



Lausanne World Pulse

Providing Evangelism & Missions News, Information and Analysis

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PUBLISHER'S MEMO

Persecution of the Church: Hot, Warm, Temperate

By Lon Allison

Hot Persecution

For the last several weeks I have been reading alarming reports from Orissa, India, and now from northern Iraq. Canon Andrew White, an Anglican pastor in Baghdad, sent out a prayer alert with the title: "I didn't think it could be worse, but it is." He reports that Christians are being killed and are fleeing Mosul, ancient Nivevah. One report said that as Al Qaeda is being forced from Baghdad, they are moving north with increased anger and violence, which is being directed at Christians. The Chaldean Christian archbishop has been killed. My prayers surround these Indian and Arab brethren. This is the hardest kind of persecution. It is a severity many Christians don't experience and consider with terror-filled thoughts. I call this persecution *severe* or "*hot*."

History tells us that this severe persecution makes some believers more committed. Indeed, as Tertullian has written, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church." But it is also true that many leave the faith or minimize their devotion to be safe.

Warm Persecution

A second form of persecution against Christ's people occurs in nations and regions where governments are aligned with religions—most often, Islamic and Hindu-dominated cultures. It is also possible for governments to repress Christian faith, as evidenced this past summer in China. There, the government placed restrictions on the propagating of faith during the 2008 Olympics. This form of persecution is more *moderate* or "*warm*" persecution.

An example of this is the Abba Love ministry movement in Jakarta, Indonesia. Indonesia is the largest Muslim-dominated country in the world. While the degree of religious persecution differs regionally in Indonesia, some amount of repression is experienced everywhere. Abba Love Ministries has adapted the way they do church based upon this moderate persecution.

On any given Sunday, upwards of twenty thousand Abba Love Christians meet in fifteen worship locations throughout the Jakarta metroplex. The worship centers are rented, and range from space in business complexes to shopping malls. While these gatherings are public, they are also portable.

If the Muslim-based government represses Christians in one area, the Christians adjust meeting places. However, they know that persecution could become more severe. At present, there is a precarious balance between the government and the economic sectors that hold it in check. Many successful businesses are run by Christians, and to persecute them more violently would cripple the economy. If and when persecution moves from warm to hot, Abba Love Ministries is prepared to go underground.

The real strength of the movement are the 1,500 cell groups that meet throughout the metroplex. If the public worship services are shut down, the cell groups meeting in homes and offices will take even more leadership in nurturing faith and evangelizing. You cannot be in Abba Love without being in a cell group.

Temperate Persecution

The third form of religious persecution is what I call *sly* and “*temperate*.” Most of the West falls into this category. In such areas, beneath the guise of religious tolerance, Christians are not overtly persecuted. Their meeting places are not closed; their lives are not at stake. Yet an insidious and demonic stupor represses believers. For instance, in my country, being a Christian is fine; however, being a fervent Christian is not. Often in such cultures, academia and media undermine Christian faith at nearly every turn.

One leading Christian stated that to talk about God at a party one time will result in sneers and turned backs. Talk about God a second time, and you will not be invited to the next party. This oppressive atmosphere shuts most Christian’s mouths when it comes to sharing faith as a way of life. We in the West try to adapt. We become educated and rich to gain approval. Or, we focus on deeds of compassion without accompanying verbal proclamation to be affirmed by the secular majority. Either approach makes Christian faith rather toothless and tasteless. I believe we in the West are perhaps most crippled when it comes to religious persecution, even though it is of only the temperate, but oh so sly, variety.

Join me in reading what the authors in this issue of LWP write about concerning Christian persecution. We need their instruction, and we need their courage. Our master declared that he was sending us out as sheep in the midst of wolves (Luke 10:3). He knew our plights; he faced them himself. But he also said, “...whoever is ashamed of me and my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory” (Luke 9:26). Hot, warm, or temperate persecution is not the real issue. Our response as Christ followers is.

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NEWS BRIEFS

BOLIVIA: Conflict and Violence Escalates while Bishops Call for Peace

Roman Catholic bishops in Bolivia appealed to the country’s political leaders to bring an end to recent violence that has reportedly left several people dead and many others injured. Several regions of the country are demanding autonomy and oppose plans by President Evo Morales for constitutional reform. ([Ecumenical News International](#))

BOLIVIA: Evangelical Lutherans Ordain Women for the First Time

The [Bolivian Evangelical Lutheran Church](#) has marked its seventieth anniversary by a special service at which, for the first time, the ordination of women as pastors within the church was a highpoint of the celebration. "It is only after seventy years that we open our eyes and accept that we are all part of this inclusive Church, and that we can thrive together in harmony," said the Rev. Luis Cristóbal Alejo Fernández, president of the Bolivian Church, about the anniversary service at which two women and five men were ordained, and a further three women and ten men were authorized to carry out church functions. ([Bolivian Evangelical Lutheran Church](#))

EGYPT: Violence against Coptic People Increases

In October 2008, after a fact-finding visit to the fourth-century Abu-Fana monastery building in Upper Egypt, [Christian Solidarity Worldwide](#) (CSW) reported on a brutal attack in which three monks were kidnapped and tortured. Several more were reported shot during the assault by local Bedouins on 31 May 2008, and estimates are that the monastery has been attacked at least fifteen times by local Bedouins since 2004. Violence against

Coptic people, institutions, businesses, and property has escalated recently. CSW expressed concern that inaction by state authorities and security forces will lead to further unrest. ([Christian Solidarity Worldwide](#))

GERMANY: WCC General Secretary's Term Extended a Year

At its meeting 23-26 September 2008 in Luebeck, Germany, the [World Council of Churches](#) (WCC) announced its decision to extend the contract of Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia, the current WCC general secretary, through the time when a new general secretary takes office. In February, Kobia announced he would not seek a second term as general secretary. The council will elect a new general secretary in September 2009 at its meeting in Geneva, Switzerland. ([World Council of Churches](#))

GERMANY: Churches Speak Up for Iraqi Refugees

Churches in Germany pleaded for their country and the European Union (EU) to admit more Iraqi refugees amid reports that the German government was backing off plans to take in a group of Iraqi Christians. Rev. Stephan Reimers, who represents the interests of the Evangelical Church in Germany to the German government and EU authorities, said further postponement of admitting Iraqi refugees could not be justified amid catastrophic conditions in the country. Meeting on 25 September 2008, the EU reported it would take up to ten thousand more Iraqi refugees and send a mission to the Middle East to identify the most vulnerable people. ([Ecumenical News International](#))

GHANA: WACC and CCG Combating HIV/AIDS Stigma

Beginning 1 July 2008, the [World Association for Christian Communication](#) (WACC) and the [Christian Council of Ghana](#) (CCG) embarked on a 3-year project targeting HIV/AIDS-related stigma and discrimination. The initiative emerged as a result of close talks between WACC and CCG in 2005. CCG has close working ties with religious and community leaders in Ghana. Efforts will be aimed at reducing HIV/AIDS-related stigma and discrimination in three districts close to the capital city of Accra. The three districts were chosen because of their high levels of infection, attributed partly to fear of getting tested for the virus because of rampant stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV/AIDS. ([World Association for Christian Communication](#))

INDIA: Violence Continues against Christians in Orissa

In September 2008, Christians in Orissa, especially in Kandhamal, 250 kilometers from Bhubaneswar, reported continued acts of violence against them by Hindu mobs following the killing of Hindu leader Swami Laxmanananda Saraswati in August. A Maoist leader is reported to have claimed responsibility for the killing; however, some Hindu groups say it was a Christian conspiracy, as the 85-year-old slain monk had been campaigning against conversion to Christianity in Kandhamal, where he was based. Estimates are that more than half of the 100,000 Christians in Kandhamal are reported to have been made homeless as a result of Hindu extremists roaming villages, trying to forcibly convert Christians to Hinduism, and looting and torching Christian houses. ([Ecumenical News International](#))

IRAN: Parliament Approves Legislation Making Apostasy Punishable by Death

In September 2008, the Iranian Parliament voted in favor of a bill stipulating the death penalty for apostasy. Although news of the vote was withdrawn from the Iranian Parliament website only hours after it was published, official Iranian news agencies, including the Islamic Republic of Iran News Network, announced the decision. The draft of the bill adds a number of crimes to the list of those punishable by execution, including "establishing weblogs and sites promoting corruption, prostitution, and apostasy." ([Christian Solidarity Worldwide](#))

NORTH AMERICA: Bill McCartney Returns to Promise Keepers Leadership Role

In September 2008, Bill McCartney, co-founder of [Promise Keepers](#) (PK), returned as chairman and CEO of the organization. He resigned in 2003. Assuming his new role, McCartney brought back former PK executive and current board member Raleigh Washington to serve as president. According to its website, PK has "drawn more than six million men to some 250 conferences in stadiums and arenas across North America" since its founding in 1990. ([Promise Keepers](#))

PHILIPPINES: Video Conference Nurtures Understanding among Youth

A 3-hour Internet-based video conference on 29 August 2008 revolved around building peace and mutual understanding through dialogue between Christians, Muslims, and non-Christian and non-Muslim youth. Organized by [PeaceTech](#), the video conference enabled students in Baguio and Cotabato to reflect upon how ignorance breeds prejudice, which eventually leads to conflict. PeaceTech is a non-government organization which is holding a peace-building video dialogue series among Muslim and non-Muslim youths in various countries. Through two movie screens installed at the Baguio Convention Center, over one thousand high school students exchanged testimonies and ideas, and prayed and sang with their fellow students in Cotabato City. Students also pondered what steps they could take to promote better Muslim-Christian understanding, and what they could do to help promote peace. ([PeaceTech](#))

POLAND: Network of Nigerian Missionaries Appoints New International Facilitator

The Network of Nigerian Missionaries (NNM) has appointed a new international facilitator, Pastor Zion Okuneye. Okuneye, who lives in Warsaw, is a pastor with the Redeemed Christian Church (RCC) in Poland (under Pastor Enoch Adeboye) and serves as the coordinator of mission efforts for the RCC in Eastern Europe. NNM is a “platform for Nigerian missionaries, pastors, Christian leaders, and professionals serving God in the Diaspora.” Among its objectives is to equip the Nigerian Church with information needed to become more actively involved in world evangelization, especially to the least-reached parts of the world. (Network of Nigerian Missionaries)

QATAR: Anglicans Begin Construction of Second Church

The foundation stone of Qatar’s second Anglican church was laid 28 September 2008 in a ceremony presided over by the Bishop of Cyprus. According to *Christianity Today*, the event followed the March completion of the country’s first ever church, the Roman Catholic Our Lady of the Rosary church, which is on a site nearby. Three more churches are planned in Qatar, where the majority of the population practice a strict form of Islam called Wahhabism. Land for the Anglican church on the outskirts of the capital city of Doha was donated by the Qatari emir, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani. ([Assist News](#))

SOUTH AFRICA: All Africa Conference of Churches Commends Mbeki’s Decision to Resign

The general secretary of the [All Africa Conference of Churches](#) (AACC) has praised President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa for putting his country first by announcing his resignation after losing the confidence of the ruling African National Congress. Rev. Mvume Dandala, a Methodist from South Africa, who has led Nairobi-based AACC since 2003, said Mbeki demonstrated that “a country is bigger than an individual.” He added that Mbeki showed respect for institutions of leadership. Mbeki announced his resignation 21 September 2008 ([Ecumenical News International](#))

TURKEY: TURK-7 Marks Fifth Year of Ministry

Christian broadcasting company [TURK-7](#), an international partnership ministry, celebrated its fifth anniversary in October 2008. TURK-7 partners with approximately thirty organizations and churches and develops Christian television programming for the Church in Turkey and Turkish-speaking Christians worldwide. According to David Harder of [SAT-7](#), the Middle Eastern Christian television broadcast that shaped TURK-7, TURK-7 also aims to provide a better understanding of Christianity to the wider Turkish community. Harder added, “Often they’re told things about what Christians believe that simply aren’t true.” TURK-7 creates its own programs, but is also implementing Western Christian programs, such as VeggieTales, using Turkish voicing. ([Turk-7](#))

UNITED KINGDOM: Scientists, Philosophers, and Theologians Explore the “Big Questions”

