, hope of a well-beloved and definitive country which will receive them, transfigured along with their sorrows. Death is a transition, not an end. The witnesses are struck by the cheerfulness or the serenity of the martyrs before their execution. The chronicler of the community of Lyons writes that 'Blandina shone with joy, as if she had been summoned to a wedding banquet and not to be delivered over to the beasts'. This old servant, said to be ugly and doubtless an object of scorn, entered the arena like a young beauty whom a prince comes to escort to a seat at his side at the eternal feast. Thomas More, with his customary humour, counts on taking up in this peaceful realm the 'good conversations' that he had with his royal persecutor. And the theologian Bonhoeffer told his companions on the eve of his execution: 'It is the end, but for me the beginning of life.'

If so many are impatient to die, it is not in order to escape the torments earlier; it is because these torments are not responding quickly enough to the call which rang in the ears of the first to be persecuted: 'Come to the Father.'

And the church does not believe that the martyr is swallowed up in death. Born to a more worthy life, in heaven the martyrs become intercessors to whom the church appeals. This is the way in which a cult of the martyrs developed from the beginning, a development from which would later emerge the cult of the saints.

### **Loving**

Finally, and here the connection is obvious, the martyr achieves love. Christ had said: 'There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends.' Is not loving Christ a matter of loving like him, i.e. to the ultimate offering of oneself? Polycarp calls those who have endured to the end 'imitators of true love'. Not all deserve this title, for it can be that someone's heart fails.

However, in the prisons, the affection which united the captives amazed those who witnessed it: they supported one another. Their sacrifice, far from terrifying the dispersed community of the faithful, strengthened its courage and led to revivals. There was no trace of harshness in the martyrs towards their persecutors. Thomas More still conceded readily to his adversaries the freedom of judgment which he allowed himself, and did not condemn them. The Jesuit Daniel in 1648, encircled by the Iroquois and already pierced

all over with their arrows, repeated as long as he had strength to speak, to God, that he was offering his blood for the flock; and to his murderers, that they would always find the saviour ready to receive them in grace if they had recourse to his mercy.

### **Witnessing**

So it is that the most profound sense of the word martyrdom is witnessing. What power can the fury of hatred have beyond that of killing? Again we must understand that it is certainly possible to suppress a life, but one cannot boast of having taken it, since it has already been offered. Christ himself invoked this supreme independence, exalted by the act which above all seemed to abolish it: 'No one takes my life, but I give it.' From this gift, Charles de Foucauld deduced: 'Live today as if you were going to die a martyr this evening.'

However, it is not so much the person at whom the persecutor strikes but what he or she affirms; it is this that provokes anger. It is easy to strike someone, but hands flowing with blood do not prevent the words from taking wing. Though one voice may be silenced, the whole of the life presses on behind it and continues to bear witness. The scandal of such a death serves to make the message resound. It is the crime which reveals the perfection of a life, the ultimate meaning that supported it, by inextricably intertwining reasons for living and reasons for dying.

It is worth remembering a comment of Clement of Alexandria in the third century: 'Martyrdom', he said, 'is fullness, not because it finishes a human life but because it brings love to the fullest point.' On Golgotha, simply because he had seen Christ breathe his last, a pagan exclaimed: 'Truly this man was the Son of God.' The persecutors collaborate in spite of themselves with the growing influence which they ridicule. Who would remember the African bishop Janani Luwum had he merely devoted himself to his everyday tasks, however conscientiously, and had not given to someone who advised him to flee an answer which made his service an example: 'I am not afraid. I am the archbishop. I must stay.'

The persecutors were well aware that in killing someone they were bringing the meaning of a life to white heat, definitively demonstrating the force of a conviction, and making not so much a corpse as a martyr. An admirable life and an exemplary death are beyond their grasp.

### **Conquering**

What is left to them? Torture, which serves to dissociate life from death, so closely interwoven in a common task. In this terrible transition the torturers have the victim at their mercy. It is an occasion for destroying before their eyes, and above all before those of the victim, both the physical body and that for which the victim lived. He or she is to die twice, lose both life and the meaning of that life. In this way the torturers count on heaping ignominy on the cause that the martyr defends. That is why the pagans did not choose their sanctions at random. By casting Christians into the arena they forced these people to play roles in a spectacle that they could not bear to watch when they were free; they made them agents in these abominations, hoping that the lofty thoughts which always inspired them would be submerged in ridicule and horror. By torturing their victims, the executioners of the modern age seek to vilify them with the same atrocious obstinacy. What is left of nobility and courage in this heap of flesh, this haggard face, those mad avowals? If those who are tortured speak, they repudiate their gods and repudiate themselves.

But broken, lacerated, burned, the majority hold their heads high. This is what the ancients called combat: not dying, but suffering, without grovelling in the abject misery to

which their executioners have reduced them. They remain human beings. And God does not cease to be born in the amazing manner of their bodies. This criminal whom they seek to silence raises his song of innocence even more loudly; the cause he or she defends takes flight before the scandalized eyes of the world, passes on a message of peace and love, and dares to wash both human beings and their violence in the blood which has been shed. So Bishop Vladimir died with words of forgiveness for those who assassinated him.

The life, the death, the suffering and the profound significance which all these have come together in the absolute form of an invincible witness.

### **The Church Around Them**

But more than persecutor and persecuted are needed to make a martyr. Around them the martyrs also needed the world, for which they are always the sacrifice. Others will speak when the victims are no longer in a position to do so themselves.

If martyrs owe their title to what they were, it is firmly connected with those who spoke of them and finished the story. This story emerges from monuments, from recollections, from books in which the church has a living memorial, and even more, its glory and its substance. 'Martyrdom', says one text from Vatican II, 'is considered by the church to be an eminent grace and the supreme proof of charity.' And if there is no witness to take over from the silence, the church still remembers these obscure servants with just as much respect in its assemblies as those whom it calls 'all the saints'.

To the eyes of faith, violence begins instead of ends, perpetuates what it had thought to break. At the funeral of Cardinal Stepinac, the Archbishop of Milan, later pope under the name of Paul VI, celebrated this proud permanency. 'The passion of Christ continues ... It was necessary for the Christ to suffer. It is still necessary for the church to suffer. For its fidelity to Christ, for its authenticity. To renew its capacity to speak to the world and save it. Martyrdom is one of its charisms.' T.S. Eliot, in *Murder in the Cathedral*, expressed such hope like this: 'We rejoice and mourn in the death of martyrs. We mourn, for the sin of the world that has martyred them; we rejoice, that another soul is numbered among the Saints in Heaven, for the glory of God and for the salvation of men.' And let us remember those of old who approached death as a threshold, certain of entering the kingdom of 'unquenchable light'.

But does one have to be a Christian to perceive a dawn in the heart of such darkness? Let us listen to someone who, without sharing this hope, does not hesitate to write: 'I, who do not believe in redemption, ended by thinking that the enigma of atrocity is not more fascinating than that of the simplest act of heroism or love. But only sacrifice can look torture in the eyes; and the God of Christ would not be God without the crucifixion.'

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## **Towards a Modern Protestant Theology of Martyrdom**

# Joseph Tson

**Keywords:** Suffering, martyrdom, divine image, kingdom of God, providence, glory, testing, character.

The Westminster Catechism asks the question: 'What is the purpose of man?' The answer given is this: 'To glorify God and enjoy Him forever.' I believe that while this answer is good, a much more important question needs to be asked: What is *God's* purpose with man? In other words, why did God create man? What is God's final purpose with him and how is that purpose achieved? These are the most important questions that we can ask today.

The Bible gives us a clear answer to the question of why God created mankind. God created man in his own image with the purpose of giving him dominion over all creation. This purpose of God has never been changed or thwarted or abandoned. The fall of man did create a problem, but that problem was solved in the cross of Christ. However, a strange thing has happened in Protestant theology: the redemption of man through the cross of Christ has been made so central that for many, it has become the primary purpose of human history. This is equal to saying that God created man in order to save him. This simple reformulation shows us by just how far our theology has missed the mark.

The central purpose of God in human history has always been to make for himself a people 'conformed to the image of his Son', so that Christ would be 'the first-born among many brethren' ([Rom. 8:29](#)), ultimately, 'bringing many sons to glory' ([Heb. 2:10](#)). God's final purpose with these 'sons' is to 'put [them] in charge of all his possessions' ([Matt. 24:47](#); [Lk. 12:44](#)). Throughout the course of earthly history, God has been at work shaping his children, forming their character, preparing them for ruling, and testing their faithfulness and reliability. He does this by giving them tasks and responsibilities, by confronting them with difficulties and challenges, and by testing their allegiance to himself and their obedience to his rules and commandments. Moreover, God will continue this work until the end of history. The Bible refers to the realization of God's final purpose with man in several ways: at times, it is called obtaining the inheritance; at other times, reigning with Christ or being glorified with Christ; and it is also referred to as having treasures in heaven, or simply, as having rewards in heaven.

One of the basic arguments of this book has been that we must see suffering and martyrdom as an integral part of this ultimate purpose of God with humankind. More exactly, suffering and martyrdom should be perceived as two of the best means by which God achieves his purposes with man. Both suffering and self-sacrifice in the service of Christ produce the character traits that will bring a child of God to the closest likeness of Christ. This should be *our* goal because a Christlike character is the essential qualification for reigning with Christ.

Another basic affirmation of this book has been that the character which a person develops here on earth will remain a part of that person after death and will become a main issue for investigation at the judgement seat of Christ. The goal toward which we must aim in our earthly life is to develop a character that will be found blameless on that future day. God has to be pleased with what he sees in the configuration or the structure of our character. The works of each one of us will be judged there, but those works will simply reveal the character we developed in our lifetime on earth. In the end, our works and our character will both determine the verdict of the Judge: the place and rank he will assign to us in the kingdom of heaven. In fact, God's decision will reflect whether or not each one of us has fulfilled the goal for which God created man from the beginning.



A third basic thesis of this book has been that man has not been called to earn his place and rank in heaven. It is God who has predestined him for a specific place and rank. God has redeemed that individual and has given him the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit, then, who produces Christlikeness ([2 Cor. 3:18](#)) and a godly character (the fruit of the Spirit) in him. God's enabling grace makes one capable to do the good works that God has prepared for him to do. Meanwhile, God, in his goodness and generosity, has determined to give all his possessions to his children. Due to all these divine investments, the possibility of merit is utterly excluded, leaving no reasons whatsoever for us to boast. At the same time, however, all the things that the Holy Spirit is said to be doing in a person are also that person's own responsibility and obligation. In this way, the activity of God and the responsibility of man go hand in hand throughout the entire training process.

Suffering and martyrdom have to be seen as part of God's plan; they are his instruments by which he achieves his purposes in history and by which he will accomplish his final purpose with man. As we look at them from God's standpoint, we are able to see that they act in two directions. In the first place, by means of the suffering and martyrdom of his children, God is working certain things in society and in history. In the second place, by means of the same suffering and self-sacrifice, God is working something in that child, in his inner structure or character. This is a very important differentiation, and we shall now look at suffering and martyrdom under these two headings: suffering and martyrdom as part of God's strategy in the world; and, suffering and martyrdom as God's methods for forming and shaping the character of his children.

## **SUFFERING AND MARTYRDOM: GOD'S STRATEGY IN THE WORLD**

Jesus Christ, as King of kings and Lord of lords, calls people to himself and demands from them total allegiance to himself. Nothing of this world, not father or mother, husband or wife, son or daughter, or material goods, ought to stand between him and his children. Jesus expects them to learn from him and to become like him. Then Jesus sends them into the world as his Father sent him into the world, to spread his message and to be his witnesses. He knows that the world will hate his witnesses and will turn against them with merciless violence. Nonetheless, he expects them to meet that hatred with love, and to face that violence with glad acceptance, following his example by suffering and dying for the lost world. Their suffering and martyrdom are prompted by their allegiance to his own Person and are endured for the purpose of spreading his gospel. Christ's disciples do not seek these things for their own sake, and they do not inflict these on themselves. Their goal is not to suffer and to die; on the contrary, their goal is Christ's Person and Christ's cause in the world, the spreading of his gospel.

Suffering for Christ is not only the suffering of persecution. It begins when one leaves close relatives for the service of Christ. For some, it means selling their possessions and giving them to the poor, which often means giving them for the propagation of the gospel. For others, suffering for Christ may mean agonizing in prayer for the cause of Christ, or agonizing and toiling for the building up of the body of Christ and the perfecting of the saints. Again, to clarify this concept, suffering for Christ is not a self-inflicted suffering. The disciple of Christ seeks to do the will of Christ and to promote the cause of Christ. However, suffering for Christ does mean that the disciple will *voluntarily* involve himself in suffering and in sacrificial living for Christ and his gospel.

Furthermore, a disciple of Christ thinks as a slave of Christ: he is totally at the disposition of the Master. It is the Master who decides what kind of service this particular disciple should perform. The first duty of the disciple is, therefore, to discover the will of his Master and to do it with joy and passion. If and only if the disciple does his duty, can

he be certain that his Master is always with him, living in and through him to accomplish his own purposes.

Martyrdom is the function God gives to some of his elect to literally die for the sake of Christ and his gospel. From what the Scriptures intimate, it is apparent that there is a fixed number of God's children who have been predestined by God for this supreme sacrifice. For some, martyrdom might be a quick event, like being shot or beheaded, but for others it could also be preceded by torture. God may have in his plan a long martyrdom of toiling in a labour camp or the misery and pain of a long imprisonment. In such a situation, even if the Christian is released after some time and the actual death occurs at home because of his health having been shattered by the long detention and suffering, I believe that God still reckons his death as a martyrdom. In our more sophisticated age, martyrdom might also take the shape of an imprisonment in a psychiatric hospital—a modern form of torture that is possibly the most cruel form of martyrdom—where one's mental health and even one's personality are utterly ruined by means of drugs and other psychological torture.

God does everything with a purpose. If he chooses to call his children to suffering and self-sacrifice, he must have very important purposes to achieve through them. Hence, it is the duty of the children to obey their Father even if they do not understand the purpose or rationale behind the Father's command. But the Father wants his children to understand him, because he wants them to develop a mind like his. Therefore, he has revealed his mind, his purposes, and his methods to his children in his written Word and in his Incarnate Word.

