

# The Standard Bearer

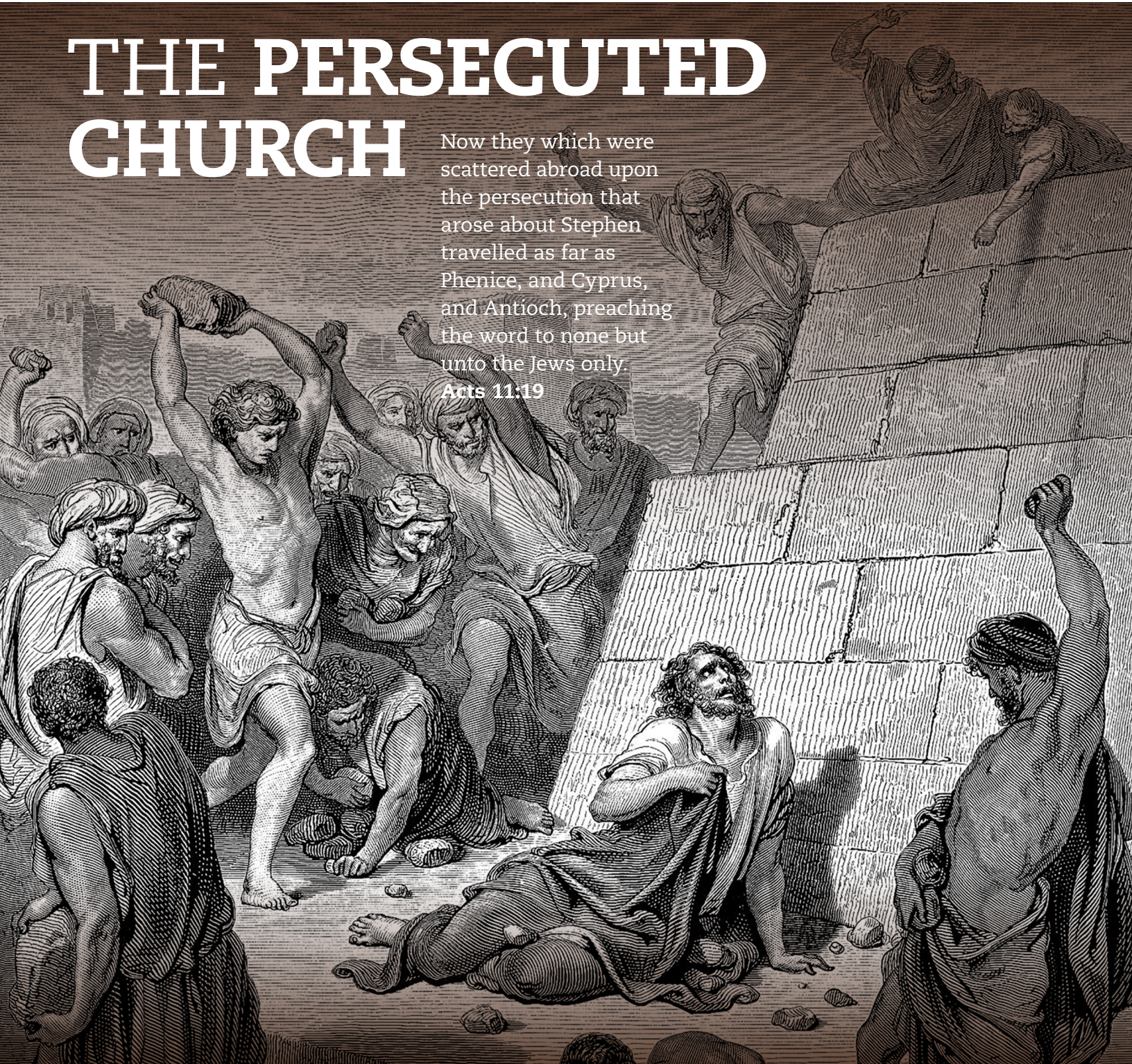
A Reformed semi-monthly magazine

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## THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only.

Acts 11:19



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**Note on the cover:** *The cover of this special issue is an engraving of the stoning of Stephen by Gustave Doré (1832-1883). The Bible text chosen to accompany it relates not only the persecution that followed Stephen's death but also one of the positive effects of persecution under the sovereign hand of God. Once again we thank Erika Kiel (Kalamazoo PRC) for her fine work in designing the cover.*



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## Meditation

Rev. Carl Haak, minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches, Michigan and member of Georgetown PRC, Hudsonville, Michigan

# Remember the persecuted church

**Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body.**

**Hebrews 13:3**

Imprisonment, torture, beatings, death threats, bombings of churches, burning of homes, looting of property—to these things most of us are strangers. Yet, for millions of our brothers and sisters in Christ worldwide these things are a daily reality.

In North Korea, Somalia, Myanmar, India, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Columbia, China, and other nations, Christians are being killed, sentenced to prison, confined in labor camps, and held in shipping containers. Young women are raped and children abducted after witnessing parents put to a bloody death. All this because in a wonder of grace they confessed that God's Son and their Savior is "the way, the truth and the life, no man cometh to the Father but by me" (John 14:6).

In light of the disparity between their experience and ours, what do we owe these fellow saints? Is there any "comfort of love, any fellowship in the Spirit, any bowels and mercies" (Phil. 2:1) that we show them?

Yes, "*Remember* them that are in prison as imprisoned with them, and them that are ill-treated, as being yourselves in the body."

Bind them as a seal upon your heart, embrace them as fellow members of the body of Christ, put yourself in their shoes, intercede for them before the Throne with groaning and supplication, and listen to the witness their sufferings give to the worth and beauty of "Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours" (I Cor. 1:2).

## Remember whom?

In the opening verses of Hebrews 13 the apostle Paul is applying the balm of the communion of saints to the bruised and bloodied hearts of persecuted believers. The opening verses are grounded upon a practical application of our apostolic confession of faith; "I believe an holy catholic (*universal*) church, (in which is) the communion of saints."

Paul writes Hebrews to converted Jews who had

scattered throughout Asia Minor due to an outbreak of persecution against their faith (James 1:1, I Pet. 1:1, 2). The Hebrew Christians were in danger of being "drawn back" (Heb. 10:38, 39), that is, apostatizing from the faith, occasioned in no small part by the evil treatment of family members, public contempt, and the pillaging of their possessions (Heb. 10:33, 34). As a result many had become homeless, destitute, and objects of scorn. Others had been imprisoned, not accepting release by renouncing their faith.

The apostle places the care of these persecuted saints into the bosom of the communion of the saints. "Let brotherly love continue" (Heb. 13:1), that is, let love be uninterrupted by believers dispersed from each other as the result of flight, forced isolation from one another, or being carted off to prison. "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers; for thereby some have entertained angels unawares" (Heb. 13:2), that is, show hospitality to those who are now homeless and hungry and show up at your door. And then: "Remember them that are imprisoned as bound with them..." (Heb. 13:3), that is, visit them in prison, if at all possible give them meat and drink, and clothe them, "for what ye have done to the least of my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matt. 25:5ff.).

We are to extend, as we are able, the communion of the saints to persecuted believers throughout the world. This communion extends beyond our local church, or denomination, or country to which we belong. It extends to "all and everyone, who believes, being members in Christ, [who] are in common, partakers of Him." And thus we must "know it to be our duty, readily and cheerfully" to remember the persecuted church worldwide by "employing our gifts for their advantage and salvation" (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 55).

We are to do this by understanding that we are "bound with them." The Holy Spirit calls not only for *spiritual empathy*: to imagine what you would feel if you were thrown in a smelly cell with evil men; but He also calls for *spiritual identity*: to see yourself as being bound (united by the Spirit) to them in the one body of Christ. When the world of unbelief reaches out to harm them, they harm you. When they are beaten, we cry out. When

they are called the filth of the world, we stand with them in their reproach. “Who is not weak, and I am weak? Who is not offended, and I burn not?” (II Cor. 11:29).

Who are the persecuted for Christ’s sake in this present world? May we give them a passing glance, an infrequent prayer, an occasional thought? They are our brothers and sisters in the Lord. Along with us, they belong to the universal body and bride of Christ. We are to embrace them in the communion of saints, an obligation we are to perform cheerfully and readily.

### Remember how?

We remember them by becoming aware of the persecution they endure throughout the world. Educate yourself, your family and congregation, youth and children to the reality of the persecution of Christians today. How can we remember them if we do not know where they are, who they are, or the condition of their lives? Much less, how can we confess that they are members of the universal body of Christ, if their fiery trials are not known and do not press on our hearts? Subscribe to the publication, *Voice of the Martyrs*, and read it with your children. Search [opendoorsus.com](http://opendoorsus.com).

Our knowledge must produce empathy. “Remember them that are ill-treated, as being yourselves in the body.” Paul is reminding us that the souls of persecuted believers have bodies. Empathy for them directs us not only to their souls, but also to their physical condition. You yourself have a body that experiences anxiety, knows overwhelming fatigue, fears pain, and seeks rest. Let us personally and along with our diaconates find ways to extend benevolence to them in tangible gifts of shelter, clothing, and food.

A man named Onesiphorus inspires us. During Paul’s final imprisonment in Rome Paul was held in a cell where prisoners received neither food and drink nor basic needs. This was left to the prisoner’s family and friends to supply. It was at this time that Paul also suffered the added pain “that all they in Asia be turned away from me” (II Tim. 1:15). While Paul was shackled in a dark, filthy dungeon, seemingly abandoned by former friends in the Lord, Onesiphorus of Ephesus “was not ashamed of my chain, but he sought me out very diligently and found me” (II Tim. 1:16-17). Onesiphorus, already known for deeds of mercy in his own church, traveled 600 miles and suddenly appeared on the other side of the bars that imprisoned Paul. In his hands were food, drink, and balm, and in his mouth comfortable words of Scripture: “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13). Can you imagine the scene? What must have been Paul’s response to this love for him? We must do likewise.

It is especially though our prayers that we remember our persecuted brothers and sisters in the world. In the midst of their suffering, the first request we receive from persecuted Christians is: “Pray for us!”

Sincere, frequent, intercessory prayers are the means the Spirit is pleased to use to strengthen their faith and impart His grace, even upon saints of God personally unknown to us. Paul spoke of a time in his journeys that he was “pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life.” Although the Corinthians had been unaware of Paul’s agony, yet Paul gratefully tells them, “Ye also helping together by prayer for us” (II Cor. 1: 8-12).