"Seeking Truth: Science, Mystery, and Human Identity" is the title of a program at St Paul’s Institute, St Paul’s Cathedral, running from September 2008-January 2009. The series brings together scientists, philosophers, and theologians to explore the “big questions,” such as: How did the universe evolve? What is the place of humans within creation? How do our minds work? and What do we mean by the human soul? Taking the science and religion debate from conflict to dialogue, the series hopes to find ways in which spiritual quest and scientific endeavor can enlighten one another. ([St. Paul’s Cathedral](#))

UNITED KINGDOM: Campaign Calls Attention to Brutality in Burma

Change for Burma!, a partnership of [Christian Solidarity Worldwide](#) and [Partners, Relief, and Development UK](#), was launched in September 2008, exactly one year after the largest pro-democracy protests in twenty years swept across Burma. The campaign also launched a day before the twentieth anniversary of the seizure of power by Burma's current military junta, the latest in a succession of military regimes which have held power since 1962. *Change for Burma!* hopes to raise awareness of what it calls one of the world's most brutal regimes. The website allows the public to email their respective members of the British Parliament, encouraging them to ask the UN Security Council to bring the Burmese government before the International Criminal Court. ([Christian Solidarity Worldwide](#))

UNITED STATES: World Journalism Institute Appoints Apologetics Chair

On 22 September, the [World Journalism Institute](#) (WJI) appointed Dr. Anthony B. Bradley as Francis Schaeffer Chair of Apologetics. WJI's mission is "to recruit, equip, place, and encourage journalists who are Christians in the mainstream newsrooms of America." Bradley will continue full-time teaching responsibilities at [Covenant Theological Seminary](#) (CTS) in St. Louis, Missouri, but will also teach for WJI in its 2009 journalism course at The King's College in New York City. Bradley is assistant professor of apologetics and systematic theology at CTS, having joined the faculty in 2005. ([Evangelical Press Association](#))

UNITED STATES: Samaritan's Purse Continues Hurricane Relief Efforts

Following devastating Hurricane Ike, [Samaritan's Purse](#) (SP) dispatched three disaster relief units and a convoy of supplies on the road toward Texas to help provide aid to storm victims. The convoy included tractor trailers filled with supplies, including heavy-duty plastic sheeting, construction equipment, and building materials. SP was already working in the Gulf Coast following Hurricane Gustav and has done extensive relief work along the Southwest and Gulf Coast in the years since the devastating hurricanes of 2005. ([Samaritan's Purse](#))

ZIMBABWE: Christian Student Group Seeks Justice

In a recent statement, the Student Christian Movement of Zimbabwe urged the country's new government, expected to be forged out of a power-sharing agreement, to ensure that perpetrators of violence marring a presidential runoff election in June face the law. According to the statement, "...the country badly needs a healing process, and to this extent the new government arrangement is a welcome development." The students' group said it deplored "the post-March 29 violence instigated, organized, and sponsored by the state against its opponents." Talks mediated by South African leader Thabo Mbeki, following Robert Mugabe's re-election in a disputed runoff vote, led to a power-sharing agreement on 25 September 2008 between Mugabe, Morgan Tsvangirai of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) party, and Arthur Mutambara, leader of a smaller MDC faction. ([Ecumenical News International](#))

THEMED ARTICLES: The Persecuted Church

Persecution: Normal and Expected

By Nik Ripken

"If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also." - John 15:20

They admitted to being confused, these pastors and lay leaders who had endured decades of persecution within the now-failing Soviet Republic. Yet they agreed to share their personal, family, and church stories with the broader Christian community, hoping to help churches, mission organizations, and missionaries in the West develop a more biblical missiology of suffering. These pastors and lay leaders were intimately conversant with persecution, suffering, and martyrdom.

The confusion surfaced near the end of a series of interviews. Life histories had been shared, stories of persecution recited and documented, and tears shed while events were dissected. The testimonies were

compelling. It seemed to the interviewer that this was the stuff of scripture—that he was hearing Bible stories come to life in his own time.

And that’s when the moment of confusion came, when the interviewer asked some questions that weren’t very professional or well planned. After hearing story after gripping story, he was compelled to ask this group of pastors and lay leaders, “Why have you cheated us in the West? Why haven’t you written these stories down? Where are the books that chronicle your faith and persecution? These stories are worthy of a movie. These are Bible stories come to life! Why have you not shared these lessons learned?”

As Common as the Sun Rising in the East

His outburst was greeted with confused silence. The pastors and lay leaders were dumbfounded. Most of the people simply ignored the embarrassing questions and the harshness of the challenge. Finally, one brother stood up, took the interviewer by the arm, and drew him to the end of the large room by the eastern window of the dwelling. Looking out at the horizon, the man spoke calmly to the interviewer: “Sir, when your sons were growing up, how many mornings did you take them to the window of your house and say to them, ‘Look, boys, the sun is coming up in the east this morning?’”

The interviewer found the question silly. “Well, I never once did that,” he answered. “Had I done that, my sons would have thought I had lost my mind, because the sun *always* comes up in the east!” Gently, the wise brother made his point: “Sir, that is why we talk little of our persecution and suffering. That is why we have not written our stories down. And that is why we have not made a movie. Our persecution is *always* with us. It simply comes as we walk with Jesus. It is like the sun coming up in the east.

“Besides,” he continued, “when did you Christians in the West stop reading the Bible? Our stories have already been told. God has already told all of us what we need to know about persecution and suffering.”

To say the interviewer was deeply humbled belabors the obvious. But the truth found a way into his heart and he was changed that day.

What kind of person sees persecution as biblical, expected, and hardly worth mentioning? Clearly, a person steeped in the story of scripture and well-acquainted with God. We would be wise to listen and learn the lessons.

First, persecution is normal for those who follow Jesus. Scripture makes this point from beginning to end. It is, quite simply, like the sun coming up in the east. Persecution is neither good nor bad—it just is. Certainly, Christians are not to seek persecution. But, at the same time, Christians need not give in to a crippling fear.

Persecutors intend for their actions to punish, intimidate, and (ultimately) silence God’s people. But God can use persecution in other ways. His highest purpose in persecution is to call his people closer to himself and to refocus their attention to the suffering of their Lord. When followers of Christ suffer willingly for their Savior, this gives their faith value. That kind of suffering also increases the impact of their witness.

Second, conversion is the primary cause of persecution. That may sound strange, but consider this simple truth: *When people come to Jesus, persecution results. And the only way to stop persecution is to keep people from coming to Jesus.* Conversion and suffering for the faith are simply two sides of the same coin. Many Christians in the West hold to a missiology of suffering that is, at the very least, biblically inconsistent. They see persecution as “bad,” as “a punishment,” and as “something to be avoided at all cost.” Western Christians facing persecution would typically ask, “What did we do to *deserve* this?” And that question really means, “What did we do *wrong*?” But believers who are more at home in the world of persecution would see things differently. They might say, “We are being persecuted because we did what was *right*!” What a different perspective!

The Western Church has been led by a host of well-meaning proclaimers and organizations asking that Christians pray for brothers and sisters who are experiencing persecution. That is biblically right and godly. Yet those who pray typically ask for God to *stop the persecution*.

Is that really what we want to pray, when *the only way to stop persecution is to keep people from coming to Jesus*?

Those who see persecution like the sun coming up in the east seldom ask others to pray for their suffering to end. Rather, they ask that others pray that:

- they might remain obedient in the midst of their persecution
- they might be bold in their witness
- God would use their suffering to bring others to himself

But they do not ask that others pray for their persecution to end. Amazingly, they understand that there is no resurrection without a crucifixion. And while they never seek to suffer, they find joy in being allowed to suffer for and with Jesus. In their suffering, they are privileged to identify with their risen Lord.

Third, even when missionaries do everything right, the result of a bold and culturally-astute witness will be the persecution, suffering, and martyrdom of others. That's the result of "the mission enterprise." One of Satan's most powerful attacks comes against the fruit of a believer's witness. Consider this scenario: Faith has been shared and received. A new disciple has come into the family. The one who has shared the good news feels responsible. And Satan can use that good feeling of responsibility for his purposes. The words Satan whispers are devastating: "You were faithful in your witness. Now look: someone is being hurt because of what you did! Your beloved disciple is now being persecuted! And it's all because of what you did. Maybe it would have been better if this one had never come to Christ."

Subconsciously, it is easy to accept those words. It's easy to believe that the persecution is your fault. Trying to assuage that terrible guilt, Western workers often move into "rescue mode." The plan is simple: "Perhaps we should extract this new disciple and keep him safe!" Tragically, in the process, God's call to church planting gets lost. And, what's even more dangerous is that the rescuers come to believe that safety is something that they can guarantee and provide.

The Purposes of God?

God's story speaks to the situation. What do we do when Joseph is wrongly accused and thrown into Pharaoh's prison? Practically speaking, what do we do when that happens today? We write emails. We distribute contact information for governments and United Nations officials. We fill inboxes and voicemails with demands that the person be freed. We righteously claim that his rights have been violated. We point out that he has committed no crime and we say that we will settle for nothing less than his release. We threaten sanctions.

And that's all understandable.

But what if *God* has determined that he needs this person in jail for a season? Or, at the very least, what if God determines that he will use this time of imprisonment for some special purpose? What if we spring this person too soon—before he has the opportunity to interpret "Pharaoh's" dream? What if we rescue him, only to discover that we have been working against the purposes of God?

Of course, we dare not be careless here: no believer has the right to be silent when another believer is suffering! The Church in the West has no right to ignore the suffering of brothers and sisters around the globe. But even so, there is a God-given wisdom that will lead God's people to understand that there are times to allow Christians to remain imprisoned for the sake of God and his kingdom. They also will understand exactly when those times are.

For eighty percent of the Christian family in our world today, persecution remains as common as the sun coming up in the east. Surely, persecution is never to be sought nor fearfully avoided. But when it comes, each follower of Christ is invited to embrace it, to see it as normal and expected, and to pray that God might somehow use it for his purposes.

Dr. Nik Ripken (pseudonym) is a mission veteran of twenty-four years with the International Mission Board, SBC, having served in Malawi, South Africa, Kenya, Somalia, and Germany. Currently, he and his wife serve as strategy associates in Northern Africa and the Middle East with specific responsibilities for the Horn of Africa and some Gulf States.

Persecution and Mission

By Thomas Schirmacher

Persecution has often been related to the growth and mission of the Church. Tertullian's famous words, "The blood of the martyrs is a seed of the Church," forewarned the Roman emperors that their opposition would only enlarge the Church. Jesus, when warning his disciples of future persecution, had prophesied that it would turn them into his witnesses (Luke 21:13). Paul showed clearly that his imprisonment and suffering did not hinder the gospel—but instead, furthered it (Philippians 1:12-26).

Indeed, the first organized persecution of the first congregation in Jerusalem only led to the dispersal of Christians into the whole Roman Empire and the beginning of Christian missions to the Gentiles. The first Gentiles were converted in Antioch not by the apostles, but by "normal" Christians who had fled Jerusalem (Acts 7:54-8:8). During the **1974 Lausanne International Congress on World Evangelization** it was said that "persecution is a storm that is permitted to scatter the seed of the Word, and disperse the sower and reaper over many fields. It is God's way of extending his kingdom."

So persecution often accompanies missions, for "missions lead to martyrdom, and martyrdom becomes missions."¹ Jesus warned his disciples that they were going out as sheep in the midst of wolves (Matthew 10:16; Luke 10:3). The universal spread of Christ's Church has always been accompanied with the blood of the martyrs; world mission is "mission beneath the cross."

Johan Candelin rightly observed, however, that persecution does not always produce church growth, although persecution grows because some of the fastest growing churches in the world exist in countries without religious liberty.² According to Candelin, 300 million evangelicals worldwide live with the threat of physical persecution, and the vast majority belong to fast-growing evangelical communities like those found in China.

The collapse of international Communism and the fall of many dictators may have resulted in a decrease in direct persecution in some places. However, the expansion of Islamic fundamentalism, the growth of political Hinduism, and the rise of new dictatorships in Africa are all global factors giving rise to new growth in attacks on Christian churches and individuals.