God entered into history by sending his incarnate Son as a suffering slave who would end his own earthly life enduring torture and martyrdom. In this event, God revealed to us that suffering and self-sacrifice are his specific methods for tackling the problems of rebellion, of evil, and of the sin of mankind. Self-sacrifice is the only method consistent with his own nature. For instance, God cannot respond to hate with hate, because if he did, he would borrow not only the method but also the nature of the one who is the originator of hate, the evil one. God can respond only with love, because he *is* love, and by suffering and sacrificing himself for the ones who hate him, he expresses the essence of his own nature.

Now, the ones who are born of God have become partakers of the nature of God ([2 Pet. 1:4](#)). Therefore, the children of God are called to tackle the problems of this world with the same *agape*-love which is the nature of God ([1 John 4:4-21](#)). More than this, Christ united himself with his brethren in a union that is comparable to his union with the Father ([John 17:21-26](#)). Christ lives in them and continues his work in the world through them. But he has not changed the strategy he used when he was in the world. His method is still the method of the cross. With this in mind, Christ told his disciples that he would send them into the world just as his Father had sent him into the world; in other words, he sent them to be in the same position and to conquer by the same method, namely, the method of the cross. For precisely this reason, Jesus asked them to take up their own crosses and to follow his example by going into all the world to preach the gospel (to witness), to serve others, and to die for others. Their crosses represent their voluntary sacrificial involvement in the fulfillment of their Father's purposes with mankind.

There are three basic results of the deaths of the martyrs.

## **MARTYRDOM AND THE TRIUMPH OF GOD'S TRUTH**

The unredeemed world lives in spiritual darkness. The eyes of unbelievers have been darkened by Satan, resulting in their hatred of the light of truth. For people who have lived

a long time in darkness, a bright light that suddenly shines upon them produces pain. They cannot stand the light. They hate the light, and they do their best to put it out. Jesus explained the world's reaction to his own coming into the world in these terms ([John 3:19–20](#)), and he told his disciples to expect exactly the same kind of treatment.

Speaking in modern terms, each group of people on this planet considers its own religion to be one of its most precious treasures. Thus, telling them that their faith is wrong or untrue becomes an unforgivable offence and insult against them. The attempt to change their religion is perceived as an attack on their 'national identity'. This is why Christian missionaries are met with hostility and violence in every place to which they carry the gospel. For his part, the missionary must be convinced that the population to which he takes the Word lives in the lie of Satan and is damned to hell as a result of it. If the missionary is not convinced of this, he will not risk his life to kindle the light in their midst.

However, when the ambassador of Christ speaks the truth in love, and meets death with joy, a strange miracle occurs: the eyes of unbelievers are opened, they are enabled to see the truth of God, and this leads them to believe in the gospel. Ever since the centurion's eyes were opened at Calvary, ever since he believed that Jesus was the Son of God *because he had seen the manner of His death* ([Mk. 15:39](#)), thousands and thousands of Christian martyrdoms over the centuries have produced the same results. Moreover, this was precisely what Tertullian had in mind when he wrote that the blood of the martyrs is the seed out of which new Christians are born. Many, many groups of people on this planet have testified that the darkness which had been over them was dissipated only when a missionary was killed there. However, countless areas and peoples of the world today still experience a darkness that will be vanquished only when enough Christians have given up their lives in martyrdom among them.

## **MARTYRDOM AND THE DEFEAT OF SATAN**

Jesus saw his own coming into this world as an invasion of the strong man's house in order to spoil his goods ([Matt. 12:29](#)). He saw the Prince of this world being cast out at his own death ([Jn. 12:31–33](#)), and as a result of the ministry of his own disciples ([Lk. 10:17–19](#)). Jesus taught them not to be afraid of the ones who can kill only the body, and he charged them to bravely lose their lives in order to gain the victory ([Matt. 10:26–39](#)). Hence, John was simply following the teaching of his Lord when he depicted the casting out of Satan and his defeat through the deaths of the martyrs in [Revelation 12:9–11](#).

Satan has two instruments with which he keeps humans in bondage and slavery. His first instrument is sin. The sins of people are Satan's 'certificate of ownership'. But this document was nailed to the cross of Calvary and was cancelled by the death of Christ ([Col. 2:14–15](#)). Satan's second instrument is the fear of dying ([Heb. 2:14–15](#)). Again, by his own death, Jesus liberated his own from the fear of death. When the martyrs meet their death without fear, Satan's last instrument is rendered powerless, and he is crushed and defeated.

As the deceiver of the nations, Satan maintains their enslavement by keeping them in the darkness of his deception. When the martyrs cause the truth of God to shine brightly among the nations, those who were formerly in the bondage of darkness respond by turning back to God. The death of the martyrs opens the eyes of unbelievers, and when they see the light, Satan's power over them is gone. We have further proof of this reality in the Book of Revelation, where we see the knowledge of God coming to all the nations as a result of the deaths of the martyrs ([Rev. 11:1–19](#); [14:1–12](#); [15:2–4](#)). The martyrs are shown to defeat Satan by bringing all the nations to God through their witness and death.

The story of Job shows us another aspect of Satan's defeat by the faithfulness in suffering of God's people. Job's refusal to curse God demonstrated to the whole population of heaven that God had genuine worshippers on the earth, thus proving Satan wrong. The suffering of Job was watched by the hosts of heaven as an extraordinary spectacle. It appears that Paul had the experience of Job in mind when, speaking of the suffering of the apostles, he said that they 'have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men' ([1 Cor. 4:9](#)).

Writing from prison about his own ministry, Paul told the Ephesians that 'the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places' now have the opportunity of knowing God's 'manifold wisdom' as it is being manifested in the church ([Eph. 3:10](#)). Paul was talking about the same wisdom of God that he had earlier described in [1 Cor. 1:17-31](#). This is the wisdom of God which the world considers utter foolishness: that he sent his only Son to die on the cross. However, the manifestation of God's wisdom in this world did not end with Jesus on the cross; it is continued in his children when they obey God's commission to go into the world and to sacrifice themselves for the cause of Christ. As they conquer by dying, God's children demonstrate his wisdom to the whole cosmos. Moreover, by their witness and death, Satan is discredited and defeated.

## **MARTYRDOM AND THE GLORY OF GOD**

Jesus described the outcome of his crucifixion as both his own glorification and as the glorification of God ([Jn. 12:27-32](#); [13:31-32](#)). Yet death by crucifixion was one of the most shameful and barbaric modes of execution; how could *that* be considered an act glorifying to God? The answer becomes clear when one sees what that act has revealed to the world. In Christ's voluntary suffering for the salvation of mankind, the true nature of God was revealed. His essence was shown to be perfect love, utterly and unconditionally giving itself to others, even enduring pain and death for them. The glory of God shines through the beauty and splendour of self-sacrifice as nowhere else, and most importantly, this glory of God, the glory of his self-sacrificing love, shines out in each martyrdom. For this reason, John referred to the martyrdom of Peter as 'the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God' ([Jn. 21:19](#), NIV). It was also the reason why Paul was so determined to glorify Christ by his own dying ([Philp. 1:20](#), NASB).

Martyrdom has the power of revealing the love of God to those in darkness. Herein lies its power to convince and to persuade: people see the love of God in the death of the martyr and are compelled to believe in God's love and sacrifice for them. Paul expressed the same idea in the concept of reflecting the image of Christ or the glory of God to other people through our suffering and our loving self-sacrifice for others ([2 Cor. 3:18](#); [4:1-15](#)). As the knowledge of Christ and the grace of God is spread to more and more people through the sacrifice of the children of God, there is more and more thanksgiving, praise, and glory given to God.

## **SUFFERING AND MARTYRDOM: FORMING THE CHARACTER OF THE ONE WHO ACCEPTS THEM**

God achieves great things in the world through the one who accepts his way of suffering and self-sacrifice. In the end, however, it turns out that the greatest things are achieved in those who suffer with the sufferer himself. The one who sacrificially accepts to be a blessing for others discover that, in the final analysis, he is the one who has harvested the greatest blessings.

In all the literature that we have studied, from the Book of Isaiah to the Book of Revelation, from the Books of the Maccabees to *The Martyrs' Mirror*, we have seen the following truth clearly expressed and taught: the ones who suffer and die for their faith will have special rewards and will enjoy special privileges in heaven. As we investigated this issue, we saw that there were two main questions to answer. The first one was this: What is the nature or the content of these rewards? Or, worded in a slightly different way, what are the things that are promised to us as our future rewards in heaven? The second question we then asked was the following: Upon what criteria will the distribution of these rewards be based? The latter is an especially acute question if one seriously believes that God in his sovereignty has destined everything for his children, and that he bestows everything on his children by grace.

I have already indicated, at the beginning of these concluding remarks, that the answers to these questions are found when one understands the final purpose of God with man. We have seen that God created man so that he would ultimately be a partner with his only begotten Son in the ruling of the affairs of the created universe. Now, we have to focus in on a few aspects of this final purpose of God with mankind.

To begin with, God created the man and the woman in his own image. The creation of humanity 'in his image' is interpreted here to include both a structural and a relational sense. In the structural sense, the human person was created as a responsible being, with the capacity to reason, to feel emotion, and to will freely. In the relational sense, God made man with the capacity to enter into relationships; from the beginning, God put the first man in relationship with himself, with his wife, with the created universe, and later on with other human beings. I used the word *capacity* in both areas because in both, man must learn and grow. While the image of God in man was damaged by the fall of man, it was not destroyed. The basic damage was resolved by Christ's redemption and by the new birth; yet the need to grow into that image or to develop it to full maturity is still there (cf. [2 Cor. 3:18](#); [Eph. 4:22-24](#); [Col. 3:9-10](#)).

A very important aspect of 'the image of God' in us is character. A person's character is made up of all the things that a person does 'by habit', or that 'are his custom to do'. They are the things that have been practised so much that they have become part of the inner structure or makeup of that person. These 'habits' come to be recognized as the 'way of being' of a certain person. Jesus expressed this concept with his analogy of the 'good tree' and the 'bad tree'. Each tree produces its kind of fruit naturally. Jesus made it very clear that we shall be judged according to what 'our tree' produces ([Matt. 7:16-20](#); [12:33-37](#); [Lk. 6:43-45](#)). However, it is very important for us to see that Jesus commanded us not only to *bring forth* good fruit, but he commanded *us* to 'make the tree good' ([Matt. 12:33](#), italics mine). Jesus also referred to this inner structure as 'the heart' of a person ([Matt. 15:19-20](#); [Mk. 7:20-23](#); [Lk. 6:45](#)). And again, Jesus made people directly responsible for the inner content of their lives, since it is out of 'the heart' that the outer behaviour flows ([Lk. 11:39-41](#)). Of course, this emphasis on *our* duty to change our own character does not mean that we can do it in our own power, but it does mean that we are responsible for using or not using the resources God has placed at our disposal.

There are three fundamental character traits that God aims to produce in us, and they are the most basic for our growth in Christlikeness. The first and most important is the willingness and the capacity to live under the authority of God. The attitude of submission and obedience to God, manifested by the fervent desire and diligent struggle to do things according to his commandments, is the basic trait that makes one fit to live harmoniously in the kingdom of God. God desires to have children who are free and capable of determining and choosing 'the good' themselves, and who, in that freedom, always choose to do what the Sovereign Father and Lord wants them to do. They would never presume



that there might be a better way than God's way of doing things. Since they are convinced that God's ways are always perfect and because they have the inner pleasure of doing the will of the Father, they will always fully obey him and will gladly submit to his commands.

The second most important character trait of a perfected child of God is *agape*-love. This love is the essence of the relationships in the Holy Trinity, in which each Person gives everything to the others and does everything for the others, to the honour and glory of the others. This is the love that produces a servant attitude even to the point of self-sacrifice. It makes service to others and self-sacrifice for others not a grudging obligation but a happy privilege.

The third character trait of a perfected child of God is wisdom. This is the capacity to apply the commandments of the Father and the ways of the Father in the most diverse and complex situations. It leads to combinations like 'speaking the truth in love' ([Eph. 4:15](#)) and other such Godlike attitudes and actions. Furthermore, a child of God displays wisdom when, possessing the freedom to choose between right and wrong, he always enjoys being totally obedient to the Father.

God did not desire robots that would automatically execute the tasks for which they had been previously programmed. He wanted free persons, capable of fellowship and partnership with him. But in order for this to happen, free persons need to have their character developed to this end in conditions and situations conducive to such growth. God, in his wisdom, decided that our present life on earth, with all its difficulties and challenges, is the kind of environment necessary for this purpose.

Suffering is a key aspect of the environment designed by God for the formation of his children's character. Christ himself was made 'perfect through suffering' ([Heb. 2:10](#), NIV). We are told that this meant, at least in part, that 'He learned obedience from the things which he suffered' ([Heb. 5:8](#), NASB), and that 'because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted' ([2:18](#), NIV). The Book of Hebrews, in the twelfth chapter, applies this principle to all the children of God. As his 'sons', we are commanded to 'endure hardship as discipline' ([12:7](#)), since 'God disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness' ([12:10](#)). 'Those who have been trained by it', discover on that final day that their suffering has produced in them 'a harvest of righteousness and peace' ([12:11](#)). Both the apostles Paul and James develop the idea that trials, afflictions, and temptations 'produce' in our character the qualities that will make us fit for our final destiny ([Rom. 5:1-5](#); [James 1:2-12](#)).

The suffering of Christ's messengers, when they are violently and brutally treated by the very people they are trying to reach with the truth, is an integral part of this process of Christlike character formation. As God's chosen ones suffer the arrests, tortures, and martyrdoms, special qualities are inscribed deep within their character, bringing them in the closest possible way to Christlikeness. This biblical teaching was well applied by Christians in the second and third centuries in their practice of calling the day when a Christian was martyred, the day of 'his perfection'. In addition, they recognized that Christians were not to pursue or to seek after these sufferings, inflicting them on themselves; they must pursue only Christ and Christ's ministry in the world. It is the Lord who chooses if and what kind of sufferings and tribulations will come to them.