Make prayer for the persecuted church a regular, if not daily, part of your prayer life. Pray that God fill them in their suffering with the joy and peace of Christ through the Holy Spirit. Pray that God preserve them in the faith, assure them of His presence, give them renewed boldness, and make them steadfast in their confession. Pray that God preserve them from vengeance, but rather give them to pray for those who spitefully use and persecute them. Entreat God the persecuted may even pray that their cruel persecutors might be converted to Christ or be overthrown in their evil. And let us teach our children in their bedtime prayers to bring the needs of frightened and lonely believing children to their Father’s throne for comfort and relief.

### Remember why?

Why must we remember our persecuted brethren throughout the world and close to home?

If we do not remember the persecuted church, despite our orthodoxy and sound truth, we and our children will lose what it means to be a child of God in this world. “The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me they will persecute you also” (John 15:20).

The persecuted church reminds us forcefully of the reality of belonging to Christ in this life. She suffers for Christ’s sake. We will not be excepted: “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (II Tim. 3:12). What was Christianity in its origins? “They that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word” (Acts 8:4). What has it been in its history? “In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). What will it be in its future? “Ye shall be hated of all men for my sake” (Matt. 10:32). Only one way exists to escape persecution. Deny Christ. But the church refuses to do so, because for her “to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil. 1:21).

The witness of our imprisoned and ill-treated fellow saints emboldens our faith. The Holy Spirit gave us He-

brews 11 to give courage to the persecuted church. Read the list of martyrs for the truth's sake; read of those who found no place in this world because they held fast to the promises of God. This is the "cloud of witnesses" urging us to run our race with endurance in spite of the fury of a devilish world. When we watch and pray, we see the time has come to seal our love for Him by sacrifice (Psalter# 139, stanza 5). The persecuted church today stands as a cloud of witnesses instructing us to hold fast to the faith once delivered to the saints. We must stand as they stand, and we must add our testimony to theirs.

The persecuted church shows us how our God has willed for the gospel to be spread and the church to be gathered. To our God, persecution is not a problem to be solved, an evil to be avoided. He uses the blood of

the martyrs to plant and grow the seeds of faith. It is God's purpose to use the weapons of the enemy to accomplish His purposes. "Even the wrath of man shall praise Thee, Thy designs it shall fulfill" (Psalter# 207, stanza 4). Through persecution God is purifying His Son's bride for eternity.

The persecuted church today proclaims the preciousness of Christ. "To you who believe, Jesus is precious" (I Pet. 2:7). How precious? Listen to the confession of persecuted church. "Christ is so precious to us that we count not our life dear to ourselves, but only that we might testify of Him who loved us and gave Himself for us. We would rather have Jesus than anything this world affords."

Remember the persecuted church for their good and blessing, and for our own.

## Editor's note

In this special issue we seek to draw attention to the persecuted church worldwide. Our initial plan involved a variety of articles from a biblical, theological, historical, and practical viewpoint. However, we decided that our readers would benefit most from a wide variety of first-hand accounts of developing hostility toward Christianity around the globe. The issue you hold in your hands, therefore, bears a strong international flavor. We heartily thank each brother who contributed to this issue, and we assure them all that our greater

knowledge of the persecuted church will stir us all to watch and pray.

You will notice that not every writer is named and pictured, and that is by request. To all who agreed to write, we included this notice with our masterplan: "Please send us a picture of yourself to include with the article. On the other hand, if you wish to remain anonymous because of the threat of persecution to you, we will honor that request."

BLH



### The persecuted church—Editorial

Prof. Brian Huizinga, professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary and member of Grandville PRC in Grandville, Michigan

## Martyr

What comes to mind when you hear the word *martyr* or *martyrdom*? Perhaps some of the following, in no order: *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*. Stephen. Nero. Inquisition. John Hus. Torture. Justin Martyr. Bloody Mary. Gottschalk of Orbais. The Book of Revelation. Stake. The Papacy. Peter Martyr Vermigli. William Tyndale. Diocletian. Guillotine. Fear. The Roman Colosseum. *The Voice of the Martyrs*. Tertullian's famous line.

Catacombs. Polycarp. "How long, O Lord?" Duke of Alba. Hugh Latimer's words while tied to the stake: "Be of good comfort, master Ridley, and play the man: we shall this day light such a candle, by God's grace, in England, as I trust shall never be put out."

Could you include a twenty-first century martyr in the list above? Or is a martyr like a guillotine—something from a bygone era, the stuff of old history books?

## The identity of the martyr

A martyr is an elect, Spirit-filled believer who willingly suffers persecution and ultimately death for faithfully testifying of Christ.

First, the word *martyr* in Scripture refers to someone who witnesses or testifies of Christ. A martyr is not anyone who dies for a cause, even a religious cause.<sup>1</sup> The world is so full of hatred and strife as the red horse gallops according to Christ's sovereign direction (Rev. 6:4) that humans everywhere and of all religious convictions suffer atrocities. However, suffering at the hands of wicked men does not necessarily make one a martyr. Neither is a martyr one who violently revolts against the church or state and then plays the martyr by trying to elicit sympathy and support while suffering just consequences for such wicked rebellion. Faithful witnesses of Christ are not lawless rebels who defy the commandments of Christ while taking His name on their lips. A martyr is someone put to death on account of steadfast commitment to the person, gospel, and commands of the risen Lord Jesus Christ as He is revealed in Scripture. Martyrs not only refuse to blaspheme Christ or renounce past confessions of Christ, but they actively and positively bear testimony of the glory, beauty, power, mercy, and justice of their Lord as the only Savior.

Second, a martyr gives his or her life. The persecution of Christians takes many forms in escalating measure. For faithfulness to the Word of Christ, a Christian may suffer slander, defamation, ostracization, isolation, "cancellation," confiscation or destruction of property, job loss, fines, violence, beatings, imprisonment, or death. A martyr is a Christian who suffers *unto death*. A martyr loves not his life unto death, and willingly seals his faith with the testimony of his own life.

Third, a martyr is made strong in the power of God's grace. Suffering martyrdom is not an act of natural strength. The thought of enduring persecution, or worse, of observing one's own children and grandchildren suffering violent persecution naturally makes one shrink back in great trepidation. Martyrdom requires a marvelous grace that proceeds out of the fountain of God's eternal and electing love, is rooted in the death and resurrection of Jesus, and is wrought as saving strength by the Holy Spirit who powerfully activates and influences the will of the believer. When filled with

God's Spirit, the Christian witness counts it all joy to be counted worthy to fill up the sufferings of Christ (James 1:2; Acts 5:41; Col. 1:24).

## Stephen the martyr

The martyr most well known among believers is the first one in the Christian church. Bible commentators like to call him the "proto-martyr." His name is Stephen, and he embodied all the characteristics of a martyr.<sup>2</sup> Charged with blasphemy and contempt for God's law, Stephen, one of the first deacons, gave an enthusiastic testimony of his Lord and was killed for it.

The narrative in Acts 7 is overflowing with striking details of Stephen's martyrdom: how he would not capitulate in testifying of Christ as the hope of all the fathers (vv. 1-50); how he accused his opponents of being betrayers and murderers of the Just One (vv. 51-52); how his foes gnashed on him with their teeth (v. 54); how he looked up with a gaze that pierced into heaven (v. 55); how he saw the Son of Man standing in heaven at God's right hand (v. 56); how his adversaries broke out in furious rage, ran at him, threw him out of the city, and stoned him (vv. 57-58); how the stone hurlers took off their robes for better agility and laid them down at the feet of a bystander (v. 58); and how he, amid the barrage of stones, knelt down and loudly cried, "Lord lay not this sin to their charge," and then died (v. 60).

But there is one more very interesting detail of Stephen's martyrdom: Stephen bled. It is not until later in the book of Acts, when the apostle Paul gives his defense before the Jews of Jerusalem that we read of Stephen's blood. Paul, of course, was an eyewitness of Stephen's martyrdom, and is the Lord's answer to Stephen's last prayer. Paul saw everything that day, and later informed the Jews (Acts 22:20), "And when the blood of the martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him." While many suppose Paul is simply using a figure of speech for a violent death, it seems likely that Stephen literally shed his blood under the rain of stones hurled at him.

Scripture frequently connects martyrdom and bloodshed, and that is why Tertullian famously taught, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church." For example, we read in Revelation 17:6, "And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and

1 Out of curiosity I searched "persecution" on Wikipedia and was initially surprised (but not really) to discover that the first listed category for groups who suffer "religious" persecution is "Atheists." I later noticed all the entries are alphabetized, so "Atheists" is first and "Zoroastrians" is last. Atheists or Zoroastrians who suffer for their religious convictions are not martyrs in the biblical sense of the term.

2 Stephen and Antipas are the only two believers in Scripture mentioned by name and explicitly identified by the term "martyr" (Acts 22:20; Rev. 2:13).

when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration.” Frequently in the Old Testament, the righteous, from Abel to Zacharias, were slain as martyrs, and not by barbaric pagans, but by their kinsman according to the flesh in the sphere of the covenant. Scripture notes that these martyrs covered the earth with their blood (Matt. 23:35).

Scripture connects martyrdom and blood for several reasons. First, the shedding of blood captures the *violence* of the persecution. Martyrs are not only strangled, poisoned, beaten, boiled, burned, and frozen, but often the earthly house of their physical bodies is vandalized so violently that blood emerges. As the writer to the Hebrews notes, it is one thing to struggle and withstand opposition, but it is another thing to resist *unto blood* (Heb. 12:4).

Second, the shedding of blood captures the reality of the believer’s *sacrifice*. The life of the sacrificial lamb was in its blood (Lev. 17:11). Like the lamb at the slaughterhouse of the altar, the Christian is slaughtered in blood, sacrificing his life in gratitude to Christ (Rom. 8:36; 12:1).

Third, in shedding blood, the martyr is *united to the Lord* whose “sweat was as it were great drops of blood” (Luke 22:44) and who was pierced on the cross so that blood came out (John 19:34). If our Lord shed His blood (Luke 22:20), and a servant like Stephen is not greater than his Lord (John 15:20), then martyrs can expect to shed theirs. In fact, what greater honor can there be than identification with the Savior in the effusion of blood, bleeding for the one whose precious blood was shed for our eternal redemption.

### **The Voice of the Martyrs**

Once again, do you know a twenty-first century martyr? I know believers who have suffered for their faith, as we all have, to one degree or another, but I do not personally know any martyrs. That admission is a strong indication of how easy it still is to be a professing Christian in the USA, and in many other places throughout the world. However, our days of freedom are numbered in the West, as the state more and more bears the visage of the Antichrist.

