

Servants in the Crucible

Findings from a Global Study on Persecution and the Implications for
Sending Agencies and Sending Churches

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PREFACE

This endeavor began within the fire and crucible of persecution. It was coupled with a desire to understand what role expatriate missionaries, sending agencies and churches should and could play among those suffering due to their Christian witness. As a people group strategist among an unreached people group in the Horn of Africa, I discovered that persecution could become an immediate reality for Muslims who simply sought my friendship, let alone made any move toward Christianity.

During the seven years we spent among these people, the majority of the believers in Jesus Christ were systematically hunted down and persecuted, with many martyred by adherents to Islam. Other believers were displaced; they live in refugee camps, they reside in adjacent countries or in the West. An entire generation of believers has been decimated from within the country.

How does one incarnate Christ in such an environment? How is Christ made known where even a casual relationship can visit harm upon the new acquaintance? How can we witness and disciple in such ways that when persecution comes, it does so because of who Jesus is and not for secondary reasons such as being employed by a foreigner, worshipping with foreigners or proclaiming faith in culturally inappropriate ways? Among our people group in the Horn of Africa, all those martyred had a relationship with expatriate Christians that contributed to the timing of their deaths. How does one incarnate Christ, send, train and manage expatriate missionaries in environments where persecution is the norm?

A number of global missiologists decided in 1994 that there was a desperate need to address issues of witness, missionary profile and discipleship among the persecuted in the Horn of Africa. Discipleship materials needed to be developed and shared among the local and expatriate Christian workers serving there. The task before the global missiologists and people group strategists was daunting: the issue represented a global challenge.

Funding grants were secured to research and evaluate globally the issues surrounding persecution, suffering and martyrdom. The goal was to produce discipleship materials that would address the needs and responsibilities of sending bodies, equip missionaries alongside their international partners and share all that was learned from those interviewed.

This manual represents the first of multiple documents drawn from 450 interviews in 48 countries where persecution was and is an everyday occurrence. Multiple people groups were interviewed in many countries. Interviews are ongoing. This is an attempt to hear the persecuted, to learn from their struggles, mistakes and victorious living. Through these interviews we share and hear from a faith that is continuously born within a crucible of fire, refined by trial and made into a witness that will stand the test of time. Within their stories we hear the Bible echoed in our day, with all the human failings and all the victory from the partnership of God and His children.

This book should be seen as a companion to those that will follow. The second document will detail principles and profiles emerging from the persecution study. It will expand into a discipleship manual that can be used in workshops among those who incarnate Christ in the midst of persecution, both local believers and expatriate missionaries. It will include a workbook, additional case studies, devotionals, articles pertinent to the topics and a CD. Eventually the material will have a Website with links to related resources. Workshops are already being led, using the material over a three- to four-day period. Others are being mentored in the process of interviewing so they can continue the project and teach this material.

The third document will be developed in a chronological Bible storying format. Most people in places of persecution are oral communicators. For many literate believers it is dangerous to have printed materials. This document will represent an attempt to place approximately 25 to 50 oral, biblically based stories in a persecution track for training purposes.

A fourth book is planned. It will be a scholarly document written and edited by international scholars. It will survey issues of suffering, persecution and martyrdom from the disciplines of the Old Testament,

New Testament, church history, theology, philosophy and missiology.
This book will be available to colleges, seminaries and mission agencies.

Special thanks go to the persecuted who so courageously live out their faith within environments of persecution, suffering and martyrdom. Many others labored faithfully to set up interviews, keeping those interviewed and myself as safe as possible. The guidance of the Persecution Task Force has been invaluable.

This document represents a desire for sending churches and sending agencies to embrace lostness within environments of suffering, persecution and martyrdom, submitting all other agendas to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. As persecution comes, let it be for Jesus.

Nik Ripken
January 2004

INTRODUCTION

The present study is based upon intensive interviews of people who personally experience persecution in the exercise of Christian faith. The interviews were conducted in 48 different countries spanning the five most populous continents. For each case of the 450 formal interviews conducted, there was explicit information from local sources that identified those interviewed with the first-hand experience of persecution. Either those interviewed had themselves experienced persecution or were family members or close associates of individuals who had been martyred.

Interviews were conducted on the basis of a carefully constructed survey tool that directly corresponded to a matrix for indexing the responses in a database. The purpose of the interviews was to ask persecuted Christians to teach us how this experience has helped to define and shape their understanding of the Christian life, and to seek among their testimony the keys to victorious Christian living that perseveres even under the fiery trials of persecution. In addition, further understanding was gained about how Christian witness and churches emerge in the midst of persecution.

The methodology is unique in that the focus is to hear from the persecuted themselves. The most rigorous standards for handling the information have been maintained, both in terms of scientific research methods and to protect the security of those interviewed. In scope it is the broadest and most detailed study known in terms of geographic extent and cultural variety. At the same time, the format of personal interviews of Christians widely known among their churches as persecuted allowed for field-based research that delved deeply into the details of these experiences. The interviews were conducted according to professional primary research standards.

Thanks are due the hundreds of persecuted individuals and their families who participated in the project. Thanks also to various Christian entities who helped arrange field interviews and to many who encouraged and worked with this project. Those few who have read all 1,800-plus pages of the verbatim interview reports consider this to be the most carefully researched and documented survey ever conducted of persecuted

Christians in history. They have also taken great pains to assure that the findings presented represent legitimate conclusions from the data.

The principles presented as findings in the following pages state what these brothers and sisters have taught us. Many of the concepts presented here are most relevant to those who work intimately with local believers in contexts of persecution. The findings, which are highlighted in *Servants in the Crucible*, reflect the concerns of missionaries and missionary administrators who want to see the beginning of a church-planting movement among every ethno-linguistic people group.

Jesus gave His followers the missionary mandate to “make disciples of all nations.” This requires Christians to share the gospel message with all peoples, whether persecuted or not. These Christian workers ask how missionary strategy should proceed in order to promote Christian witness and support our persecuted brethren. Likewise, the findings can help administrators and missionaries avoid doing harm inadvertently.

This survey is very different from the work of many organizations seeking to document and quantify the amount of persecution of Christians in order to lobby politically on their behalf. This study focused on understanding the dynamics of persecution and how the activities of missionaries and the growth of churches in resistant areas are tied to it.

Persecution is as much a reality for followers of Jesus Christ in the twenty-first century as it was for those in the first century. Little has changed. Families and social structures ostracize followers of Jesus Christ daily. They are beaten and imprisoned. Others are martyred as a result of their witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Few Christians in the Western world spend time thinking about or praying for their suffering brothers and sisters. Much of this is due to not knowing, rather than not caring. Many expatriate missionaries, coming from Western religious environments where little emphasis is given to suffering, are ill prepared to meet the challenges inherent in environments defined by persecution.

Expatriate workers must be certain of the centrality of their faith in Jesus before asking others to place their lives in jeopardy.

The goal of this endeavor was to discover how God was making Himself known in the midst of persecution. How are people coming to Christ? How are they being discipled? How do existing churches react to events of persecution and to the persecutors? Why do some Christian communities, and individual believers, flourish under fire while others falter?

Countries and people groups that historically have experienced persecution at multiple levels have earned serious attention. Waves of persecution, as well as individual experiences, were investigated by this study in the former Soviet Union, with interviews recalling events beginning in 1917, the purges of 1939 and the more deliberate Christian persecutions in the 1960s. Persecution under communism was investigated within the former U.S.S.R., China, North Korea and Cuba.

Alongside communism, a review was undertaken where the State was a partner with a state religion or church in persecution aimed at evangelicals. Most church-planting movements are to be found within these systems in what can be called “top-down persecution.” In top-down persecution there is both good news and bad news. The good news is that believers are often found in large numbers before persecution begins. Believers are in the thousands. They are gathered into community. They have churches, seminaries and are aligned denominationally. It is their growth that becomes a threat to the power structures in society.

In top-down persecution, families can and do hide their children from the authorities. Parents will bribe the persecutors to get their children out of prison, even when the believers ask them not to do so. The good news is that people have a space of time, generally, to hear the gospel, believe and gather into community before the persecutors become concerned enough to persecute them.

The bad news is that, when these top-down persecutors do persecute believers, they can enact programs that will beat, imprison and martyr Christians by the thousands. The persecutors can adopt a scorched earth policy that attempts to eliminate the intelligentsia of an entire generation, of which believers are an intimate part. Systems of Christianity remain the fourth leading persecutor of Christians. Places where Buddhism and Hinduism are the norm were included in the interviews. Emperor worship in varying degrees is found today in North Korea and Cuba, as it was in

some of the Eastern Bloc satellites. We began interviews in places that had experienced persecution historically then moved to more current situations, having amassed insight and experience along the path. Looming on the horizon was always the challenge of Islam.

Muslim-background believers (MBBs) throughout Asia, North Africa and the Horn of Africa shared great insights. Persecution is rampant in Indonesia, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Pakistan and others. Countries such as Saudi Arabia and other Gulf States remain the greatest challenge, but according to statistics, the persecution in those countries remains quite low, reflecting the success they have had in systematically suppressing Christian witness and faith. Obviously, there have to be believers present in order to have persecution.

In these countries the combination of family, society and government, as persecutors in partnership, is so repressive that it is extremely difficult for believers to emerge. This can be referred to as “bottom-up persecution.” Bottom-up persecution appears to be the most effective form. Here one does not get the chance to hear, believe and be gathered into believing communities. The persecutors are around the meal table, in the living room and sleep in the bed next to the one seeking spiritual truth.