Mission to Persecutors

Following Old Testament tradition (e.g., Job 31:29; 42:8-9), the New Testament exhorts us to pray for God's grace for persecutors and to give testimony to them (Matthew 5:44, Luke 6:27-28; 1 Corinthians 4:12). The most impressive testimony is Jesus' prayer that God will have mercy on his persecutors (Luke 23:34). The first Christian martyr, Stephen, prayed similarly (Acts 7:60). Both requests were heard, for some of the persecutors were later converted (the Roman officer in Luke 23:47; Paul in Acts 9:1-18). Church history contains many descriptions of dying Christians, such as Polycarp, who prayed for those tormenting them.

The modern Church has its own examples. In 1913, the Indonesian evangelist Petrus Octavianus described a missionary in the Toradya area in southern Celebes. Five tribe members wanted to kill the missionary, but permitted him to pray first. He prayed aloud that they would be saved. Three of the murderers were banned to

Java, were converted in prison, and returned to Toradya, where they founded a church which later (1971) became the fourth largest church in Indonesia. Let us also not forget the five missionaries shot to death by the Aucas in Equador in the 1960s. Several of the murderers later became pillars of the Aucan church.

Many who began as persecutors of Christians later became believers themselves. The best known is Paul, who frequently referred to his former persecution of the Church (see 1 Corinthians 15:9; Galatians 1:13, 23-24; Philippians 3:6; 1 Timothy 1:13; Acts 9:4-5, 22: 4, 7-8; 16:11, 14-15).

Jesus, Mission, and Persecution

To speak of Jesus is to speak of mission, suffering, and persecution. The prediction of his death accompanies his entire earthly ministry (e.g., Matthew 16:21; 17:22-23; 10:17-19; 26:2). The details of the Passion narratives take up the longest sections of the Gospels. Paul consistently presented Jesus as the archetypal martyr and as an example for all Christians; therefore, it is not surprising that early Church documents on martyrdom considered Jesus to be the prototype of the martyr.

Jesus is the actual object of all persecution. For this reason, Jesus asked Saul, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” (Acts 9:4; 22:7; 26:14), and identified himself as “Jesus, whom you persecute” (Acts 9:5; 22: 8; 26:15). The true reason for Christians’ suffering is Christ, since it is the focus on him which justifies the opposition. Martin Luther once said, “The clearer the Church recognizes Christ and testifies of him, the more certainly it will encounter the contradiction, the confrontation, and the hatred of the Antichrist.” Jesus himself frequently reminded the disciples that they would be persecuted for his sake while preaching the gospel (see Matthew 10:22; 16:25; Luke 21:12).

Without the offence of the cross, there would be no mission, but also no persecution (Galatians 5:11). Paul accused his opponents of being circumcised only to escape persecution (Galatians 6:12, 14). Indeed, the word of the cross is foolishness to unbelievers (1 Corinthians 1:18), an impediment to the Jews, and nonsense to the Gentiles (1 Corinthians 1:23); however, it is also the centre of salvation history (1 Corinthians 1:23; 2:2). The message of the cross is thus the glory of the gospel, as well as its foolishness (1 Corinthians 1:17-25; Galatians 6:11-14).

The Holy Spirit, the Real Missionary, and Persecution

Without the Holy Spirit, all mission is futile and comes to nothing. However, since mission and persecution are closely related, the Holy Spirit also plays a vital role in the experience of persecution. He is “the comforter” (John 16:16, 26) and gives Christians the strength to endure persecution—even to rejoice in the most difficult conditions (1 Peter 4:14). The spirit of glory, which had rested on the Messiah (Isaiah 11:2), brings his glory to those who seem to have lost all glory (e.g., Stephen, whom Luke described as “being full of the Holy Spirit” [Acts 7:55] during his defense and his execution, as he saw the glory of God in heaven).

Jesus promised wisdom to the persecuted when they stand before their judges and have to give testimony; the Holy Spirit will indeed instruct them in what to say (Luke 21:12-15; Matthew 10:19-20). William Carl Weinrich³ notes that Jesus seldom spoke of the Holy Spirit’s function; however, when he did so, frequently he described the Holy Spirit as the helper and comforter in persecution (Matthew 10:17-20; Mark 13:9-11; Luke 21:12-19). No wonder Paul attributed his endurance to the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 6:6; Philippians 1:19; 1 Thessalonians 1:6-7). The early Church was constantly aware that only the Spirit of God could provide the persecuted with wisdom and strength to endure.

No Automatic Blessing from Persecution

Nowhere are Christians encouraged to seek persecution or martyrdom. This is in contrast to those who justify self-destruction (e.g., suicide bombers) on religious grounds. Neither does persecution automatically lead to church growth or to a purer, stronger faith. The experience of the German Church under the Third Reich and under Communism, for example, has led to neither a more intense reflection about persecution nor to revival or

church growth. Even when persecution is fruitful, however, its results are never automatic; instead, it is always due to God's sovereign grace.

Jesus' parable of the sower (Matthew 13:3-8, 20-22) identifies wealth and egotism as just as dangerous to faith as persecution and pressure. Western Christians tend to glorify persecution, and believers under persecution tend to glorify liberty and wealth. The faith of the one suffers under persecution and pressure; the faith of the other is suffocated by worldly concerns and the deceit of wealth. Additionally, in the West persecution comes in many forms and is much wider than physical abuse. Thus, Christians are persecuted at work for upholding Christian values, and Christians who take a stand against secularism are exposing themselves to ridicule and abuse. The Church is called to help and support such Christians, as well as those suffering more obvious physical opposition.

It is an unfortunate fact of ecclesiastical history that persecution can also engender conflict and division between Christians. An appropriate, if terrifying, modern example occurred in Korea when Japanese rulers (1910-1945) required all Koreans to kowtow to Shinto shrines in order to honor the Japanese Emperor and the sun goddess. After long resistance, in 1937 and 1938, most Christian groups surrendered to the increasingly intolerable coercion, but were strongly divided (particularly Presbyterians) on the significance of the required ceremony: was it a religious rite or merely a cultural formality? Sixty years later, the issue remains unresolved, and the breach is still evident, even though the original problem is long gone.

Christians Persecuting Christians

Prophets and true believers have always been persecuted by institutional religious authorities. Israel itself persecuted the Old Testament prophets, Jesus, and the apostles. Jesus compared the spiritual leaders of his day with those who had murdered the Old Testament prophets (Matthew 5:10-12; 10:23; 23:21, 34; Luke 11:49; 13:34; 21:12; John 5:16; see also Stephen in Acts 7:52; Peter in Acts 2:23; and Paul in 1 Thessalonians 2:14-15).

Christians today also persecute both fellow Christians and others. We need only remember the forced conversions in the Middle Ages, the colonization of Latin America, the Crusades, the oppression of heretics, the Inquisition, and the Jewish pogroms. Ever since the fourth century, the term *martyr* has been expanded to include Christians killed by other "orthodox" Christians.

The fact that Christians themselves are martyred in the name of the Christian God, as dreadful as it is, is not foreign to scripture. The holy books of no other religion depict their followers so negatively as the Bible does the people of Israel and Christians. This honest and sometimes severe self-criticism is integral to both Judaism and Christianity, in contrast to other religions.

The State, Politics, and Persecution

We must avoid defining persecution in merely pious terms, since it can arise when Christians take certain ethical or political positions. Recent Catholic theology, particularly liberation theology, sometimes has applied martyr terminology to political martyrs and resistance fighters.

It is indeed proper that persecution sometimes has a concrete political aspect, especially when criticism of rulers initiates the persecution. There is a long tradition of political critique giving rise to persecution, from Old Testament prophets to people such as Athanasius, Thomas Becket, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King, and Archbishop Oscar Romero. Christians are normally loyal citizens who seek the welfare of their state, country, and people; however, whenever the state tries to force them to dishonor God, and especially seeks to suppress their mission, they must obey God rather than humans (Acts 5:29; 4:19).

It is, of course, difficult to conjecture in advance to what extent we can cooperate with governments during periods of persecution, and when we must begin to resist. In world mission, this question has to be decided anew by Christians in each context. We certainly need a new evaluation of the possibility of breaking state laws and resisting the powers for the sake of the gospel.

Peter and the apostles preached the gospel in spite of the state's prohibition (Acts 4:19-20; 5:29) and were frequently arrested and punished as a result (Acts 12:1-2). In the face of Roman opposition, Christians referred to Jesus as "Lord" (Greek: "kyrios") and king (in opposition to an imperial edict, see Acts 17:6-7; 4:12). They followed Old Testament examples (e.g., Daniel in Daniel 3; priests in 2 Chronicles 26:18; the Egyptian midwives in Exodus 1:15-20; Rahab in Joshua 2). Rather than condemning their dishonesty, the New Testament presents them as role models of faith (Hebrews 11:31; James 2:25). Note that these examples do not concern only idolatry or a recantation of the gospel, but any infringement of God's law (murder, etc.). Such resistance assumes, however, that the state has required us to transgress against God's law.

There has never been a persecution solely on religious grounds, since there is always a confusing blend of religious concerns with cultural and social problems. Political, national, economic, and personal motives may also play a role. In Revelation, hatred for the Church is augmented by political and economic issues. Another example is the Ephesian craftsmen who instigate a riot because they consider Paul's mission work a threat to their welfare (Acts 19:23-29). In Acts 16, Paul and Silas are imprisoned after exorcising a fortune-telling demon out of a slave girl because her owners are angry at the loss of their profit (Acts 16:16-24).

There is actually no difference between those "persecuted because of their faith" and those persecuted for their "active support of justice." In Revelation, the anti-Christian government (the Beast) oppresses the saints ("...they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus"; Revelation 14:12; 12:17). Both obedience to principles of justice and truth, as well as loyalty to Jesus, equally incite hatred. And as world mission is a primary commandment (Matthew 28:18-20) and includes teaching all aspects of God's commandments (Matthew 28:20), oppressors may name social or ethical issues as the reason for their opposition; however, the real reason is our faithfulness to the mission mandate. Christians know the true reason for persecution: the world hates them as it hates their Lord (John 15:18ff), and therefore persecution will always be closely associated with missionary obedience.

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Dr. Thomas Schirmacher is professor of ethics and sociology of religion in Germany and Turkey. He is also president of Martin Bucer Theological Seminary, spokesman for human rights of the World Evangelical Alliance, and director of the International Institute for Religious Freedom (Bonn, Cape Town, Colombo). Schirmacher has four doctorates (theology, cultural anthropology, ethics, and sociology of religions).

Persecution (Modern Ages)

By Thomas Schirmacher

Introduction

Martyrdom and the persecution of Christians concerned not only the early Church, but has accompanied all branches of Christianity throughout history. The history of the Church is also the history of her persecution. Of the twentieth century, Chuck Colson writes, "More Christians have been martyred for their faith in this century alone than in the previous nineteen centuries combined."¹

Most of the persecution and killing of Christians can be attributed to one of three groups of persecutors: Islamic states, totalitarian secular states, and countries fighting Christian missionary work.

1. Persecution in Islamic Countries

From the foundation of Islam and the expansion of the early Muslim empires through the Ottoman Empire with its “satellites,” Christians were conquered, killed, enslaved, or suppressed as second-class citizens. Today, this kind of persecution is most obvious in Iran, Saudi Arabia, Arab Emirates, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq, Sudan, Northern Nigeria, and to a much lesser extent in more secularised countries like Egypt, Indonesia, Tunisia, and Turkey.

Constantinople was conquered and destroyed by the Ottomans in 1453, who then took over large areas of the Byzantine Empire with its Orthodox churches as they had conquered the regions of many old oriental churches, like the Copts in Egypt or the Syrian Christians.

Christians were deemed second-class citizens; however, policies of oppression changed from sultan to sultan—from severe and cruel persecution to subtle pressure through extra tax, lack of access to education, and riots. The height of the persecution was reached only at the end of the Ottoman Empire and the beginning of the modern Turkish Republic when Armenians were killed directly or through starvation and illness while on huge marches in 1895, 1908, and 1909 to 1916 (peaking in 1915).