The world is a much bigger place than the path we take to church, work, or school and the people we see there. There are many martyrs today, whether we know and see them and their blood or not. One helpful resource for gaining an appreciation for how dangerous it is for Christians in many countries throughout the world is “The Voice of the Martyrs” (VOM), an international non-profit organization formed to provide awareness, practical relief, and spiritual support

for persecuted Christians worldwide. What the major news outlets typically do not report, publications produced by organizations like VOM do: how and where converts to Christianity are targeted by governments, religious extremists, terrorist groups, and even family members.

One useful feature of the VOM website is the “Global Prayer Guide” which provides an interactive map that includes the continents of Asia, Africa, and South America (with Latin America). On the webpage a user can hover a cursor over each individual country and pop-ups will identify the country as “monitored,” “hostile,” or “restricted,” with the latter being the most dangerous for Christians. Clicking on each country takes the user to information such as an overview of the country, its major religion, and how Christians are currently persecuted there.

Surely God is presently including some Somalians in His covenant of grace, saving them and their children in the blood of Jesus. Probably every true Christian in Somalia knows several martyrs. About Somalia, a “restricted” country in Africa, we read,

There are no church buildings in Somalia, and Christians must exercise extreme care when meeting in groups. It is strictly illegal to convert or evangelize. Christians are actively pursued, and when discovered they are immediately killed. Christians are more likely to be killed by al-Shabab or family members than to be imprisoned by the government. The autonomous region of Somaliland has seen a recent increase in the number of underground Christians being arrested.

Surely Christ is presently building His church out of lively stones from North Korea, a notoriously dangerous place for Christians to live. About North Korea we read,

...decades of rule by an oppressive regime, currently led by Kim Jong Un, has forced Christians to worship in underground settings. The communist-inspired dictatorship is founded upon Juche, a distinctly North Korean religious ideology that requires worship of and subservience to the Kim family. Christianity is considered subversive and is brutally opposed. Anyone discovered to be a Christian or to have expressed any interest in Christ or the Bible is considered an enemy of the state. The gospel is still proclaimed in North Korea through various creative means, including shortwave radio and bold evangelists who risk their lives to smuggle Bibles and discipleship resources into the country.... If discovered, Christians face harsh persecution from the government and from members of the community, who are required to serve as government informants. Even those who are aware of Christian activity but do not report it to the government are punished as enemies of the regime.

While we may not be resisting unto blood, many like Stephen are and will.

### The impact of the martyr

Stephen's death left a greater mark on the church than any testimony he made during his life. His martyrdom initiated the first great wave of persecution against Christians, and on account of that persecution believers were scattered abroad with God's Word.<sup>3</sup> The blood of

<sup>3</sup> See the Scripture passage on the front cover of this magazine.

the martyrs is indeed the seed of the church, for God always ordains and uses persecution for the advance of His kingdom and the spread of the saving name of Christ.

This is great encouragement to believers who suffer or observe martyrdom today, and for the rest of us who see the dark cloud of tribulation lowering. The word of the gospel is not bound, and it will go into every nation. God even uses persecution to spread the gospel to others and fulfill the promise of which we sing in Psalter# 238, stanza 2, "Heathen lands and hostile peoples soon shall come the Lord to know...."



## The persecuted church

Prof. Barrett Gritters, professor of Practical Theology in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary and member of Hudsonville PRC

## Are you ready for persecution? A training plan

Persecution is approaching and no one should expect to handle it well without good preparation (training). We must be prepared for persecution. The importance of being prepared for persecution is like the importance of being prepared for running a marathon or fighting in war—both of which are biblical illustrations of what the child of God will face, and soon.

Persecution, as the rest of this issue shows, is real. When it progresses, as the Bible prophesies it will, it will be severe, so severe that Scripture warns against caving in, giving up, surrendering.

But take this out of the abstract and make it real. What will you do if the government (or private bank) threatens to cancel *your* bank account, and with it your ability to buy? What will happen when *your* home is taken away, *your* freedom to assemble for worship revoked, or *your* pastor arrested because he spoke against an evil? Have we considered that our Christian schools may be closed? And how will your children handle it when you tell them that you do not have supper on the table because you *will not* deny Christ? They are going to be hungry. If persecution takes us by surprise or finds us soft, what will be the consequences?

The need for preparation (training) for persecution is one reason Scripture speaks of the Christian life as a *race*—not a sprint, but a long race. "Let us run...the race that is before us" (Heb. 12:1). "So run, that you

may obtain [the prize]" (I Cor 9:24). In the race that is the Christian life are "heartbreak hills"—troubles, hardships, persecutions. "...[A]ll that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (II Tim. 3:12). Persecution is part of the Christian race and preparation for persecution is necessary.

The need for training is highlighted when Scripture calls the Christian life a *battle*. Now the figure changes from a *race*, the end of which is a trophy, to *war*. And this war is not a clash between two sports teams—we sometimes call an intense game a 'battle'—but a war whose outcome is life and death. Faith is a "fight" that must be fought (I Tim. 6:12). It is fought with swords that slay spiritually. So, "be a good soldier," Paul says to Timothy (II Tim. 2:3). "Put on God's armor," he says to the Ephesians (6:10ff.) for the battle's evil day is coming (v. 13), and we must stand and not fall in this conflict.

For long races and hot battles training is essential.

I would not like to think about a son or grandson going into a battle without basic training. What commander would allow it except a fool? It terrifies me to think of it. What would you think of your son or daughter who proposed to run a marathon without preparation? Foolish? Proud? Both? *Endurance* is necessary, which is why Hebrews 12 calls for *patience*. "Let us run *with patience*." That is, running such a race takes a stamina that comes only by good and long training.

Speaking about this, Paul says to the Corinthians, “and every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things.” Paraphrased, he means: “Every athlete who competes goes into strict training.”

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One of the premier long-distance running races in the United States happens on the second Saturday of May every year in Grand Rapids, Michigan, where I live. The Riverbank Run attracts over 10,000 runners to compete in the 25k (or another shorter race). I recently looked at a suggested training schedule for those who would like to run. It advises almost five months of preparation, with something to do seven days every week. Every day something, and every week the intensity increases. Required is a discipline and commitment that not very many people have. But if you expect to make it from the beginning to the end of the 15.5-mile course, you need to have a training plan and stick with it. Trainers advise to stay strong, eat well, sleep more, but especially to make a plan that will put you through the paces, gradually increase your endurance, and give you the mental preparation for what is to come. A long run! You need to be tough, mentally and physically. Check out a training schedule for a 25k race sometime and see what discipline is required.

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This is a good lesson for Christians who want to be ready for the intensely difficult time of persecution.

There are both mental and physical dimensions to our training.

The mental can be likened to classroom training. The physical can be likened to on-field training. For example, a prospective driver (at age 14 or 15) must learn some very important things from books in the classroom. He better know how a car works, the rules of the road, what road signs mean, what to do in emergencies, and a dozen other matters before he gets behind the wheel. But then he needs to get behind the wheel and practice. Likewise, a soldier needs a good deal of book-learning. Rules of combat, how to keep safe, what to do if he is taken captive, and more. But then he also needs to get in the field and do live training. And no one would propose to send into combat someone who had not practice-fired a gun, learned to jump into a foxhole, or heard loud explosions close by.

For a child of God, both theory and practice are important training for the difficult Christian life that likely will include persecution. Saying “theory” must not leave the wrong impression, though, because the book-learning required of Christians is much more than mere ‘theory.’ Nevertheless, they must learn *in the classroom* from The Book of Life, Christianity’s text.

The classroom is home, church, the Christian school, and one’s own closet of devotion. The curriculum for these classes includes some major categories, including: 1) God’s great love for His people in Jesus, which love is more precious to me than anything else in life. 2) What God delights in, what He abhors, and what is His ultimate aim in the world. 3) God’s plan for His people in this life and in the life to come, which includes both our *destination* of glory and the *path* that leads to glory—the path of sanctification, which is the cross-bearing discipleship of suffering (Matt. 10:21, 22). The suffering may come from enemies; it may also come from ‘friends.’ It may include death. 4) God’s promise that He will preserve believers to the end, and the call He gives them to “endure to the end” (Matt. 10:22; 24:13).

And more; so much more. The volumes that explain these subjects are thick. Lots of class time is needed to prepare minds and hearts steadfastly to reject “the pleasures of sin” and instead choose “suffering for a season” (Heb. 10:25) because of how precious the love of God is.

At the same time, on-field training is necessary. The curriculum for these sessions is also extensive, including: 1) *Living* in and experiencing deeply the joy of God in Christ, among the saints, so that both God and His people become to me truly as precious as my song puts it: *Truly*, the lovingkindness of my God is more than life to me (Psalm 63)! 2) *Seeing*, in real life, what is God-pleasing and what God hates. 3) *Practicing* self-denial, bearing the cross, and daily mortifying my old man. Go without something when we have the ability to have it. Feel the pain of mortifying self and reflect on why this is important. And more; so much more.

I want to be prepared. I want our children prepared. Oh, that we not be unprepared!

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Without laying out a *required* plan, would it be helpful just to imagine a *general* plan for training ourselves and our children—one that perhaps looks a little like a plan for long-distance training, where each stage advances in intensity and increases our ability to endure? Probably you want to adjust this as you reflect more on Scripture, and your own situation. Here is a start:

#### *Decade One (ages 1-10)*

1. Instill and nurture a love for God in Jesus Christ—above all things precious.
2. Learn from Bible history the stories of suffering for Christ’s sake, *without* specific personal application.
3. Practice self-denial, giving up little things. Give collection money to church; give time in service to others. Bring a cup of cold water in the name of Christ.
4. Pray for the persecuted church.

### *Decade Two (ages 11-20)*

1. Further nurture a love for God in Jesus Christ—above all things precious.
2. Learn from Bible history *and church history* the stories of suffering and martyrdom, with *specific and personal applications*.
3. Practice self-denial, giving up *greater* things, more painful. Take up the *cross*.
4. Pray for the persecuted church. Pray for *readiness to endure persecution* personally. Discuss how persecution may come to us, soon.

### *Decade Three and ff. (ages 21- death)*

1. Further nurture a love for God in Jesus Christ—above all things precious.
2. Read more history of persecution, for exam-

ple, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, Eliot's *Through Gates of Splendor*, and such like.