While the top-down persecutors attempt to enforce their will upon the believing community, bottom-up persecutors enforce their will before one ever gets to Jesus. In bottom-up persecution, one’s family will not hide the believer from the authorities or bribe their children’s way from prison. It is these very parents who deliver their children to the authorities, lock them in their bedrooms or beat them into submission. In bottom-up persecution, there generally is no need to fear the government, because those seeking the truth will not survive the attention of their father, their uncle or their oldest brother.

When the State is the architect of persecution, it can be deadly. When the State joins a state religion, such as the Orthodox Church with the Communist U.S.S.R., the situation becomes more serious still. When the State, a state religion and one’s immediate family are partners in the persecution, the situation is dire indeed. This last combination of institutions and family arrayed against Christians is representative of many of the Arab states and Muslim countries. One reason Christianity

has exploded in China is the State has had few partners in its persecution of believers.

The process of gathering and analyzing the information was challenging. Contact usually was made with a believer in a suffering setting through three to five intermediary contacts. The interviews were arranged by a variety of sending agencies, sending churches and individuals. Issues concerning trust and how the gathered information would be shared were serious hurdles to overcome. Many of the trips, each covering five to eight countries at a time, took over a month to accomplish. At least seven to 10 interviews were sought within each country or people group, but the average was higher.

Believers were overwhelmingly willing to tell their stories. They shared what they had experienced and learned after being assured that their information would remain confidential. The interviewer assured them that the Church in the West had heard of their faith and had remembered to pray for them. Further, they were told that we needed their wisdom and advice in order to help suffering believers in other countries, to train cross-cultural missionaries and to educate those who would send others to labor in fields defined, partially, by persecution.

Many interviews took three hours. Most of the believers allowed the interview to be recorded on a small tape recorder. Others allowed only written notes. Some asked that nothing be recorded or written down until I was safely away from their area. Most interviews were held in-country. Cities were often the safest location for the believers to meet. Sometimes the interviews took place in a third country, and a few were attempted by telephone. The interviewer and his wife handled these interviews. Hours of tapes were transcribed and then entered into a database containing 100 fields for analysis. Three task force members read each case study. The raw interviews will never become public. In time, secure and sanitized versions of some of the interviews may become public, given permission.

The following findings come directly from the interviews. They demonstrate how God, the persecutor, the persecuted, the Church and the missionary all interact within the matrix of suffering, persecution and martyrdom. This document in no way exhausts the insights and information gained from the interviews. It focuses on the findings that most clearly relate to those who send, the agencies and churches. Note

that these findings are descriptive, not prescriptive. They represent what was found, not necessarily what the interviewer wanted or expected to find.

The following working definitions, influenced by being among persecuted believers, will be suggested:

MBB is a Muslim-background believer
HBB is a Hindu-background believer
CBB is a Christian-background believer
CPM is a church-planting movement

Persecution is a negative reaction by government, ideologies, society and family to the presence of Christ, incarnated through a positive witness by believing individuals and communities.

Paul Marshall of Freedom House suggests that there may be as many as five differing definitions of “Christian” employed, definitions that can serve to cloud issues being reported and discussed. These five definitions, found in the “International Bulletin of Missionary Research,” January 1998, are summarized as follows:

“census Christians” – call themselves Christian when asked
“member Christians” -- describe themselves as “Catholic, Orthodox, Baptist, Lutheran,” etc.
“member Christians” -- attend church and participate in its functions/sacraments
“committed Christians” – say they are “born again” and their faith is determinative for all of life
“crypto-Christians” – are secret believers who have yet to declare their faith within a church

For this study a **Christian** is a follower of Jesus Christ, born again by faith. Most commonly, Christians will live according to the teachings of Jesus and the Bible and they will share their faith with others whenever possible.

A **martyr** is a follower of Jesus Christ who was killed by an act of human violence while witnessing, or as a result of bearing witness. It is very difficult to determine that martyrdom has in fact occurred without the

passage of time, which allows the believing community to affirm the validity of the testimony given by the one who was killed.

A **church**, in order to survive in persecution, must select its own leaders, care for the physical and spiritual needs of its members and reproduce itself into other New Testament communities.

A missionary is a cross-cultural worker who shares the gospel, or facilitates the gospel being shared among those who have never heard or have little chance of hearing, unto the ends of the earth.

Further presuppositions are that persecution is normal, biblically, and that the No. 1 reason for persecution is that people are giving their lives to Jesus. Therefore, as expatriate workers and local believers are obedient to their task, they will cause persecution, suffering and martyrdom.

Things to consider:

- 1. Develop your own working definitions for church, missionary, persecution and martyr.**
- 2. Determine if your environment is defined by top-down or bottom-up persecution. Identify the persecutor's partners.**
- 3. Decide if persecution is seen as biblically normal in your setting. It is important to articulate who the persecutors are and the methods they employ to control or eliminate the faith. This knowledge helps to disciple new believers for their coming trials.**
- 4. Persecution increases with the effectiveness of witness and the numerical growth of believers. Preparing for persecution requires a forward look, speculating what persecution will look like when a CPM begins and when the faith becomes a serious threat to the existing power structures.**

Chapter 1 The Process of Conversion.

Understanding the process of conversion in the midst of persecution can enhance the effectiveness of those sent.

The interviews illustrate consistent patterns in the faith process and the environment. Most of those coming to Christ dwell in pre-Pentecost environments of persecution. Pre-Pentecost is that time within each people group before a believing community emerges. Before this happens, believers are scattered, no Christian structures have emerged, and faith is tenuous.

Pentecost is defined as that time in a people group's history when the Holy Spirit gathers scattered believers together into communities that choose their leaders, care for the physical needs of their members and reproduce themselves. Pentecost can further be viewed as the transition from individual faith to a church-planting movement. It is not uncommon for first-generation believers, in pre-Pentecost environments, to misunderstand what God is accomplishing among their people. Often, first-generation believers do not know one another. These interviews suggest that all a seeker needs to learn from a Western worker within a pre-Pentecost environment is who is Jesus, what the Bible says and how a follower of Jesus Christ both lives and dies.

MBBs often have the following three common features in their conversion process. First, God moves into their lives through dreams and visions. Second, God miraculously places His Word, the Bible, into their hands. And third, God places a local believer or near-culture Christian along the seeker's spiritual path.

We see many examples of signs, miracles and dreams around the world. The house church experience in China, especially pre-1970, was one of hundreds of churches beginning through miracles of healing. Muslims hear the voice of God, behold Jesus in a dream and are delivered. One believer related that while he had never met a Christian or known of the Bible, he heard "a voice without a body" calling him to "find Jesus, find the gospel." He did not know if Jesus was a person or an animal, whether the gospel was a fruit or a rock. From his remote village the voice told him to go to a certain city, to a certain street, knock on a specific door and ask for a man by name. Being an

oral person, in tune with the spirit world, he went. The Holy Spirit led him to the door of one of the few believers among the millions in his people group.

In Islam these dreams and visions serve to send the recipient on a spiritual journey, often lasting three to seven years. Most Muslims experience the emptiness of Islam and stop praying ritualistically in the mosque.

Nowhere is the sovereign nature of God more visible than in environments of extreme darkness and persecution. God is always a witness to Himself. Many societies have deliberately tried to eliminate any access to the gospel. Bibles and hymnbooks are not available. Missionary activity is forbidden or severely restricted. Contact with the outside world is tightly managed and monitored. Media resources are unavailable, illegal and expensive. The lost are generally illiterate while most resources are in literate forms, handled by literate delivery systems, modeled on Western patterns of transferring truth and information.

God is making Himself known regardless of the obstacles: illiteracy, persecution, isolation in remote villages, no expatriate missionaries or few available Christian resources. In the darkest corners of the planet, people who have never met a missionary, seen or heard of a Bible and who have never had a discussion with a Christian are coming to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. God is constantly calling out first-generation believers among the tribes and peoples of the world. How is this happening? How can what God is doing be enhanced?

Media strategies can be adjusted to build upon what God is doing. There is a great need for widespread sowing of the gospel in forms that oral learners can comprehend and reproduce. Interviews can be produced and aired that affirm to new believers that their faith experiences are not unusual, not a freak within their culture, nor are they alone in their faith. Isolated believers need to know that this is how God moves. Cross-cultural missionaries need to sensitize themselves as Joseph to Pharaoh, Ananias to Saul and Philip to the Ethiopian eunuch, so as to recognize those in whom God is at work.

It is not manipulative to pray for God to visit the unbelieving with a dream, vision or miracle. It is powerful to suggest that God will place His Word in their hands and send them a messenger from within their culture. This will often give voice to what God has already accomplished in the seeker's life.

Giving voice, affirming the process, will further confirm and validate the movement of the Holy Spirit in the life of the one in whom Christ is moving.

But charlatans abound. Every manipulation and false expression of the spirit world that existed in the New Testament is found today. Such is the consistent nature of satanic activity where seekers or new believers have neither the Bible nor a faith community. Fear of the false should not cause truth to surrender.

Typically during this spiritual pilgrimage, especially among MBBs, the second component occurs as God miraculously places His Word into the seekers' hands. Sometimes these first two elements are reversed. Seekers find a copy of the Bible, read it, it sends them on a spiritual journey, and they then experience signs, miracles and wonders. God has always been about this type of action. Where, for instance, did a foreigner from Ethiopia--a man of color and a eunuch--get a copy of the book of Isaiah, as related in Acts 8? The importance and power of God's Word cannot be overly stressed, either for the seeker or the believer.

Five interviews in one Central Asian people group illustrate these first two points. All five men met Jesus through dreams and visions, which initiated a spiritual pilgrimage away from Islam and communism. Each man obtained a copy of the Bible in the midst of his spiritual pilgrimage. Finding the Word was definitive in their faith-making process. As in the case of the Ethiopian eunuch 2,000 years before, the Holy Spirit brings the Word to those who are seeking it.