Alongside God's purpose of *training* his children through suffering and martyrdom stands his equally important purpose of *testing* them. Again, this is a concept that is constantly taught in the Bible, both in the Old and the New Testaments. To summarize what was previously shown in the above study in greater detail, let us review the main points of Jesus' teaching on this subject, bringing in the concepts of δόκιμος and ἀδόκιμος used by Paul, James, and Peter.

On four different occasions, Jesus used the analogy of a king who entrusted his affairs to his slaves, and then went away, leaving them on their own for a long time. When the king came back, he gave rewards to his slaves according to the faithfulness they had demonstrated in the administration of what he had entrusted to them ([Matt. 24:45–51; 25:14–30](#); [Lk. 12:35–48; 19:11–27](#)). When he had finished telling them this parable, Jesus gave them his conclusions, as well as his practical applications for this analogy, in the form of another parable: the story of the shrewd steward ([Lk. 16:1–13](#))

1. If one is faithful in the administration of little things, one will be faithful in the administration of big things ([Lk. 16:10](#)). Accordingly, the awarding of smaller or greater positions of responsibility in the kingdom of heaven will correspond to the degree of faithfulness demonstrated by the ‘slave’ in the management of the things entrusted to him in this world ([Lk. 19:11–27](#)).
2. The riches of this world are not ‘true’ riches: they are merely temporary things. Nonetheless, if one is not faithful in their administration, one will not be given the ‘true’, eternal riches in heaven ([Lk. 16:11](#)).
3. The things we have in this world are not ours. We are ‘slaves’, and slaves do not have ownership of anything. On the other hand, we are also God’s children, and God has destined us for the possession of everything he has: the whole created universe has been designated as our inheritance. There is a catch, however. Although it is God’s bountiful generosity to give us everything he has, he will not entrust us with what is our own, if we are not faithful in managing the things of this world, of which we are not owners but simply stewards ([Lk. 16:12](#)). At the same time, we are not called to ‘earn’ the inheritance by the things we do in the service of God in this life; rather, we are called to do these ‘works’ in order to prove ourselves reliable and trustworthy.

Therefore, the tasks we are given to do on earth, the trials and sufferings we endure, and the sacrifices we make, are both *training* us, that is, they are producing in us the character or the capability for responsibilities in heaven, and they are *testing* us, that is, they are giving us the possibility to demonstrate our faithfulness to the One who is so generous that he wants to give us all that he has.

At the end of the production line in every factory is the ‘quality control’, the person who has the job of checking each product, making sure that it meets the standards of the maker and that it is fit to be launched on the market. The judgment seat of Christ is where we will face our own ‘quality control’. The verdict, in the words of Jesus, will be either ‘Well done, good and faithful slave, ... you are worthy’, or ‘You wicked, lazy slave’. In the words of the apostle Paul, the verdict will be either δόκιμος, that is, ‘tested and approved’ as fit for ruling with Christ, or ἀδόκιμος, that is, ‘tested and rejected’ as unfit for positions of responsibility.

Paul depicted the lamentable situation of a person who has been saved, that is, has been accepted in heaven, but who has no reward there. Although he is in heaven, he cannot be entrusted with any responsibility, because he is not capable of handling the authority to rule. The analogy of the vessels of different sizes is very useful at this point. All the ‘vessels’ in heaven will be filled to the brim. Each one will be filled to its full capacity. For this reason, not one of them can complain that it has not been given enough or that it should have been given more. Most significantly, we have learned from the above investigation that the capacity of each vessel is developed here on earth in the faithful service that each renders to the King.

Additionally, the Bible makes it clear that although a child of God may be submitted to the harshness of life in order to be tested for reliability, it is God himself who will provide

that child with all the necessary resources for success. As a result, his final victory does not provide him with any reasons for boasting; knowing this to be true, God's child will say with all his being: 'All that we have accomplished you have done for us' ([Isa. 26:12](#), NIV). The concept of personal merit cannot have any place in the thinking of a child of God who has learned that God gives to each one of his children both the willing and the achieving ([Philp. 2:13](#)).

It is very important for Christians living in affluent countries to understand the test of earthly riches. God wants us to keep for ourselves and for our family that which we truly need and to invest everything else in the promotion of his kingdom. The great temptation is to keep it all for ourselves, and the more we accumulate, the greater our desire to acquire even more. Our heart becomes tied to our riches, and they become our 'treasure'. Sadly, we do not realize that this is the essence of the test to which we are being submitted: God wants to see whether we obey him or we follow our own appetites for more riches, hoarding them all to ourselves. Meanwhile, we are tragically unaware that, in this manner, our riches on earth become our poverty in heaven.

The following question may be asked: How much should we keep and how much should we give? This very question is part of the test. God has given us sufficient wisdom to know how much we need, and he gives us sufficient guidance to know what he expects from us in each situation. There will be no room for excuses at the judgment seat of Christ. There will only be the verdict, 'good slave' or 'bad slave'; we will only hear, 'tested and approved' or 'tested and rejected'. It is in this light that we have to understand what Jesus taught us about 'the deceitfulness of wealth' ([Matt. 13:22](#), NIV), symbolized by the thorns that choke the Word so that it never comes to fruition in an individual's life.

As vital as the test of earthly riches is for our eternal destiny, the supreme test is nonetheless in the form of suffering and martyrdom for Christ and his gospel. In these situations of extreme pain and agony, the endurance, perseverance, and faithfulness of the child of God is tested to the maximum. It was in Gethsemane and on Calvary that God tested his Son in the ultimate way, and it was because of his obedience in those situations that God gave him the highest position of honour and glory ([Philp. 2:5-11](#); [Heb. 2:9](#)). This is why God has reserved the greatest honour and glory for those of his children who go through sufferings, tortures, and martyrdom.

As we can see from the main body of this study and from the conclusions stated above, suffering and martyrdom have an extremely important role in God's strategy in human history. They express the essence of God's nature—his self-sacrificial love—and they point to the method of God's own involvement in the world. Furthermore, suffering and martyrdom play an essential part in God's way of transforming us into his own image.

For untold numbers of Christians passing through terrible sufferings and persecutions in many countries around the world today, the understanding of this biblical teaching may come as a life-changing revelation, revolutionizing their lives. As a consequence, their sufferings will suddenly 'make sense'. They will not see the trials and afflictions that have come over them as unfortunate calamities, but as the greatest gift and privilege they could ever have received from their Lord. Furthermore, this teaching may revolutionize not only the lives of persecuted Christians but also the lives of Christians living in freedom and affluence. In fact, these rich Christians may be in a greater danger than their brethren suffering trials and tribulations, because the testing of the former may be even more severe; having been given riches and freedom, they must now choose whether they will be Christlike and self-sacrificing or selfish and indulgent.

Jesus Christ is not a Santa Claus with the task of distributing goodies and pampering our feelings. He is the King of kings and Lord of lords who calls all of us to submit to him and to do our part in carrying out his own programme in this world. Of course, his



programme entails sacrificial living on our part, and when he comes again on that Last Day, he will judge us and assess us according to our obedience to his royal commands. He wants to make us kings just as he is King, but he will entrust such positions only to those who have obeyed him as he himself obeyed his Father.

It is possible that if confronted with it, most Christians today will reject this teaching, because it is too demanding. It is much more comfortable to live with a theology that offers only blessings and no demands. But wise people do not ask which theology is the most convenient; instead, they ask which teaching is true or, even better, which one comes from God.

My endeavour has been to capture the mind of God as it has been revealed to us in his inerrant Word and as it was understood by people who were challenged by the harsh realities of persecution, suffering, and martyrdom throughout history. This study has changed my own approach to life, and I pray that it will do the same for many others. However hard this teaching may seem, through it we come to understand that from the start of this difficult and exacting pilgrimage, all the way to its triumphant finish in our heavenly home, it is God who works his own extraordinary purposes in us, and it is he who will always merit all the praise and all the glory.

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# Christian Faith and Human Rights

Thorwald Lorenzen

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## 1. THE RESPONSIBILITY OF KNOWLEDGE

Are we—as citizens and as Christians—responsible for what we know? Should it make a difference to our lives, to our faith, to our understanding of God, when government agencies use all the intricacies of modern technology to devise ever more effective instruments of torture in order to maim and break the bodies and spirits of men, women and children?

- when 15 million children under the age of five die each year—that is 40,000 each day—because they don't have enough food, water and medical care; and when millions of those who survive are exploited by child labour and child prostitution?

- when ideologies of racism, apartheid and sexism—often undergirded with biblical arguments—deny equal chances to millions of people?
- when day by day students, union workers, pastors, and journalists disappear—the UN recorded 5,000 reported disappearances in the first three months of 1993—and are never seen again, because in their passion for truth and justice they opposed the political and economic establishment?
- when millions of refugees and asylum seekers exist under inhuman conditions and who, in addition, are despised as the outcasts of modern human society?
- when there is an increasing rate of unemployment, casting millions of people into a crisis of identity, and robbing them of a chance to care for themselves and for their families?
- when in all corners of our globe people are denied the religious liberty to worship and live the way their religious impulses demand?
- when over a billion people live in abject poverty with no hope of betterment?

What impact does this knowledge make on the conscience of Christians? Does this knowledge effect our faith in God? Are the denials of human rights only moral concerns that call for our charity, or are we also challenged on a deeper, a theological level?

As Christians we claim that the ‘earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein’ ([Ps. 24:1](#)); we confess that ‘God so loved the world that he gave his only Son’ ([Jn. 3:16](#)), and that ‘God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself’ ([2 Cor. 5:19](#)). But have we succeeded in inter-relating these claims of faith with the real world in which we live? Should the ‘wretched of the earth’ have a place in our theological reflection—and what should that place be?

I fear that as theologians and church members we have not succeeded in inter-relating the rich content of our faith with the ground of our faith, the ‘poverty’ of Jesus. How else can we explain that our churches are replete with people whose knowledge about the modern struggle for human rights is very limited; and even the little we do know, we have failed to relate to our faith in God? The impression is easily given that we can believe in God and worship him, and at the same time by-pass those whose human dignity is being spoiled, maimed and broken. Perhaps, we should allow Sigmund Freud to remind us that humans have developed subtle ways to deceive themselves. Even as Christians we remain sinners and as such we live in the constant danger that our perception and interpretation of the world is determined by our personal and national self-interest, rather than by our faith in Jesus the Christ. It belongs to the task of theology to measure our faith and our practice and ask whether they are still in touch with their source and content.

Many believe that today’s challenge is: can the human race survive in a humane manner, or will the spiral of selfishness, violence and mistrust accelerate beyond our control? Can our individual and national selfishness be bridled? Are we able to develop a vision of human life that transcends our immediate national, social and religious interests, and as such may help us to develop structures that make human life possible for all people? Both as Christians and as citizens we are called to accept responsibility for what we know: ‘Anyone, then, who knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, commits sin’ ([Jas. 4:17](#)).

## 2. THE PROMISE OF HUMAN RIGHTS

It is the noble destiny of the state and of the law to provide structures of justice, peace, security and social welfare. The law spells out how human selfishness can be bridled, how the weaker members of society can be protected and how justice can be equally distributed. Legal structures implement what has been codified in the law. State and law

are not intended to be the instruments of the mighty and the powerful to further their interests. Rather, state and law must be servants of truth and justice and thereby show special consideration for those who have no voice, no power and no friends.

In the Old Testament, for instance, the law shows a special leaning towards the orphans, the stranger, the widow and the slave; and the kings are reminded not to exploit the poor and not to oppress the powerless. Jesus' own messianic mission is intimately linked with proclaiming 'good news to the poor', 'release to the captives', the 'recovering of sight to the blind', and setting 'at liberty those who are oppressed' ([Lk. 4:18](#)); indeed, eschatological salvation is promised to the poor, oppressed and tortured: 'Blessed are you ... for yours is the kingdom of God' ([Lk. 6:20-26](#)). The earliest Christians affirmed that vision of reality when they sought and found the presence of Jesus not only in the preaching of the word and the proper administration of the sacraments, but also in the children ([Mk. 9:36](#)), the prisoner, the stranger and the poor ([Mt. 25:31-46](#)).

Today's challenge to the human family is whether the national function of law and state can be expanded into a global vision. Can we repeat on an international level what law and state should try to do on a national level? The need for such international structures is clear. All major socio-ethical problems are global problems: millions of refugees and asylum seekers; the ecology crisis; the nuclear arsenals; the world economic order and the problem of dependence; the vicious spiral in which the poor get poorer and the rich get richer. The promise of human rights is that the family of nations can agree on international structures that may pave the way to more peace, justice and social welfare in our world.

The human rights movement is not new. It has its origin in the struggle to understand and define human dignity and then protect that dignity against those who may want to deny or spoil it. Many historical impulses have shaped the modern human rights movement. There were the British, the French and the American Revolutions with their attempts to protect human dignity against the onslaught of state, crown and church, and at the same time to lay moral foundations for a more humane and therefore more promising future. They searched for a new authority to justify their opposition to existing institutions, and they found it in a higher law, a law of nature or of nature's God, a law inherent to the human being. This human rights tradition was fuelled and modified by the socialist movement and by the specific demands of the developing countries.

A decisive interruption in human history was caused by the second world war (1939-1945). Concentration camps, the attempt of genocide, and the first military use of nuclear bombs shocked humanity into the awareness that human ingenuity and technology can be used, not only to build, but also to destroy; that reason need not be the creative instrument of advance, but that it can also prostitute itself to serve the strategies of hatred, racism and fascism. People began to realize that the human family needed a universal morality that transcended the interest of individual nation states, and that international structures were required to implement such a global morality. The awareness of this need resulted in the United Nations Organisation and the *International Bill of Human Rights*. The United Nations (1945) was founded with the declared purpose:

#### **WE THE PEOPLES OF THE UNITED NATIONS DETERMINED**

- to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind, and
- to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small, and

- to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained, and
- to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom,

### **AND FOR THESE ENDS**

- to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours, and
- to unite our strength to maintain international peace and security, and to ensure, by the acceptance of the principles and the institution of methods, that armed force shall not be used, save in the common interest, and
- to employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples,

### **HAVE RESOLVED TO COMBINE OUR EFFORTS TO ACCOMPLISH THESE AIMS.**

#### **(Preamble to the Charter of the United Nations, 1945)**

In 1948 the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* was issued. It has been hailed as one of the important landmarks in the history of humanity. It sets a standard of morality by which nations should measure their treatment of citizens and by which citizens could know their own rights and duties over against the state and the human community.