3. Continue, even more consciously, the discipline of self-denial and cross-bearing, rather than the mentality that age deserves a softer life.

4. Pray, pray, pray, for the persecuted saints. Soon, remember, they may be praying for us.

Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified (I Pet. 4:12-14).



## The persecuted church

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## On the persecution of Christians in Germany

### Introduction

When we talk about the persecution of Christians in Germany, it certainly cannot be compared with the events in which Christian families are torn apart and Christians are captured, tortured, and slaughtered. In comparison to this, we are doing well in Germany. However, that does not mean that Christians in Germany do not experience hardship. Four aspects are highlighted below.

### 1. Discrimination and persecution of Christian asylum seekers

Christians from the Middle East are fleeing to Germany, among other places. Here they are initially accommodated in so-called initial-reception-camps (asylum homes, refugee accommodations). There they live together with a comparatively large number of Muslims who have also fled their home countries because of wars or civil strife. The German authorities do not bother to distinguish people based on their origin or reason for

fleeing. It is not uncommon for Muslim asylum seekers to be assigned to organizational tasks in refugee homes simply because they speak the language. For Christians, this means that in the refugee shelters they meet exactly the Muslims and Islamists from whom they fled and who are once again threatening them. Since Muslims do not know anything like religious freedom, they also discriminate against Christians in Germany.

Those who have recently converted from Islam to Christianity suffer the worst. If it becomes known in the initial-reception centers that someone has become a Christian, he is viewed by Muslims as a traitor to their faith. Such a person must expect to be threatened and insulted. Christians also report that they receive death threats, violent attacks and, last but not least, sexual assaults. This means that the fear of many Christians is also great in these refugee homes. You often hear from them: "We expected that we would be safe here, but we have to realize that we will not be offered any protection here either." There is also the risk that the converts

will be a danger to their relatives who are often still living in their home countries.

Of course, the government authorities would have to intervene here. But very often they look the other way and make clear that there is no public interest in this problem. In addition, they would lack sufficient evidence. In fact, given the difficult situation among those who are often psychologically traumatized, it takes great courage to make public the humiliation the Christians are experiencing. If at all, reports are only made after the fact, that is, after the Christians have been removed from the dangerous environment and allowed to sleep on mattresses in church rooms. But this is initially not possible because of the law, especially as long as it is not clear whether they are even entitled to asylum. The situation overall is terrible.

For just over four years, our church has opened its church rooms on Sunday evenings for services in the Farsi language (which is the language spoken in Iran and Afghanistan). Between 35 and 60 people regularly come together there for church services. But, of course, this is just a small drop in a very large ocean.

## 2. Deportation of Christians seeking asylum

If Christians have fled to Germany, the authorities might not accept their reasons for asylum. In these cases they are sent back to their home country. Legally speaking, religious discrimination is a reason for asylum in Germany. But those affected must prove their religious discrimination to non-Christian officials. So they have to present their faith to people who are not Christians themselves. Some judges admit, at least at the beginning of such a hearing, that they are not competent to do this (“We now have to do something that we cannot do at all”). But very often asylum applications are rejected in the fast-track process.

On the other hand, there is the problem that some asylum seekers pretend to be Christians who in reality are not. The Iranian pastor of the congregation that holds services in our rooms reported that he had met so-called converts from Iran who had been baptized five or even more times in Christian churches in order to obtain appropriate certificates for the authorities. In fact, the naivety of some Christian churches is great. None of this makes things any easier for the state. It is therefore not without reason to be critical initially of a change of faith. But apart from the fact that there is no uniform standard for faith tests on the part of the state when processing asylum applications, faith tests in asylum courts represent state interference in religious matters.

## 3. Socialization of our children

For the past two decades, Christian parents have found themselves under great pressure from the German school system. This school system is almost completely regulated by the state. There are a few Christian schools, but this depends on specific local circumstances and is not the rule. In the many areas where there are no Christian schools, parents are required to send their children to public schools. (Home schooling is strictly prohibited in Germany. Parents who want to home school their children have to emigrate.) In these public schools the children not only learn the theory of evolution, they will also be given so-called sex education lessons. At the age of nine, children are given detailed pregnancy prevention lessons, among other things. Everything is demonstrated without any shame.

In addition, there was a far-reaching change in the law that was made in 2008. It has the well-sounding title: “To facilitate family court measures when the well-being of the child is at risk” (§1666 BGB). If you think based on the title that this is simply about the state being allowed to intervene in the event of parental failure, the truth is just the opposite: The core message of this legal text is that the children do not belong to the parents, but to the state, and the state loaned the children out to their parents, so to speak. This law is, in fact, about bringing children under the control of the state.

If this frightens us, we must soberly recognize that the state is not taking these measures against the majority of the population. According to official surveys, more than sixty percent of the German population agrees with the forced sexualization by the schools and also with the state controlling the education of the children. The reason for this is that the feminist revolt has hammered a whole new concept of family into people’s minds for decades. Motherhood is therefore discredited without regard to any empirical science: it is seen as slavery. Abortion is a social reality. People living homosexually are allowed to adopt children, especially since the social goal is to create the androgynous (male-female) “new human being” anyway. The last step on this path so far is that children are allowed to choose their gender every year from puberty onwards, that is, they are allowed to decide again and again whether they want to be a boy or a girl, without their parents being allowed to intervene. But as I said, the state institutions are only the reflex, in a sense the vicarious agent, of the majority of society.

Christians know from the Word of God that the family is a creation order, while the state is rooted in the Noahic order, that is, it is given to us by God in the sense of a preservation order. Without the Holy Scrip-

ture, even in hatred of the Bible, mankind is blind and running astray. They know nothing about the order of creation and the dignity of the family.

#### 4. Sanctioning Christians who raise their voices against ideologizing our children

But it is not just parents who are massively harassed by this socially destructive agenda. If someone speaks out against this ideologization, it is not unlikely that they will be sanctioned in the name of the current legislation. So, specifically, pastors who call homosexuality an abomination before God from the pulpit based on Romans 1:24–27 must expect to be severely punished. This is done on the grounds of “hate speech”.

It is important to keep in mind how times have changed. God’s commandments have always been violated, and there have always been people who thought lawlessly and only grudgingly submitted to God’s law (Psalm 66:3). In contrast to this, however, the situation now is that people are not only violating God’s law, but are also declaring—in the name of human rights—that God’s law is inhumane because it prohibits a homosexual lifestyle. So the law of God is not only violated, but it is judged as repressive by the current ideology.

Here too, however, there is still a lot to learn in the German churches. Unfortunately, it is a fact that preachers who are denounced for “hate crimes” cannot easily count on the church members to unite behind them. It is often explained that the pastor could have said it more carefully, more reservedly, “wiser,” or should have refrained from posting the sermon on the Internet. They still want to build bridges from the basis of their civil religion and therefore adapt to the cultural and social inclinations of

the general public. So they are still steeped in the false idea that this life is about personal peace and prosperity. It is the approach to life that Neil Postman described as “amusing ourselves to death.” The faith in many churches in Germany is still trapped in this false frame.

#### Summary

What we see in all four events outlined above is that the state exceeds its authority in each case. It intervenes in an area over which it has no jurisdiction from God, whether it thinks it is authorized to carry out faith tests on asylum seekers and decide who is a Christian and who is not, or whether it imagines it to be able to decide whether and in what form church services can take place, or whether it is poisoning the souls of our children through the ideologized school system or even sanctioning what is preached from the pulpits. Even if such a state presents itself to the outside world as tolerant or liberal (“progressive liberalism”), it develops into a leviathan, as Thomas Hobbes puts it. The state turns from a servant of God (Rom. 13:3, 4) into an antichristian monster (Dan. 7:3ff.; Rev. 13:2ff.).

As was already stated, the situation in Germany is not there yet. But the fact that the Christian witness is being pushed out of the public eye more and more should be a warning harbinger to everyone.

No matter how developments continue, it must be clear to Christians that we cannot comply with the state’s attacks. In such cases we are called to obey God rather than men (Acts 4:19; 5:29), even if this following eventually leads to suffering, persecution, and martyrdom.



## The persecuted church

Rev. J. Y. Paulraj, pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Vellore, India

# A briefing on the persecution against Christians in India

**Persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.**

**II Corinthians 4:9**

“Pastor, can you help bury my church believer here in Vellore? The parents do not wish to take their deceased daughter back to their native village because the Hindu

relatives would not let her be buried in peace. The girl wished to be buried with Christian prayers and songs.” Pastor Joshua asked me if we could assist with the burial of Mempidas, a 22-year-old Christian who led her parents and brother to the Christian faith even as she was sick and dying of TB. We, the members of the Protestant Reformed Church in Vellore, assisted this

family with the burial and hosted them for a few days before they returned to their native town, about 1,800 km from Vellore, in December 2023.

### Persecution today

According to the Open Doors survey, India ranks as the eleventh worst country in the world for persecution against Christians. Yet, Christians in India do not repay evil with evil but continue to do good to their neighbors, following the teachings of their great and good Teacher. The watchdog organization recorded 293 incidents of anti-Christian persecution in the first six months of 2023, marking a 60% increase in episodes of persecution against Christians in India since 2016 under the new government. The year 2023 was the darkest year for all Indians, with ongoing ethnic violence between tribes in the state of Manipur since May 2023. Although these clashes are described as tribal conflicts over reservations, in reality, they are acts of persecution against Christians. Hundreds of homes, personal belongings, and religious institutions such as church buildings and schools run by Christians from both Tribal Christian Communities have been destroyed. Many Christians from both communities have lost their lives. Most horrifically, many young Christian women were raped and even paraded naked on the streets simply because they are Christians. The ongoing Christian persecution in the state of Manipur is predominantly for political reasons, masked as religious and faith-based conflicts. Despite such persecution, Christians in India strive to remain strong and continue to witness Christ crucified for His own, whom He calls from all nations, tongues, and tribes.

### Why persecution in India?

The persecution does not stem from non-Christians in India being particularly zealous for their faith or showing hatred towards other faiths. Indian Hindus are inclusive, embracing numerous gods and goddesses in their belief system and proudly proclaiming the existence of many millions of gods and goddesses. Many Hindus consider Jesus Christ as one of the gurus and gods, deserving of respect. Yet, Hindu nationalist groups such as the RSS, VHP, and Shiv Sena aim to keep a spirit of hatred alive and cause disharmony among Indians in the name of religion for political gains. Only a small percentage of Indians are part of such groups; otherwise, Indians are generally kind and compassionate towards fellow human beings.