This is not the case in India. In 69 interviews among Hindus, there was little or no evidence that the Bible was formative either in the faith-making process or in discipleship. Those coming to Christ from Islam, Orthodoxy, Catholicism and even communism arrive with the awareness of Holy Scripture and a hunger to decipher its truths.

Converts from Buddhism and Hinduism bring little desire or hunger to their new faith. Hinduism seems to depend upon its holy men for the assimilation of its religious writings. Authority is vested in the one handling sacred texts. The common person relies on Hinduism's holy men to understand religious writings. Converts to Christianity transfer to their new faith a dependence upon Christian holy men to read and interpret the Word of God. They show little desire to know the Scriptures themselves. The interviews show that

many converts could not quote one verse of Scripture and most could not tell a Bible story. Implications for sustaining a church-planting movement and remaining faithful in persecution are immense.

Yet for Hindus and Muslims there is both good news and bad news. The good news is that those who are seeking and literate are miraculously obtaining God's Word. This is especially crucial for Muslims. As they read and compare the Bible to the Qur'an and Jesus to Mohammed, the Holy Spirit reaches deeply into their souls. The bad news is that 80 percent of all the unreached peoples of the world cannot read or write a word. It can be argued that interacting with the Word of God is vital for people coming to faith in Christ. Faith among most people groups is seldom found without this element or step.

It also can be argued that multitudes have a poor chance at faith if Bibles are available only for those who are literate! Chronological Bible storying, as well as the Bible on cassette tapes, on video, CD and radio, appears vital to widespread sowing of the gospel. Further, a reliance alone on signs, miracles and wonders, without the grounding that the Bible offers, develops shallow Christians caught in a self-elevating cycle of experiences.

The third common feature occurs when God places a local believer or near-culture Christian along this spiritual path. This believer will approach the seeker asking, "Do you understand the meaning of that dream or miraculous occurrence? Have you understood what you have read?" Thus faith is born.

Signs, dreams, miracles cause one to begin a spiritual pilgrimage. God miraculously provides the Bible for literates to read. God sends the seekers an in-culture or near-culture believer to explain what they have experienced and read, as Joseph to Pharaoh, Ananias to Saul or Phillip to the Ethiopian eunuch.

These three elements were found in the majority of the Muslim-background believer (MBB) interviews, particularly in places where there is no church or expatriate missionary. This process challenges sending agencies and churches. God continues through the Holy Spirit to break into the human experience, making Himself known. His Word is vital to the faith-making process. And local believers, actively sharing their faith and sensitive to the Holy Spirit, also are central in the believing process.

The interviews show that the nature and works of God have not changed from New Testament times until today. Conflicting views in the West regarding the Holy Spirit should not prohibit the cross-cultural missionary from humbly acknowledging the miraculous nature of God.

Missionaries need to be careful not to short-circuit this process by reducing the Christian faith to mere doctrines, important though they are. Two thousand years of theological education are no substitute for the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit. Omitting the possibility of God in the miraculous can handicap local believers when they are called to experience persecution. As in the New Testament, new believers rely upon supernatural events and the presence of God in their midst. When they face suffering, persecution and martyrdom, it is vital for them to remember those times when God was particularly present in their lives.

Those who have lived for generations in settled society, filled with open churches, where Christianity is culturally the norm, must not deprive first-generation believers of their biblical birthright in the midst of persecution. Believers who dwell in post- Pentecost environments have difficulty imagining the challenges of a faith that emerges in a pre-Pentecost environment.

What do these findings say about the expatriate missionary? The research produced a surprise, even though most of the interviews were generated by missionary contacts. Fewer than 15 percent of those interviewed had any contact with a missionary before coming to faith. Why is this?

Many peoples of the world are in places inaccessible to expatriate missionaries. Perhaps God loves His children too much to expose them to Western theological models that are not biblically sound in regard to suffering, the miraculous and reproducing community. The interviews reflect that literate males often lead mission enterprises from the West to literate males. Consequently the vast majority of the illiterate, and virtually all females, get few chances to hear and believe, especially within Islam. The issues are hearing the gospel, understanding it and reproducing it. The argument is not literacy or illiteracy. It is hearing and believing. The vast majority of MBBs interviewed were literate and male in an environment where most are illiterate.

There is also a common sense factor in play. The Mission Handbook published by MARC, 1998-2000, quoting Operation World, 1993, (see page 43) claims that there were 900 Western missionaries for the more than 1.2 billion Muslims worldwide. That represents approximately 1.2 percent of Western mission resources. This further divides out to 1,111,111 Muslims per Western missionary! Can God, in His wisdom, afford to depend upon the Western missionary, no matter how well trained, to accomplish the global task of evangelism? The challenge remains to join God both where He is working and how He is working. A missionary cannot travel anywhere that God has not already called His children to Himself. The missionary must be prepared to seek and find those God has called to Himself. The missionary needs to affirm and nurture what God has begun.

Sending agencies and churches should accept the dreams, miracles and healings God is allowing among His children, as long as faith and experience are consistent with the Bible and are edifying the Christian community.

Things to consider:

- 1. Expatriate workers who labor among the persecuted should look for, pray for and encourage signs, wonders, dreams and visions, which lead to a faith that is biblically sound.**
- 2. Workers from the West must map and understand how their host culture normally comes to faith in comparison to their sending culture. For example, how do low caste Hindus generally find Jesus in comparison to Muslims nearby?**
- 3. Map how people from your home area come to faith. The importance of this is seen as missionaries generally carry with them the structures through which they find Jesus, while Muslims, Hindus and other peoples generally come to Christ through different avenues.**
- 4. Workers from the West need to carefully evaluate the value of post-Pentecost structures, doctrinal divisions and literate means of communication before inserting them into pre-Pentecost environments of persecution.**
- 5. Compare the faith-making process when the missionary is central to the salvation experience with the same process when the missionary meets the believer after he or she has found Jesus.**

2 Movement of Faith into the Second Generation

The interviews note an alarming trend of severe persecution within pre-Pentecost environments. Few believers are multiplying themselves into the second generation, especially in Islam. *Second generation* is defined as faith that travels to one's mother, father and children. It is a faith that moves out of one's own age bracket and travels down through succeeding generations. Among MBBs particularly, God is calling peoples to Himself, but there are few examples that faith is finding root in the lives of spouses and children and then emerging into reproducing communities.

When this constant recurrence of first-generation believers was pointed out to those interviewed, they were surprised. Some did not understand the importance of moving into community or witnessing to their spouses, children, extended family or friends. Their main concern was simply to survive as a Christian in a hostile setting.

Without a witnessing component instilled early in the discipleship matrix, faith often moves slowly into the second generation.

The findings illustrate that the persecutors are very successful in limiting faith to the first generation. One can statistically project, from the interviews, the typical experience of 100 MBBs and understand why most believers are first-generation among a particular people group or country.

From 100 MBBs, 80 percent will be male. When the time arrives to marry, some will not find a wife, but most will marry a Muslim woman chosen by the groom's father. Many MBBs who are upwardly mobile in society, well educated and economically secure, will marry a single, female, expatriate worker. Substantial numbers of MBBs will secure jobs with Western mission agencies, eventually receiving an international posting. Others will flee from persecution to neighboring countries, and missionaries will extract many.

In most environments it would be unusual if 10 believers remain from the initial 100 regenerated within their people group.

By the time a MBB arrives at marriage, he has stopped going to the mosque, and the family is, at least, suspicious. It is common for the Muslim father to seek the most conservative first cousin for his son's marriage. The family makes the betrothal, summons the young woman and gives her two charges: bring the groom back to Islam or, failing that, protect the ensuing children from his heresy. Every effort is made to keep faith from moving into the second generation.

More attention needs to be given to the role of women, particularly where faith is not moving into the second generation. In Islam, the interviews illustrate issues that directly hinder faith from moving into succeeding generations. Typically, a male MBB arrives at faith after a process that can span three to five years. If he is married, it is common for this newly converted man to proclaim faith for his household, including wife and children. It is not uncommon for the male MBB to "lead" his wife to faith and baptism within three to six months after declaring his faith to her. Though he experienced a long pilgrimage to Christ, his Muslim, male-dominated, Islamic culture seems to re-impose itself as he does not allow his wife the same space and time to acquire her own faith.

He often proclaims, "This is now a Christian home," and that includes declaring that his wife and children are now Christians. Though we stated earlier that 80 percent of MBBs are male; the reality is more alarming. Most of the 20 percent who are believed to be MBB women cannot describe a Christ-centered faith experience apart from her husband's. Most women who are reported to be MBBs cannot articulate how to share their Christian faith with another woman. Many women, reported to be MBBs, returned to Islam immediately following the death or martyrdom of their husbands.

There is evidence of a deeper theological issue. When witness patterns are isolated and studied, it becomes apparent that men are culturally selective with whom they proclaim their faith. When men do share their faith, it is common for them to witness to their fathers, brothers, uncles, male cousins and male friends. They are seldom evangelically involved with the female side of the family and social structure. What is involved here? While further research is needed, what is suggested in these findings is another cultural presupposition, borrowed from the previous faith system. In Islam, a woman can inherit from her father half as much as her brother. In a court of law, a woman's testimony is a third or half of a man's. It can be argued that a

Muslim woman's role in Paradise is to serve men. In many conservative environments Muslim women cannot vote, drive or hold a public job where men are present.

What the research suggests is that men, even male MBBs, hold a cultural theology that questions whether a woman's soul equals a man's. Further investigation is needed to determine if women hold this same theological view about themselves.