Between 1909 and 1916, 155 million Armenians died. Similarly, Assyrian Christians faced persecution in 1895, 1933, and then again in the 1970s and 1980s. When all was said and done, 750,000 Assyrians had died. As of today, only four thousand Assyrians and forty thousand Armenians live in Turkey. When Turkey had to give back Smyrna to Greece in 1921, severe programs of persecution against the Greeks in Asia Minor resulted in the deaths of two million Greeks. In 1922, 120,000 Greeks were killed in Smyrna on one day alone. This put an end to a 4,000-year history of Greeks in Asia Minor. The overall percentage of Christians in Turkey also declined from thirty percent prior to World War I to 0.3% today.

2. Persecution by Atheist and Secular Governments

From the French Revolution and other right-wing totalitarian nationalistic governments like Mexico, national socialism in Germany, and some African despots like Idi Amin in Uganda, to left-wing totalitarian governments mainly in communist countries like the former Soviet Union, China, Vietnam, or Eastern Europe, Christians have been persecuted. Since 1989, the number of communist countries has greatly declined; however, this kind of persecution is still obvious today in China and North Korea, and to a lesser degree in Cuba and Libya.

The war against religion by the French Reign of Terror in the 1700s reached its first peak in 1792 with the killing of two hundred clergy and thirty thousand people having to leave the country. In 1793, the so-called “Dechristianisation” started; churches were closed or destroyed, laws were changed, priests and nuns were forced to marry, and church possessions were plundered. Thousands of priests were deported to Guyana or French prison islands in 1797. The concordate between France and the Vatican reduced the persecution, and Napoleon’s “separation of church and state” ended it in 1805—although Christianity never again played a major role in politics, education, or public life in France.

The greatest persecution of Christians in history took place during the seventy years of the Soviet Union (1917-1989). In 1917, Lenin started his war against the Orthodox and Catholic churches, which led to the deaths of 8,100 clergy in 1922 and a decision in 1928 that the Communists would wipe out any religion.

In Moscow alone, 150 churches were destroyed, three hundred churches were converted for secular purposes, and two hundred Orthodox bishops were killed. During that time and up until 1943, approximately fifteen million Christians died—many of them in persecution not directly aimed at the churches, but against the “Kulaks” or other supposedly “political enemies.” Besides the Russian Orthodox and the Catholic Church, victims of persecution were mainly German, Estian, and Lithuanian Lutherans, Baptists, and Mennonites.

During the war against Germany, restrictions against Christians were lowered; even so, severe persecution went on in the satellite states of Latvia and Ukraine—mainly against those in the Catholic Church. From 1945 to 1956, persecution intensified again throughout all of Communist Europe. Christians were rarely murdered directly, but rather were sent to the “Gulags” and psychiatric clinics. Nikita Khrushchev closed thirteen thousand Russian Orthodox churches and fifty-three cloisters. Only in Hungary and Yugoslavia was there agreement between state and church; in all other countries persecution stayed severe and effective until the 1980s.

Persecution of Christians is often mixed with other economic, political, social, and racial problems. To choose but one example, the heavy persecution of the Catholic Church in Mexico under Benito Juarez (1861-1872) and Plutarco Calles (1926-1938), as well as in Spain (1931 and 1936-1939), had a social revolutionary background, as the Catholic Church was the greatest landowner and was seen as the enemy of the poor. But this is only one side of the coin. The other side is the atheistic grounding of the fight against the Church. In Mexico, all bishops had to leave the country, priests were not allowed to be educated, and the education of young people was monopolised by the atheist government. The number of martyrs in Mexico during that period is estimated have been around 5,300. At the same time in Spain, two thousand churches and monasteries were destroyed and six thousand clergy murdered.

3. Reactions to Christian Mission Work and Christianity as a Supposed Western Religion²

Most instances of persecution can be found in Asia, with additional occurrences (but to a lesser extent) in Africa. In Asian history we see persecution of Christians taking place during specific periods of time: Japan (1587-1635; Christianity was forbidden 1635-1854), China (1617, 1665, 1723, 1724, 1736, 1811, 1857, 1900-1901), Korea (1784, 1791, 1801, 1815, 1827, 1839, 1846, 1866, 1881, 1887), and Madagascar (since 1835). Today’s examples in Asia are: China, North Korea, Vietnam, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and certain regions of India. In some Asian countries, like Indonesia and India, severe persecution erupted only recently; however, in other Asian countries it has a long-standing history over centuries.

Persecution of Christians by Christians

There has also been considerable persecution of Christians by other Christians. Christianity is not a homogeneous group, and the different confessions have fought each other often in war, by the criminal system, or through other types of persecution.

In 1179, the Third Lateran Council ordered secular rulers to punish heretics, and in 1215 the Fourth Lateran Council gave the same command to the bishops. Pope Gregor IX established the Inquisition in 1231. In the medieval age the Roman Catholic Church or Catholic kings and rulers cruelly suppressed revival movements as well as other movements; it is still debated how much they actually differed from orthodox Christianity (the Cathars, the Albigensians, the Beziers, and others). Also, pre-Reformation movements like the Waldenses or the Hussites were subdued with fire and sword. The Crusades often included war against Eastern Orthodox and Old Oriental churches by Western Christians.

After the Reformation, Catholics fought and persecuted Protestants, especially following the so-called “Counter Reformation” in 1546. On St. Bartholomew's Day 1572, the French king ordered the murder of all Protestants in France. In Spain or Italy it was virtually impossible to live as a Protestant for centuries. At the same time, however, Protestants suppressed Catholics—although often not as cruelly or well-organised (with the exception of the English Reformation, where any act of allegiance to the Pope was considered treason under the Anglican kings and queens).

Both Catholics and Protestants in Europe cruelly suppressed the Anabaptists and similar movements, leading to many adherents later emigrating to America and other countries to find religious freedom. As the idea of religious freedom gained ground among evangelicals in the middle of the nineteenth century (among mainline Protestants after World War I, Catholics after World War II, and Orthodox only recently), persecution of Christians by Christians is gradually fading away and is no longer happening on a large scale today.

Persecution of believers is a central topic and a cruel but omnipresent reality in the Old and New Testament. It is written into the history not only of the Church, but of world history in general. It is a worldwide reality today—spiritually, statistically, and politically. It is time to give it the room in our teaching, thinking, and action that it deserves.

For further reading on the topic of Christian persecution, please see other articles in this issue of Lausanne World Pulse, as well as the bibliography below.

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Endnotes

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2. We do not include the Islamic countries here.

Dr. Thomas Schirmacher is professor of ethics and sociology of religion in Germany and Turkey. He is also president of Martin Bucer Theological Seminary, spokesman for human rights of the World Evangelical Alliance, and director of the International Institute for Religious Freedom (Bonn, Cape Town, Colombo). Schirmacher has four doctorates (theology, cultural anthropology, ethics, and sociology of religions).

Evangelism and Church Growth in a Culture of Persecution

By Antonia Leonora van der Meer

I was sent to Angola by the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students (IFES) upon the request of the Evangelical Alliance of Angola to help start a student movement. I served there from 1984 until 1995. My family thought I had gone crazy; I had a happy and blessed ministry with students in Brazil—why on earth should I go to “that country”? But I felt convinced the Lord was calling me. After my first return home, I shared with my family what God was doing in Angola. They soon began supporting my ministry.

The entire time I was in Angola, the country was at war. Although it was a Marxist country and imposed restrictions on religious freedom, from 1991 onward there was a growing freedom for churches. However, persecution, to some extent, was always present. Indeed, it was not always fierce; however, there was always pressure on the churches. The government demanded that churches should register, which would give their leaders the right to travel abroad, and to receive help and visits from abroad. But it was not easy to become registered, and even after registration, restrictions continued. Below are five examples of what happened:

1. Some police officers came to a small church in the country and shouted at the people, “Tomorrow, at seven o’clock, you are to come back and destroy your church. We will be there to control you, and you will suffer if you will not obey!” A number of the church members came and destroyed their church building. The leaders went to the police to make a complaint and ask for help and the right to rebuild. The police mocked them, saying, “Your own people have destroyed your church. How can you prove that we ordered them to do so?”

2. I visited some Christian Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Europe with the general secretary of the Evangelical Alliance. For years, the church in Angola did not receive any help from abroad. I encouraged them to make contacts, believing more help would come. And help was promised. When the first container with very necessary goods came to the port, the director of religious affairs came to our office shouting that we did not have the right to receive this help; instead, he said, it should be handed over to him and distributed by the social affairs people. Although this came as a shock, we fasted and prayed. The general secretary studied some laws and went to seek guidance from the Roman Catholic Caritas Agency. The director's attitude changed completely: "Obviously you can receive these goods; however, you could give some of it to us, as you know we need it."
3. During my first months in Angola I started a small prayer meeting with four students in my home. The general secretary said that I could use the church, but that I did not have the right to do such activities in my home. There were "popular vigilantes" everywhere who would notice what we were doing, tell the police, and get us in trouble.
4. The most difficult experience was with student work. We started very low-key by holding our meetings in church buildings, but we were soon found out and were told that what we were doing was unacceptable. In one university town the faithful members of the group were called twice, individually, by the director of the university, who told them, "You have to choose: either you continue your studies and give up your faith or, if you prefer to keep going to church, you will lose all rights to study and not receive any proof of the studies you have done so far." They all told him they wanted to serve their country, but could not deny their Lord. The third time the pressure was during a large public meeting in which they were called to stand up, one by one, and declare their choice. Because they still kept faithful to Christ, the police came to their houses during the night and took them away to serve in the army. But they were not treated like other soldiers; instead, they were branded as people who had betrayed their country. They were sent to dangerous places. After two years, the accusations were removed and they were allowed to come back and finish their studies.
5. It was also common to have a spy at our meetings. Typically, I felt immediately who this person was (special insight God gives us in such contexts). I had to pray not to resent his or her presence, but to see him or her as any other sinner in need of God's grace. Little by little, I learned to overcome my fears; however, I kept praying for wisdom in how I presented my teaching.

Evangelism and Church Growth in Such Contexts

Restrictions on religious freedom may have caused fears; however, people felt a great need for God's love, for security, and for hope. So during my time in Angola, the churches were usually full. People responded well to the gospel, and many were converted. Most pastors had very little training, but they loved the Lord and kept preaching. Most sermons were very simple, but the truth of the gospel came through and people came to Christ.

There was no freedom to build new churches during this time. So how did the existing churches cope with the growing number of believers? Some held four services and three Sunday schools (for children and adults) every Sunday. One church, which met in the room of a house, removed all the inner walls to increase the size of the church. Another church had a pile of bricks outside and a loudspeaker; a significant number of people would sit on bricks (in the sun) for hours, taking part in the service. There would often be spies in church services, so the leaders had to be wise to speak the truth in politically inoffensive ways.

One time, I was called by a leader from the women's department of the official Marxist party. She wanted to meet me, and I expected the worst. What she really wanted was for me to share my faith, to read the Bible and explain it, and to pray with her. So I did. She called me a second time to do the same thing; this time she brought another friend from the party along with her.

Although there was no way to do public evangelism, friendship evangelism was always possible. We would visit people in their homes, and before we would leave, we would ask for permission to read a text from the Bible

and to pray. Most people would accept. Funeral meetings were good places to do this. Because so many people died during this time—which led to great pain—people would be very open to receive a visit. We would offer them comfort and pray for them.

I also evangelized in hospitals, visiting the many casualties from the war—people hurting inside and outside, often very lonely and in great need of comfort and love. Some were Marxist, and during the first visits they were very resistant. However, friendship removed barriers and opened up opportunities to share the gospel. I would never criticize Marxism; instead, I would present the love of God.

When the restrictions in the country lessened, poorer people started to build their own churches, often very simple buildings. They gathered with great joy and courage, often without any covering from the sunshine. Greater freedom also encouraged the churches to work together in evangelistic projects and to organize conferences for teaching and encouragement of all church leaders.

The Growth of Evangelical Churches

Although there were fewer restrictions in the 1990s, the war continued. Peace only came in 2002. However, there was tremendous church growth in Angola during this time. In 1975, 384,000 people (eight percent of the population) were evangelical Christians. Compare that to 2000, when there were over 2.1 million (16.4% of the population) evangelical Christians.¹

Not all the growth was healthy; many new churches were organized, some by local prophets with very little knowledge of the Bible, with some forms of syncretism. However, even those churches were frequently open to learning more about the Bible; several, in fact, became more evangelical.