India is a secular country by origin. Hinduism was not originally from this country; its key beliefs and prac-

tices were introduced by Aryan nomadic migrants about two thousand years ago. The fabric of the Hindu faith system is inclusive, taking pride in the belief in millions of gods and goddesses. The exclusivity of the Christian gospel—that there is one God who has revealed Himself in the person of Jesus Christ, who is the only way, truth, and life, and apart from whom no one can be saved—is something some devout Hindus find hard to tolerate. However, only a small percentage of Hindus are intolerant of the Christian gospel; the majority are open to different beliefs because Hinduism does not have a specific founder, scripture, or set doctrines to follow. Due to general ignorance about their faith, many people are open to anything, and this is where religious leaders with political motives stir up people, sowing seeds of insecurity that lead to religious persecution.

### Social system behind the persecution

The Indian social structure is divided by the caste system. Tragically, even within the Hindu religion, there are many castes, and proponents of higher castes claim that the caste system was established by god and thus cannot be changed, not even by the god who created it. This caste system, supposedly introduced by Aryans who migrated to India between 1500 and 500 BC, dictates one's way of life and is noted in essential documents of every individual. Employment, marriages, and business ties are often influenced by this system, which is complex yet deeply ingrained. Any attempt to challenge this system can lead to great opposition, sometimes even death, in what is known as honor killings. Only a small percentage of Indians disregard the caste system, and these individuals are often atheists.

Whenever someone embraces the Christian faith for the first time, they are seen as deniers of the national faith. Families and relatives might disown new converts, denying them inheritance and special privileges. My wife, Kasthuri, was disowned by her family and relatives when she disclosed her Christian faith and decision to marry a Christian. Several members of our churches have faced similar hardships due to their faith in Jesus Christ, yet they consider it an honor to suffer for Christ.

According to the Indian Constitution, Hindus considered as low caste are entitled to special reservations that ensure priority in education and employment. However, they lose such privileges upon embracing the Christian faith. Despite this harsh reality, many from the lower castes are drawn to Christianity, attracted by the message that all human beings are created equally in the image and likeness of God. This message of hope leads many so-called low-caste individuals to Christianity. Although the Indian Christian community consists

of people from all castes and classes, the general public often perceives Christians as low caste, contributing to a form of emotional persecution against them.

### Sad Christian contribution to hatred

A segment of the Christian community in India inadvertently fuels hatred through practices that disregard local culture. For example, wearing white, a color associated with mourning and considered inauspicious, is common among Pentecostals but is not well received. Similarly, discouraging women from wearing flowers in their hair, jewelry, or traditional marital ornaments, highly regarded in Indian culture, is perceived as an insult to Indian traditions. This resistance to culturally esteemed practices contributes to the perception of Christians as a threat to Indian culture. Christians are not called to oppose cultural practices that are not explicitly condemned by Scripture.

In conclusion, we draw inspiration from the believers of the first church in Jerusalem, who, as described in Acts 2:46-47, shared their food with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. Like the early Christians, who navigated cultural norms respectfully, and the apostle Paul, who made concessions for the sake of mission work (Acts 16:3; 18:8; 21:20-24), we recognize the value of engaging with culture in ways that honor both our faith and the local traditions not opposed by Scripture.

### Our Christian hope in India

The persecution of Christians in India is not a new phenomenon; it began with the apostle Thomas, who was martyred by a Hindu Brahmin in AD July 72 in Chennai, India. Despite varying degrees of persecution, Indian Christians remain undeterred in their faith and witness in this hostile environment, strengthened by Christ Himself. We consider it an honor to suffer for Christ, as it allows us to identify with Him in His suffering. God's sovereignty over the suffering and death of Christ extends to every persecution endured by Christians, leading to purification and progress within the church.

The global Christian community is requested to remember Christians in India and support them with prayer and practical assistance so that they might continue to stand a testimony for the love and holiness of Christ. And, that erring Christian community will also get rid of its ignorant practices. At the phase of the on-going persecution, we, Indian Christians along with the apostle Paul are pleased to declare, "We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; *persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed*—always carrying in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies" (II Cor. 4:8-10). Amen.

Come, LORD Jesus!



## The persecuted church

Rev. Emmanuel Singh, missionary pastor in Kolkata, Northern India

## Persecution report from Kolkata, India

I thank God for this opportunity to share something on the topic of persecution in India.

Since 2014, under the rule of BJP government, persecuting Christians has become a target act of this present government. All key leaders of the present government are trained under the RSS, which is a type of Hindu extremist group. Even our prime minister was trained by RSS Hindu militant group. What this government promised to the rest of Hindus as an agenda he keeps that promise, such as demolishing the five-hundred-year-old mosque. On that ground, he has built the Rama Temple as the country's national temple, per in-

formation this would be the last election if the Moody government comes to power, since (they claim) it will change the Indian Constitution by replacing Hindu Law Manu smriti Sangita. So, the future of Indian Christian minorities is in danger.

On April 4 there was open Prayer Rally by local Christian communities to urge through prayer to stop persecution of Christians. Christian leaders from eight states came to testify to the fact of persecution. I was one of the speakers to address directly the Moody government (cf. photo on next page) and urge her to protect the Christian minority, according to our Indian consti-



tutional rights as stated in Article 25: “All persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess, practice, and propagate religion subject to public order, morality and health.” Further, Article 26 says that all denominations can manage their own affairs in matters of religion.

The Moody government is not protecting our religious rights, but rather persecuting us through their militant groups. Law and order in this land are under attack. We Christians as a small minority, less than 2% of the Indian population, are living under the pressures to deny our faith and be forced to convert into pagan faith. This is the present situation; we are going through a furious fire of persecution. I want to share with you the type of persecutions we are having in our daily life in India.

### Persecution by family

From the four corners of the earth the Lord is gathering His elect by the preaching of the gospel. As a missionary-pastor, I am experiencing every day in Kolkata how gracious and marvelous is the Lord's sovereign work of saving souls in this pagan nation. When a brother or sister turns to the Christian faith, its own blood-related siblings and dear ones from the family begin a mental torture to them. A Hindu who came into contact with us through social media, Minakshi, very recently had lost her husband to blood cancer. In the last seven months she has been coming to our CERC-Kolkata for worship very secretly. She is a widow with two small children, and now in the family every one came to know her faith and practice as she has stopped worshiping Hindu idols and rituals. Now family members stopped supporting her financially and asked her to leave the house with her two kids.

This is how persecution takes place in the life of new converts; still they have to pay the price of Christian faith.

There is another sister, Bandana, from a village who attends our Bible study online. Every night her husband comes after drinking and beats her, trying to stop her from learning the gospel and reading the Bible. Her husband has burnt the Bible so that she cannot read, forcing her to practice again Hindu rituals. Even her in-laws are against her Christian faith. This is how individual Christian faith-seekers are every day somewhere in India

being tortured and persecuted by pagan forces.

### Persecution by community

In India people live in communities. Most of the place's majorities are Hindu, and have local clubs that function like a little supreme court. If you face any problem or allegation within the community, this kind of club will judge you; even police take their assessment and verdict as a genuine witness and proof. New Christian converts are always subjected to injustice and terrible mental and physical assault. Practicing one's Christian faith by living in Hindu communities is very difficult for a child of God. Especially in the northern part of India Christian minorities are going through a difficult time; it seems that any time they have to pay the price of their faith, they are killed by Hindu militant group.

### Persecution by the government

Indian BJP government is trying to control the growth of Christian activities. They have closed the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) and more than 20,000 Christian NGOs (non-profits), even trying to cancel many more official registrations of Christian organizations. Christian institutions and schools they want to take over and put all Hindus in as staff. Every month under false accusations pastors and missionaries are sent to prison. Last month (March) a record 476 pastors were in prison fighting for justice.

We ask saints everywhere to pray for us. We believe God is sovereign and in control of everything. While there is day, we must work more to bring the gospel to the darkness of this world no matter what the risk is or even if it may cost us our life. As faithful laborers of the gospel, we must preach and preach till Christ returns.



## The persecuted church

Dr. Sungho Lee is professor of historical theology in the Korean Theological Seminary (KTS), South Korea

## Religious persecution in Korea

Religious persecution may have become an unfamiliar term in Korea. Religious freedom is fully protected by laws and thus Christians have no fear of being persecuted for their faith. Although the church is said to be in decline, there are still so many churches and over 8 million Christians in Korea according to a recent poll. However, it is almost impossible to talk about the Korean church without mentioning its history of persecution. Persecution has always been present throughout the history of the church, and the same is true for Korean churches. In this article, I would like to explain some historical religious persecutions in Korea in three major aspects. First, there was persecution of Roman Catholics by the Joseon dynasty, based on Confucianism, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Second, there was persecution of Protestants by the Japanese government during the colonial period (1910-1945). Lastly, there was persecution of Protestants by Communists, primarily during the Korean War.

The first religious persecution in Korea dates back to the Joseon Dynasty. In the mid-eighteenth century, some radical scholars who sought to reform and westernize the Korean government began eagerly studying the Western knowledge including Christianity. After carefully reading the doctrinal books and the Bible, some of them converted to Roman Catholicism by themselves without any help from foreign missionaries. Later, the collective Catholic faith was discovered among the doctrinal research group during the winter of 1777, led by Kwon Cheol-sin and Jeong Yak-jeon. As gatherings of Catholic believers became more active, the Joseon government also began to monitor this movement closely. A devout Roman Catholic, Kim Beom-woo, was discovered destroying and burying some precious objects in the ancestral rites and was subsequently arrested. After enduring severe tortures, he and his comrades were executed, becoming the first martyrs of the Joseon Catholic Church. The Korean Catholics were relieved of persecutions after the Pope permitted ancestral worship. Today, conservative Protestants are still taught by their pastors not to participate in ancestral worship, which often draws criticisms from non-Christians.

Afterwards, the Catholic Church in Korea developed

further through the efforts of Father Zhou Wenmo, who came from China. However, the Joseon government felt threatened by the growth of the Roman Catholic Church and began to suppress it on a large scale. While the target of persecution was previously the middle class and lower class, it expanded to the noble class. In addition, a series of persecutions occurred across many regions. A representative incident is the Shinyu Persecution that occurred in 1801, during which it is known that more than 300 Catholics were martyred. But, the persecution did not stop there. The Gihae Persecution, which began in May 1839, and its extension, the Byeongo Persecution, caused the Catholic Church in Korea to lose about 100 more believers, including priests. The final and largest persecution in 1866 resulted in over 8,000 martyrs. Despite the severe persecutions, the number of the Roman Catholics continued to grow. The long persecution stopped, and Protestant missionaries were able to come freely to Korea after the government changed her foreign policy from isolation to openness.