The consequence of being an active witness in the midst of persecution, especially within Islam, is well documented. Why place oneself in harm's way as a result of witnessing to a woman who may not be soul competent? This issue may be at the very heart of mission to Islam. We noted in chapter one that literate males lead most mission agencies and evangelistic outreach. Could this practice inadvertently reinforce what Muslim men and women believe within their own systems of faith?

Decades ago, Samuel Zwemmer painted a snapshot of women in Islam when he wrote, "As a babe she is unwelcome; as a child untaught; as a wife unloved; as a mother unhonoured; in old age uncared for; and when her dark and dreary life is ended she is unmourned by those she has served." ¹

If one attends conferences where MBBs gather, it is interesting to note the significant number of MBBs married to foreign women. Normally this couple and their children are supported by the wife's Western connections and they are faithful to work among the husband's people group. When their offspring reach high school or college age the family immigrates to the wife's country of origin. Therefore, faith does not move into the second generation within the host people group.

Note that this is not a moral or ethical statement concerning inter-cultural marriage. It is an observation concerning why faith is not reproducing itself into the second generation. Inter-marriage hinders emerging believers from being a part of succeeding generations of believing communities. In one Central Asian country the MBB pastor related that he had performed 14 weddings involving MBBs from 1983-1998. This would be one of the largest number of weddings among MBBs in any one location. Thirteen of

¹ Samuel Zwemmer, *Across the World of Islam* (New York: Revell, 1929), 135.

the marriages were to foreigners. Twelve of the couples emigrated. In one North African country this inter-marriage issue has become so acute that expatriate mission agencies have considered not recruiting single, female workers for the near future.

If a MBB is faithful to the biblical injunction not to be “unequally yoked,” and he marries a Christian, then the pressure from the family and community greatly increase. As children are born, and faith potentially moves into a second generation, the pressure becomes more intense. Children born to MBBs have a most difficult time. They are required to attend Islamic classes, have severe identity problems among their peers and often are a security risk to their parents.

Imagine little Fatima at “show and tell” in her school in a North African country. She stands before her class and quotes John 3:16 and sings the equivalent of “Jesus Loves Me.” School officials, extended family members and the police visit her parents before the end of the day. The dilemma concerning the education of MBB children is huge. Concerns over children lead many first-generation believers in the midst of persecution to consider emigration.

All of the MBBs interviewed claimed that their parents could legally remove children born to a Christian union with full support from the State.

Missionaries from the West might find this problem difficult to solve. The “solution” may well be the emergence of self-sustaining, believing communities. Experiencing and enduring this type of societal persecution that targets believing families might be the price that must be paid while community is emerging. While this observation sounds harsh, emigrating or placing MBB children in missionary schools or pricey international schools has not led to sustainable believing communities in many places.

MBBs who have related personal stories of imprisonment, deprivation, ostracism and torture in matter-of-fact voices, break down completely as they relate the needs of their children. The interviews clearly record that in the U.S.S.R. and China, believers who had multiple generations of witness

and faith survived and even flourished in the fire. Many could relate testimonies of faith in regard to their fathers, grandfathers and great-grandfathers. When the man of God, the pastor, entered the sanctuary in the U.S.S.R., the entire congregation would rise in honor of that servant who dared to remain faithful through all the years of persecution under communism. From the beginning of life, children of believers were fed a diet of faith in the midst of suffering, persecution and martyrdom. A strong Christian inheritance and biblical accounts of God's people remaining faithful in the midst of persecution are highly successful partners in encouraging succeeding generations in the faith.

Countries and people groups where faith has continued into the second generation exhibit commonalities that remind the cross-cultural missionary of the biblical record. Some commonalities include a desire to share one's faith locally and globally, a faith that is centered in families and communities and a faith that seeks to forgive and draw one's persecutors to Christ.

To move into second-generation believing communities, emphasis must be given to reaching families, especially the heads of households.

Few in the West can appreciate the tremendous power and influence of the father and the first-born son in family units. In many societies where families are the chief persecutors, almost 50 percent of the believers interviewed waited until their fathers were dead, divorced or out of the house before the sons came to faith. In specific people group settings, this can go above 80 percent. Young men often come to Christ expressing anger and hatred toward their father. Interviews reveal that, for some MBBs, becoming a Christian was a means of punishing one's father and rejecting one's culture.

It is extremely difficult to establish and extend the Kingdom of God based upon a faith that appears to be anti-culture and anti-family and which hates the father figure in the home. One mission executive leads his missionary force to send Muslim young men home to apologize to their fathers if they are attempting to come to faith without the knowledge of the head of the household. The desired end of such a practice is to show respect for the father within the culture and to bring the head of the household into the faith investigation process. This mission leader refuses to allow Christianity to be seen as anti-family.

While reaching the male head of the household is a critical issue, fewer efforts are being made to reach women, especially in Islam. Special emphasis must be given to intentionally sending women to reach women and developing oral means of reproducing the Bible alongside narrative means of sharing the gospel story. But we must remember that the ultimate goal is to reach families. To reach women more than men in the coming decades simply transfers the problem.

Some of the challenges that hinder second-generation believers from emerging are:

- Emigration by choice
- Extraction by expatriate workers
- Marriage to a foreigner
- Marriage to a Muslim or one from the majority religion
- Decision to remain single rather than face the pressures of being married within the non-believing family structure
- A reliance on “fringe people”. (See chapter 4.)
- Employment with an expatriate faith organization that leads to an international posting
- Failure to witness or “loss of voice”
- Denial of faith
- Pseudo-martyrdom, which is a martyrdom for reasons other than a positive Christian witness, especially before community emerges
- Hatred of one’s father and culture
- Education secured outside of one’s country of origin
- Removal of children from the community of origin for educational or security purposes
- Concentration on literate males, with little attention to women or oral communicators
- Removal of children from the family of origin by the grandparents, extended family or the State.

Helping family-centered faith to reproduce into the second generation is a vital component of the missionary task.

A comprehensive strategy for ministry within environments of persecution includes an insight into the intentions and methodologies of the opposition. It is important that local believers understand and use the laws of their own country. As the Apostle Paul invoked his Roman citizenship, believers need

to know their rights, the national laws and the international treaties their country has signed. Such knowledge often diminishes persecution by the State at the grass-roots level. It also holds the persecutors accountable for their actions. Paul did not survive Rome, but his appeal to the State at the highest level led to a record of his and the State's actions.

Interviews with a former Chinese policeman, now a believer, reveal that arresting believers was a lucrative practice. The one interviewed said that at his police station, toward the end of the month and before payday, they would joke, "I am out of money. Let's go and arrest some Christians." Another believer stated that the casual arrest of believers was the practice in his area until he learned the local and national laws. Then he challenged those arresting believers with the fact that they were actually breaking the law and subverting the due process of the law. Paying bribes to the police to free a believer from jail is often counter-productive.

For most persecutors, beating, imprisoning or killing the believers in their midst is not their primary goal.

Persecutors fear a witness that reproduces itself within relationships and families into succeeding generations. They simply desire to neuter the first-generation believers, make them "lose their voice." They want to make believers shut up, keep their faith to themselves, be neutralized. This loss of voice is the most common result of persecution. If the persecutors can isolate the believers, kill their witness and limit the believing process to one convert, then the persecution is more effective than if they had tortured, imprisoned or martyred the believer. Persecutors seldom want public exposure.

Intentionally focusing upon family units in evangelism is pivotal, as are issues surrounding baptism. In most societies, the persecutors equate baptism with salvation. Among the persecutors, baptism represents a bonding with the new community and a rejection of the community of origin. Baptism, in their minds, is the equivalent of the new believer's profession or declaration of faith. Believers who are successfully gathered into community acknowledge multiple influences in regard to baptism. Especially in pre-Pentecost environments, baptism needs to be carefully thought through and practiced. The interviews highlight the need for these items to be considered when moving toward baptism:

- Baptism follows conversion
- Baptism is practiced in and among the host believing community and missionaries do not constitute that community
- Baptism serves the cause of witness within the non-Christian family
- Discipleship precedes baptism
- The one baptizing should be an in-culture or near-culture Christian
- Cultural norms of who constitutes an adult should be honored
- Baptism of a Muslim woman by a non-family male can be problematic.
- The baptism of an individual, outside of his or her own community, is to be discouraged.

Baptism is tied to conversion. Few foreign agencies or local bodies have a practice of baptizing anyone below the age of 18 among first-generation believers, especially within Islam. Baptism follows conversion and a period of discipleship. This time can be short, but usually is a period of years in Islam. Please recall that these findings are descriptive, not prescriptive. This is a description of what was found, not what this practice possibly needs to become. The more severe the persecution environment, the longer between profession of faith and baptism. Further, and crucial in persecution, baptism is practiced within local believing families and community. Believers emerging into the second generation were baptized within their own culture. They were not extracted in order to experience baptism.

Missionaries are consistent in practicing baptism after conversion, with many encouraging a period of discipleship and testing of the new convert. When missionaries baptize, the period between conversion and baptism is a few months to one year. When MBBs baptize one another, the timing is usually three to five years. Missionaries often extract a new convert to a nearby location in order to baptize, or they baptize only with the convert and other expatriate workers in attendance. Where second-generation believers are emerging, baptism is experienced and shared within a local believing community, often made up of family units. Baptism is delayed in order to allow community to emerge together. Baptism is sometimes delayed in order to allow witness to grow within family units. In the haste to get to baptism, expatriate missionaries can inadvertently replace the local community of faith.

The extraction of the one baptized models a witness that takes place outside of the community of origin.

