

Persecution

By Mark Moore

I. Vital Stats and Facts about Persecution of Christians

1. 163,000 Christians die every year for their faith. Half of all the Christians who have ever died for their faith did so in this century alone, some 35 million! 15,000,000 of these were Orthodox or Catholic Christians who died under the Soviet regime between 1917 and 1980, primarily in prison camps.
2. Persecution tends to rise with evangelistic effectiveness.
3. The top ten persecuting countries are: Burma/Myanmar, China, Egypt, Iran, Laos, North Korea, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Vietnam.
4. After fierce lobbying, American legislators agreed to levy punishments ranging from diplomatic protests to economic sanctions against countries that persistently persecute Christians and other religious minorities.
5. Those killed for their faith (by millions): Christians, 70; Muslims, 70; Hindus; 11, Jews, 9; Buddhists, 4; Sikhs, 2; Baha'is, 1 and all others combined, 5; Total = 169 (the numbers don't add up because of rounding up to millions).
6. Worst eras for Christian martyrs:
 - a) Roman persecution of early Christians
 - b) 12th - 14th centuries when Genghis Khan and Tamerlane massacred millions of Christians.
 - c) 1970's – 230,000 per year.
 - d) 2025 – 210,000 (estimate).

II. Terrifying Slaughters

1. 1630: some 300,000 Christians in Japan (mostly Catholic) were executed often by crucifixion. Seventy of them were crucified upside down on the beach at low tide so that they would drown when the tide came in.
2. 1920-1930: 200,000 Russian Orthodox priests, monks and nuns were slaughtered. Many crucified by nailing them to the door of their churches or stripped naked, doused with water and left to freeze in the winter air.
3. Recently in Iran one Christian was injected with Radioactive material and then released. Probably to die a slow death.
4. 1960-1970's: During the cultural revolution in China, some 400,000 died.
5. 1970's: Under Idi Amin, 100,000 of the 300,000 killed were Christians.
6. 1994: As many as 500,000 of the 700,000 Rwandans killed were believers.
7. Since 1970: as many as 1,000,000 Christian and Animists have been killed in Sudan by the Muslims of the north.

III. Myths of Persecution

1. **The church grows when it is persecuted.** Fact: Due to persecution, the number of Christians in Turkey have dropped from 32% to 0.2% this century. In Syria they dropped from 40% to 10%. Iran went from 15% to 2% and Iraq from 35% to 5%.
2. **Martyrs are church leaders or evangelists.** Most Christians who have died have not born direct witness to their faiths. They are sweep away in a flood of ethnic cleansing or trapped in war torn regions. Prison camps have been more common that crosses.
3. **Christians are primarily martyred because of their testimony of Jesus.** The social, economic and political factors listed below have much more to do with Christian deaths than preaching the gospel.

4. **Martyrs die glorious and victorious deaths, rejoicing to suffer for Jesus.** Most are poor and frightened. They are mothers, children, workers and students, just trying to fight for their lives.
 5. **We can stop it.** We cannot change the nature of humanity. We can't change the fact that Christianity threatens the world. We can't change the word of God that predicts it. This, however, is *no excuse to sit idly by and do nothing!*
- IV. Reasons for Persecution – People don't generally attack others unless they feel threatened. Furthermore, persecution is *rarely* an issue of religious difference alone.
1. Religious – the doctrine of Christianity is opposed, rising number of converts threatens the hegemony of other groups.
 2. Financial – Christian doctrine threatens certain trades or practices; Christians band together and share business and resources; Christians have lands, property and resources others want to confiscate.
 3. Anti-Western bias – Christianity is seen in many places as Western. Where the West is hated, so is Christian faith.
 4. Political – Often social, religious, and political groups get melded into one. Often it is the political threat being attacked, not the religious faith. Some Christian groups also slander other religious or political groups and find themselves attacked.
 5. Racism – Again, certain groups are dominated by Christians. If there is genocide against that ethnic group, it may have little to do with their doctrine.
- V. What can we do?
1. Pray
 - a) More than 300,000 churches in 100 countries will take part in the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church.
 - b) Add this to your weekly prayer list.
 - c) Pray specifically that (a) God would be glorified, (b) the great commission would be completed (which will, of course, initially *increase* persecution), pray particularly Peter's prayer for boldness in the face of persecution (Acts 4:29), (c) that Jesus would come, (d) that the Holy Spirit would first purify and then comfort his church (Rev. 6:10-11).
 2. Write letters – Do not expect a direct response. But don't be discouraged, that does not mean that things won't change behind the scenes.
 3. Symbolic Suffering – make a personal sacrifice or inconvenience as a reminder of your brothers and sisters in the throes of suffering.
 4. Stay informed – Read a book on persecution; watch a video; put one of the key information web sites on your "favorites" of your browser. See the mission's department for current resources both printed and on the Web.
 5. Teach a lesson on persecution in your church.
 6. Give generously to relief efforts on behalf of the persecuted church.