Another important persecution in Korea occurred during the Japanese colonial period. Japan took over Korea's sovereignty in 1905 and completely annexed it in 1910. However, religious persecution of the Korean church did not occur immediately at that time. Because Japan felt uncomfortable with missionaries and Christian believers in Korea, it kept a constant watch on the church.

An important incident worth mentioning here is the Jeam-ri massacre, which is related to the March 1st Movement, a large-scale, peaceful independence movement that took place in 1919. The Japanese soldiers massacred about 30 villagers in Jeam-ri after gathering them at Jeam-ri Church. The soldiers closed the church door, set the building on fire, and shot people who tried to escape. This terrible atrocity was reported and publicized by courageous missionaries in Korea.

The blatant persecution of Korean Christians increased with Japan's forced worship at Shinto shrines. The Japanese initiated the Manchurian Conquest in 1931 and began imposing the Shinto shrine worship throughout Korea, which served as ideological basis for the Japanese imperialism. Most Korean churches were

unable to withstand Japan's pressure and ended up complying. To justify visiting the shrine, some argued that it was a state ceremony rather than a religious issue. They even interpreted the Ten Commandments in a manner completely different from the traditional interpretation, suggesting that the first commandment, along with others, applied only to the Jews.

The protesters against the decision of the general assembly, which approved the Shintoism, defined it as clear idolatry. They formed solidarity with each other and developed an organized and collective resistance movement. Naturally, they had no choice but to become targets of severe persecution by the Japanese government. Pastor Joo Ki-cheol, the most influential leader of this movement, attracted the attention of the Japanese government from the early stage. Pastor Joo openly opposed shrine worship, risking martyrdom, and was imprisoned for seven years before ultimately being martyred in prison. In addition, over 2,000 protestants were imprisoned, over 200 churches were closed, and over 50 people were martyred for refusing to visit Japanese shrines.

Unfortunately, the Korean Presbyterian Church failed to discipline those who participated in the Shinto worship after the liberation. They refused the official repentance decreed by the general assembly and shamelessly insisted that personal and individual repentance is sufficient for full forgiveness from God. Furthermore, they finally expelled from the church the protesters who cried out for discipline. This led to the first schism in the history of the Korean Presbyterian Church in 1952, while the war was still ongoing! They did not consider the war as God's judgment against apostasy.

Another form of religious persecution occurred under the Communist regime after liberation, as they were materialist and thus strongly opposed all kinds of religious beliefs. What I would like to draw particular attention to here is the persecution during the Korean War, which took place five years after the liberation. The cruel persecution by the North Korean People's Army was widespread and intensive during the war, as they temporarily occupied South Korea before eventually retreating. One example is the case of Byeongchon Church, where 66 believers lost their lives in the same place at the hands of the retreating North Korean People's Army. According to research results, it is known that over 1,000 Christian victims were sacrificed by the North Korean People's Army during the Korean War.

Today, physical persecution as described above is not prevalent in the Korean church. However, a more serious challenge to the church is the temptation of the world. Although this may be a global phenomenon, the strong waves of secularization and materialism, which have encroached on Korean society, are also penetrating the Korean church. As a result, the gospel message proclaimed from the pulpit is being diluted, and young people and children, who are descendants of the covenant, continue to leave the church.

If the Korean church fails to respond appropriately to these temptations, the resulting damage could be greater than physical persecution. This is truly a time when the Korean church is desperately in need of the grace of the Lord. We must pray that the Lord, who has protected and established the Korean Church from physical persecution, will likewise save the Korean Church from today's crisis.



## The persecuted church

Rev. Titus Sanceuluai, pastor of Hope Protestant Reformed Church of Myanmar

## The history of persecution in Myanmar

The name of our country is Myanmar (formerly called Burma). This country is for most people unknown, obscure, not important in geopolitics, world economy, and world peace. But, not to our heavenly Father. Even in this unimportant, obscure country He has His covenant people, elected from eternity in Christ by grace only. For Him this obscure country also included in His creation, as well as in His eternal decrees that

He works out throughout history. The country's size is the same as the state of Texas, and borders with India, China, Laos, Thailand, Bangladesh, and has in its south side Andaman Sea and Bay of Bengal.

This article will be presented under these topics: The Beginning, the Calm, Reappearance, Double Persecution, and Its Continuation.

## The beginning

By His eternal plan the good news of our Lord Jesus Christ arrived in Burma in 1813 through the American missionary Adoniram Judson. He was a Congregationalist but converted to Baptist later, so he arrived in our country as a Baptist missionary.

After six years of labor, the Lord started to give him fruits of labor, because He had His people here also. The first Burmese convert name is Mr. Maung Naw. After that, the Lord added more Burmese believers to his missionary work. He along with his wife were very happy to see the fruits of their labors, and very thankful to God. So, the church begins.

In order to have persecution, the church must first exist; now, the situation is ready. When Adoniram Judson started to evangelize the people at Rangoon, the seaport of that time, the two local empires started to quarrel about their borders. One empire was called the Burmese Empire and the other was called the British Empire of India. During those times most of India was colonized by British East India Company in the name of the British crown. Those border problems worsened each day and became the foundation for persecution.

Lastly, after Adoniram Judson was working among Burmese people ten years, the first Anglo-Burmese war broke out in 1824. The Burmese Empire lost the war, and so they were very angry and hated white people and white people's religion, Christianity. They did not know, American and English are different. In their eyes all are white people, and they could not touch the white men, so, they started to hate local Christians, and started to persecute them.

In this first persecution, most early Burmese Christians were killed, including Mr. Maung Naw the first Burmese believer. Many believers were arrested and hung upside down and beaten by persecutors. When they did that, they asked, "Are you going to forsake this infidel religion?" If the believer answered "No," they beat again and asked again and beat again, till he or she died. Even Adoniram Judson himself did not escape from this persecution because he is a white man; though he explained he is an American not British, they did not listen. So, he was put into notorious prison of Ava.

This history is not written fully yet; I will explain why at the end of this article. But the first believers in our country suffered so much for the truth's sake though they know very little about this new faith, yet they were so faithful. It is the wonder of God's electing grace. Our country's church history begun with blood and suffering for Him.

## The calm

Two more Anglo-Burmese wars were fought and the Burma Empire lost both wars so that in 1886 the whole country is under British Empire. That ended the persecution of His church for the next hundred or so years. Sometimes the Lord uses wars to end persecution—amazing work of His absolute sovereignty over nations.

After the good news arrived, more than seventy years the church had peace and time to grow. During the time that Burma was under British rule, the church grew so much. Now, instead of Burmese tribe, the church grew among other tribes. In this country we have so many tribes, completely different in language, feature, as well as custom. Now, the Chin tribe, Kachin tribe, and most of Karen tribe became believers. And through Roman Catholic mission, Kayah tribe became Catholic Christian.

During British Colonial time, a lot of churches were built; the first college in the country was Christian College. Many mission schools were opened and became centers of learning. It was the most peaceful time for the church and God's people.

The Lord honored the work of Adoniram Judson, so that the Baptist denomination is the largest in the country still today. It is the wonderful way of our heavenly Father. He gives grace and strength to serve Him, after that He honors one's labor.

During this same time the spirit of Burmese nationalism arose, which will play a key role in persecuting the church in the future.

## Reappearance

After World War II, in 1948 our country Burma received its independence from British and practiced parliamentary democracy. Those good years lasted only a little more than ten years; in 1962 the army took control of the country. Many Burmese people supported the coup, but not the tribal people.

Outwardly, the military government, through the spirit of nationalism, tried to bring Burmese tribal domination to other tribes. The motto was, the country will be Burmese-Buddhist. That means other religions will not be favored; slowly all those who hold other religions must change into Buddhist.

That was reappearance of persecution of God's church. Now, the line was drawn very clearly. The majority of population, Burmese tribe, is Buddhist with other smaller tribes. And four ethnic tribes are Christian: Chin, Kachin, Kayah, and Karen.

Then persecution began again throughout the coun-

try in social ways, not much in torturing and killing, but in despising and regarding believers as second-class citizens. The government controlled all factories, government offices, schools, and social life in the name of socialism. Under this kind of ruling, to be a Christian brings pain. To save its face to the world, the government declared all religions are allowed to practice freely. In reality, only in some areas, many churches became underground churches. Every Sunday worship was a risk, you could end up in jail for worshipping.

Many churches closed, all Christian schools are confiscated, along with church-owned properties. So, now, children and young people have to go to government-controlled public schools, where they are looked down, mocked, despised. We all have to go through it; no one escaped, persecution is universal; it is state-sponsored. The authorities said that one cannot change tribe or nationality but can change religion.

And the Lord sent an upheaval in 1988 that will change the government to the core. For so many social and economic difficulties the whole country rose up against its own government. We called it “8888 movement,” because it started 1988, 8th day of the 8th month.

The result was that the socialist dictatorship government, which had persecuted the church, completely dissolved. But, another military coup took place, and the country became completely ruled by the military. Many of its policy changes will benefit His church.

Though the new military regime continued the policy on Christianity, one of its policy changes benefited the church; it allowed its citizens to go to other countries for work. Under the previous socialist government no one was allowed to go out from the country.

### Double persecution

Due to that policy change the author of this article came out from the country to Singapore to study at Far Eastern Bible College of Bible Presbyterian Church of Singapore in 1994. But to his dismay, the college taught that in salvation man is 50% and God is 50%, as well as a dispensational, premillennial view on Eschatology.

But our covenant Lord had a different purpose in this. That was, in His providential guidance I met the late Rev. Jason Kortering from the Protestant Reformed Churches in America, who was then missionary-on-loan to the Evangelical Reformed Churches of Singapore. That was the turning point of my life. During the years 1994-97, I learned from him all the Reformed truth that we dearly hold, especially covenant is not agreement but friendship, no innocent-party remarriage, Three Forms

of Unity, Church Order of Dordt, and Reformed amillennial truth. At the same time, I studied at Far Eastern College, in the Master of Divinity program, especially Greek and Hebrew. After that, I reported back to my sending church for study, Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Burma, that I am now a changed person, truly believing the historic Reformed truth. The church was so angry that they kicked out my wife and my two young children from their house, because I have not my own house but stay at the house given by the church. My daughter was five years old and my son was just six months; now they were on the street for Reformed truth. And the church informed the college, which kicked me out from dormitory. I was in another country with no place to stay, on the street.