Second-generation communities began to emerge in Central Asia as new converts to Christ were sent back to their families with the challenge to allow their changed lives to become a steady witness. They were discipled and they incarnated Christ slowly and carefully over a period of three to five years. When the first convert eventually came to baptism, many in his or her family were ready to be baptized also, and a New Testament community was born. Before they went to this practice, converts were persecuted because of the event of baptism. Later the persecution was in reaction to a positive Christian witness among lost people over a period of time.

For faith to move into the second generation, sending agencies and churches must concentrate on what the findings reveal. Attention must be given to reaching family units and baptizing in community. Baptism is an act of obedience, a response to a new faith that is centered in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. It is also a symbol of community and witness. This one issue could become a book unto itself.

Among sending agencies and churches, especially where partnership on the field is important, the issue of baptism could be volatile. Though many agencies are not denominationally based, missionaries do arrive representing the agenda of their particular religious heritage. Baptism remains, for the expatriate missionary, one of the key factors in measuring success. Baptism also suggests identification with the doctrine of and allegiance to the sending body. It is common for MBBs to be baptized multiple times as they travel from one expatriate missionary organization to another, seeking true community.

A careful revisiting of the interviews suggests some interesting insights in regard to baptism. Expatriate missionaries tend to define baptism in terms of theology and mode. Missionaries debate whether baptism is a symbol of new faith, a sign of a faith that is to come or if it is salvific in itself. In addition, missionaries will discuss their particular allegiance to the mode of baptism, is it to be performed by immersion, pouring or sprinkling? Also, to many missionaries, the issue of the qualifications of the one baptizing is important.

MBBs in pre-Pentecost environments almost never ask any of these questions, however important they are. Their chief concern is, "Have I been baptized into Christ and into a new community?" They are seeking a home, a place to belong and a community that will care for their spiritual and

physical needs. Baptism is community, local and eternal. They likely will be baptized multiple times and pass through many foreign expatriate organizations in the search for real community.

MBBs can practice baptism as symbol, sign and sacrament within the same family in one generation. Few Muslims find Christ in a vacuum, apart from some type of church around them. Interviews illustrate Muslim men who have been on a spiritual journey for years. They have experienced Christ through dreams, visions and miracles. God has miraculously placed His Word in the seekers' hands. Some near-culture believer enters the picture to help these seekers understand what they have read, dreamed and sought. After three to seven years of searching, these Muslims find Christ and are eventually baptized. Their baptism is a symbol of their new life in Christ.

Still influenced by their Muslim background and male self-image, they carry a witness to their wives. Surrounded by different Christian faith systems, it is not unusual for these MBB men to baptize their wives in three to six months. These women were baptized because their husbands unduly influenced them, not because of a spiritual conviction arising from personal faith. It is surprisingly common for these MBB men to then baptize their infant child. They have viewed various denominations and their practices. They are not willing to take the chance that baptism itself might not provide salvation. Infant baptism also appeals to the residue of Islam within them, which suggests that faith is a result of external practices. In numerous interviews with MBBs, neither the wife nor the children could articulate the role of Jesus in salvation. When doctrinal practices precede faith, Christianity has a difficult task moving into and through succeeding generations.

Baptism is not the primary debate here, though it is central to community. It is meant to be illustrative. In the presence of numerous Christian faith systems, baptism can travel from symbol, to sign, to sacrament in one generation. Such practices are due to observed behavior and imported doctrinal differences.

An intentional effort will need to be made to return baptism to New Testament roots of identification with Christ, centered within families and local community.

Generally expatriate missionaries arrive on the field highly educated, with substantial financial support. Their children are in the better schools, and the missionary has a budget that includes international travel. Missionaries have nice homes and computers. They have a high living standard compared to the locals and they have access to the best medical care. Every few years they fly home for furlough or a vacation. It should be no surprise that a Two-Thirds World person observing the support package with which Christianity arrives might assume that Jesus and such a package of benefits are necessarily connected.

Missionaries must learn to understand the motives of those who express interest in Christianity. Few come to Christ with pure motives, especially in environments of persecution and first-generation faith. God welcomes the seeker and the Holy Spirit will refine the hearts of those with mixed intentions. Yet it is quite difficult for second-generation believers to emerge from within a faith built upon a first-generation foundation of ulterior motives. A seeker who asks about Jesus may come hating his father, wanting a job, hoping for education in the West, wanting to emigrate or looking for a wife. Missionaries must learn how to identify and deal with such agendas early in the faith-building process.

All people have motives and agendas. Expatriate workers arrive on the field clothed in the agendas from sending churches and agencies. Serving cross-culturally with children requires a constant dialogue concerning family needs and agendas: health care, shelter, education and doctrinal issues. The expatriate worker who understands his own agendas will better understand the existence of agendas among the peoples he seeks to reach.

Jesus sent His disciples out as “sheep among wolves.” He never said that His sheep had to be unaware or foolish. When poor motives are not recognized early, the result can be a denial of emerging faith or traitors who jeopardize believers. This Judas Syndrome may be avoided by carefully discipling seekers and by knowing the factors within the local culture that make Christianity attractive.

Where does the first-generation believer find strength? In many places it is dangerous to own a Bible. In the former U.S.S.R., Christian fathers often were sources of Christian strength within the family. In Islam the father often is the chief persecutor. For faith to develop into the second generation, it must become immersed in family, in community and in the Bible. A

heritage must be built and recognized, “This is how Christians live. This is how they die.” In the parts of India where these interviews took place, thousands of people are coming to Christ in response to miracles of healing. There are few Bibles. It remains to be seen what faith in India will become as it is exposed to increasing persecution and as it reacts with cultic influences.

Sending agencies and churches must provide the first-generation believer with spiritual models as they send their expatriate workers, as families, among the lost. Along with the Bible, such discipleship models are indispensable to faith traveling into succeeding generations. These models clearly show the first-generation believer the way Christians should respond to persecution.

Where there is no Christian heritage, the missionary challenge is to teach the Bible comprehensively and to model the faith as succeeding generations of believers emerge and write their own history among the faithful.

Are sending agencies and churches developing and commissioning cross-cultural missionaries capable of modeling a suffering faith that can provide a foundation for first-generation believers to move into succeeding generations? The missionary role is to stand in the gap, providing a genealogy of faith until believers can grow their own heritage.

Things to consider:

- 1. Develop a profile of the believers you know. In Islam, most are male, single, under 25 years of age, with little social status.**
- 2. Note the number of believers who are first-, second- and third-generation both spiritually and biologically. Is faith traveling upwards into grandparents, fathers and mothers as well as into the children of believers?**
- 3. List the obstacles that may keep faith from traveling into succeeding generations in your setting.**
- 4. For the church to emerge in persecution, missionaries should not extract believers, educate them outside their own social setting nor hire believers to carry out the agenda of the mission agency.**
- 5. Investigate issues of soul competency among women.**
- 6. Explore how much of the Bible is in oral form, how many songs are indigenous. This research suggests that the Bible is held in oral forms to**

rapidly transmit truth. The Bible is kept in literate form in order to preserve truth.

7. List your literate and oral tools for evangelism and discipleship. Note the percentage of your population that is either literate or oral communicators.

8. Missionary dependence upon a literate Bible is troubling in the midst of persecution as they need to be able to recreate the biblical stories automatically, not being so dependent upon literate resources, especially within oral cultures.

9. Note the ways that expatriate missionaries practice baptism among the host believing community and count the times that MBBs have been baptized and by whom.

10. In first-generation, pre-Pentecost environments, note if missionaries in your location can come to a common agreement on baptism.

11. Determine who the persecutors are and what methods they usually employ in order to stop witness. Note here that the persecuted will generally fear types of persecutions that they have yet to experience within their own culture.

3 Victorious Faith in the Midst of Persecution.

The interviews show that there are common life experiences and practices among believers who are victorious through persecution. Faith that moves into the second generation will spring from the lives of believers who share many of the following:

They have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

The discipline of prayer is central to their lives. They know how to talk with God.

They have memorized large portions of the Bible.

Indigenous hymns, choruses and songs are central to their daily life and worship.

Those incarcerated for their faith know that they have the support of the believing community; they are prayed for, and the community is caring for their families.

They know that their persecution is normal and that it is for Jesus' sake.

They have claimed their freedom and lost their fear. They have a genealogy of faith.

Christians who were victorious through persecution could speak of a personal faith. Christ was in them and with them when they were ostracized by their family, when they were afraid, when they were in pain or facing death. Those victorious in persecution are people of prayer. We heard repeated testimonies that believers in prison could not be separated from God because they had long communed with Him in prayer.

After prayer, the greatest comfort for the persecuted Christians seems to come from having memorized large portions of the Bible and many indigenous songs.

A lay pastor was in prison and in exile for 17 years. While in prison he was isolated in a damp cell with 1,500 common criminals. He was the only believer. As was his custom, he stood each morning, faced the east, prayed and sang a particular heart song to God. Each day 1,500 criminals would jeer, throw waste at him and make loud clanging noises on their cell wall.

He developed the practice of hunting for scraps of paper on which to write Bible verses, sticking the pieces of paper to his cell wall. Each time the jailers found these Bible-laden scraps of paper; they would push him around and threaten him. But they could not break his spirit.

Then one day they broke into his house and took some of his wife's clothes. They dressed a female criminal in the clothes and allowed the pastor to catch a glimpse of her as she passed his cell. He thought the State had his wife, and he worried about who would care for their children. He almost lost his mind as the authorities began to torture this woman, just cells away, until she died. He was a broken man. He called his jailors and told them that he would sign a confession if only they would allow him to check on his children.