This 'Declaration' was followed, in 1966, by two 'Covenants' that provide legal codification and international juridical authority to the human rights contained therein: the *International Covenant of Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights*, the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, and the *Optional Protocol* to the latter covenant. For governments that have ratified it, this 'Protocol' allows individual persons to file complaints in human rights matters with an international Human Rights Committee. Together with the *Universal Declaration* these Covenants form the *International Bill of Human Rights* which sets a moral and juridical standard for the human community. Ninety nations have ratified these covenants and have thereby committed themselves to use all available urgency to implement these human rights in their area of jurisdiction.

The *Universal Declaration* and the *Covenants* are backed up by many more declarations and conventions that deal with the definition and effective implementation of individual human rights. Recent examples are the *Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief* (1981), the *Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment* (1984), and the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989).<sup>1</sup> A Convention on Religious Liberty, and a Declaration or Convention on Conscientious Objection are in the process of preparation. Under the auspices of the United Nations the human family of nations has therefore developed a substantial corpus of human rights which can—if they are implemented—provide the moral foundation for a future of more justice and peace. Today there is a theoretical consensus that 'human rights and fundamental freedoms are the birthright of

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<sup>1</sup> 1. The official human rights instruments are accessible in: United Nations, *Human Rights: A Compilation of International Instruments*, Geneva, United Nations, 1988; a list of the countries that have ratified or signed the various instruments is found in: United Nations, *Human Rights: Status of Human Rights Instruments*, Center for Human Rights, New York, United Nations, 1987. These books are updated from time to time. Very informative is also: United Nations, *United Nations Action in the Field of Human Rights*, New York, United Nations, 1983, or latest edition.

all human beings; their protection and promotion is the first responsibility of Government' (*Vienna Declaration 1993*, part II § 2 etc.).

What then is the content of human rights? Details can be gathered from the above mentioned documents. For a more general summary we may recognize the various traditions that have flowed into the modern understanding of human rights, and at the same time show our awareness of imminent challenges to which the human rights movement is responding.

There are, first of all, the so-called *individual rights*. They have evolved mainly from the 'western' concern to protect the dignity of the individual over against human and historical institutions like state and church, party and crown. They include the right to life, the right to freedom of thought, opinion, conscience and religion, the right of people to participate freely in free and frequent elections, the right to privacy and to fairness before the law, the right to equality, and the prohibition of torture, slavery and arbitrary arrests.

Secondly, there are the *social rights* which socialist countries have brought into the debate as a corrective to western individualism. Social rights include the right to work and to a fair pay, the right to leisure and the right to form trade unions, the right to social security, to education, to proper medical treatment, and to participate freely in the life of the community.

Thirdly, there are the rights that show special concern for the *developing nations* in the two-thirds world. These nations feel themselves trapped in a never ending spiral of dependence and they suffer under an unjust world economic order. For many in the two-thirds world the individual and social rights appear to be unobtainable luxuries. What good is the right to free speech if you can't read or write and have no way to receive information? What good is the right to life if you have no food, no water and no medical facilities? What good is the right to a national identity if you belong to the 12 million refugees who are considered the outcasts of modern human society? Human rights therefore also contain rights such as the right to self determination of nations, the right to a national identity, the right to asylum, and the rights to the basic necessities like food, water, shelter and medical treatment to make a life of human dignity possible.

Fourthly, in recent years the human community has begun to understand that the struggle for human rights is an illusion if we do not protect the environment which supplies the air, the water and the food that we need for our survival. The air we breathe, the water we drink, the vegetables we eat all become part of ourselves. We are intimately woven into the fabric of nature. But with our focus on ourselves, on history and on progress we have exploited nature so much that the word 'ecology crisis' is an understatement. The United Nations with the impetus from the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Rio de Janeiro, June 1992) is in the process of developing *rights of nature*.

Finally, let us not forget that with our activity or passivity we determine the life of future generations, our children and grandchildren. The tremendous debts which most developing countries have can never be paid back. These debts strangle the children before they are born. Nuclear technology creates waste with deadly radiation that lasts for thousands of years. The cutting down of the rain forests, desertification and the thinning of the ozone layer create climatic conditions which may spell doom for our children and grandchildren. We must therefore in all our decisions now consider the rights of *future generations*.

When we speak of human *rights*, we mean those rights that are codified in the *Bill of Human Rights*. They have the force of international law for all members of the United Nations. They have grown out of the conviction that human dignity needs to be defined and protected. Human rights have the purpose of protecting the dignity and identity of

human beings in the context of their society and the environment. They are defined and codified in legal documents, and they are implemented by legal structures. If a right is disregarded or broken, certain clearly defined sanctions should normally take effect. At the same time, the human rights tradition is a process by which the human community responds ever anew to ethical challenges and then seeks to provide those instruments and structures that best define and protect human dignity.

*Human* rights are 'human' in that they are inherent in the existence of human beings, they are the 'birthright' of every human being. These rights belong to people irrespective of their race, colour, religion, intelligence, nationality, profession, or sex.

As '*human* rights' they are by their very nature universally valid. During the recent World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna (June 1993) a number of countries (chief among them China) made the attempt to relativize the universal nature of human rights. They argued that the content of human rights varies according to culture and context, and they claimed that the authority of human rights can be accepted only within the limits of national laws. Fortunately the world conference resisted these attempts to modify the universality of human rights and insisted: 'The universal nature of these rights and freedoms is beyond question' (*Vienna Declaration 1993*, part II [1](#)). The universality of human rights implies, of course, that nations bring their own constitutions and legal systems into alignment with the human rights structures. Human rights precede national law and therefore have a critical function. It is a problem when nations refer to the principle of national sovereignty or cultural diversity in their interpretation and application of human rights. When the principle of universality is denied then an essential dimension of human rights is surrendered.

The same is true with respect to the *indivisibility* of human rights. Commitment to human rights implies an obligation to respect and implement all human rights. And the moral intention of human rights is, that each nation is challenged to focus on implementing those rights that constitute a problem in its cultural, political and economic context. In Vienna it was affirmed: 'All human rights are *universal, indivisible and inter-dependent* and *inter-related*. ... While the significance of national and regional particularities and various historical, cultural and religious backgrounds must be borne in mind, it is the duty of states, regardless of their political, economic and cultural systems, to promote all human rights and fundamental freedoms' (*Vienna Declaration 1993*, part II [3](#), emphasis mine).

### 3. CHRISTIANS FAITH AND HUMAN RIGHTS

As Christians we have good reasons to presume that the providential activity of God has been at work in the human rights tradition. Christians and churches, should therefore wholeheartedly participate in the struggle for the codification and implementation of human rights.

The biblical traditions portray God as desiring to make human life human. When his people are oppressed, God longs for their liberation, and he invites people like Moses to participate in that liberating activity. With the law codes in Israel special care is taken to ease the fate of the poor, the slave, the widow and the stranger. The prophets condemn those leaders in religious, economic and political institutions that are not concerned with protecting the dignity of human persons. Jesus announces liberation to the oppressed ([Lk. 4:18f.](#)) and promises grace to the poor, to the hungry and the sorrowful ([Lk. 6:20f.](#)). He fleshes out the gospel by healing the sick, driving out demons and sharing his life with the marginal people of society. The earliest Christian churches accepted Jesus' passion for the



world by affirming the essential equality of all persons and by beginning to eliminate injustice from their own midst.

Indeed, we may safely say that the Psalmist gathers up the tendency and the intention of the whole biblical message when he hears God saying: 'Give justice to the weak and the orphan; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute' ([Ps. 82:3](#)). And the writer of Proverbs relates this directly to God's action in history: 'the Lord will plead their cause' ([Prov. 22:22](#)). Moreover, 'those who oppress the poor insult their Maker, but those who are kind to the needy honour him' ([Prov. 14:31](#)). It belongs to the privilege of faith to attend to God's healing, saving and liberating passion for the world. By our attitude and action we reveal who our God is.

We can even go a step further. The *content* of human rights is analogous to the Christian understanding of the human person. We saw that the human rights tradition is aware of the relational reality of the *humanum*. It therefore does not only speak of individual rights, but also of social rights. And at the present time there are attempts to integrate ecological rights and the rights of future generations into the human rights tradition.

It was a decisive break-through in our understanding of reality when it was realized that the human person, indeed all of reality, can be adequately understood only in *relational terms*. The essential nature of the human being is that he or she *receives* life, that human persons are responsive to someone and therefore responsible. Martin Buber has reminded us, however, that although human beings find their identity in the manifold fabric of relationships, the I—Thou relationship precedes the I—It relationship. This alone can protect the conscience from becoming functionalised for ideological interests. The relational network in which human beings experience, shape and live their human identity, includes the following dimensions.

There is, first of all, the *relationship that human persons have to themselves*. It belongs to the great achievements of the human rights tradition to assert and safeguard the inherent dignity of the human person. In and with our conscience we are aware of an identity that is uniquely ours; an identity that is not granted by crown, state, society, or religion, and that can therefore not be taken away by them. What God the creator said to Jacob summarises a theological conviction that is true for all human beings: 'Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine' ([Isa. 43:1](#)). We also recall that Jesus healed concrete individuals and how he used the personal pronoun when he interpreted people's experience of God: '*Your* faith has made you whole,' From the view point of Christian faith we can therefore only hail those human rights that want to protect the dignity of the individual over against the encroachment of human and historical institutions like the state and even religious institutions. Individual rights, like the freedom of thought, conscience and religion, the right to express one's opinion, the right to a fair and public trial, equality rights, protection against torture and slavery, but also the social rights, like the right to work, the right to education, the right to fair wages and the right to join a trade union are designed to protect the dignity of the individual.

At the same time we must distinguish between the dignity of the individual and individualism. The human conscience reminds us that human beings by nature are not individualists, but that we receive and shape our individual dignity in a network of life-giving relationships.

This brings us, secondly, to the religious dimension of life, our *relationship to God*. This may be somewhat controversial, at least in the 'western' world, but in light of the history of humanity as a whole, and considering the universal human experience, the burden of proof must be placed upon those who deny that the human being is inherently religious.

Long ago Saint Augustine prayed: ‘ ... thou hast made us for thyself and restless is our heart until it comes to rest in thee.’<sup>2</sup>

When we fail to recognize the essential God-orientation of humanity, then the danger is that either an ideology of individualism or of collectivism will result. The former results from the self-assertion of the individual, which, if not checked by faith in God and by social and ecological concerns, easily leads to a social Darwinism of the survival of the fittest. The consequences will be economic exploitation and political domination, with the resulting problems of social and ecological injustice. Collectivism results in an ideological socialism which tends to quench the creativity of the individual and thereby subdues an important characteristic that is necessary to build a just society. Martin Buber, probably having capitalism and socialism in mind, says:

... if individualism understands only a part of man, collectivism understands man only as part: neither advances to the wholeness of man, to man as a whole. Individualism sees man only in relation to himself, but collectivism does not see man at all, it sees only society.<sup>3</sup>

We would therefore argue that if the God-orientation of humanity is denied, then everything else is in danger of becoming distorted. Instead of recognizing God as the ground of all being, the human ego usurps the centre of reality and makes itself the focus and reference point of all reality. It is therefore the conviction of Christians that the human conscience needs to be freed from the self-centred interest of the ego, and this liberation of the conscience to its true being comes through faith in Jesus Christ. Only when the conscience is freed from its immediate self-interest can it become aware of its freedom as a relational reality and can assume responsibility for this relational existence.

Any ideology that does not recognize the religious dimension to be an essential part of the *humanum*, and any institution that wants to limit or stifle the exercise of faith and the practice of religion, transgresses against the dignity of human beings. No human and historical institution can prescribe or demand that people should believe, but every institution has the duty to create room for the free exercise of religion. If this room is not granted, then the human conscience feels stifled and will seek ever new ways to exercise its religious thrust. Human rights therefore define and protect those aspects of life which have to do with the exercise of religious faith.

The third dimension of human relational reality is the *relationship among human beings*. While the conscience reminds us of our individual identity and dignity, while the experience of freedom, prayer, and worship is a constant reminder of our God-orientation, our loving and the need to be loved indicate that only in togetherness with others do we find our human fulfilment.

Jesus’ messianic mission therefore included the formation of a *messianic community*. His togetherness with other people was a constitutive part of his own ministry. To share in his ministry, he called people to discipleship and created a community of men and women around himself. With them he met around the meal table, shared in their life, and commissioned them to share in his mission. However, he did not create a community of elitism or exclusiveness, but showed a radical openness to the outsider: the poor, the leper, the gentile, the women and the children. Indeed, for Jesus, to love God and to love one’s neighbour belonged together ([Mk. 12:29-31](#); [Mt. 25:31-46](#)). One cannot worship God whilst hating one’s neighbour ([Mt. 5:23f](#)).

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<sup>2</sup> 2. ‘Confessions,’ Book 1, cited from *The Library of Christian Classics*, Vol. VII: Augustine: Confessions and Eucheridion, (London: SCM, 1995), p. 31.

<sup>3</sup> 3. ‘What is Man?’, 1938, in Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man* (London: Collins, 1961), (1947), p. 241.



This emphasis of Jesus' life resounded in the ministry and experience of the early church. For Paul, one's relationship to God through Jesus Christ has a reconciling effect on human separation: in Christ there 'is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus' ([Gal. 3:28](#)). And the writer of 1 John asserts: 'whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.' ([1 Jn. 4:8](#), cf. v. [16](#)). 'Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen.' ([4:20](#)). Thus, for Jesus and the early church it was clear that one's relationship to God and one's relationship to one's fellow human beings were a constitutive part of human identity.