That is the lot of Reformed Christians in this land; we suffer double persecution—one from military government and the other from fellow Christian people.

Under God’s providential care, I arrived back safely to my country and started a new church called Hope Protestant Reformed Church. My old Presbyterian congregation joined it after I explained to them the Three Forms of Unity and other Reformed truths, especially no innocent-party remarriage and Reformed amillennialism. The congregation agreed and confessed the same truth.

The problem is most believers in this country are indoctrinated in Baptist-Premillennialist-Evangelical beliefs. And most of them could not forsake their old tribal custom and beliefs. It is very surprising that so many previous missionaries never taught them to forsake their old unbelieving, unbiblical, tribal customs. That plagues Christianity until today. So, when the true Reformed church teaches that we believers have to follow only what the Word of God teaches us, then many believers see Reformed faith as enemy to their traditions. In that way, they look down on, despise, and ostracize Reformed believers in their communities. Many are afraid to be treated like that, so they were afraid to join the Reformed church. At the same time military government also brought a lot of persecutions on believers.

### Its continuation

For our Lord’s working out of His eternal plan, the military government changed itself to become so-called civil democratic government in 2010. That brought a lot of peace for the church. And in 2015 the real civil government led by Nobel prize winner lady Aung Sang Su Kyi became the country’s government. The church was truly free till 2020.

Then, through God’s eternal decree, the military

coup happened again. Now, the country is under complete military control again. And the whole country was plunged into all-out civil war. Many took up arms against military. Having tasted freedom for almost ten years, no one wanted to go back to military slavery. Every day fighting is going on, and many people are dying. Many young people joined the freedom-fighter movement.

The military coup government looked at Christianity and saw it as a threat, without any legitimate reason. So it banned any gathering of more than five people. That effected Sunday worship; it is quite a risk to be in the church. Now this persecution continues while this ar-

ticle is written. In countrysides many church buildings are destroyed, many believers are killed, and their properties confiscated. How much damage and how many are killed no one knows; only God knows.

But, as Reformed believers, we know this situation has not happened by chance, but rather for His glory and our good. We confess that truth against daily difficulties. We know and hope one day the peace will come back.

For that reason, not many books are written yet about this history of persecution. After the Lord brings peace, books will come out about the suffering of God's people.



## The persecuted church

Rev. Marcus Wee, co-pastor of Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church in Singapore

## The pressures on the saints in Singapore

Singapore is a busy city-state with a population of about 5.92 million people, packed into a land area of approximately 720 square kilometers (278 square miles, about a quarter the size of Rhode Island).

A multi-racial and multi-religious nation, Singapore has the following religious demographics: 26% Buddhist, 18% Muslim, 17% Christian, 8% Hindu, 6% followers of Chinese traditional religions like Taoism or Confucianism, and 4% other religions. Another 22% do not identify with any religion.<sup>1</sup> About 7% of those identifying as “Christian” are Roman Catholics, which brings the percentage of Protestant Christians in Singapore to about 10%.

There are many things that are remarkable about Singapore as a nation. However, in the eyes of God and of His Christ, most precious is that there is a golden candlestick in this region, representing various true churches of Jesus Christ in this part of Southeast Asia. Among these true churches of Christ is Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church (CERC).

CERC has been established for 36 years, and com-

prises first, second, and third-generation Christians. CERC, as every true church of Jesus Christ across the length and breadth of the world, faces persecution. This is according to God's will as He has revealed it in II Timothy 3:12: “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.”

In her early years, persecution was more overt. It was not uncommon to hear of first-time converts to Christianity being actively opposed by their family members, being ostracized, and in some cases, severely beaten, for the sake of the gospel. Back then, families were more steeped in Buddhism and Chinese religions, with ancestor worship an important aspect of such religions. Heathen parents pinned their hopes on their children to continue the family religion, and to pray for them when they departed. Therefore, the conversion of their children to Christianity, viewed as a “Western religion,” was met with much dismay and fierce opposition. Some of these stories are detailed in *Say Among the Heathen the Lord Reigns*, by Mrs. Jean Kortering.<sup>2</sup>

With the passage of time, including the changing

<sup>1</sup> William Miner, “In Singapore, religious diversity and tolerance go hand in hand,” *Pew Research Center* (October 6, 2023). <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/10/06/in-singapore-religious-diversity-and-tolerance-go-hand-in-hand>.

<sup>2</sup> Jean Kortering, *Say Among the Heathen the Lord Reigns: Evidences in Southeast Asia* (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing, 2022).

views of society, such fierce and overt persecution has lessened greatly, while not being entirely unheard of.

Christians in Singapore, by-and-large, are free to practice their religion. Singapore prides itself on being a multi-racial and multi-religious society, claiming that every citizen and resident has a place in the nation, regardless of race, language, culture, or religion. The government is careful to maintain religious harmony and peace in the nation.

On one hand, one has the right to practice his own religion, and the right to freedom of speech. One even has the right to evangelize, openly. However, there are also laws in place that potentially could be used against churches which maintain a faithful witness to Jesus Christ.

For example, the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act empowers the government to restrain a religious leader, or any other person, from “causing feelings of enmity, hatred, ill-will or hostility between different religious groups.” It also prohibits insulting the religious beliefs of others and wounding their religious feelings.<sup>3</sup>

To be clear, these laws are impartial. They apply equally to all religions, and do not target Christians in particular. Yet, knowing that we live in the last days of growing wickedness and opposition to Christ and His church, knowing that the Antichrist is rising to deceive the nations and wage war against the church, when will it be that these laws will be turned against true churches of Jesus Christ in Singapore? When will it be, that to faithfully preach the gospel—that God is the one true and living God and all other gods are idols, and that Jesus Christ is the only Way to the Father—will be deemed to be ‘wounding religious feelings’? Given the Bible’s clear depiction of the growing wickedness of the times, such things will likely be in store for Christians living in Singapore during the time of the Antichrist.

There are shifting winds in Singapore’s society, seen in issues on gender and sexuality. In recent years, much of the debate has centered on a law in the Penal Code, Section 377A, that incriminates gay sex (but not lesbian sex). In November 2022, the law was repealed, after multiple unsuccessful challenges prior to that.<sup>4</sup> Although the law itself had been unenforced, and on its own was inconsequential, yet it was a yardstick of the nation’s

morality on issues of gender and sexuality. Now, that yardstick has shifted, reflecting a greater tolerance and normalization of sexual immorality, contrary to the will of God (Lev. 18:22, 20:13; Rom. 1:18ff.).

As Singapore is still largely a conservative society, with people from various religions still holding on to traditional values of marriage and the family, the nation seems to be some ways away from redefining marriage and legalizing so-called same-sex unions, perhaps a generation or two behind the United States of America. The government, seeking to be sensitive to this reality, has amended the Constitution to protect the definition of marriage as a union between one man and one woman. This definition, however, not actually being enshrined in the Constitution itself, can be overturned by a simple majority vote in parliament in the future.<sup>5</sup>

However, the sexual revolution is gaining momentum here, particularly among the youth,<sup>6</sup> and will be a source of greater pressure upon those who seek to uphold the biblical view of marriage, and to speak out against sexual immorality. Again, when will living faithfully for the gospel of Christ be considered to be the ‘wounding of religious feelings,’ and therefore punishable by law?

Even as we see dark clouds on the horizon that will make it more difficult for future generations of Singaporean Christians to live out the faith, we recognize that persecution is not merely a future reality. The child of God, even in times of relative earthly peace, whether in ‘Christian’ America or in multi-religious Singapore, still faces persecution. We face pressure. Pressure to conform to the society in which we live. Pressure not to speak of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the offense of the cross that shows just how hopeless and sinful fallen man is, and who therefore cannot save himself, but desperately needs the only Savior, Jesus. Pressure to ‘tone down’ that gospel, or to keep silent altogether.

Because the laws of Singapore require all students to attend government primary (grade) schools, with few exceptions, many of our covenant children attend the public schools, where we face this pressure daily, even from a young age. We are exposed to the lies of the Devil, not only his outright denials of God’s truth (“Ye shall

3 This is a helpful article that spells out the rights that a Christian in Singapore has in practising one’s faith. Ronald JJ Wong, “Practising and professing your faith: Know your rights,” *thirst* (April 11, 2018). <https://thirst.sg/practising-professing-faith-know-your-rights/>.

4 Here is a timeline of events: [https://www.bing.com/search?pglt=41&q=377a+timeline&cvid=9329e2c-2c1e84a4d85cc64fa83960fda&gs\\_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUqBg-gAEEUYOzIGCAAQRrg7MgYIARBFGDzSAQgxOTQ4a-jBqMagCALACAA&FORM=ANNTA1&PC=EDGEDB](https://www.bing.com/search?pglt=41&q=377a+timeline&cvid=9329e2c-2c1e84a4d85cc64fa83960fda&gs_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUqBg-gAEEUYOzIGCAAQRrg7MgYIARBFGDzSAQgxOTQ4a-jBqMagCALACAA&FORM=ANNTA1&PC=EDGEDB)

5 More details on this decision and its implications can be found here: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/politics/askst-what-to-know-about-the-constitutional-changes-to-protect-the-definition-of-marriage>.

6 Nabilah Awang, “TODAY Youth Survey: High overall acceptance of LGBTQ people among youth, but family members having same-sex relationships harder to accept,” *Today* (November 11, 2021). <https://www.todayonline.com/singapore/today-youth-survey-high-overall-acceptance-lgbtq-people-among-youth-family-members-harder-to-accept>.

not surely die”), but also his subtle whisperings (“Yea, hath God said?”), deceiving us that the good life involves chasing after our earthly dreams, bowing down to the idol of academic success; teaching us, through the ideals of meritocracy, to depend on ourselves in the pursuit of happiness.

There is a real temptation for us to view our most fundamental identity not as a citizen of the kingdom of heaven, but as a citizen of this nation, and to take pride in it. There is a real temptation to take to heart the words of our pledge, recited daily in the public schools, that our true unity is “regardless of race, language, or religion”, instead of in Christ and His Word. There is a real temptation to view God, the Bible, and the church as one of the many compartments of our earthly life, and not as our world-and-life view. There is real pressure to compromise on the antithesis.