In 1995, there was a worldwide evangelistic effort by Billy Graham, whose messages were sent by satellite all over the world. Although it took a lot of work to receive permission to use public places in Angola, it was granted. In Luanda, we were allowed to use the Karl Marx cinema, which was crowded every evening. I prayed for and invited my neighbors; all of them went to at least to one of the meetings.

After the end of the war in 2002, evangelical churches grew even more rapidly, and there was a growing number of new denominations. Several denominations were formed by leaders who were unwilling to adapt to existing denominations and who wanted to be their own bosses. The divisions created during forty years of war also had an influence in this divisiveness. Many foreign missions had worked with only specific people, so there was little interaction and fellowship with other evangelicals. Other foreign missionaries who had come to the country more recently had been planting their own brand of Christianity.

Following my time in Angola, I returned to Brazil to work at a school of missions. I have been sharing from my vision and experience, telling students and members of Brazilian churches that there are no impossible situations for the gospel. When things seem hard, often people's hearts are very open. However, one needs wisdom to know how to present the message of the gospel and how to disciple converts. Lack of wisdom by missionaries in these areas can cause great suffering among the local people.

Currently in Brazil, we are practicing evangelism in our micro-region, where there is only a small percentage of evangelicals and many resistant traditional religious groups. We are also seeking to reach the nearly fifteen thousand students at the local university.

Please pray with us for the ongoing work in Angola, in Brazil, and in many other places where believers are reaching out in ministry to this important population of university students.

Endnote

1. Johnstone, Patrick and Jason Mandryk. 2001. *Operation World*. Waynesboro, Georgia, USA: Paternoster.

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Somalia: An On-going, Overlooked Crisis

By Carl Moeller

The situation in Somalia is probably the most overlooked, under-reported crisis in the world. The country has been devastated by civil war, famine, drought, floods, assassinations, and suicide bombings. There are one million Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and 1.7 million people in need of food. United Nations officials who work in Somalia have stated that the country has higher malnutrition rates, more bloodshed, and fewer aid workers than the Darfur region in Sudan. There are four doctors per 100,000 people, and only twenty-nine percent of the population of 8.4 million has access to safe drinking water.

“The situation in Somalia is the worst on the continent of Africa,” Ahmedou Ould-Abdallah, a top United Nations official for Somalia, told the *New York Times* in 2007. Reuters reported in July 2008 that insecurity and attacks in southern Somalia have forced many aid groups to scale down or halt humanitarian operations “to cope with one of the world’s worst humanitarian emergencies.” Pirate attacks on unescorted ships have been a growing problem in Somalia. According to the International Maritime Bureau, three European freighters were hijacked off the Horn of Africa in June 2008, adding to the twenty-seven other reported attacks this year. Some of those pirated ships contained humanitarian aid for Somalia.

Somalia is the only country in the world which has been without a government for the last seventeen years. Warlords continue to control parts of the country. In 2007, thousands of civilians in Mogadishu were killed or wounded. Somalia has no constitution or any legal provision for the protection of religious freedom.

Christianity in a War-torn Country

Somalia is 99.96 percent Muslim, with just four to five thousand Christians. The conditions for Christians and others in war-torn Somalia have continued to deteriorate. Currently, there are pockets of believers living under extremely dangerous conditions. Some converts to Christ from Islam have lost their lives shortly after coming to faith. Somalia is ranked number twelve on Open Doors’ World Watch List of fifty countries where Christians face the most severe persecution.

At least six Christians were killed for their faith in Somalia in 2006. Most of them had an Islamic background and were killed after their Muslim Background Believer status was revealed. An Italian nun was killed in September 2006, possibly as a result of remarks made by Pope Benedict XVI when quoting a medieval text on violence in Islam. Many Christians have been forced to flee to other countries.

The biggest hardship for any Somali believer is to be an outcast from his or her family and society. To most Somalis, “Christian” describes an alcohol-drinking non-Muslim with an immoral lifestyle. Somali society can not imagine a Christian believer to be a God-fearing person. Therefore, having a family member converted to Christianity brings great shame to the entire family.

The Perseverance of Faithful Christians

Despite all the difficulties, Christian workers continue to faithfully labor among the Somali people throughout the Horn of Africa. The Lord is doing signs and miracles among the Somali people. He is touching the hearts of Somalis and drawing them to himself.

Prayer Points for Somalia:

- For the establishment of a stable

Christians gather in house churches to study God's word, to worship, and to pray for one another. Generally, Somali believers enjoy singing, are gifted in writing poems, and sometimes create songs spontaneously; they worship in their own language, with their own spiritual songs, and in their own style. Somalis are not used to long sermons; instead, they like discussions which can become heated because emotions are involved.

Over the past year people around the world have been praying for the transformation of the Somali nation, thanks to a prayer campaign launched by **Open Doors**. Looking at the country and its people, some might think that there is no hope for this nation. However, the Lord, through the prayers of his people, can make the impossible happen.

Over the past few months several Open Doors partners have written to tell us of Somalis who have come to Christ. Other reports tell of Somalis growing firm in the faith, despite the difficult circumstances they are facing.

In reading these reports I am moved by the fact that just like all of God's children, these believers learn to walk with him while they are feeling strong, but also when they are going through doubt and pain and the valley of the shadow of death.

While some are feeling despondent, others have hope that God will restore their nation and bring the stability that is such a distant dream.

One Somali brother wrote, *"My many difficulties make me love God, who has become my protection. When I witness about my faith, I feel a power that goes with me and keeps me from falling. I feel different and I'm not the person I was before. After I found a Bible written in Somali, and an English one, I found healing in many ways. I know that my changing situation will stabilize one day."*

You can join thousands of Christians globally who are praying for God's intervention in Somalia. To participate in the prayer campaign for Somalia, go to: www.OpenDoorsUSA.org or: www.opendoorsusa.org/content/view/480.

Please also lift up Somalia in prayer during the annual International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church on Sunday, 9 November 2008.

Dr. Carl Moeller is president/CEO of Open Doors USA. Open Doors is an international ministry which has supported and strengthened persecuted Christians for fifty years. Moeller formerly ministered with Campus Crusade for Christ and Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, California, USA.

Looking Ahead and Up as Christians Are Persecuted in Iraq

By The Rev. Canon Andrew White

In 2007, we watched as Christians were persecuted, killed, and massacred in Dura, south of Baghdad. Many fled Baghdad and went to the safe area of Nineveh in the heart of Mosul. The place they fled to is the heart of the Christian community. In recent days, the Christians have again been targeted, killed, and massacred.

government which allows freedom of religion for Christians.

- That humanitarian relief will get to the thousands who need food, water, and medical help.
- That Muslim Background Believers will stand strong in their faith, despite immense pressure from family and friends to return to Islam.
- That Christians who meet in house or cell churches will be kept safe and not be discovered by extremists.
- That those who are preparing the translation of the Bible and other Christian materials into *Af-Maay* would have diligence, insight, and wisdom through the help of the Holy Spirit. This will allow for God's truth to be conveyed to a significant minority group in Somalia.

This time not in Baghdad, but in the heart of the Christian area of Nineveh. While in church recently, I asked our people how many of them were from Nineveh; about eighty percent said they were.

Our church warden's nephew and his father had just been shot dead outside their house in Nineveh. Alhassan, the nephew, was due to be engaged that same week. As I left church, I was phoned again by church members who had heard that their family home in Nineveh had been blown up. There were now seven people without a home and in need of help.

The fact that Christians are now being attacked in the heartland of Christianity is very significant. Here, the people have believed in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob for 2,700 years—since Jonah, the miserable evangelist, turned up by submarine transportation. Seven hundred years later, another miserable person, doubting Thomas, turned up on his way to India. He told the Ninevites that their messiah had arrived down the road in Israel. The people believed. As a result, Nineveh is the longest-standing Christian place in the world. Today, Christians in Iraq most revere Jonah and Mar Thoma (St. Thomas). St. Georges Anglican Church Baghdad is now the largest church in Iraq with nearly two thousand members.

None of our people are traditionally Anglican; however, now, in the midst of trauma, denominations do not matter—all that matters is that that we believe in Jesus. During a recent service I told our people what I regularly tell them: "There are no guarantees that we will not be killed this week, but there is one guarantee: when we see Jesus, we will be like him." At this, the people always cheer.

We cannot deny the success of the U.S. surge; violence is still down in Baghdad. However, the sad reality is that many terrorist groups like Al Qaida have moved north to places like Mosul. Who is responsible for the violence is still not clear: some say Sunni Muslims, others say Al Qaida, still others say the Kurds. This seems quite unlikely, as many Christians have now escaped Nineveh/Mosul and are seeking refuge in Kurdistan. Added to these many problems and dangers that Christians are facing has also been the Parliament's recent dismissal to allow minorities to have representation reserved in the regional governments. Life is very hard for the remaining Christians in Iraq; the majority of this minority have already fled. Those left are the ones who cannot afford to leave or are refusing to. In the midst of this crisis, the multi-national forces in Iraq are considering what they can do. The Iraqi government has already seconded one thousand police and military forces to the area.

In the midst of this crisis, once again the only solution appears to be to overcome the violence by force. As people of peace, this may not be the solution we like; however, there appears to be no other option—those committing this violence will not talk to others, nor will they engage and look for other solutions. As far as they are concerned, they are killing the infidels who they believe are aligned to the West and the Coalition.

Meanwhile, back at church we simply keep loving and serving. We now have a clinic at the church with three doctors, three dentists, and a pharmacy. Everything we do is free, and most of our patients are not Christian, but Muslim. We have no plans to stop serving all people, regardless of religion. We will never stop loving. The threat keeps returning, the violence is real, but by the grace of God, we will keep going.

The Rev. Canon Andrew White is president and CEO of the Foundation for Relief and Reconciliation in the Middle East, chaplain of St. George's Church in Baghdad, Anglican/Episcopal chaplain of the International Zone Baghdad and senior advisor in Inter-Religious Affairs to the Prime Minister of Iraq. Over the past few years he has acted as a negotiator in many conflict situations, including the siege of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem and the riots between Muslims and Christians in Northern Nigeria. In recent years, he has been awarded several significant prizes for his peace work, including the US Cross of Valor, the Tanenbaum Peace Maker in Action Prize, the International Sternberg Prize and the ICCJ Prize for Sustained Intellectual Contribution to Jewish-Christian Relations and in 2003 the Three Faiths' Forum Prize for Inter-Faith Relations.

PERSPECTIVES

To Touch the King: Why We Minister to Those who Suffer

By R. C. Stevens

The grandmother, Rama, was an old acquaintance who had worked as a house-helper for some friends of ours. Her son and daughter-in-law sat with her on the floor of our sitting room—their clothes and hollow faces declaring their poverty, the quiet despair in his eyes highlighting the harsh life of a day laborer. Recently, I had spent the better part of two days with them and they had come by our home to pay their respects before returning to the village. Sitting together now, I felt anger rise like bile in my mouth—anger at this family—at their poverty and ignorance and at the way they simply accept their lot in life. Anger at a world of injustice and suffering that we have so little ability to change.

The Need of a Family

A week earlier, Rama and her daughter-in-law tried to change their fate. They arrived on our doorstep with Sonu—a 5-month-old baby boy wrapped in a blanket. Only two large, unseeing eyes were visible. He was sick, and as the cheap village doctors had not helped, they had been to see our pediatrician who had told them that something was wrong with the child's blood, and that the treatment would cost in excess of 2,000INR (Indian Rupees). They asked us to help as they did not have that kind of money. They had nowhere else to go and had spent the last two hours searching for our house in hopes that we might be willing to pay for the treatment.

Bundling them into a rickshaw, I abandoned my afternoon plans to sit in doctors' waiting rooms and ensure that Sonu received the proper treatment. Speaking with the pediatrician, I began to realize how critical the child's situation was. The doctor's only official recommendation was an immediate blood transfusion. Unofficially, his entire manner spoke of the futility of even trying.

At a small modern hospital not far away, an elderly doctor with kind hands and a gentle spirit took Sonu from his mother's arms, removed the blanket, and engaged in the fight for this small life. I had never seen anyone so sick and still alive. This small child was emaciated, with skin hanging from his body due to dehydration; each breath punctuated with small cries of pain. He was unresponsive when the doctor tried five times to find a vein that was open enough to allow for an IV. The little one needed oxygen, antibiotics, and rehydration fluid to try and control blood poisoning, dehydration, pneumonia, and tuberculosis.