This relational dimension of human existence is recognized in the human rights declarations and conventions. Human rights therefore do not only contain the individual rights but also safeguard the conditions and structures of human life together. They recognize the family as the basic unit of society. They assure the right of free assembly. They safeguard the self determination of national and cultural units. They speak about the participation of the individual in cultural, political and religious life. They call for good working conditions, for fair wages, for trade unions, and for social security. They provide for a fair judicial system, for the education of children, and for a proper provision for holidays and leisure time which allows people to live and enjoy life together. They forbid the exploitation of other human beings such as by slavery and torture. Human rights therefore recognize and safeguard the human and the Christian conviction that to be a true human being one needs to have creative relationship to one's neighbour.

A fourth dimension of human relational existence is our *relationship with nature*. As human persons we are bound into the delicate fabric of our environment. Nature provides the context in which we discover ourselves, in which we praise God and love our neighbour. Nature provides the sustenance for our life. It is the space that invites and enables human creativity.

The biblical story explicates the human relationship to nature. According to [Genesis 1:26-28](#) it is part of the human *imago dei* that the human person must exercise responsible rule—that is what 'to have dominion' originally meant—over nature. Nature is part of God's creation. In it the human person is given a special place ([Gen. 1-2](#); [Ps. 8](#)). Adam names the animals, and God determines that the plants and the animals are to provide sustenance for human life. But two things must not be forgotten. *All* human beings have a right to share in the fruits of the earth, and an *exploitation of nature for selfish ends* is excluded by the assertion that nature is part of God's creation. It was especially the Semitic wisdom literature which underlined the fact that in our relationship to nature we confront the holiness of God himself.<sup>4</sup> Also the interesting biblical details that God's covenant with Noah included 'every living creature' ([Gen. 9:9f.](#)), and that human salvation includes the redemption of nature ([Rom. 8:18-25](#)), point to what Gerhard von Rad called the 'existential relationship' between human beings and their environment.<sup>5</sup>

If human rights are designed to define and protect human dignity, then human relationship to nature must be defined and protected. The human rights tradition has recognized this dimension of human existence in the right to enjoy a healthy environment, and the ecological rights which are designed to protect the delicate balance of nature. Related rights include the right to an equal share of goods, the right to shelter, food, and adequate living conditions, the right to work, and the right to own property as the

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<sup>4</sup> 4. Compare Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel* (London: SCM, 1972).

<sup>5</sup> 5. *Ibid.* p. 303.

products of human labour. Countries have the right to use their natural resources and the duty to protect their natural wealth against human exploitation. If humankind destroys the delicate ecological balance, it is destroying the garden which provides the sustenance and context for human survival.

We finally mention the importance of an active, creative and constructive relationship with history and therewith our *relationship to the future* and our responsibility for future generations. We have seen so far: conscience gives us the awareness of our individual dignity, prayer and worship remind us of our relationship with God, love points to the need of a relationship with our fellow human beings, and the very substance of life and work shows that we are an integral part of nature and the cosmos. In addition we need to recognize that, on the one hand, we are products of the past historical process, and on the other hand, we are able through responsible decisions and actions to participate in shaping our own future. History is not a succession of predetermined events, but it is an ongoing process which we, through our decisions or non-decisions, our activity or passivity, our responsibility or irresponsibility, will help to determine.

This fundamental observation that human beings are called to responsibility and are, whether they like it or not, shapers of human history, is also an important aspect of the biblical message. Jesus called men and women to share in his ministry and mission. The apostle Paul emphasized that faith in Christ does not eliminate human responsibility but inspires it. He does not only call Christians to responsible living—‘If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit’ ([Gal. 5:25](#))—but he explicitly states that he himself, and Christians in general, are called to be ‘fellow workers’ with God ([1 Cor. 3:5–11](#), cf. [2 Cor. 6:1](#)). In using not only *doulos* or *diakonos* to describe Christian ministry, but also *sunergos*, Paul raises a theological claim for himself and his helpers.<sup>6</sup> This in no way detracts from Paul’s emphasis on grace. Living out of the grace which God has revealed in Jesus Christ does not eliminate human responsibility, but, on the contrary, it calls for it.

The human rights tradition recognizes our being woven into the historical process by defining and protecting those rights which help us to exercise this part of our nature. On the individual level we think of the right to liberty and security of person, the right to education, the right to move freely within one’s country, to freely leave one’s country and return to it, the right to participate in political, economic, and cultural decision-making, the right to marry and establish a family, the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, the right to free assembly, the right to form trade unions and to strike, the right to rest, leisure, and freedom of expression. On the national level it includes the right of self-determination and the right freely to dispose of one’s natural wealth and resources.

We need to pause here and remind ourselves that human rights are not *necessarily* identical with the content of the Christian faith. As Christians we presume that God is providentially at work in the human rights tradition, and therefore we have a positive and expectant attitude toward human rights. But this does not relieve us of the task to participate critically in the codification and implementation of human rights. In each situation we need to relate the resources of our faith to the human rights concern at hand. In doing that there may emerge special emphases which the Christian faith may have to offer.

As Christians we claim, for instance, to have a plausible answer to the ontology crisis with respect to law in general and to human rights in particular. Human rights are by definition universal and therefore presuppose a universal morality. In the past, Natural Law theories have served to provide an ontological basis for such universal morality. However, although originally Natural Law theories had the critical intention to curb the

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<sup>6</sup> 6. Georg Bertra, ‘*sunergos* ...’, in [TDNT VII \(1971\), p. 875](#).

self interest of peoples and nations, in fact they have proved to be inadequate as the moral foundation of universal law because they have the inherent tendency to validate the *status quo* in any given social order. Slavery, war, racism, and the subordination of women have all been validated with natural law theories. Thus the ontological basis for a universal morality remains an unsolved problem.

That such a foundation is necessary has always been felt. The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* speaks of 'the *inherent dignity* and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family' (Preamble, my emphasis), and it asserts in §1: 'All human beings *are born free* and equal in dignity and rights. They *are endowed* with reason and conscience ...' (my emphasis).

The intention of these formulations, pointing toward a moral foundation for human rights, is clear. They want to underline the universality of human rights, and they want to assert that the dignity and freedom of the human person is superior to human and historical institutions like the state, the law, and the church. Historical institutions neither granted nor invented these rights, therefore they also cannot take them away. They must recognize these rights, do everything in their power to implement them, and create circumstances so that all human beings can fully enjoy and exercise their rights.

But the problem comes when one tries to define, understand, and explain the *moral foundation* for human rights. What does it mean that a person has certain 'inherent' and 'inalienable' rights; that people are 'born' with certain rights which no one can take away from them; that human beings have these rights 'by nature'? If people 'are endowed with reason and conscience', who or what endows them with such?

The most one can say at the present time, is that there is an emerging consensus that human rights are grounded in the *human person*. But then the difficulty is how the human person is to be understood and defined. Is it basically an individualistic being, or is it basically a social being? Is the reality 'God' constitutive for understanding the human person or is it not?

We face a similar question when we ask how we can arrive at a universally valid *content* of human rights? What are the criteria for deciding between right and wrong? If human rights are seen basically as agreements between people and nations, would such rights not basically mirror the social values of the people who make such agreements? Would not this merely mirror and maintain the *status quo*? And if this is not the case, as the references to the moral foundation in the human rights documents have indicated, must we then not try to define a moral foundation in such a way that it can also question and criticise our present value systems?

The problem and the challenge is clear: unless a universally valid moral foundation for human rights is discovered and agreed upon, human rights will be increasingly emptied of their validity and authority, and they will continue to be misused in the ongoing ideological warfare. The dawning awareness that all humankind is in the same boat and needs to face the challenge of human survival together, may provide the necessary motivation to arrive at a moral foundation that can provide both legitimacy and clearer content for human rights.

As Christians we refer to God as creator and sustainer of heaven and earth with respect to the foundation of a universal morality, and we point to revelation as a discernible content to define and protect human dignity.

A further illustration as to how Christian faith can provide a special emphasis is the reminder that even the most noble human rights can be misused and are therefore in need of constant interpretation. From the Christian point of view we do not only affirm the equality and equal dignity of all human persons, but we insist on a definite and intentional leaning towards the protection of the weak, the sick, the poor, and other marginal people

in a society. This alone can safeguard human rights from becoming a soft weapon in the ideological cold war. This alone can help human rights to fulfil their aim of paving the way to a free, just and peaceful human society. The same is true with the symbol of freedom. Our 'western' understanding of freedom tends to be individualistic and nationalistic. We claim the freedom to do what we like, with the corollary that we must respect the freedom of others. With this definition we overlook, however, that every 'other' becomes a possible limiter of my freedom and thus a potential enemy. The resources of faith remind us that freedom is a relational reality so that I can only be truly free together with the 'other'. The liberated conscience will therefore understand other human beings not as potential enemies, who constantly threaten to limit its freedom, but it will seek the welfare of others, knowing that they are potential sources of life and freedom.

As a final illustration we mention that although the Christian faith will encourage people to become aware of their rights and to claim them in their pilgrimage of liberation, the resources of faith also entail the power *not* to claim one's own rights if this is seen to be more conducive in paving the way for justice and peace.

#### 4. OUTLOOK

The promise of human rights is that they may provide the moral foundation for the humane survival of the human race. The greatest problem in respect to human rights is the lack of implementation. If we as Christians and as churches can presume that the providential activity of God is at work in the human rights tradition, then it must be part be part of the mission of the church to make its contribution to the codification and implementation of human rights.

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## Reconciliation: A Reality or Simply Political Correctness

Allison Howell

**Keywords:** Slavery, conflict, missions, redemptions, hatred, reconciliation, forgiveness

To live under a curse imposes a heavy burden, but the Kasena, Builsa, Frafra and Sisaala people of Northern Ghana have the legacy of a double curse in their past. They share the same curse of sin that the whole human race has been under, but they also have had to face the curse of slavery and the disruption that it has brought to life. The Builsa,

Frafra and Kasena predominantly live in dispersed extended family compounds while the Sisaala live in clustered villages. All are mostly involved in subsistence farming that has been passed on to them from their founding ancestors.

## A GROWING AWARENESS OF THE PAIN OF THE PAST

Although the slave trade was officially abolished in Britain and the United States in 1807, the traffic of slaves within Africa continued and more slaves were smuggled across the Atlantic between 1807 and 1833 than during the pre-abolition period.<sup>1</sup> Slavery and apprenticeship were finally abolished in Britain in 1838, but this did not stop the slave raids in Northern Ghana which continued to feed both an internal market and the external market associated with nations that had not abolished slavery. For the Northern Ghanaians, the most intensive period of slave raiding occurred between the 1860s and 1900.<sup>2</sup>

When I first went to Northern Ghana in 1981 as part of a church planting team<sup>3</sup>, I had little knowledge or understanding of this background. Slowly I became aware that there had been slave raids in the area. The Kasena have a word, *gwala*, specifically used to refer to the raids. The Builsa people each year celebrate *Feok*, their harvest festival. The festival is also used to celebrate their defeat of the slave raider, Babatu.<sup>4</sup> However, in my cultural learning I occasionally only noted a person's reference to the raids and my colleagues and I thought little about the legacy of the raids in the society and psychology of the people.

As people responded to the gospel of Jesus Christ, so the church grew. From time to time there were differences of opinion, misunderstandings and occasionally disputes between church leaders and missionaries. On two occasions, a mediator stepped in to help a church leader and myself resolve a misunderstanding.

In 1988, the church leaders and missionaries began to look seriously at the whole issue of conflict and conflict resolution within the context of our ministry. The crisis came when the church asked for the removal of one missionary who had offended them. They also expressed grievances about the way other missionaries dealt with cultural issues, did not show hospitality, did not visit Ghanaians in their homes and did not trust them, especially with finances. Prior to that time my colleagues and I had always attempted to resolve conflicts according to our perception of a 'biblical pattern', but often that seemed only to heighten the problem and cause further misunderstanding.

It was at this point that a number of Kasena church leaders and I began to explore the cultural beliefs and practices related to the causes of disputes, the types of disputes the Kasena classify and how they attempt to resolve them. We met to discuss our findings and to examine our own cultural patterns of resolving conflicts as expatriates. We discussed

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<sup>1</sup> 1. Albert van Danzig, *Forts and Castles of Ghana*, (Accra: Sedco, 1980), p. 66.

<sup>2</sup> 2. Allison Howell, 'The slave trade and its impact on Northern Ghana', in Allison Howell (ed), *The Slave Trade and Reconciliation: A Northern Ghanaian Perspective*, (Accra: Bible Church of Africa and SIM Ghana, 1998), p. 43.

<sup>3</sup> 3. SIM Ghana missionaries began a church planting ministry in Northern Ghana in 1978 among the Kasena, Builsa, Frafra and Sisaala. Originally, the partner church was known as The Good News Church of Ghana, but in 1995, the church changed its name to the Bible Church of Africa to reflect the church's own involvement in mission outside Ghana. The Bible Church of Africa and SIM Ghana are autonomous organisations but co-ordinate ministries through a Joint Committee.

<sup>4</sup> 4. George Atemboa, 'The impact of the slave trade on the Builsa', in *The Slave Trade and Reconciliation*, pp. 23-30.

the strengths and weaknesses of each other's socio-cultural patterns. We analysed these patterns in terms of biblical patterns and then developed principles for working through cross-cultural conflict.<sup>5</sup> This was a new step of openness in the path of the relationship between the church and the mission. Together we formed a Joint Committee of Church and Mission to mutually discuss areas of ministry and concern, with the church having predominant numbers.