Persecution for Christians in Singapore is real, as it is for Christians in every part of the world, even if it is not

yet overt and life-threatening. The call of Christ to the church of Smyrna comes also to true churches of Jesus Christ today: “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life” (Rev. 2:10b).

These words of Christ apply to us today, pointedly. Being faithful unto death involves first being faithful in living for Christ. How will we die for Christ when persecution is overt and the pressure is high, when we will not live for Him when persecution is subtle and the pressure is low?

But we thank God that He not only gives us this calling to be faithful, but also empowers us to be so. We thank God that Christ was faithful unto death, even despite our unfaithfulness, and has earned for us the crown of life.

So let us press on, fellow persecuted saint, whether we face overt, life-threatening persecution, or whether we face subtle pressures, relying on Christ alone. Let us pray for one another, fellow members of the church of Jesus Christ, that we may faithfully live and die for Him.



## The persecuted church

B. H.

## Report from the United Kingdom

There is no systematic persecution of Christians in the United Kingdom.<sup>1</sup> Christians are not arrested for being Christians or for going to church. Christians are not barred from occupations for being Christians. There is, however, a growing hostility to Christianity among those who have rule and governance. This is a hostility that is particularly manifested against God’s moral law and the exclusive claims of the Christian gospel. The growth in hostility needs to be recognized against the backdrop of widespread apostasy of the mainline denominations through the nineteenth and twentieth century with the rise of liberal theology. The doctrinal decline has been followed by a steep drop in numbers attending church. It is worth considering that church attendance has declined from 6,484,300 to 3,081,500 (equivalent to a decline from 11.8% to 5.0% of the

population) in Britain between 1980 and 2015.<sup>2</sup> Between the different parts of Britain there are some differences, with England and Wales showing the lowest church attendance and Scotland the highest. Northern Ireland has a higher church attendance than the three countries in Great Britain. Obviously, these figures include all ‘types’ of Christians; Reformed believers are only a very small proportion of these numbers.

This hostility to the Christian message has been fuelled by the rise of the LGBTQ+ movement and the woke agenda, both of which have had a considerable impact on educational establishments, politics, and the boardrooms of many companies. As a result, a Christian is likely to find himself in trouble when he refuses to conform to the dictates that accompany activist organizations. The pressures, to some extent, can vary in different parts of the United Kingdom due to the devolution of power to region-

<sup>1</sup> United Kingdom and Britain are not interchangeable terms. The island of Great Britain consists of three regions (England, Scotland, and Wales) while the United Kingdom also includes Northern Ireland.

<sup>2</sup> Faith Survey accessed 19/03/2024 <https://faithsurvey.co.uk/uk-christianity.htm>

al assemblies/parliaments.<sup>3</sup> For example, the Welsh parliament (Senedd Cymru) recently declared that Wales (that is, the Senedd Cymru) has set out an ambitious plan “with hope at its heart” to reach goal of becoming the most LGBTQ+ friendly nation in Europe.<sup>4</sup> The accompanying action plan makes it clear how the government wishes to achieve these goals. Among the objectives will be making education “inclusive” and banning conversion practices aimed at stopping people being LGBTQ+. In the Corinth church, the apostle noted sins practised that show a person is outside the kingdom of God. Those sins included the sin of homosexuality, but he also notes that “such were some of you” (I Cor. 6:11). The Welsh government aims to prevent this being said; it therefore aims at preventing repentance and people entering the true freedom of Jesus Christ. Other parts of the UK are also looking at ending conversion practices. Currently, the Scottish government is consulting on legislation to end conversion practices<sup>5</sup> and similar legislation for England has also been debated in the Westminster parliament.<sup>6</sup>

Currently, anti-conversion laws are only being proposed in the countries that make up the UK. However, it is already easy to fall foul of current legislation in the public square. This can easily be illustrated by the number of legal cases that organizations such as Christian Concern and the Christian Institute fight defending Christians who have fallen foul of current legislation. A quick perusal of these organizations’ websites<sup>7</sup> shows that many of these cases center on issues dealing with Christians fallen foul of the LGBT lobby. Two cases are sufficient to illustrate the potential trouble that can arise when the status quo is questioned.

In June 2023, Councillor King Lawal was made aware of inappropriate behavior that took place at a local Pride event. This included naked men illegally parading through streets in front of children. As a Christian, he believed what happened was wrong and ‘sinful.’ His ‘mistake’ was to write a rare Twitter post in which

he said, “When did Pride become a thing to celebrate. Because of Pride Satan fell as an arch Angel. Pride is not a virtue but a Sin. Those who have Pride should Repent of their sins and return to Jesus Christ. He can save you. #PrideMonth #Pride23 #PrideParade.” As a result of the tweet, he was canceled by seven organizations, and was suspended by the Conservative party pending an investigation.

Another disturbing case centers on a chaplain who worked in an independent school that exists to educate according to “the Protestant and Evangelical principles of the Church of England.” The chaplain was sacked, and his name referred to the UK anti-terror unit, Prevent, for challenging LGBT ideology.<sup>8</sup> The chaplain had simply preached a sermon in which he encouraged pupils to debate gender ideology. This sermon was followed by a visit to the school by the LGBT activist group, Educate and Celebrate, which got staff to chant “*smash heteronormativity*.” In the context of the government’s anti-terror unit, it is worth noting that a recent document lists anti-abortion as a potential sign of an ideology leading to terrorism. This comes as the Conservative government considers widening what it will consider to be extremism. In response to this development, Andrea Willams, Chief Executive of Christian Concern has said: “Christian Concern has supported Christians who have been referred to Prevent for expressing their Christian beliefs. The new definition of extremism should have ensured that this would not happen again. Sadly, I now expect to see more referrals of Christians to Prevent, not less.”<sup>9</sup>

Recently, further concern has been raised over the government’s ability to define hate speech. A campaign to launch the Scottish government’s controversial new hate-crime law, which came into force from April 1, 2024, is advising the public to call the police over ‘hurtful words.’ This legislation makes it a criminal offence to ‘stir up hatred’ against certain groups (these groups are people with protected characteristics that includes religion, sexual orientation, and ‘transgender identity’). According to *The Herald*, Police Scotland have set up Third-Party Reporting Centers, dubbed ‘snitch sites’, where victims or witnesses of hate crime may report an incident indirectly to a trusted third party. A list of reporting centers in Glasgow on Police Scotland’s website includes a sex shop and the HQ of LGBT Youth Scotland. Although significant amendments had to be made

3 Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have some autonomy in governance and have regional assemblies/parliaments with some law-making powers.

4 Llywodraeth Cymru Welsh Government (accessed 16/03/2024). <https://media.service.gov.wales/news/wales-sets-out-ambitious-plan-with-hope-at-its-heart-to-reach-goal-of-becoming-the-most-lgbtq-friendly-nation-in-europe/>

5 Scottish Government Riaghaltas na h-Alba (accessed 16/03/2024). <https://www.gov.scot/policies/lgbti/ending-conversion-practices/>

6 Christian Concern (accessed 16/03/2024). <https://christianconcern.com/news/extreme-conversion-therapy-bill-to-be-debated-in-parliament/>

7 Please see the following websites for information on legal cases: Christian Concern <https://christianconcern.com/cases/> and Christian Institute <https://www.christian.org.uk/case/>

8 The Christian Institute accessed 19/03/2024 <https://www.christian.org.uk/news/chaplain-reported-to-anti-terror-unit-for-challenging-lgbt-ideology-will-appeal-case/>

9 Christian Concern accessed 19/03/2024 <https://christianconcern.com/news/christians-risk-being-deemed-extremist-under-new-definition/>

to the original bill to stop it from posing a major threat to evangelism and Christian comment on sexual ethics, concerns remain over the impact on free speech.

Governments are also taking an increased interest in the workings of the family and seek greater authority of child rearing. As a simple example, both Scotland and Wales have banned all forms of physical chastisement of children by their parents. Of course, the two governments point to obvious cases of abusive uses of physical force to justify their action, but the solution was to pass legislation that outlaws ‘reasonable chastisement,’ which Proverbs recommends to wise parents. A simple smack applied to a wayward child in England or Wales is now a criminal act.

There is no sign that the legislative pressure on what

Christians can say are abating. So, what should we do? Pray!

Christians need to be wise, not seeking trouble but at the same time being faithful to Jesus Christ, making a stand when required. Pray that God’s people would have wisdom and courage when conducting themselves particularly in public life; understanding when it is prudent to be silent and, on the other hand, recognize when it is necessary to speak out (Prov. 26:4, 5). Pray also that God would overthrow the schemes of wicked men in high places and that their folly would be manifest to all. In the words of Psalm 140:8, “Grant not, O LORD, the desires of the wicked: further not his wicked device; lest they exalt themselves.” Pray that the Lord of the harvest would raise up faithful preachers for the Reformed faith in the UK (Rom. 10:14–15).

## Announcements

### Resolution of Sympathy

The Council and congregation of Doon PRC express our Christian sympathies to Rev. Daniel and Sharon Kleyn in the death of Sharon’s father, **Professor Herman C. Hanko**. “For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord’s” (Romans 14:8).

Mike Mantel, Vice President  
Perry Van Egdom, Clerk

### Classis East

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, May 15, 2024 at 8:00 A.M., in the Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church, Byron Center, MI.

Rev. Clayton Spronk,  
Stated Clerk

### Reformed Witness Hour

[reformedwitnesshour.org](http://reformedwitnesshour.org)

**Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma**

May 5—Rebecca Marries Isaac  
Genesis 24:55-67

May 12—Shiphrah and Puah Fear God  
Exodus 1:1-21

May 19—Miriam’s Lamentable Fall  
Numbers 12

May 26—The Faith of Rahab  
Hebrews 11:131

### Call to Synod!!

Synod 2023 appointed Trinity Protestant Reformed Church, Hudsonville, Michigan the calling church for the 2024 Synod.

The Consistory hereby notifies our churches that the 2024 Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America will convene, the Lord willing, on Tuesday, June 11, 2024 at 8:00 A.M., in the Trinity Protestant Reformed Church.

The pre-Synodical Service will be held on Monday evening, June 10, at 7:00 P.M. Rev. G. Eriks, president of the 2023 Synod, will preach the sermon. Synodical delegates are requested to meet with the Consistory before the service.

Delegates in need of lodging should contact Mr. Terry Dykstra, email: [terry.dykstra96@gmail.com](mailto:terry.dykstra96@gmail.com). Phone: 616-293-3156.

Consistory of  
Trinity Protestant Reformed Church  
Terry Dykstra, Clerk.