

# EVANGELICAL REVIEW OF THEOLOGY

**VOLUME 24**

*Articles and book reviews original and selected from  
publications worldwide for an international  
readership for the purpose of discerning the  
obedience of faith*

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Published by  
PATERNOSTER PERIODICALS



for  
WORLD EVANGELICAL FELLOWSHIP  
Theological Commission

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**Volume 24 • Number 1 • January 2000**

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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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