As years passed by, conflicts and misunderstandings from time to time would rumble to the surface and hurt would be expressed. One fact that became apparent was that we tended to relate mostly in a 'work' capacity and in 'meetings'. In terms of friendship and entering into one another's homes, this was infrequent and often the atmosphere was formal. In addition, while doing in-depth research into the background history of the Kasena people in 1992, I became aware that there was still a deep wound from what happened during the years of the slave trade.<sup>6</sup>

In 1994, Rev. Johnson Asare, the President of the Bible Church of Africa, and Ruby Mikulencak, an SIM missionary, voiced a desire for a partnership consultation. All church leaders and missionaries would be able to spend several days staying together, not to discuss work and business, but to talk about our relationship and to listen to one another. An external facilitator was invited to lead us through the discussions. We met for three days at the beginning of 1995 and talked and played games.

The facilitator used a series of stimulating and thought-provoking simulations to make us reflect on and think through the meaning of partnership. We examined the strengths and weaknesses of the church/mission relationship and the church and the mission each visualized their thoughts through the use of symbols. There was pain and hurt to watch a group from the church symbolically express their view that the mission oppressed the church: they placed a small piece of discoloured cloth symbolizing the church on the ground, and then on the top of it they placed a large rock symbolizing the Mission.

The church said some difficult things about us as a mission; however, jointly, and in a very open atmosphere, we were able to discuss four issues raised by the church and one highlighted by the mission. Together we made recommendations for improvements in our relationship. This Partnership Consultation was the beginning of a series of similar consultations.

In January 1998, we again met but this time to talk about our joint vision. During the discussions it became apparent that there were difficulties between some church leaders and some missionaries. Finally, a church leader told how he had gone with a group of other Ghanaians to visit Cape Coast Castle. Together they stood in the male dungeon—a tiny, damp and dark room where 300 to 400 slaves were crammed before they were pushed through 'the gate of no return' on to slave ships. One man commented, 'As for the whites, we can't forgive them. The way they treated my grandfathers, I'm not going to forgive them.' The church leader then went on to say, 'Sometimes when missionaries do things that hurt us, we can't help thinking back to the slave trade and asking, "Are they any different"?' There were wounds from this event that were still having implications in our relationship.

The reference to the slave trade was not an isolated comment. Memories of the slave trade still exist in Northern Ghana. The castles along Ghana's coast are a stark reminder of the brutality of slavery. Furthermore, over the past few years, there has been increasing

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<sup>5</sup> 5. Allison Howell, *Working together cross-culturally: Some lessons learned from Northern Ghana*, (Accra: SIM Ghana, 1996).

<sup>6</sup> 6. The author has published a detailed account of the Kasena in her book, *The Religious Itinerary of a Ghanaian People: The Kasena and the Christian Gospel*, (Frankfurt/M.: Peter Lang, 1997).

publicity in the Ghanaian news media. Southern Ghanaian chiefs have poured libations to their ancestors to atone for the part that their ancestors played in the slave trade.<sup>7</sup> Most significantly, increasing numbers of African-Americans are visiting Ghana to learn something of their identity. Plans are also underway to re-open slave routes and re-develop slave markets for people to visit.

The church leader's comment highlighted to us the need to talk jointly in the north of Ghana about the slave trade and the gospel of Jesus Christ. We made a joint decision to hold a seminar at which we would discuss the impact of the slave trade on northern peoples and the relevance of the gospel of Jesus Christ in it. This would constitute another step forward in the process of understanding one another, learning from each other and facing unresolved issues.

## **THE SLAVE TRADE AND THE GOSPEL: PREPARATION AND PARTICIPATION**

In planning for the seminar, five church leaders and two missionaries were each asked to prepare presentations. John Bosco Bawiah, a Kasena pastor, opened the seminar with a devotion on [Romans 6:15–22](#), 'From slaves of sin to children of God'. Four church leaders, Boniface Akantoe (Nankani), Kwame Jua (Sisaala), Francis Kupoe (Kasena) and George Atemboa (Builsa) prepared papers on the impact of the slave trade on their own ethnic group. They were given a series of questions to guide them in their research on the effect of the slave raids:

- What stories do your people tell about slave raids?
- What songs tell about the slave raids or people defeating the slave raiders?
- What shrines are associated with the slave raids or defeating the slave raiders?  
What do you know about these shrines, their powers and how people use them today?
- What effects did the slave raids have on the Kasena people?

Each leader was also asked to reflect on how Christ, as the one authentic Lord of history acted to reclaim and redeem the past.<sup>8</sup> Although Christ was not named in the Old Testament, the apostle Paul saw Christ's presence and action in the history of the Exodus ([1 Cor. 10:1–4](#) and [Ex. 17:1–7](#)). The 'rock was Christ' that gave water in the wilderness wanderings. The four church leaders considered the following questions:

- What Scripture passages show you that Jesus Christ was present in your past and that it was Christ who acted to save your people from the slave raids?
- How do you show your people and others outside that Christ was present at the time of the slave raids and wants to redeem their past?

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<sup>7</sup> 7. Nana Kwadwo Akpan, 'Purifying a people's soul', *Daily Graphic*, 3 December 1994, p. 5; 'Chiefs to be cleansed of misdeeds in slave trade', *Ghanaian Times*, 7 December 1994, p. 1; 'Stools and skins purified,' Ghanaian Times, 10 December 1994, p. 15; 'They shed tears for ancestors,' *Daily Graphic*, 12 December 1994, pp. 1, 8–9.

<sup>8</sup> 8. Kwame Bediako 'The Gospel as Alpha and Omega of culture: the African Dimension,' *Akrofi-Christaller Centre News*, No. 20 (January–June 1997), pp. 8–11. Bediako discusses this passage and asks in relation to the Ga Homowo festival, 'May not Ga Christians revisit Ga history and redirect the whole community's attention to the one authentic Lord of history, Jesus Christ, to whom alone credit is due?'



- How can Christians today celebrate the fact that it was Christ who delivered them from the slave raids? What will Christians do now to celebrate Christ's salvation?
- How, as Christians, do we show the community that we celebrate or remember these events because of the role that we have now discovered Christ played in our past?
- How does this help you tell others about the Good News of Jesus Christ?
- What will Christians do, as a result of seeing Christ acting in their past, to help other Christians grow in their faith?

Each church leader found that the memory of the slave raids lives on in the minds of their people. Songs are still sung that speak of different aspects of the slave raids. In the Sisaala town of Gwollu, the remnants of a wall remain that their forefathers built to protect themselves from slave raiders. Some groups were more devastated than others. The leaders spoke of disruption to their forefathers' lives through hunger when food was destroyed or confiscated by raiders; through parents sometimes having to sell their own children because of hunger; and through the capture or death of family members. They referred to the long-term legacy of hatred not only towards whites, but towards those in other ethnic groups and within their own communities who were involved in the traffic of humans.

Amongst several groups, the present day power of certain earth shrines is traced back to the salvific role these shrines played in preserving or delivering people from the raids. On the north side of Chiana in the Kasena community stands a large granite hill known as Zambao. It is the predominant earth shrine of the area. People took refuge there during the raids and from that position attacked the slave raiders and drove them out. People today credit Zambao with saving them. In his paper, Francis Kupoe referred to the hills mentioned in [Psalm 121](#) and noted that the Psalmist not only knew that God created the hills, but describes God as his Helper (v.2), Shade (v.5), Protector (v.7) and Guard (v.8). Kupoe described the hills in Chiana as God's protective measure for the Kasena.<sup>9</sup>

The realization that the slave raids in Northern Ghana had occurred as part of a wider phenomenon led me into writing a paper on the historical background of the whole history of slavery. It was revealing to learn that in the tenth and eleventh centuries 'Western Europeans and Arabs raided and attacked Slavonic peoples and sold them into slavery'.<sup>10</sup> I. Hrbek states that 'Slavonic prisoners of war must have formed the bulk of the slave population in Western Europe'.<sup>11</sup> So great was this slave movement that the word for slave in all western European languages comes from the word 'Slav', which is the name that the various Slavonic peoples of Eastern Europe used for themselves. They were also exported to Muslim countries. Perhaps this gives us a better understanding of the lengthy background of bitterness, hatred and retaliation that still exists in places such as Kosovo and Yugoslavia today.

The writing of the paper was difficult, particularly when I was faced with the findings of Thomas Foxwell Buxton, the evangelical British parliamentarian, who learnt that 'in 1837 and 1838, more slaves were crossing the Atlantic than when Wilberforce began his

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<sup>9</sup> 9. Francis Kupoe, 'The impact of the slave trade on the Kasena', in *The Slave Trade and Reconciliation*, p. 21.

<sup>10</sup> 10. Allison Howell, 'The slave trade and its impact on Northern Ghana', in *The Slave Trade and Reconciliation*, p. 35.

<sup>11</sup> 11. I. Hrbek (ed), *General History of Africa: III Africa from the Seventh to the Eleventh Century*, Abridged Edition, (London: James Currey, 1988 and 1992), p. 7.



campaign fifty years earlier'.<sup>12</sup> He found that in the raiding, marketing, passage and landing of slaves, seven out of every ten slaves captured were murdered. Africa was being depopulated at the rate of half a million people per year. The slave trade was blocking Christian preaching and blocking Africa from economic benefits. My response to the issue was expressed in personal terms.

As I personally reflect on the details of what is in this document, it leaves me with profound sadness at the actions of our white forefathers. Although I am an Australian, my ancestors mostly come from Britain and were there during the period when the greatest numbers of slaves were being shipped out of Africa to the Americas. I am sorry for and deeply regret the actions of my nation and my forefathers. I look at the sins of my forefathers for their view of black Africans as inferior and of no worth. I see their sin in using Scripture to justify oppression, brutality and inhuman treatment. I see their sin of greed in wanting to make profits by abusing African life to do so. We are shamed by what has been done for we as a nation have sinned against God. I apologize for the subtle attitudes of superiority that sometimes creep into my life and work. All that I am and have is only because of the grace of God.<sup>13</sup>

Discussion of past events such as this has the potential to re-open old wounds and hatreds. Both Ghanaians and missionaries have raised questions: 'What does this have to do with us? We weren't even there! What does all this have to do with the gospel?' In the conclusion of my paper I said that what we talk about

is not for the purpose of stirring up hatred and bitterness. Every Christian should go back into his or her past armed with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, not to try and 'restore' its glory or to 'wallow' in its misery, but to allow the Gospel of Jesus Christ to 'redeem' it. This is an important way of bringing transformation to culture and life and of moving forward in our Christian faith.<sup>14</sup>

The slave trade had an impact not only on the physical lives of people, but also on the spiritual realm. Together as a group we looked at God's action in freeing the Israelites from slavery and the implications that had for Northern Ghana.

Jay Moon addressed the issue of forgiveness and reconciliation. In his paper, he referred to an Angolan proverb which says that, 'The one who throws the stone forgets; the one who is hit remembers forever.' He then added, 'It may be easy for those whose ancestors participated in the slave trade to forget about it and get on with life. The one who was enslaved, however, was hit with a stone that left a deep wound. He can never forget it unless the wound is uncovered and healed.'<sup>15</sup> Moon argued that 'When slavery started, the devil opened a wound spiritually that has brought a curse upon us. This wound is deep and is oozing with infection. We can't wait any longer. We cannot ignore it or shamefully cover it up. The time has come to start the healing, otherwise, we will be like sick men and women in need of life-saving surgery.'

He referred to the story in [2 Samuel 21](#) where a similar situation occurred during the reign of King David. King David found out that a wound had been covered up. Famine came on the land and when David consulted the Lord, the Lord showed him that Saul and his

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<sup>12</sup> 12. Andrew Walls, 'The Legacy of Thomas Foxwell Buxton,' *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 1991, p. 75.

<sup>13</sup> 13. Allison Howell, op. cit., pp. 52, 53.

<sup>14</sup> 14. Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>15</sup> 15. Jay Moon, 'Forgiveness and reconciliation', in *The Slave Trade and Reconciliation*, p. 59.

family were guilty of murdering the people of Gibeon. King Saul had died, but in his lifetime he had violated an oath that the Israelites had made with the Gibeonites four hundred years before ([Joshua 9](#)). Moon noted that

The famine happened during the reign of King David. King David was from the tribe of Judah. Joshua was the one who made the treaty with the Gibeonites. He was not from the tribe of Judah, he was from the tribe of Ephraim. They were from two different tribes all together—just like Kasena and Builsa are both Ghanaian but are totally different ethnic groups. The man who broke the treaty was Saul who was not from the tribe of Judah or from the tribe of Ephraim. He was from the tribe of Benjamin. The people who suffered from the famine were not just the tribe of Benjamin. All twelve tribes suffered since God held all twelve tribes responsible.<sup>16</sup>

King David still had to deal with this wound. His confession resulted in forgiveness, reconciliation and healing. Moon drew out two principles that need to be acknowledged

- The blessing and the curse of the past affect the present.
- When the leaders of a people sin and the people passively accept it, then the whole group is accountable before God.<sup>17</sup>

After reading [Matthew 18:20–35](#), where Jesus tells the parable of the unforgiving servant, Moon addressed his Northern Ghanaian Colleagues:

This story is very powerful in Ghana today because you have the ointment to bring about healing. Your people were made slaves; they have been sinned against. Now God has chosen you to become a Christian. Jesus paid the big debt of sin for you and your debt is no longer there. Now, Jesus hands you the healing ointment and says,

‘Forgive those who have sinned against you just as I have forgiven you.’ You have the key to bring about the healing in Jesus’ name. If you offer forgiveness in Jesus’ name, then the process to heal the wound will begin.<sup>18</sup>

In his reference to the wound, Moon acknowledged that the wound had been passed on from one generation to another—from parents to their children. The hatred and bitterness would continue to be passed on if we did not allow God to cleanse the wound. Moon concluded by stating.

Today, I want to take off the cover of denial and confess the sins of my forefathers. It was my people that sinned against your people and because of that, we have a wound today. I am deeply sorry for the pain that you have suffered. When you talk behind my back, I know it is because of the wound.<sup>19</sup>

Moon then stated that the only way he could express what he felt was by washing the feet of the Chairman of the Inter Church District Council, Rev. Stephen Aputara. In his response, Aputara called forward the SIM northern team leader, Ruby Mikulencak and in a symbolic gesture, he and four other church leaders washed their feet. As they did so he quietly stated:

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<sup>16</sup> 16. Ibid., pp. 59, 60.

