

ΤΩ ΧΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

“In the Nick of Time”

Occasional Essays
and Other Stuff
for Christian
Students

Presented by the
President of

Central Baptist
Theological
Seminary of
Minneapolis

American Christianity needs leaders. American Christianity needs *Christian* leaders. Christian leaders explain the Scriptures, bringing them to bear upon life's urgent questions. Christian leaders exemplify the life of faith, finding their ultimate satisfaction in God alone. They unite intellectual discipline with ordinate affection, turning their entire being toward the love of God. These essays are dedicated to the task of inviting today's Christian students to become tomorrow's Christian leaders.

—Kevin T. Bauder

“...Be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.”

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Our Persecuted Brothers

Those of us Christians who live in Western liberal democracies have not faced real persecution for generations. This is not to say that we never experience opposition to the free exercise of our faith. Mostly, however, that opposition is applied in subtle ways. Rarely has any of us faced jail or physical abuse or martyrdom for the Lord's sake.

Given our present comfort and (illusory) security, we tend to forget that many of our Christian brothers and sisters are enduring great hardship for the name of Jesus. Because we have become negligent, we are no longer able either to perform the obligations that we owe to our brethren or to reap the benefit that we should from their sacrifice.

In places like Myanmar and China, believers can still be forcibly disbanded or even arrested for their faith and testimony. In certain Muslim countries, one risks one's life to confess Christ and proclaim the gospel. While militant Hindus no longer control the Indian government, the threat of bodily harm is still a recent memory for believers there.

The problem is not limited to Asia. Believers, and especially missionaries in some Latin American countries, can face illegal but very real oppression from Catholic officials or from organized criminals. What is reported as genocide in Africa is sometimes the persecution of Christians by either animists or communists.

Even Europe is not without an element of oppression. In Romania, for example, freedom of religion is formally guaranteed, but the Orthodox Church is so powerful as to be able to harass “repenters” (as they are called), especially in the rural areas. Pastors report that the Orthodox priests sometimes refuse to permit Baptist and Pentecostal churches to bury their

dead in the public cemeteries. While these situations can be disputed through litigation, a successful challenge can take days—in a country that does not embalm and where summertime temperatures can easily range upwards of 100 degrees.

One of the worst persecutors of Christians is North Korea. David Hawk, a human rights expert, prepared a report (*The Hidden Gulag: Exposing North Korea's Prison Camps*) in behalf of the U. S. Committee for Human Rights in North Korea. The report details religious persecution in North Korea. He tells of an old man and his daughter who were shot through the head at point-blank range when a small Bible fell out of the girl's laundry. William F. Buckley summarizes another event from the Hawk report:

Nine years ago in South Pyongan province, a unit of the North Korean army was assigned the job of widening a highway connecting Pyongyang to the nearest seaport. Demolition of a house standing in the way revealed, hidden between two bricks, a Bible and a list of 25 names: a Christian pastor, two assistant pastors, two elders and 20 parishioners. The 25 were all detained and, later that month, brought to the road construction site, where spectators had been arranged in neat rows. The parishioners were grouped off to one side while the pastor, the assistant pastors and the elders were bound hand and foot and made to lie down in front of a steamroller. As if following a script written in early Roman history, they were told they could escape death by denying their faith and pledging to serve Dear Leader Kim Jong II and Great Leader Kim Il Sung. They chose death.

Hawk concludes his narrative of this episode by noting that some of the parishioners “cried, screamed out, or fainted when the skulls made a popping sound as they were crushed beneath the steamroller.”

Forty years ago, it was common for American churches to spend time in prayer for persecuted brethren behind the Iron Curtain (the Soviet Union and those nations under its influence). No one could have imagined the dramatic way in which God would answer those prayers during the late 1980s. Believers still experience persecution in many places, but the prayers seem to be less common than they once were.

Christians in the West, and especially in America, enjoy real (if ephemeral) privileges of ease and security. We forget too easily that the persecution of our brothers and sisters is the persecution of Christ Himself (Acts 9:4-5). For the sake of our Savior we owe it to them to pray for them and to help them materially in every way that we can.

I believe that it is sometimes possible to do more. When the authorities attempted to force Paul to leave Philippi, he resorted to legal means that forced the authorities to recognize his rights as a Roman citizen (Acts 16:37-38). Most commentators agree that Paul's motive was to secure some small protection for the infant congregation in Philippi. If this is correct, then it would indicate that Christians may use the power of law—the power of government—to limit the persecution of believers. This is particularly relevant for American Christians, who can appeal to their government to make the protection of religious freedom a priority in its diplomatic relations with other governments.

One thing, however, we must not do. We must not pity our persecuted brothers and sisters. Compassion is one thing, and it should move us to pray and to work in their behalf. When the apostles were persecuted, however, they did not consider themselves to be the objects of pity. Rather, they rejoiced that they had been counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of Jesus. Persecution is a badge of honor. Those who endure it will some day receive manifold reward at the hand of the Savior.

While we enjoy our ease and security, we must remember that the blood of martyrs still flows. We tend to see ourselves as the center of God's work in the world, and we think of Africa, Asia, and Latin America as mission fields. But what if His real work is being done where people are actually being required to suffer for the Son of God? Is it possible that we are merely the spectators on the sidelines? ✕

This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, president of Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.

A Christmas Carol

G. K. Chesterton (1874-1936)

The Christ-child lay on Mary's lap,
His hair was like a light.
(O weary, weary were the world,
But here is all aright.)

The Christ-child lay on Mary's breast,
His hair was like a star.
(O stern and cunning are the kings,
But here the true hearts are.)

The Christ-child lay on Mary's heart,
His hair was like a fire.
(O weary, weary is the world,
But here the world's desire.)

The Christ-child stood at Mary's knee,
His hair was like a crown,
And all the flowers looked up at Him,
And all the stars looked down. ✕

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