Sonu's immediate need was blood. He simply did not have enough to sustain himself, and without more he would die. Pricking, poking, prodding, and praying, the staff was able to coax just enough blood out of him for the tests required to match type and compatibility. I was handed two small vials of his blood and put them in my shirt pocket. I set out across town to the blood bank to bring back a liter of bright red life.

Taking Risks, Walking in Faith

Here in India, to get blood you have to give it. And so I found myself in a chair with small blood-soaked cotton balls on the floor and a man sticking a needle in my arm. Asking if it was a new needle, his grunt of affirmation did little to reassure me; for a split second I wondered if this was worth the risk of contracting some fatal blood-borne disease. But who else would give their blood for some unknown child? I didn't have time to try and find a family member. And even if someone could be found, could I really ask that person to take the risk that I myself was hesitating to take? After all, someone had already shed his blood for me. The shedding of blood still seems to be the price of life.

The next day I found myself driving to and from the hospital—willing Sonu to live, pleading with God, giving hope to his parents, consulting the doctors, and always wondering if I was doing the right thing. And as Sonu fought for his life, I fought with my conscience.

“They are poor untouchables sitting in one of the most expensive hospitals in our city,” I thought. “What about current mission theory in regards to money, dependence, and the poor? Should I have taken them to a hospital that they could more easily afford? How much money will this cost me?”

Then the guilt hit me: “This is a child’s life we are talking about! If we had gone somewhere else, he surely would have died. Why does being poor mean that he should not get as good of treatment as myself or my daughters? How can I put a price on the value of a life?”

Then this thought came: “Perhaps it would be better to just let him die. He is in so much pain, and even if he lives, his life will probably be one of incredible hardship—driving a rickshaw or hoping for work as a laborer.”

Guilt reemerged: “Who am I to decide whether this child lives or dies? How do I know what his life will be like? Am I God? Who knows that God may not use this child to start a movement for his glory among his own people one day?”

“But what if he dies?” I wondered. “What if this is all for nothing? Oh God, please spare his life.”

Jesus in Disguise

It was midnight and my phone began ringing. I picked it up to find someone speaking rapidly in Hindi: “Sonu just died, please come immediately.” I hurriedly dressed and drove to the hospital. It felt like I had been punched in the gut—I could hardly breathe. I had so wanted him to live. Grief, anger, and relief welled up from within me.

Walking into the hospital room, Sonu was in his bassinet; all the tubes were still connected to him. I put my hand upon him, closed his eyes in the sleep of death, and removed the oxygen, the medical tape, and the IV. He was at last at peace. His breathing no longer labored; his body was no longer taut with pain. The doctors were kind. “We did all we could,” one said. “If only you had brought him in a few days earlier.”

Standing there with a dead child beside me, the answer to all my questions became clear. It was not Sonu in that small bed, but Jesus. It was his emaciated and dying body I touched each time I came to visit. It was his eyes that did not see anything other than pain. It was Jesus we did this for—not Sonu or his family. And as I searched the reality of a broken child’s body, I began to see with eyes of faith the broken body of our Lord. It did not matter how much or how little money was spent. It did not matter whether Sonu lived or died. What mattered was whether or not I had touched our Lord. Matthew 25:34-36, 40 says,

Then the King will say to those on his right, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me. I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.”

Hunger, thirst, nakedness, sickness, imprisonment, loneliness. Food, water, clothes, presence. And the secret? That such simple acts of service can be transformed into spiritual acts of worship—if we have eyes to see Jesus in the faces of those we serve. The “least of these”—the poor, the oppressed, the destitute and deranged, the orphans and the widows—all are our king and savior, the God of the universe in disguise. It took a little boy for me to see this truth.

Sonu's family left our home with a strong rebuke for letting him get so sick before seeking out help. "It is God's will," they replied. "What can we do?" What could they do? The question echoed in my mind. As they walked away, I looked carefully, and it was almost as though I could see Jesus walking among them. Ignorance and apathy from long years of suffering made me wonder if they would show up at our door with another Sonu one day. But if they do, I am ready. I will abandon my well-laid plans to sit in doctors' offices, find rickshaws, pay bills, and pray with all my heart for another small life. For the issue on that day will not be whether the child lives or dies, but whether or not I reach out my hand to touch one who is suffering, and in so doing, touch the king.

R.C. Stevens (pseudonym) has served with his wife and two children on a church-planting team among Hindus in South Asia for the past eight years.

The Wimp with the Pen: Witnessing God's Work inside a South African Prison

By Martin Johnson

We had driven south from Johannesburg for about an hour. There were five of us in an 8-seater van, and the countryside we were driving through looked remarkably like rural Australia. While you don't see African men and women walking along Australia's country roads carrying loads on their heads, it wasn't too hard to imagine you were back in Australia.

We were on our way to a South African government correctional facility with Pastor Willie Dengler. As well as pastoring Mayfield Baptist Church in Johannesburg, Willie also heads up **World Hope Ministries** in Africa, which ministers into 170 of South Africa's 240 prisons. This was a regular journey for Willie as he visited the church inside the prison—set up in part through the ministry of World Hope.

Today's visit was going to be special, however.

We stopped in a country town at a McDonald's for breakfast; here we met two African pastors and five members of a Christian rock band. They were travelling in two pickup trucks holding their drum kit, public address system, and guitars. They were going to play at the morning's church service to be held in the prison.

Stepping into a Gaol

We arrived at the prison, where we were met by the chaplain, who helped us through the complicated process of registering ourselves as visitors. We had our hands stamped and prominent ID cards were hung around our necks. I was more than happy to have everything I needed to make sure they would let me out of prison at the end of the morning.

Once inside the main gate, some of the inmates helped us carry the band's equipment into the hall for the service. Prisoners in South Africa wear orange uniforms with black lettering. Each uniform is supposed to be identical, but it was obvious that some of the inmates had given their uniforms personal touches. Often this was by shifting buttons around or cutting the sleeves differently.

As we walked through the prison grounds, we saw shifting furniture and inmates cutting grass with whippersnappers. I suddenly realized how out of place I must have looked. Here I was, a white guy from Australia in street clothes, walking with twenty or so orange-clad prisoners in a South African *gaol* (prison), with all of us carrying various bits of musical instruments, a public address system, and a child's swimming pool. The swimming pool was to be used for a baptismal service after the main worship time.

Worshipping inside the Gaol

The worship service was held in a large hall, which looked like it could hold at least one thousand men. There

were two rows of fixed benches running the full length of the hall, with fixed seats that swiveled from underneath them so you could sit and use the bench for eating or writing.

At one end of the hall a boxing ring with the ropes removed was used as the stage. We all began setting up. Willie had brought communion glasses, grape juice, and some loaves of bread—they were going to celebrate both communion and baptism. The child's swimming pool was left outside, and two inmates found a garden hose to fill it with water.

As the guys plugged in the public address system and set up their instruments, the inmates started arriving. They were keen to talk with us, and at first this was quite awkward. We knew this was a maximum security prison, which meant that the majority of the inmates were here for crimes such as murder or manslaughter and were unlikely to be released for thirty to forty years. Willie had no qualms—"Just go and talk to them," he said.

As the hall filled, a couple of the men started singing. I had learned that singing and dancing come far more naturally to African men than it does to white Australian males in their late fifties!

After a few bars, the whole congregation joined in. To hear African voices singing praises to God is an amazing experience. There was a 4-part harmony immediately, but other harmony lines and dancing were added as they sang. The words were in Sueto, one of the thirteen official languages in South Africa.

Soon, the two African pastors, who had joined us at breakfast, took the lead over the public address system. To my ears, it sounded like a well-rehearsed choir, with the two African pastors acting as song leaders. While they all knew the song, it was nonetheless a quite spontaneous breaking into song that would come to characterize this and our next visit to South Africa's prisons.

The prison church was organized by a committee of inmates. Willie said this was only a recent event since prison authorities had not allowed inmates to meet together in committees or organizing groups for any reason. As I watched the leaders organise the men into their rows and then move into the service proper, I was amazed at how smoothly it all went.

We all had to speak with our Australian English translated into Sueto by one of the members of the prison church committee. At first, it was hard to get used to the need to stop after each sentence and allow the translator to repeat what you had said; however, the translators were used to it and made allowances for us visiting amateurs.

Communion and Baptism

At the end of the service, communion was served. We were asked to hold the bread and glasses at the front while each man came forward to take a piece of bread and a glass of juice. Another member of Willie's team kept refilling the glasses as they were emptied.

It was a privilege to greet each man and offer him the elements of the Lord's Supper. Even in *gaol*, the truth of the message of the Lord's Supper and what it signified—that through Christ's death on the cross, we can all be made right through him—could impact every person, no matter what he or she had done.

The child's swimming pool was now full on the concrete path outside the hall. Willie invited all the men to move outside; he asked those who were being baptised to line up.

World Hope Ministries runs a discipleship course in prison which leads each person to the point of baptism. The course is run by the prison church committee; however, Pastor Willie is called on to do the baptizing a few times each year. [Bible Society NSW](#) supplies the Bibles that the men are given partway through the course.

As we gathered around the pool, the men again started singing. Those being baptized stripped down to their shorts and stood in a line. Willie prayed for them as a group and invited each man to step into the pool. As he prayed individually for each man, he bent him backwards and baptized him in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. It was the most amazing baptism service I will likely ever see. Fifty-one men stepped into the water that day, making a statement to their fellow inmates that they would follow Jesus and seek to live a life of glory to him—even in prison.

Unforgettable Encounters

After packing up, we started walking back to the gates—again with inmates helping by carrying pieces of equipment.

As we approached the main gate, an inmate fell into step beside me and thanked me for coming. “Can you give me something?” he quietly asked. I wondered what he wanted. “Can I have your pen? We don’t get many writing materials in here,” he said.

I wondered for a moment what to do. The last thing I wanted to do was to jeopardise Willie’s ministry. Was giving a prisoner a pen considered contraband? Was it against prison rules? But then I thought, what harm could a pen do?

I decided that rather than handing it to him, I would pull the pen and some other things out of my shirt pocket and let the pen drop to the ground. I thought I was probably being a wimp. Why not just hand it to him? The wimp side of me won, however, and he readily picked the pen up from the ground. He nodded his thanks and we went our separate ways.

I’ve thought a lot about the men I met that day. I can still see their faces: the older man whose glasses I held as he was baptised by Willie; the man who joked with me that he was coming to Sydney so he could hear me tell him more about my story; the man who asked me if I knew what had happened to the photograph that another visiting ministry group had taken of him; and the man to whom I gave the pen.

I’m not sure what heaven will be like. Maybe I will see them again. This I know—that I was inspired by their worship and their commitment to their faith inside what must be one of the hardest places on earth to maintain a witness for Jesus Christ.

Martin Johnson is manager of communications for Bible Society NSW, www.biblesocietynsw.com.au.

Internet—The Transition of Everything from Atoms to Bits

By Walt Wilson

We are the first generation in all of human history to hold in our hands the technology to reach every man, woman, and child on earth. Although the product price points are not yet in place, this is not a distant dream. It is a current reality. Market forces in technology are driving us forward.

Perhaps the place to begin is an understanding that the Internet—the world of bits—is a real place, just like any physical place constructed of atoms. It cannot be ignored since it is inhabited by over one billion human beings in every country on earth. It has grown by about one million people every day. They communicate, buy and sell, socialize, obtain knowledge, get directions, seek medical answers, buy products, and even look for God on the Internet. They live in the world of cyberspace so much so that they no longer view the Internet, the smart phone, or their laptop as a technology. They view it as an ordinary, everyday tool.

It’s not one or the other. Bits or atoms. It’s now both; but for many, the transition takes some time. In the early 1990s corporate CEOs responded by saying, “Yes, we have an Internet site. We’re in the world of cyberspace.”

But did they really leverage the power of bits? Did they really understand? No. Did they acquire new customers, increase revenue, improve distribution, collaborate with suppliers, communicate internally, or make process faster, better, and cheaper? No. They viewed it as a technology—bits—that did not integrate into their world of atoms. So they left it to the eggheads and went about business as usual.