Sensing his despair through the power of the Holy Spirit, his wife and family, hundreds of miles away, began to call out his name to God. The Holy Spirit allowed this believer in prison to hear that prayer, the actual voices of his wife, brother-in-law and children. The next morning his jailors came for him. His back was straight, his shoulders squared and there was a sparkle in his eye. He told them, "I am not signing anything." They asked, "What happened to you over night? We had you defeated, broken." He replied, "Last night the Holy Spirit allowed me to hear the voices of my family as they prayed for me. I know that they are OK." His faith was restored.

It was a special day when he found a large piece of paper and was able to record many memory verses on it. Carelessly, he plastered the paper on his cell wall. When the guards discovered it, two of them dragged him from his cell toward the execution grounds. Immediately 1,500 criminals rose to their feet, faced the east and began to sing that song of praise to God. The guards fearfully released the pastor and did not lay hands on him again.

What a believer takes into persecution is all he has to build upon during persecution.

Sadly, interviews note that some believers went into suffering with only knowledge of Jesus. They had few of the fundamentals of faith that allow for growth and victory through persecution, even death. Questions asked in the interviews, especially where persecution was severe, were: "What made you strong? What kept you faithful?" Many times in response to this interviewer's question, the believers stood, faced the east and sang the heart

song that they sang those many years in prison. They quoted verse after verse, story followed story from the Bible. “What is your verse? What is your song?” became an integral portion of the interviews.

Without songs of faith that are indigenous to the host culture, there was little evidence of victorious faith. Songs or choruses translated from another culture seldom, if ever, appeared.

In the former U.S.S.R., young people at an illegal gathering were challenged to recreate the gospels and as many songs, choruses and hymns as they could from memory. Few had ever held a Bible or a hymnbook. At the week’s end, these 500 youth had recreated Matthew, Mark, Luke and John with fewer than 12 mistakes. They reproduced over a thousand songs from memory. Little wonder that faith remained vigorous within the communist years.

Those separated from family and communities by suffering always carry a burden of concern for those they leave behind. Churches that pray for members who are persecuted and care for the family of the one being persecuted share an irreplaceable gift with those who are paying a large price on behalf of the community.

A MBB was in jail. He worried over his family and the small house church that he left behind. One day his interrogator shouted at him that he was in more trouble for, “...though we have you in jail those Christians that you lead are still meeting under the same tree!” The MBB smiled and thanked his captor for the great news that the church was remaining faithful.

Christians are human and often make mistakes that can cause or intensify persecution. No matter the reason for the persecution, when a believer goes before the authorities, when homes are confiscated and children removed from school, the believing community needs to close ranks around the one immersed in suffering.

Never should the sheep be condemned for what the wolves have done to them. One of the greatest gifts that can be given to believers in the midst of persecution is for the believing community to assure them that what they are experiencing is for Christ’s sake and for no other reason.

One of the most holy men in all of Islam is the one who has memorized the Qur’an. Often it is blind men who have accomplished this feat. The Qur’an

is approximately the length of the Christian New Testament. Many Muslims and MBBs point out that Western Christians, including expatriate workers, have a poor knowledge of their own Holy Scriptures. Often when asked a question, expatriate workers have to get their Bible and look up the answer. Could Christian faith see a breakthrough into Islam if Christians would commit the New Testament to memory?

It is important to note the centrality of community in victorious living. Those experiencing severe persecution note that they find victory in Jesus as they carry their oral Bible with them into prison. They have committed many songs, choruses and hymns to memory. They have a community that encourages them, prays for them and cares for their family. Yet what happens where community has yet to emerge? These interviews suggest that there is no substitute for the local church, for community. When faith is isolated in pre-Pentecost environments that are defined by persecution, then the persecution is very effective in suppressing the emergence of the church.

Victorious living is found in community, where new believers can be encouraged by other believers, learn from their suffering and see their families cared for. In the Gospels there was little overt persecution, outside of the martyrdom of John the Baptist. How many followers of Jesus went to prison? How many were beaten or killed? These interviews suggest that missionaries need to incarnate Christ so that severe persecution arrives after believers have heard, believed and have been gathered into community. Persecution visited upon an individual outside of community is generally effective. Persecution borne by the family of God generally generates a deeper faith and more growth.

There remain three further issues that lead to victorious faith in the midst of persecution. Those excelling in their faith have lost their fear, they have claimed their freedom, and they have a genealogy of faith.

Nothing is more debilitating than fear. Nothing. Numerous interviews record believers who are “afraid of their fears.” Believers fear what has never happened in their particular setting. They fear loss of jobs, loss of education for their children, imprisonment and death. Yet when these fears are investigated it is discovered that such persecutions have yet to occur in the country of the one being interviewed. But still they fear that it might happen.

In two different interviews, separated by continents, MBBs interviewed stated that God was so concerned over this issue of fear that He placed in His Word 366 verses that deal with not being afraid. One interviewed claimed that, “God has given us one verse for each day of the year concerning not being afraid and He has given us one extra verse when we have a really bad day.” Missionaries are not immune from this greatest of challenges, to live without fear. Too many interviews note that missionaries “teach us to be afraid.”

Claiming one’s freedom in Christ is central to the faith whether born under the Common Law of the West or the Roman Law that is the norm among the persecuted. The Chinese have much to teach us in regard to claiming our freedom. The authorities will threaten the house church leaders with the confiscation of their property. The house church leader would reply, “If you want this farm, you need to talk to Jesus, as I have given it to Him. But if you do take it, I am free to trust God for my daily bread.” Threatened with torture they claim they are “free to trust God for healing.” Imprisoned they proclaim that they are then “free to share their faith with other prisoners.” Told they will be killed, they state that then they are “free to be with Jesus.”

It is difficult to successfully persecute believers who have claimed their freedom in Christ.

One former secret policeman, now a believer, said that they could not afford to arrest believers, for they grew stronger in prison. Yet they could not leave these leaders free either, as they then would grow so large in numbers. Therefore the authorities would arrest them, beat and torture them severely in hope that the believer would give up the faith in order to avoid future incidences of physical persecution. Believers who claim their freedom in Christ are the bane of the persecutors.

As noted earlier, a genealogy of faith is an integral part of victorious living. When asked, “Where did you learn to live like this, where did you learn to die like this?” they pointed to the witness of their mother and grandmother, to their father and grandfather. The interviews again point to the centrality of family and community. The interviews further suggest that, in first-generation, pre-Pentecost environments, the missionary might find it imperative to quickly build a biblical genealogy of faith for the new believer. Also missionaries may be charged, as was the Apostle Paul, to encourage

new believers to watch the missionary's life if the new believer needs a clear example of how a follower of Jesus Christ lives and dies.

Things to consider:

- 1. Review the issues listed above. Determine which of these are present in mentoring relationships of which you are aware. Note weaknesses and strengths among believers you are related to.**
- 2. Believers build upon the foundations of the faith that they carry into persecution. Make sure they have those foundations.**
- 3. Note the centrality of the local church community. Victorious living apart from real community is rare. There is no substitute for community.**
- 4. Carefully observe those around who are living victorious lives and note the qualities of faith they exhibit.**
- 5. Missionaries need to model a genealogy of faith, building new believers a biblical genealogy of faith quickly. Important here are ways to model, "This is how a Christian lives. This is how a Christian dies."**
- 6. Believers who are victorious in persecution have claimed their freedom and lost their fear.**

4 A Mandate to Empower Local Believers.

In a setting defined by lostness, persecution and informers, evangelism is the primary tool for survival.

The Chinese and others within persecution model for the believing world the primacy of evangelism. At every level of the house church, Chinese leaders keep evangelism central. In specific house church movements, some claiming over 10 million followers of Christ, top leaders are responsible for mentoring 10 or more evangelists. Evangelism is never relegated to a secondary concern at any level of house church life. Evangelism and discipleship are always natural partners. Mature leaders view evangelism as more than a command from God to be obeyed. Evangelism equals survival. Leaders emerge from among those evangelizing.

The persecuted know by experience that “where two or three are gathered in my name, there I will be.” The Lord does not say, “Where one is gathered in my name there I will be.” The persecuted are aware they are made for community. Why evangelize? Because believers have experienced that it is almost impossible to exist outside of the body. In pre-Pentecost societies, believers are scattered, isolated and alone. Leading others to Christ provides community in which the believer can grow and belong. Community provides encouragement and accountability.

Evangelism--multiplying oneself--solves many of the problems found in the pre-Pentecost, persecution environment. If there are few women for male MBBs to marry, then evangelize women and families. Too small a pool of believers from which to see apostolic leadership emerge? Evangelize more potential disciples. Alone and frightened? Witness in culturally acceptable ways until surrounded by a New Testament community.

Much persecution is the result of informers. An infiltrator in the midst of believers and seekers is a recipe for trouble. Believers in Russia, China and among Islam have learned the same lesson: If the desired end result is to have a growing, evangelistic community that can be trusted, then it is necessary to grow one's own community by witnessing, having others profess Christ and then discipling the new believers to maturity. Informers

are such a curse to the emerging church that many small groups of believers will not accept believers who come from the outside. They can never completely avoid having a Judas in their midst, yet the lesson the persecuted have learned from Jesus is that Judas is to be home grown, not imported from the outside.

Trust is strongest between a mentor and a disciple. A mature believer will trust that person whom he or she has led to Christ, prayed with, lived with and discipled. A new believer will trust the one who led him or her to the Lord, sacrificed to give care, took risks and mentored.