<sup>17</sup> 17. Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>18</sup> 18. Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>19</sup> 19. Ibid., pp. 66, 67.

[This] is not a ceremony. It is not a drama. It is something that we are demonstrating before God that indeed we are very sorry for anything that the church has done against the mission. For the old wounds that we still think of and this is a symbol to demonstrate the past anger is gone and we have forgotten everything, forgiven each other and we move forward together.

Words cannot adequately express the atmosphere in the room at that time. The church asked that the papers and what had happened during the seminar be put in writing as a testimony to what was said so that we would not forget what had passed between us.

## **THE IMPACT AND IMPLICATIONS OF RECONCILIATION**

During the discussion and interaction at the end of the seminar, an older church leader sat quietly weeping. He said nothing but after the seminar he told how another family in his village had sold his grandfather into slavery. When he tried to escape, the slave raiders cut the fingers off one of his hands. The man finally escaped when the slaves reached the coast. Slowly he made his way up north and on arrival in his village, called his family together and as he showed them his hand he spat out the words, 'Never forget what they did to me.'

The leader told how they had never forgotten. Ever since that time, his family had been estranged from the family that sold his grandfather. A bitter root of animosity had become a permanent part of their community. He said, 'I even told my son about them.' Then he added, 'At the seminar, I wept because I realized that I now need to go and undo what I told my son, and our family must forgive this family for selling my grandfather.' Another Christian told me that another man had taken his wife and given her to another man. It had caused a huge dispute. Even though the Christian remarried, he gave one of his children a name related to the fight so that he would never forget. He said he had realized his need to forgive and to change his child's name.

We printed copies of the papers presented at the seminar but were then asked to publish them as a small book. The church wanted to hold a 'Book Launching Ceremony' at the beginning of 1999. In the course of preparing for the event, several church leaders and myself were asked to meet the Guest-of-Honour, a government official, to discuss the aims of the ceremony. He aggressively questioned us about our motives in wanting to raise the issue of the slave trade. He argued that it would only cause bitterness. We explained that the purpose of the seminar was not to stir up hatred and bitterness, but for us together to go back into the past so that the Good News of Jesus Christ might redeem the past and bring forgiveness and reconciliation. He seemed satisfied with our account of what had transpired.

On the day of the Book Launch, his assistant, who had not been present at our meeting with the Guest-of-Honour, asked us for help in preparing the latter's speech. As we discussed with him the contents of the book and related what had happened at the seminar, the assistant paused in his writing and admitted, 'I really like what the church has done.' He told us how he had attended a seminar in another region the previous year. One speaker had strongly criticized the ethnic groups in Ghana who had been involved in slave raiding. He added, 'What the speaker said made me angry.' He then indicated that he was from one of the slave raiding ethnic groups that we knew to be predominantly Muslim. It was at that point that we realized that the testimony of the church and Mission had had an impact on a Muslim! In addition, during the actual ceremony, the Guest-of-Honour fully acknowledged and endorsed the process of forgiveness and reconciliation that had begun between the church and Mission. He also challenged disputing communities to embrace the same course of action.

Furthermore, as a result of a report I sent to a group of supporting churches and individual Christians in Australia, a number of people raised questions about the relevance of reconciliation. 'Why apologize for the past when we weren't involved? Hasn't reconciliation just become a matter of "political correctness"?'

It has been these little unexpected reactions that have made us realize that what occurred in a small room amongst sixty people on the margins of Ghana, had potentially far wider implications than we had ever stopped to consider.

In recent years, the word 'reconciliation' has become closely associated with a number of nations attempting to come to terms with their past.<sup>20</sup> In Australia, for instance, there has been significant publicity concerning the maltreatment of Aboriginal people since the beginning of white settlement.<sup>21</sup> The revelations concerning the 'Stolen Generation' have brought to light what happened to an estimated 100,000 young aborigines of mixed race who were forcibly removed from their families and fostered in white homes in the name of 'assimilation'.<sup>22</sup>

The origins of this practice go back to the nineteenth century social Darwinist belief. Until the 1960s, successive governments believed that mixed race Aborigines would be more easily assimilated into white society than those of full descent, thus leading to the dying out of the Aboriginal race. The discredited policy has left a deep wound within the nation. There is deep hurt amongst Aboriginal Australians. White Australian reactions cover a broad spectrum from extreme guilt to complete denial of any wrongdoing. In 1997, the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation held an Australian Reconciliation Convention and this was followed by a 'National Sorry Day' in May 1998. On both occasions, Christians raised questions about the meaning of the word 'reconciliation'. Is the concept of reconciliation as understood by different groups in society the same as the Scriptural interpretation of reconciliation? Did it involve seeking justice and the question of compensation?

In Peter Fryer's extensive and insightful study on the history of Black People in Britain,<sup>23</sup> he points out that the British cities of Bristol and Liverpool were turned into boom towns and great world ports by the slave trade.<sup>24</sup> The profits netted by British slave-merchants are estimated to be 'about £12,000,000 on the 2,500,000 Africans they brought and sold between c. 1630 and 1807, and perhaps half of this profit accrued between 1750 and 1790'.<sup>25</sup> The trade stimulated the growth of banking facilities and shipbuilding. He documents in detail the growth in wealth of individuals, banks and industry. It is information such as this that prompts questions to be raised both in Africa and amongst

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<sup>20</sup> 20. Reconciliation has also been the theme at a number of Christian conferences. *Reconciliation in Difficult Places: Dealing with our Deepest Differences, The Washington Forum: Perspectives on our Global Future, Monrovia, Office of Advocacy and Education, World Vision, 1994.* Gregory Baum and Harold Wells (eds), *The Reconciliation of Peoples: Challenge to the Churches*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1997).

<sup>21</sup> 21. Bruce Elder provides a very graphic description of this in his book, *Blood on the Wattle: Massacres and maltreatment of Aboriginal Australians since 1788* (Frenchs Forest, N.S.W.: Child & Associates, 1988.)

<sup>22</sup> 22. In 1997, a report was published of the inquiry into the forced removal of Aboriginal children. Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission, *Bringing Them Home, Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from the Families*, 1997.

<sup>23</sup> 23. Peter Freyer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain*, (London: Pluto Press, 1984).

<sup>24</sup> 24. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>25</sup> 25. *Ibid.*, p. 36.

African-Americans about the need for reparation and restitution. Do issues such as social justice and restitution need to be addressed as part of reconciliation?

## THE PROCESS OF RECONCILIATION

The background to reconciliation in Scripture is broken relationships. Francis Schaeffer points out that there are four areas of broken relationship as a consequence of the Fall:

1. Spiritual division—a person is separated from God.
2. Psychological division—a person is separated from himself or herself.
3. Sociological division—a person is separated from others in society.

Ecological division—a person is separated from nature and nature is divided from nature itself.<sup>26</sup>

The apostle Paul writes about the restoration of broken relationships. He tells us that ‘in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us’, ([2 Cor. 5:19](#), NRSV). God’s move in restoring our broken relationship was to forgive us. His death on the cross was an act of grace—the offended one forgiving the offender. Moreover, on the cross Jesus forgave the offending party before there was any sign of repentance or remorse ([Lk. 23:34](#)). Therefore, reconciliation has to do with overcoming enmity or the bridging over of a quarrel.

Christ did not stop with his own act of reconciliation for he gave to us a ministry of reconciliation ([2 Cor. 5:18, 19](#)). Schaeffer reasons that on the basis of the work of Christ on the cross, Christ opened a way for all Christians to work ‘for substantial healings now in every area where there are divisions’.<sup>27</sup> Christ commissioned us to ‘make disciples of all nations’. This includes the gospel of Jesus Christ bringing healing to the divisions that we as humans have created between ourselves. According to the Ghanaian theologian, Kwame Bediako,

The Great Commission is about the discipling of the nations, the conversion of the things that make people into nations—the shared processes of thinking, the common attitudes, world views, languages, cultural, social and economic habits of thought and behaviour and practice—all those things and the lives of the people in whom those things find expression—are meant to be within the call of discipleship, including [n]ationality itself.

He then adds,

In our preaching of Jesus Christ to the nations, then, God calls peoples to bring under the lordship of Jesus Christ all those things which they reckon enable them set (sic) themselves apart from other people, and which they sometimes use to distinguish themselves from others as though superior to them.<sup>28</sup>

The gospel therefore brings reconciliation between God and humans, and reconciliation between people. If reconciliation means overcoming enmity, the way to overcome that enmity must include dealing with the cause of the quarrel or problem. The

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<sup>26</sup> 26. Francis Schaeffer and U. Middleman, *Pollution and the Death of Man*, (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1992), p. 66.

<sup>27</sup> 27. Schaeffer, op. cit., p. 67.

<sup>28</sup> 28. Kwame Bediako, ‘Mission Issues in Africa Today’, *Africa Theological Fellowship (ATF) Bulletin*, No. 1 (October 1995), pp. 6, 7.

ultimate cause of the problem in every case is human sinfulness, but human sinfulness causes injustice and harm. In the Old Testament, God's passionate desire for justice is illustrated in his concern for restitution and compensation for wrong done (see [Ex. 21:14-27](#) and [Lev. 24:1-17](#)). Reconciliation, particularly when related to wrongs committed in the past, therefore, involves the following process:

- Understanding the hurt and pain of the present related to the hurt of the past. This involves listening to the offended party talk about their grievances.
- Going back into the past to allow Christ to redeem the past. The offenders must admit the wrongs of the past just as Daniel confessed the past sins of his nation ([Dan. 9:4ff](#)). It means also acknowledging the shame we bear because of the wrongful actions that occurred. This must include the confession of our own sinful attitudes, particularly that of superiority. For the offended or wronged party, there is also confession, especially of bitterness or enmity towards the offenders.
- Saying we are sorry. This is not a trite verbal statement, for it means turning around. It is the conversion of our attitudes, our habits of thought and our shared processes of thinking.
- The offended party unconditionally forgiving the offenders. In Christ's action on the cross, he was the offended party. He did not demand that the offending party compensate. Rather he forgave unconditionally by paying the debt that humans deserved to pay. In Christ, forgiveness does not depend upon a promise of compensation or even addressing issues of injustice. Compensation and restitution are actions that flow out of forgiveness.

Addressing the issue of reparation and restitution. Compensation and restitution cannot be ignored, but neither should they be defined only in monetary or economic terms for they also affect patterns of thought and behaviour.

In conclusion, from the five points above we see that reconciliation is not an expression of political correctness. It is a process of bringing together those that have been hostile to each other. Our experience in Northern Ghana helped us to understand the relevance of the process of reconciliation to the restoration of broken relationships between God and humans and between human beings themselves. It was not only a matter for us as missionaries to acknowledge shame and apologize for the wrongful actions of our forefathers, but we needed to acknowledge the attitude of superiority that western missionaries often communicate (whether consciously or subliminally) towards those with whom God has sent us to work. It is often reflected in the independent manner in which we make decisions, the failure to consult the church prior to taking action, and the assumption that 'we have come to help you'. It is therefore evident that reconciliation has implications for healing beyond just the offended and offending parties as it causes others to examine their relationship not only with God, but also with others.

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# Books Reviewed

Reviewed by Harry Rowold

Edited by Darrell L. Guder

[\*Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America\*](#)

Reviewed by Garry Harris

John Piper

[\*The Supremacy of God in Preaching\*](#)

Reviewed by Ray Laird

David W. Bercot

[\*A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs: A Reference Guide to More Than 700 Topics Discussed by the Early Church Fathers\*](#)

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Graham McFarlane

[\*Why do you believe what you believe about the Holy Spirit?\*](#)

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Edited by James T. Dennison

[\*Institutes of Elenctic Theology, Vols. 1 & 2\*](#)

Reviewed by David Parker

Hans Finzel

[\*The Top Ten Mistakes Leaders Make\*](#)

## Book Reviews

### **MISSIONAL CHURCH: A VISION FOR THE SENDING OF THE CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA**

Edited by Darrell L. Guder

In

The Gospel and our Culture Series

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998

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*Reviewed by Henry Rowold, Mission Professor of Theology, Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis, MO (USA)*

Though it may seem ancient history now, George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (published in 1949) triggered a series of events that has spawned some very serious and creative thinking for the mission and ministry of the Christian church. In his *The Other Side of 1984: Questions for the Churches*, the late Bishop Lesslie Newbigin articulated the

challenges of an emerging post-modern, post-Christian, culturally pluralistic era for the Christian church of the West. Similar to the Gospel and Culture forum in Great Britain, a Gospel and Our Culture Network was formed in North America some ten years ago to study and interpret the implications of those challenges for the church moving into the next century.

As the result of that decade-long study, this book merits very serious attention. Its authors, six in all, are some of the finest mission scholars in North America, representing four major denominational traditions (Anabaptist, Baptist, Methodist, Reformed). Each of the six authored at least one of the chapters, though all critiqued and helped hone each of the chapters. The end result is not a mixed anthology of loosely related pieces, but a tightly-written, coherent work, characterized by competence and commitment, diagnosis and prescription.

At root, this 'missional ecclesiology' contends for an understanding of the church (its structures and theology) that is missional in design and definition. This ambitious and comprehensive project begins with two diagnostic studies: the cultural context of contemporary North America and the contemporary North American church—each chapter sensitive to developments distinctive to both Canada and the United States. With that contextual background in mind, the study turns to scriptural, theological, and missiological issues: the church called and sent to represent the reign of God, the church as apostle to the world, cultivating communities of the Holy Spirit. Finally, there are studies of the structuring of the missional church: mission leadership (equipping God's people for mission), mission structures (the particular community), and mission connectedness (community of communities in mission). Nothing about the church is free from missional scrutiny, not its theological agendas or denominational structures or congregational patterns or programmatic activities or worship traditions. Far from ecclesiastical tinkering, this book seeks to effect a systemic re-take on the entire mission and identity of the church.