Dismissing emerging technologies left space for new competitors and alternate channels for consumers looking for a better deal. Amazon sold books at a fraction of the cost the brick-and-mortar retailers were asking. Buyers went to Internet sites like Edmunds instead of to dealers to get the real story on automobile pricing. People wanted answers they could trust and slowly authority began to swing toward Google and other sources on the Internet. The car salesman in the yellow plaid jacket who sometimes colored the truth was now history. eBay created the biggest flea market in the world. Politicians circumvented the media by running their own blogs and raising millions of dollars over a weekend on the Internet. Authority and learning has shifted to the Internet.

Although certain products of atoms will never be replaced by bits, they are becoming eclipsed by bits. The average automobile contains about \$800USD in steel, but over \$2,000USD in computer chips containing information, and we are still in the early stages of integrating bits into cars. The typical smart phone has little more than a few dollars invested in atoms, but the bits drive all of the functionality and the greater cost.

The business term to describe the shift from atoms to bits is called *radical discontinuity*. Basically, it is change that happens so fast that we don't know how to describe it or even forecast it. It would be a huge mistake to think the Church is immune to this development. It is not. Many seekers across the world have shifted to information on the Internet instead of going to a place called church. People are looking for God in the world of bits, not atoms. The Internet is now becoming the funnel *into* the church. If you are not using the Internet to conduct real ministry, then you don't exist to the current generation of seekers—two million daily!

The Biblical Case for Action

“As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. ‘Tell us,’ they said, ‘when will this happen, and when will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?’” (Matthew 24:3). The Lord described the increasing chaos of the last days and then came to one of several definitive statements describing what we will see in the last days. “And this gospel will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations ... and then the end shall come” (24:14).

Jesus was not describing a 2,000-year journey; he zeroed in on the happenings of the last days to answer the disciples' question. How would we preach, or make the gospel available, to the whole world—all seven to ten billion people (depending upon the number of days left), if we do not leverage emerging mass communication technologies? There are simply no longer enough Christians to meet the demand of an exploding population.¹

For example, Google executives suggest that some two million people conduct a search on spiritual terms every day. That's what we can measure for the Internet world of one billion people. So if there are two million daily searches out of one billion Internet users, then out of 5.5 billion people in the world, there must be eleven or twelve million people who wake up every day looking for God. Most have no intention of ever going to a church. Some could be arrested or killed for seeking Christ openly. We must make the gospel available and actionable on computers, laptops, and hand-held devices to communicate privately in words and videos in native language. We must minister to the masses seeking God.

Bits were not invented here in Silicon Valley, California. They are part of the natural landscape created by God as described in Genesis 1:1: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” Bits have always been here. Why? For what reason? When Jesus spoke of the endtime, did he see the digital age? Of course he did. Consider Paul's description of the supremacy of Christ in Colossians 1:16: “For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible ... all things were created by him and for him” (emphasis mine). “How short are the days?” is the wrong question. “How do we preach the gospel to the whole world?” is the question before us.

The Journey Begins

At [Global Media Outreach](#) (GMO), we describe our mission as not telling people about Jesus or Christianity, but telling them how to have a relationship with the Lord. Every three seconds someone comes to one of our seventy-eight evangelistic websites and receives a gospel presentation.

Visitors come from every country in the world since bits do not know, understand, or care about political borders. Bits do not care about time, place, or space. They are not place-specific, but person-specific. At the same time, however, bits carry us into a real place not restricted by the old world of atoms. The grasping of this concept is of critical importance to the implementation of interactive engagement with people in need, no matter where they are or who they are. In a typical month, well over one million people visit our websites. They come from places that cause us to consult a map to find out where they are. In a typical month, well over 200,000 of them will indicate their decision to follow Christ; that's more than two million decisions in a year.

People in Crisis

Many of these are people in crisis. The pollster George Barna reports that approximately one-third of any community—the one you work in, the one you live in, the one you visit on a business trip—are in crisis; however, they will not go to church, believing there are no answers to be found there. They come to us around the clock, wanting to tell of their problems and issues. They come seeking relief from the pain, and they come seeking comfort, not knowing there is a comforter who loves them. A few examples of what we see each day follow:

- “Please pray for my emotional healing. My 5-year-old daughter died a few weeks ago in a car accident. I was raising her alone. I have attempted to take my life two times these past weeks. I am in a care facility. I am not a Christian, but know God will hear your prayers on my behalf.” - young woman in England
- “I'm thirty-two and I've never been so lost in my life. I just want to give up and die; the only thing that keeps me going is my 7-year-old son. I need help. I do not know how to start or what to do.” – woman in Nice, France
- "I have never been a Christian. I was born and raised as an atheist. Your simple message that I found by Googling 'Jesus' and pressing 'feeling lucky' led me to your site. It answered some basic questions for me. Have I come to the right place? Did I get lucky? Thanks for anything you can do for me. I have avoided 'Jesus freaks' and slick pastors my whole life. Why is Jesus calling to me now? I have heard his voice, and received an invitation that I did not ask for. I must now turn to others for more answers, so that I might find what I have always sought. I just prayed to receive Christ as my savior for the first time.” – Everett the seeker
- “I began to weep as I read your email. I am so grateful that you took the time to respond back to me. It's two a.m. and I've read the scriptures you sent. I put down the gun.”--young man in southern California

The Next Steps

Seekers who respond online to the invitation to know Christ are enrolled to receive an automatic 30-day devotional. This gets a new believer into the scriptures immediately. He or she is simultaneously introduced to www.iChristianLife.com, which, along with their GMO online missionary, begins the discipleship journey and eventual connection to a church or a Christian movement within his or her country. Internet technologies provide us with the ability to track the progress of new believers.

These responses demonstrate the power of the *anonymous intimacy* provided by the Internet. They demonstrate the value of a safe place to go. They demonstrate the power of the ministry our thousands of online missionaries conduct each day. These responses also demonstrate the power of the Holy Spirit of God in cyberspace. It is, after all, a place God created for these days.

It is our calling and vision to reach every man, woman, and child on earth. As we look at the future, we view technology not as a snapshot, but as a rapidly moving video running at super speed. We see newly-developing (silicon) chip sets making new things possible almost monthly. We see acceleration here in Silicon Valley that has not been seen before. Knowledge, capacity, and scale are exploding.

We now see the day when everyone will own or have access to a very inexpensive hand-held smart thing—one that speaks, shows movies, takes pictures, plays music, connects to other people, and tells him or her the story of Jesus. Apple's iPhone technology is a glimpse into the future. It is not a phone; it is a network computer. Like dawn coming over the horizon, we are now close enough to see the day when we will tell every man, woman, and child on earth the story of Jesus. The fields are white...the days are short...we have the technology.

"Look at the nations and watch—and be utterly amazed. For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told." - Habakkuk 1:5

Endnote

1. According to the Barna Research group, Christianity has grown at such a slow rate that Christians are not even winning their own children. While the population of the United States has grown by twenty-five million in the past fifteen years, church membership has declined by five million.

Walt Wilson is founder and chairman of [Global Media Outreach](#), a ministry of [Campus Crusade for Christ International](#). A retired Silicon Valley businessman, he was a sales manager at Fairchild Semiconductor, a start up executive at Apple Computer, finishing his career as a senior vice president with Computer Sciences Corp., managing business development in Asia.

URBAN COMMUNITIES

Articulating the Mission of God in the Global Urban Context

By Glenn Smith

Introduction to the Series

As we have walked with practitioners over the past twelve months into diverse places such as Cap-Haïtien, Luanda, Quito, Manila, Bophal, Calcutta, and with Roma communities in Romania, we have seen that poverty is a broad concept. It touches economic, social, physical, and spiritual realities. It affects peoples' identity and includes social exclusion, absence of harmony in life and well-being, deprivation at every level of life, and one's ability to participate in the welfare of the community.

But as Jayakumar Christian points out, the causes of poverty can be traced to "inadequacies in the worldview." A worldview can be a powerful instrument in perpetuating chronic poverty. All cultures and societies have within their worldview construct aspects of fallenness. And as we have seen, true Christian spirituality cannot be divorced from the struggle for justice and care for the poor and the oppressed. Spiritual formation is about empowering Christians to live their faith in the world.

In the next sixteen months we will move from a focus on slum communities to listen with practitioners in a variety of urban contexts who are ministering on the ground. We will intersperse these stories with reflective theological and missiological articles that will help us to better understand how to think biblically so as to act contextually in the global urban context.

This month, we begin this new series with a reflection on the verbal communication of the good news. It is entitled, "Getting to Yes."

What Is a City-Region?

But let's first answer the question, "What is a city/region?"

Richard Sennett defines a city as "a human settlement in which strangers are likely to meet."¹ The United Nations Population Fund documents the diversity of definitions for an urban category in its 2007 report. British urbanologist David Clark has clarified many of these issues in his most recent book, *Urban World/Global City*.²

He names a population of fifty thousand people or less a *town* or a *village*. On the other hand, *cities* are human agglomerations that have up to 200,000 residents. A *metropolitan area* has more than two million people, but a *megalopolis* is an urban region with over five million people.

These distinctions are helpful because a country like Norway considers any human settlement of two hundred people as urban, while Bénin, for example, only uses "urban" for places of ten thousand or more people.

But beyond definitions and the demographic function of cities known as "urban growth," one may ask, "What is happening to urban society today?" What were the conditions—inherited from the past—which have been transformed in these last fifty years that help us understand its present state? This is a fundamental question we need to explore if we are to understand the cultural context in which the Church is growing. But our concern points in a further direction with a second question: "How will the Church reflect biblically and pursue relevant urban mission in the urban context in the years ahead?" This causes us to realize that all too often we are not taking the time to think biblically so as to act contextually.

To answer these two questions, an attentive practitioner can employ an ethnographic analysis of the culture so as to understand how social structures and human behaviour interact and influence the evolution of urban culture. The Christian practitioner who desires to study "the knowledge and practices of people, the manner they use their freedom to dominate, to transform, to organize, to arrange, and to master space for their personal pursuit so as to live, to protect themselves, to survive, to produce, and to reproduce"³ will find in ethno-methodology an excellent tool.

To do this, one must master dominant tendencies so as to grasp where we have come from, where we are going as a society, and what the mission of God in this culture will look like.⁴

This description for cultural analysis will allow us to take seriously the implications that social activity/reality is culturally and historically specific. Urban hermeneutics allow us to understand or decode the polarity between social structure and human agency, which is constantly at work in a metropolitan area. Social institutions—the basic building blocks of a city because of their far-reaching spatial and temporal existence—are used by human agents to create urban systems and metropolitan structures. Human actions are constrained by these structures, but are also enabled by them. In attempting to understand a city, neither the subject (the human agent) nor the object (society and social institutions) has primacy.⁵

By pursuing geography of urban functions, we are looking at issues (the social dynamics, problems, needs, aspirations, and worldviews) that are culturally and historically specific. Like the city itself, these issues reflect the prevailing values, ideology, and structure of the prevailing social formation.

A useful analytical, social, and theological purpose is served by the empirical recognition that urban issues are manifest in geographical space. This implies that the resulting description will detail issues *in* the city, as well as issues *of* the city. (For example, an issue *in* urban space would include the consequences of population density. An issue *of* urban space would include attention to the socio-economic factors that go hand-in-hand with such population concentration.) To pursue this analysis, the urban ministry practitioner will need to bring a high sensitivity

- to micro details in the local context—the census data serves this end;

- with a concern for the larger worldview influences—understood as the macro issues;
- beyond a simple homogenisation of the data—one needs to examine the local context seriously;
- to a true understanding of the differences so that we can appreciate the specifics of the area and the mission of the Church in the situation.

Excursus: Worldviews

Worldviews are primarily lenses through which we look at what life is all about. Generally speaking, they are the series of presuppositions that groups of people hold, consciously and unconsciously, about the basic makeup of the community, relationship, practices, and objects of daily life, whether they are of great signification or of little importance. They are like the foundations of a house—vital, but invisible. The makeup of a worldview is based upon the interaction of one’s ultimate beliefs and the global environment within which one lives. They deal with the perennial issues of life like religion and spirituality, and contain answers to even simple questions, such as whether we eat from plates or how to launder our clothing.