According to the interviews, biblical discipleship is based in people, not programs. It is a mentoring process that has Jesus modeling faith for His disciples 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Those who mentor believers in the midst of persecution are careful to allow their “Timothys” and “John Marks” to have unrestricted access to them. New believers observe their mentors in all aspects of daily life. They observe their mentors as fathers, husbands among the extended family and in the larger social context. They have modeled for them the intimacy of prayer, the centrality of the Bible, how to share their faith, respond to crisis and endure persecution. It is typical among persecuted believers for the disciple to live with the one who introduced him to Christ.

For expatriate workers this suggests an intimate relationship with new believers within security parameters. Those living in the midst of persecution find it increasingly dangerous to possess Christian materials in literate forms. And since 80 percent of all non-believers are oral communicators, expatriate workers from the West may need to rely more on incarnational forms of mentoring than on literate forms.

Before the end of the Cold War, there were few discipleship programs to rival that of the evangelical churches in the former U.S.S.R. It was typical for each leader within the church to disciple three to five believers who had leadership potential. When persecution came and the authorities arrested the pastor, a junior pastor would fill the pastoral role. When that “Timothy” was also arrested, the next disciple would step forward. Everyone who was a believer had the task of mentoring another.

Having multiple persons at each level of service protects the body of believers from scattering if leaders experience arrest, moral failure or martyrdom.

Jesus and Paul were careful to mentor within community. Paul was careful not to leave Timothy behind. Jesus' disciples followed Him everywhere. Both Jesus and Paul shared their faith, called people to the Kingdom of God and chose disciples from within the harvest. In the midst of persecution, fear of infiltration causes Christian leaders to choose their own disciples. A believer should witness to any person seriously interested in following Jesus. Yet both Jesus and Paul carefully chose those gifted in ministry to be their disciples out of a much larger pool of believers.

Mistaking the earliest, emerging believers for the true leaders is a common missionary mistake. Often the first believers to emerge within environments of persecution are fringe people among the general population. Fringe people are often counter-cultural, see their culture as defective and are looking for a way out of their surroundings. Fringe people need Jesus, but they seldom are willing to take the gospel back to their culture and generally make poor leaders. Fringe people are perceived as outsiders by those within their own culture. When fringe people witness to their own people they lack the voice and influence to get the gospel a clear hearing. Expatriate workers must carefully select those through whom the gospel can permeate the host culture.

A discipleship model that intentionally identifies, trains and empowers local believers is at the heart of the task.

The same fear that caused Jesus' disciples to deny Him haunts the faithful today. Many interviews record a failure to publicly identify with Christ the first time a believer is confronted by a family member or friend with the question, "Are you a Christian?" The research suggests that this kind of "denial" is an unavoidable fact of life among those who live where persecution is common. This denial normally is not a rejection of Jesus. It is a failure to take a stand, to witness, to remain constant in the faith. The interviews suggest that all who would follow Christ will, at some point, deny their faith. Jesus told His followers that they would deny Him (Matt. 26:31). Judas and Simon Peter are clear examples of disciples who did not testify accordingly when challenged. In Peter's case the denial was temporary and he was restored. In the case of Judas, the betrayal was absolute and fatal.

Wisdom and experience dictate that a mentor in the midst of persecution must build the possibility of denial into the discipleship relationship. Jesus told His disciples that it would happen. It happened.

Then Jesus returned to those who denied Him, challenging them with true cross bearing, restoring them to Himself and to the community of faith.

One of the most dangerous and difficult matters that a mentor has to handle is confronting the disciple after the disciple has denied his faith.

If the denial was private, then restoration is easier. Such was the case with Simon Peter. The more public the denial, the more it affects the community and the harder the restoration. When the denial endangers the very existence of the community, as was the case for Judas and for Ananias and Sapphira, the mentor must confront the one who has denied, then step away and watch God's judgment fall.

In the Horn of Africa, an expatriate worker had a direct discipleship relationship with a MBB. In the absence of any local believing community, the missionary had kept the MBB and his family alive in very difficult times. This discipleship relationship spanned years of suffering, starvation and death in the MBB's family. The missionary helped the MBB get a secular job, helped him relocate and provided discipleship.

Once famine was avoided, a job secured and the believing family restored to health, the MBB returned to the mosque, denied his Christian faith and publicly exposed the other MBBs in the immediate area. The Western missionary prayed, fasted and, with the support of many believers, journeyed into the small desert town where his MBB friend now lived.

The MBB was shocked to see his missionary friend appear suddenly in his office. He hurried the missionary to his modest home, and there ensued a frank discussion of the denial and betrayal. The confrontation ended with the MBB forsaking the mosque and then acknowledging the betrayal of those he had once led.

Six years later this former leader still had not been trusted back into the believing community. Sadly, few are ever welcomed back. Restoration takes place when the fallen one is restored to faith by the Holy Spirit and begins over by starting a new community.

Mentoring new believers through at least one cycle of persecution is at the heart of evangelism, discipleship and leadership training. How many of these new believers remain faithful through the fire is the test of a leader.

Jesus walked with 12 disciples for three years. After the first cycle of personal persecution, 11 of the 12 came through to the other side. If 12 enter persecution and only three or four remain with the faith after the suffering event, there were mixed motives that were not recognized and addressed, the meaning of salvation was not clear, or discipleship and modeling were weak.

Many believing communities do not admit a new believer to the broader group of believers until the convert successfully travels through at least one cycle of persecution. Among one fellowship in East Asia, a new convert is initially mentored one-on-one. After three to six months he or she is admitted to a small group. This process continues for two years as the convert is introduced to increasingly larger numbers of believers. Finally the believer is brought to the entire fellowship, receives baptism and is given the next convert to disciple one-on-one.

There is no magic time formula for introducing new converts into the broader community. The severity of the persecution, the prevalence of informers and how well the convert is known within the believing community are all factors. Persecution is not static, and the structures that emerge within environments of suffering must remain flexible.

In China the size and location of the house churches fluctuate. In times of severe persecution they will reduce to meeting in cell groups of four. As the situation eases, the house church may grow to 30. Many house groups intentionally split into two groups of 15 once they get large enough. This multiplies leadership, allows the community to meet in homes and continues to focus on evangelism.

What defines a leader in the midst of persecution? The findings profile a leader both in terms of cultural norms and spiritual qualities. Culturally, a leader will have a majority of the following life experiences:

Leaders are generally male.

Leaders are 30 years of age or older.

Leaders are married.

Leaders have a vocation.

Leaders are the head of the household and have a strong social standing.

All but one of these were apparent in the life of Jesus and were common in the disciples whom He called.

A summary of first-generation believers in today's environments of suffering, especially those believers generated by missionary presence and witness, is revealing. Those emerging are often in their late teens and early twenties. They are unemployed. They are not married. They have little social standing. In Islam they are often the latter children of successive wives. Culturally, the gospel has a real challenge traveling within their social status. Are they children of God? Yes. Should they be mentored? Yes. Should they, as Jesus, wait and train patiently within God's timing in that particular culture? Absolutely. Within this profile, the expatriate Christian worker would not be pressured into finding jobs, education, money and mates for those coming to faith. New believers must develop a dependency on God's sufficiency and on their own local believing community.

If these cultural norms for a leader are held as a goal, many of the mixed motives and problems that new believers bring into the equation will dissipate.

Partnered alongside this cultural motif is a spiritual profile. The findings illustrate the following traits among those providing spiritual leadership in the midst of persecution:

They increasingly exhibit the fruit of the Spirit as they learn to exercise the gifts of the Spirit.

They reproduce themselves by naturally and normally sharing their faith.

They are evangelistic.

They mentor new believers through the first cycle of persecution and disciple them until they mature.

Rushing new believers into leadership roles is often harmful to the emerging community. Muslims and other religious adherents have almost cult-like control over their practitioners. There is a great need for consistent, long-term modeling and discipleship. The convert should begin to exhibit "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self

control.” These traits must be a pattern of life as the new believer seeks, or is asked, to serve as a pastor, evangelist, elder or deacon.

While mature belief is the goal, believers do not necessarily become mature before becoming leaders. Paul models for Timothy and slowly brings him along, challenging, reproofing, encouraging and correcting. By contrast, the criteria for leading alongside expatriate missionaries too often includes the ability to speak English, read and agree with the missionary.

Typically, new believers are removed from their families of origin and community. They often reside for extended periods with those who led them to Christ and who are their mentors. In the Two-Thirds World, such mobility within communities is not unusual or noticeable. It has many benefits as the new believer is allowed daily access to his or her mentor and sees a believing family living the faith. The discipleship model described above, found in environments of persecution today, would be in harmony with the practices of Jesus, Paul and the New Testament Church.

This pattern of discipleship is culturally and linguistically intensive. Jesus and Paul modeled faith and kingdom behavior for their chosen disciples 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The 12 not only heard the words that Jesus spoke, but they observed His actions every day of the week. They watched Jesus when He was tired, hungry and angry. They saw Him with the ill, the dying and among little children. They knew His moods and His habit of prayer. They fished with Him, slept next to Him and they daily broke bread together. What the early church adopted as worship patterns after Pentecost (meeting daily from house to house and breaking bread together) the disciples had been doing with Jesus for three years. Such people-based discipleship models are central to maturing faith in environments of suffering.

Things to consider:

- 1. Compare and contrast how one becomes a leader from your sending culture and within your host culture.**
- 2. Describe a person through whom truth can be transmitted into the local culture, be they religious or secular.**
- 3. Choose apostles from a large pool of disciples.**
- 4. Discipleship needs to shift from a literate program to one of relationship. Jesus modeled a mentoring relationship that was 24/7.**

5. In persecution, the quickest route to leadership is to bring others to Jesus. Note the role that evangelism plays in becoming a leader in your setting.