This book is a superbly crafted end-product of an extended study project, and it now takes on a second life as a catalyst for wider conversation. Part of that wider conversation should be ecclesial. As many theological traditions as these authors represent, for instance, there are other major families that need to be brought into the discussion: Anglican, Lutheran, Pentecostal. Those additional traditions can add perspective to aspects that seemed understated: the sacramental life of the church (especially the Eucharist), the pastoral ministry, and the role of the institutional church in society. Another part of the wider conversation will be cultural. Though the strength of this book is its clear focus on North America, its methodology and its commitment to Scripture and mission can serve as helpful models to other cultural areas, which in turn can share insights and perspectives to refine the conclusions drawn in this book. Still another part will be implement-al. The closer the book approaches implementation, which presumes many different persuasions and structure, the more it seems consigned to remain somewhat general and abstract.

The church stands in gratitude to the scholars of this Gospel and Our Culture Network, both for their theological and missiological rigour, and for their commitment to the mission of God in and through the church. A challenge has been issued, and both church and mission will be much enriched by grappling with the issues and insights raised.

## **THE SUPREMACY OF GOD IN PREACHING**

by John Piper.

Baker Book House, Grand Rapids. 1998.

Paper pp. 119 ISBN 0-8010-7112-7



John Piper, a Baptist pastor in Minneapolis, has been afforded the dual honour of presenting both the Billy Graham Centre Lectures on Preaching at Wheaton College and the Harold John Ockenga Lectures on Preaching at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. The substance of these two significant lectureships has been conflated in this volume with considerable impact.

The purpose of this undertaking is to militate for the supremacy of God in preaching. Piper insists: '... the vision of a great God is the linchpin in the life of the church ... Our people need someone, at least once a week, to lift up his voice and magnify the supremacy of God' (p. 11).

The author strenuously contends for the glory of God; the cross of Christ; and the power of the Holy Spirit; as the goal, the grounds, and the gift of preaching. (p. 19). Insisting that the preacher's authority is tied to the use of an inspired book, Piper advocates a rediscovery of quoting scripture in the sermon as a way of honouring God and the work of the Holy Spirit. He urges: '... rely on the Holy Spirit by saturating your preaching with the Word he inspired' (p. 42).

Frequent allusions to the public ministry of Jonathan Edwards demonstrate the impact of pulpit oration focused on the supremacy of God. The Boston clergy criticized Edwards for inciting emotion by preaching about eternity. His response, however, was irrefutable: 'If we who have the care of souls ... saw our hearers in eminent danger ... it would be morally impossible for us to avoid ... warning them to fly from it, and even to cry aloud to them' (pp. 48–49). Piper draws upon biographers who attest to Edward's intense solemnity, earnestness, and surprising lack of rhetorical eloquence (p. 49). Nevertheless, the persuasive effect of his preaching is historic.

In the chapter entitled *The Gravity and Gladness of Preaching*, the author contrasts the seriousness of Edwards with the casualness that has permeated contemporary pulpit demeanour (p. 51). He chides: 'Laughter seems to have replaced repentance as the goal of many preachers' (p. 56). Edwards is shown as the antithesis of this flippancy. Piper notes: 'His preaching was totally serious from beginning to end. You will look in vain for one joke in the 1200 sermons that remain' (p. 47). Piper's extensive study of Edwards propels him to suggest confidently the reason for this intense solemnity. He states: 'Edwards had an overwhelming conviction of the reality of the glories of heaven and the horrors of hell that made his preaching utterly earnest' (p. 48).

The second section of this project: *How to Make God Supreme in Preaching* provides a synopsis of Edward's life. It details his outstanding academic career at Yale; his lengthy ministry at the Congregational Church, Northampton, Massachusetts; and his untimely death in 1758, after assuming the Presidency of Princeton University (pp. 67–73).

The author also furnishes a concise summary of Edwards' theology which was strongly influenced by the Psalmist's call to ponder the depths of God's being. [Psalm 46:10](#), 'Be still and know that I am God', became pivotal in his experience and thinking. Piper observes: when Edwards became still and knew that God is God, the vision before his eyes was of an absolutely sovereign God, self-sufficient and all-sufficient, infinite in holiness, and therefore perfectly glorious (p. 80).

The concluding chapter is an explication of characteristics of Edwards' preaching, all of which are predicated on the firm conviction that: 'Spiritual awakening is the sovereign work of God ...' (p. 81).

They include exhortation to: 'Saturate (preaching) with Scripture' (p. 86); 'Use Threat and Warning' (p. 90); 'Plead for a Response' (p. 93); and 'Be Intense' (p. 103).

This volume articulates a theology of preaching which supports the author's thesis that the goal of preaching is the glory of God. It also provides a valuable introduction to

the life and preaching of Jonathan Edwards for those unacquainted with this giant of the American church, without embroiling the reader in the tedium of the more dense historical treatises.

**A DICTIONARY OF EARLY CHRISTIAN BELIEFS: A REFERENCE GUIDE  
TO MORE THAN 700 TOPICS DISCUSSED BY THE EARLY CHURCH  
FATHERS**

David W. Bercot (Ed) Peabody Mass.: Hendrickson Pub. 1998, 704pp. Hb ISBN 1-56563-357-1

*Reviewed by Ray Laird*

Generally speaking, evangelicals have not been all that familiar with the writings of the early Church Fathers. Pastors and leaders may have experienced a brief acquaintance with some of them during seminary days, but since then have long forgotten those who led the way in discussing and teaching the Christian faith. David Bercot has done the church a great service in providing an accessible point of entry into the extant writings of the pre-Nicene church. The volume is in dictionary form and is a collection of quotations on a wide variety of topics discussed in those Fathers. Over 700 topics are treated in this way. A random sample shows that some are more extensively covered than others. 'Freewill and Predestination' takes up 10 pages of quotations, the 'Cross' 2 ½ pages, 'Atonement' 7, 'Baptism' 12 ½, 'Modesty' 1, 'Evil' 2 ½, 'Montanists' 4 ½, 'Divinity of Christ' 34 and 'Salvation' 18. This brief glimpse demonstrates where the emphases lay and is a reasonable reflection of the concentration of the writings themselves.

Bercot admits that the entries are not exhaustive but representative. References are often provided for further material in the Fathers. Entries are suitably cross-referenced to enable viewing of the treatment of related subjects. The great danger in a work of this nature is its potential to be used as proof-texting. To his credit, Bercot warns about this in an introductory chapter on how to use the Dictionary. This is a salutary reminder that the Dictionary needs to be used judiciously. A few lines from an author may lead the reader towards the author's thinking but rarely do such encompass his teaching. This indicates that the Dictionary would best be used as an index to the Fathers rather than a comprehensive distillation of their thought. The reader may look up a topic, read the entry and then move to the references in the writings to peruse the discussions in which the quotations in the Dictionary occur. In this way a far greater understanding of their thought will be gained than by merely digesting the quotes.

The introductory chapter is essential reading for anyone wanting to make the best use of this work. Among other things, such as directions on how to work through a topic, it contains a brief presentation of three issues that are basic to understanding the writings of the Fathers, viz. Marcion and the Gnostics, the Logos, and the Early Christian Scriptures. Another useful part of the Dictionary is a who's who of the Ante-Nicene Fathers in which 46 persons are listed. Brief background information is given for each of these, a helpful feature in putting the topic material into context.

Overall, Bercot is to be commended on this work. If it leads some into the riches of those whose thought-world and culture were similar to if not identical with that of the New Testament writers and who lived and worked much nearer to our sources than we do, then he has done a useful service for the church.

**WHY DO YOU BELIEVE WHAT YOU BELIEVE ABOUT THE HOLY SPIRIT?**

by Graham McFarlane  
Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1998.  
200 pages, paperback, with illustrations.  
ISBN 0-85364-886-7  
*Reviewed by Don McLellan*

This book is an unusual mixture. It combines wide-ranging research and a depth of theological insight with quaint and simple line drawings in the kind of layout one finds in the popular and, dare we say it, frothy publications frequently found in today's Christian bookstores. The style may be described as 'spoken English written': ie. it reads as one imagines the author might speak, complete with chatty and sometimes unnecessary asides. While this style combined with sometimes curious punctuation may irritate language purists, it is not a bad thing if it encourages people to become at least partly informed in this vital area of theology.

The content of McFarlane's book is valuable. He is genuinely concerned that evangelicals think through what they believe about the Holy Spirit. His outline of the history of the theology of the Holy Spirit provides a sound platform for this exercise. What the Spirit really did in the life of the early church and its individual Christians is outlined, along with information as to how significant theologians from Augustine to John Owen and Edward Irving grappled with issues relating to the Spirit. From this foundation McFarlane gives a sound description of the work of the Spirit in the life of the believer. Finally he addresses the problem of individualism which has become a characteristic of western evangelical and charismatic churches. However, rather than emphasizing community to the detriment of the individual, McFarlane defines the work of the Spirit in terms of the individual and the community, or more specifically, 'community belonging and individual identity'. These are not goals in themselves, but goals along the way to the ultimate establishment of the kingdom of God.

The net result is a book that is solid enough for serious Bible and theological students, and light enough to encourage those to read it who would not normally read theology. Unfortunately, though not unexpectedly in a book of this genre, it lacks even a brief bibliography. Nevertheless, it is a valuable addition to the vast literature on the Holy Spirit that has come out in the past two decades, and its encouragement to discover not only what we believe about the Holy Spirit but also why we believe it, is timely.

## **INSTITUTES OF ELENCTIC THEOLOGY, VOLS. 1 & 2**

by Francis Turretin

translated by G. Musgrave Giger, edited by James T. Dennison, Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed 1992, 1994, xlii-685pp.; xxiv-724pp

*Reviewed by Pietro Bolognesi, IFED, Padua*

These are the first two volumes out of a series of three that make up the edition of the *Institutes* by one of the most important Reformed theologians. Through his teaching and preaching, Francis Turretin (1623-87) played a significant role not only in Geneva and Europe of his time, but up to the last century even beyond the Atlantic. He is a foremost example of the mature and organic expression of Reformed thinking, and this justifies his influence on the evangelical world. His *Institutes*, published only in Latin until the last century, contributed deeply to the structure and shape of evangelical thought concerning some of the most crucial doctrines.

Despite the existence of an English translation of the work (8000 pages long) dating from the last century, nobody had yet undertaken the effort of publishing it. The English-speaking community is thus indebted to the editor J.T. Dennison and to the publisher for

this excellent work presented in such a readable and attractive form. Dennison quite usefully identified all the sources of Turretin's quotations (from the Church Fathers to his contemporaries), but perhaps he could have updated Geiger's translation that in some parts sounds obsolete.

The first volume deals with ten loci, from the prolegomena to Scripture, Trinity, God's decrees, creation, Providence, angels and anthropology. The second one deals with God's law, the covenant of grace, the person and work of Christ, his mediatorial office, the calling and faith, justification and sanctification.

Reading this work will prompt many to dispute the cliché of considering Scholasticism a fruitless endeavour. In fact, it will indeed help to reveal its great richness, its scriptural and exegetical precision, the deep knowledge of church history and its willingness to interact uncompromisingly with the world. Deeply rooted in the Scripture and in open dialogue with the church tradition, Turretin offers a model of analytical investigation and of a *via media* that avoids extreme positions and exalts biblical and evangelical principles.

One could think that Turretin's controversy with the papists and Socinian rationalists of his times would now be outdated, but it is quite evident that the modern evangelical world still has to deal with most of the issues that were at the heart of his polemic. In this respect it is hardly conceivable to consider ourselves evangelicals and at the same time disregard the monumental work of this Swiss-Italian theologian. Catholicism and Rationalism, in fact, still remain two major battle grounds for the evangelical faith. This publication of Turretin's work will therefore be of considerable assistance to contemporary evangelicals.

## **THE TOP TEN MISTAKES LEADERS MAKE**

by Hans Finzel

Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1994 ISBN 1 56476 246 7

Hb 200pp

*Reviewed by David Parker*

This must be one of the most disturbing and yet useful books to be published in recent times. In ten chapters, Hans Finzel, Executive Director of the Conservative Baptist Foreign Mission has unerringly identified the most dangerous areas of trouble for leaders of Christian organizations. Although upon reflection, the points raised in this book may seem quite obvious to all, it does not take much experience of church organizations to realize how important it is for books like this to be published and read, as difficult as it is to see the common failings of leaders so boldly identified.

Finzel uses a simple, homely style with perhaps over much reliance on personal illustration and too little theoretical and biblical support. Nevertheless, he effectively shows how such problems as dictatorial leadership, absence of support for workers, over-zealous application of corporate rules, unfair delegation, poor communication and ignorance of the local context wreak havoc in Christian work and destroy the ministry, reputation and personal lives of those involved.

A clear chapter layout helps to make the main points of this book readily available. For example, in the chapter dealing with 'Dirty Delegation' (sub-titled 'Refusing to relax and let go', Finzel lists on the first page three key observations about the topic (the sin of overmanaging, the frustration caused by sloppy delegation and the problem of not matching delegation to individual ability). Boxes throughout the chapter highlight reasons why leaders will not delegate, steps in delegation (assignment, authority, accountability and affirmation), issues of concern to workers and quotes from famous leaders; charts also illustrate various facets of the process. This chapter (like all others)

concludes with 'Powerpoints' which sum up the key theoretical and practical issues (including the basic principle, 'He who is asked to do the job plans how it will be done' and a list of key ingredients and guidelines for 'clean delegation.')

In the final two chapters, the author tackles the broader issues of planning for the future and preparing for one's successor, thereby emphasising the importance to be attached to the overall purpose of the organization rather than allowing the leader's own personal agenda to control. As usual, the material is practical and relevant, and reflects Finzel's commitment to responsible leadership.

In the opening chapter, Finzel remarks that many leaders 'lack good models and mentoring' and that consequently they 'replicate the poor leadership habits they have observed in others.' By analysing all too common examples of poor leadership and showing how they can be rectified, he has gone a long way to dealing with this problem, thus making an important contribution to the already vast range of books on leadership that are available today.

## **Book and Journal Information**

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Joseph Tson, *Suffering, Martyrdom, and Rewards in Heaven* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1997). Available from the copyright holders, Romanian Missionary Society, PO Box 527, Wheaton, IL 601889-0527, USA at \$55 each including postage

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