Worldviews are communicated through the channel of culture. We should be careful to not confuse culture and worldview, although they are in constant relationship with one another. Culture is foremost a network of meanings by which a particular social group is able to recognize itself as such through a common history and way of life. This network of meanings is rooted in ideas (including beliefs, values, attitudes, and rules of behaviour) and rituals and material objects (including symbols that become a source for identity, such as the language we speak, the food we eat, the clothes we wear, and the way we organize space).

This network is not a formal and hierarchical structure. It is defined in modern society by constant change, mobility, reflection, and on-going new life experiences. This is opposed to traditional societies where culture was transmitted from one generation to another vertically within the community structures. Modernity still transmits some aspects of culture like language and basic knowledge vertically through the bias of school system; however, once this is done, the horizontal transmission of culture through friendship, peers, and socio-professional status become more important.

Worldviews may be studied in terms of four features: characteristic stories, fundamental symbols, habitual praxis, and a set of questions and answers. These presuppositions interact with each other in a variety of complex and interesting ways. By studying the intersection of these big themes, the practitioner can unearth the worldview of the context under study.

Communities often reveal their worldviews by the cultural network they produce and constantly reproduce in social interactions, objects, and symbols: from dollars to metro tickets, from office towers to streetcars, from pottery to poetry, from places of worship to sacred texts, from emblems to funerary monuments, from stadiums to crosses. Symbols provide the hermeneutic grid to perceive how the world is and how we might live in it: these symbols provide a vision of reality and a vision for it. Symbols describe the typical behaviour of a society and vice versa: the celebration of important events; the usual means of dealing with dissonance; and the rituals associated with birth, puberty, marriage, and death.

And in many communities, their symbols and characteristic behaviour are also focussed in stories. Furthermore, the answers to fundamental questions such as “Who are we?” “Where are we?” and “What are the problems we face and how will we solve them?” give us great insight into the worldviews of a community.

The Urban Context

When we discuss the task of the Church in a city-region, immediately we are struck by the necessity to address both macro and micro issues. In choosing to “address” the city, we need to remember two foundational issues that are often overlooked by God’s people living in metropolitan areas.

1. *We need to place each individual city in its own context, yet understand its place in the larger urban system.* Because of globalization, no one metropolitan area exists in isolation from others. When you ask someone where he or she lives, the answer depends not just upon where you are but to whom you are talking. I can tell a Lavallois that I live on 5th Street, a Québécois that I live in Chomedey, but to someone outside of Québec, I am from Montréal. Each address tells something about me: my living environment, the languages I use on a day-to-day basis, my lifestyle, and perhaps my social status. It is important to see the interrelationships among the different addresses in which we live, from local to national to global. It is also important to adjust these “addresses” for the audience in question.
2. *When the Church addresses the city, we must direct our attention to urban realities.* And, we need to understand our own assumptions and framework. We will always want to keep our focus on a biblical perspective on cities.

Endnotes

1. 1974. *The Fall of Public Man*. New York: Vintage Press, 39.
2. 1996. London: Routledge Press.
3. Racine, Jean-Bernard. 1993. *La ville entre Dieu et les hommes*. Genève: PBU, 296-297 (Author's translation).
4. For a more detailed analysis on methods in pursuing urban ministry reflection, read Glenn Smith's 1996 article, "Doing Theology in the Canadian Urban Context: Some Preliminary Reflections," in *Studies in Canadian Evangelical Renewal—Essays in Honour of Ian S. Rennie*. Toronto: FT Publications, 81-103. Also see note 24 on pg. 225 of *Espoir pour la ville: Dieu dans la cité*. QC: Éditions de la Clairière, 1994 and chapter 8 in *Towards the Transformation of Our City/regions*. LCWE, 2005.
5. This distinction becomes critical as we examine the biblical categories of principalities and powers in God's project for human history.

Worthwhile Books to Consult on God's Global Urban Mission

In the United Nations Population Fund report, *State of World Population 2007: Unleashing the Potential of Urban Growth*, the authors began by stating,

In 2008, the world reaches an invisible but momentous milestone: for the first time in history, more than half its human population, 3.3 billion people, will be living in urban areas. By 2030, this is expected to swell to almost five billion. Many of the new urbanites will be poor. Their future, the future of cities in developing countries, the future of humanity itself, all depend very much upon decisions made now in preparation for this growth.

While the world's urban population grew very rapidly (from 220 million to 2.8 billion) over the twentieth century, the next few decades will see an unprecedented scale of urban growth in the developing world. This will be particularly notable in Africa and Asia, where the urban population will double between 2000 and 2030. That is, the accumulated urban growth of these two regions during the whole span of history will be duplicated in a single generation. By 2030, the towns and cities of the developing world will make up eighty-one percent of urban humanity. (For an introduction to this report, click [here](#).)

- For an introduction to urban missiology, I would recommend the urban reader, *The Gospel and the Urban World*. This “book” travels as a cd-rom and contains seven hundred pages of some of the very best articles on urban ministry that have been printed in the past three decades, including good articles on slum communities. You can consult the reader and order it online at:

www.direction.ca/boutique/cederom.htm.

- For an urban bibliography, visit: www.direction.ca/images/stories/documents/bibliographie_urbanus_2006.pdf. This 25-page list of books represents the best of what is available on our subject in French and English.
- The 2006 resource *Planet of Slums* by Mike Davis (London: Verso) is an excellent exploratory book on the subject of slums. It is quite thorough and very readable.
- The 2006 resource, *Shadow Cities—A Billion Squatters, a New Urban World*, by investigative reporter Robert Neuwirth (Milton Park, U.K.: Routledge), is the newest book on the subject that I have read. The author spent months living in squatter communities in places like Mumbai and Istanbul. He paints an upbeat picture of life in these unique places.

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Getting to “Yes”

By Glenn Smith

It started off as an informal chat between two friends on a quiet Sunday afternoon. A colleague and I were several hours from home, teaching at a seminary during summer school. We decided to take a break and get something to drink. A local café seemed like an ideal setting. The waiter was in a jovial mood. While my friend and I got caught up on numerous subjects, we exchanged pleasantries with him for the full two hours that we sat in his section. He constantly ribbed us about settling the \$2.50 bill before we tried to slip out! Finally, we paid, and as he handed me the change, he asked, “What do you guys do, anyway?”

We told him we were both professors of the Bible.

“Hey, that’s neat. I love to debate!” he exclaimed. He went on to recount the recent adventures of his university debating society in New Zealand. It seemed they did quite well. He then asked, “Have you ever debated whether Judas Iscariot should have been canonized?” (I must admit that my Protestant mind had never thought much about that one.) “Or how about whether Mary really had the choice to carry the baby Jesus to term?” (Not one of my top ten, either.)

The pause in his voice prompted me to comment, “It seems to me that you are someone who really wants to understand the truth.”

“Unquestionably,” he replied. And just as quickly he was off on another round of options to debate.

“No, that’s not what I mean,” I interjected. “What I meant is, where are you at in your spiritual journey?”

“You can’t ask that,” he said. “That just confuses the issues. You get into too many opinions and people get offended. I just like to debate.”

“But what about the historical aspect of these issues?” my colleague asked.

“No, that’s not important. You see, I’m Jewish. You and I, we come at issues differently. Here’s an example: I think Ernst Zundel has done a real service to the Jewish community by denying the Holocaust. He’s made us think about the story. That’s what it’s all about—telling the story. It’s not what happened that counts; it’s the story. You can’t forget the story.”

I could see he was becoming a little nervous about his other customers. The section was slowly filling up. I picked up the bill and waved it ever so slowly. “Interesting,” I said. “You didn’t treat the bill that way. You wanted me to pay exactly \$2.50—not just anything I wanted to pretend I thought you might want me to pay. No fiction here!”

He looked at me, chagrined. As he slowly moved away, he muttered, “Never thought about it that way before.”

Explaining God’s Truth in Diverse, Urban Societies

In our increasingly urban, diverse society, how can God’s people explain his truth? The very orientation to truth, to history, and to the meaning of life is in a state of constant flux. In our situations today, it seems people think that nothing can be known for certain, that history is devoid of any sense of direction, and that all truth is relative. Any sense that some things are right and others wrong seemed to collapse with II World War.

How can we handle this dilemma when sharing the truth of the gospel?

In a study called the [Harvard Negotiation Project](#), several principles and ideas are put forth for international peace negotiations and business corporations for the resolution of conflicts. I have found that the same ideas are easily applicable in communicating the truth of our faith.

A little book called *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement without Giving In*¹ formulates four of these principles of negotiating. I think they could also help people to say “yes” to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Below are the four principles:

1. *Make a distinction between the person and the ideas he or she promotes.* It would have been very easy to laugh at the ideas of our waiter or to say, “Your ideas are wrong. You can’t believe that.” Sharing the good news means we must make the distinction between the person God created and the notions he or she believes. The tone of the voice and the words we choose are a good indication that we are making the distinction.
2. *Make it easy for people to change their opinions on subjects.* Nobody likes to admit that they are wrong or that what they have believed for twenty or thirty years is no longer valid. We may win the “argument” that certain truths are essential to life, but so polarize the person that there will be no further dialogue about the good news. In today’s climate of evangelism we need to slow down and make sure we understand the person’s point of view.
3. *Do not take a combative posture as you dialogue with people.* This principle is the logical extension of the first two ideas. As we articulate God’s truth, without compromise, it is not necessary to say, “I’m right and you’re wrong.” Rather, we can create a climate of uncertainty in the other person’s foundation for his or her ideas. We need to make Christianity attractive as an alternative way to live and to think in a very uncertain world.
4. *Tell your own story as an example of someone who changed his or her mind.* Your testimony of a changed life is a marvellous tool to help the other person see that Christianity is relevant.

Today’s cities have abandoned the story that Jesus offers life for all. But God has sent you and me into our cities to offer God’s “Yes.”

By the power of the Spirit of Jesus, we have an unprecedented opportunity to live and share this good news with our urban neighbours.

Endnote

1. Fisher, Roger and William Ury. 1991. New York: Penguin Group.

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LAUSANNE REPORTS

Lausanne Younger Leaders Gathering in Tomaszów, Poland

By Rike Huettmann and Andy Goodacre

Nearly twenty younger leaders and mentors gathered in Tomaszów, Poland, earlier this year (March 2008) for the second younger leaders gathering for Europeans. This was a follow-up to the [Lausanne Younger Leaders Gathering](#) held in Malaysia in September 2006.

Over the four days we were together, we spent time praying and worshipping God, receiving stimulating teaching and input on missions in Europe from Jeff Fountain ([YWAM Europe](#)), working out plans for the future of younger leaders gatherings and networks in Europe, joining worship in a local church in Tomaszów, and sampling local food.

The interaction with Fountain was key for the gathering. His knowledge of Christianity and missions in Europe—gathered over the last 25-plus years of missional engagement in Europe—encouraged and inspired the younger leaders. Fountain himself was encouraged by being part of the gathering, and warmly invited participants to engage further with existing networks in Europe, including the [Hope for Europe](#) network, which he has been instrumental in facilitating.

In terms of the network of Lausanne Younger Leaders, the group recognised the contribution made by Andy Goodacre in leading the network and keeping communications flowing between younger leaders in Europe following the Malaysia conference in September 2006.

Due to his upcoming move away from Europe, Goodacre will no longer be heading up this network. During the gathering, it was decided that Rike Huettmann from Germany will take on this role, with support from Rafal Piekarski (Poland), Gabi Gencheva (Bulgaria), and David Hausmann (Switzerland).

We see two areas in which this network is effective and can continue to be effective.

1. By holding an informal, relational gathering every twelve to eighteen months, where younger leaders can come together, meet, and receive input and encouragement from one another.
2. By helping younger leaders in Europe to engage with existing networks of Christian leaders, both within Europe (e.g., Hope for Europe, mission-net, European Evangelical Alliance) and internationally (e.g., the Lausanne Movement/Cape Town 2010).

The core team, led by Huettmann, will be instrumental in developing this work further in the future. We are planning another meeting next year, possibly in Germany.

Thanks for your prayers and interest in and support of this network.

Rike Huettmann and **Andy Goodacre** are part of the Lausanne Younger Leaders Network in Europe.

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