6. A key finding is that disciples are chosen by the one who will disciple them. It is suggested that “Paul” chooses “Timothy” as Jesus chose the Twelve. The mentor chooses the disciple; the disciple does not choose the mentor.

5 Churches Assimilated by the Persecutors.

There are registered churches in most of the persecuted world. Notable are the Orthodox in Eastern Europe, Egypt and Ethiopia; the Chinese or Indian churches in Malaysia, Indonesia and southern India; the Three-Self-style churches of China and Vietnam; and various evangelical and Catholic entities scattered around the world. Buildings and denominations define most of these religious entities. They have an educated and ordained clergy.

Seminaries, training schools and specific doctrinal identities are the norm. Their pastors have degrees. They are conversant with the world of Christian conferences and religious global relations. Their services would be recognizable to a visitor from the West, and their architecture would define them as churches to outside eyes. Most have existed in the midst of opposition for generations. Others can trace their heritage back to the early church era. Many are filled with minority people from within the host culture. They have much in common with churches across the globe and with those found in the Western world.

Usually these churches are isolated in a sea of lostness, where the majority of the people know little that is positive about Christianity. These are minority communities in terms of faith and ethnicity, and they have been in a survival mode for generations. The following are generally true of these registered churches within environments of persecution.

The vast majority of these churches will not encourage or allow a majority person into their worship service. They will not baptize one from a Muslim or Hindu background. They will not fellowship with believers unless they are part of a government registered church. They refuse marriage to believers outside of their racial background. They close their doors to groups that cannot legally worship elsewhere. As a consequence, these churches experience only biological growth.

Often members and clergy from these biological, historical churches will betray converts and congregations from among the majority people to the persecuting authorities. While persecution is expected from outside the believing family, such internal opposition is heartbreaking to those

persecuted. They face persecution from non-believers and alienation from within the believing family. Muslims in the Islamic world, Chinese and Vietnamese in the Three-Self-type world and Hindus in India seldom receive a gospel witness or acceptance from members in these biological churches.

An interview was recorded with the first assistant to the bishop of a large diocese in a predominantly Muslim country. This Christian leader had a PhD in theology and was 35 years old. The population of his area was 80 percent Muslim. He had never had a witnessing conversation with someone from an Islamic background. He candidly shared that the bishop had to personally interview all Muslims who professed interest in embracing Christianity and the bishop had to give written approval to the dozen pastors under his supervision before they were allowed to baptize a Muslim convert.

The communists have learned this lesson well, as have Islam and other entities of persecution. If you cannot annihilate faith, register the church, place it on a piece of property, recognize its clergy and allow structures to emerge.

The persecutors can more easily control Christian communities that are defined by buildings, property, possessions and clergy.

Many of the churches in the former U.S.S.R. experienced this sad reality. Most pastors and religious leaders had to report regularly to the authorities. Some had to report monthly, others weekly. Initially the authorities asked the pastors to limit their congregational activities to the church building proper. Many complied. Later the authorities asked that worship services be limited to a certain number of hours per week. Subsequent interrogations centered on naming those who preached, gave a testimony or sang in the worship service. At first, baptismal records were reviewed. Later the pastor was asked to submit his list of candidates for baptism. Further instructions came insisting that only children of members of like faith be candidates for baptism with no outside conversions allowed. Finally the State insisted that no one under age 25 be allowed into the church service. Many pastors complied with every request of this divisive strategy that gradually brought them under the control of the State.

The findings show that the persecutors are quite successful in getting the church to police themselves on behalf of the persecutors.

In such situations two things occur: the State swallows the church piece by piece and the State coerces the registered church leadership itself to carry out their agenda. Resistance on the part of the church or clergy results in the State twisting the clerical arms by threatening the clergy's livelihood, their children's place in school and closure of the church building or seminary. At bishop level and its equivalent, the State uses seminaries, church property, salaries and personal freedom as a type of blackmail. Where ecclesiology locates church in a building, this covert persecution is highly effective in neutralizing the registered church.

The church in the former U.S.S.R. stayed strong but numerically flat under communism. Adjacent to the U.S.S.R., the church in China experienced remarkable growth under the same political system. Soon after the advent of serious persecution, lay leadership and house churches that were basically non-denominational in identity defined the church in China. They were Chinese churches. Having few structures, the Chinese house churches had little in the material realm that could be used against them. Early within their persecution history the Chinese believers knew there was no compromising with the Communist State. Persecution was that severe. Many in the registered church of the U.S.S.R. believed, some up to the time of freedom, that they could compromise with the State in order to protect the church, often defined by buildings, possessions and position. This enabled the State to consume the church piecemeal.

When queried from the outside by international watchdog agencies, the State explains that they never limited attendance, discouraged visitors or refused to allow youth into the service. They will point to the clergy and suggest that the pastor did this himself. Some pastors acquiesced from the start. Others ignored the State throughout times of persecution. Problematically, many of the religious leaders lived in Romans 13 exclusively and subjugated all else to obedience to earthly powers. Others sought to balance these passages with passages that called followers of Christ to "render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's and unto God that which is God's" and "it is better to serve God than man."

Whenever the church partners with the State, or carries out the orders of the State, the church loses.

Most registered churches in the midst of Islam can function under oppression as long as they stay between the biological lines. Color outside

those lines by evangelizing Muslims, and property will be confiscated, churches closed and pastors imprisoned.

Persecution frequently divides the registered church.

Courage is required for churches to remain faithful when faced with external State pressure, internal membership dissent, racial realities and family needs. Some have remained faithful. It is an emotional experience to worship throughout the former U.S.S.R. in churches that withstood the persecutors. The church is filled with anticipation of the coming service. The pastor enters the sanctuary and the entire congregation stands in honor of the man and the office that remained faithful throughout years of persecution.

Many do resist, but they resist most often when the persecution is directed within a mono-racial community. Few Hindu believers are willing to suffer on behalf of the MBB. The Chinese and Indian believers in a southeast Asian country have suffered for generations, but seldom do they risk on behalf of Muslims hearing the gospel. The evangelical and Coptic churches of Egypt have survived within Islam for centuries. Often they hide any form of Muslim evangelism from their own membership.

These Christian-background churches (CBCs) are found globally. They have lived under oppression, with minority status, some for centuries. It is difficult to imagine in the West what they have endured just to remain Christian in name and worship. The church in the West should be slow to pass judgment. Yet expatriate workers must understand the implications for church planting within persecution when buildings, institutions and ecclesiastical positions define a believing community.

A number of journeys and interviews were necessary to document the pattern of the reluctance of registered churches to evangelize those in their midst. Once this pattern was recognized, reasons for such behavior were sought. The reasons are numerous, but Islamic settings readily illustrate this malady:

- It is common for members in existing churches to believe that Muslims cannot be saved. Many of the members in these registered churches do not want Muslims to enter their homes or their churches and they will do nothing to help them enter the Kingdom of God.
- Some Muslims have faked conversion, fooling and using churches.

- Others ask why they should jeopardize all the church is accomplishing, and related ecclesiastical structures, for a few Muslim converts.
- Non-Muslims greatly fear that Muslims, often from another ethnic group, will enter the church and marry their daughters.
- Church leaders from minority peoples fear losing their positions of influence if the majority peoples come to Christ in substantial numbers.

These are serious obstacles to overcome. Often it takes long-term relationships to give voice to these issues. These brothers and sisters have lived under the domination of Islam, Hinduism, Eastern Orthodoxy or Buddhism for centuries. They have endured.

The skills needed to participate in a church-planting movement are not the same skills needed to survive.

Religious entities in survival mode are extremely difficult to mobilize, though they remain a resource within God's kingdom. They "know these people" and it has been generations since they have seen a sincere convert. One Middle Eastern, CBB brother interviewed stated, "God made hell for a reason. It is not right for you to seek to remove from hell those He created to dwell there." This brother was not referring to individual Muslims. He was describing his thoughts in regard to an entire race of people. Many congregations can quote chapter and verse of Muslim or other betrayal. They can clearly count for you the cost of evangelizing the majority people in terms of closed buildings, jobs lost, church leaders imprisoned and possible riots from their immediate neighbors. They have developed this fortress mentality after centuries of painful experience.

The biggest hindrance to global evangelism is racism.

While some religious bodies are willing to fly to get to the "uttermost parts of the earth," they are less willing to incarnate Christ within their Judea and Samaria, among those of other races on their doorstep. Intermarriage is a huge issue. In one country where the majority of Christians are from the Hindu sweeper class, church leadership wept when they contemplated a movement of God among their Muslim neighbors. Their honesty was refreshing. The church, they stated, was the only place in all of society where they could lead, be educated and have social standing. Outside of the church they are second-class citizens. Now the one place where they could truly be human, the church and its related structures, might be denied them if

large numbers of Muslims turned to Christ and became the majority of the membership.

These are real issues for real people. It echoes the debate between Peter and Paul and the struggle within the early church. Was Christianity to be a Jewish reform movement? What about those Gentiles, let alone the true pagans? There is always tension between Jerusalem, the Gentile believers and the pagans. There is great need for a definition of church that drives any mission enterprise. The more a movement is defined in terms of buildings, property, possessions and clergy, the easier it is for the persecutors to control the people of God. When the believing community defines itself in terms of property, buildings or possessions, and these definitions become ingrained, the church will not need a persecutor. The church will police and limit itself.

Things to consider:

- 1. Carefully list the Christian (CBB) resources in your midst. Note the obstacles in partnering with these long suffering believers.**
- 2. Are the churches in your midst different in race as well as religion from the majority peoples? If so there are two issues that need addressing. One, help the CBBs refocus and become consumed by lostness. Second, confronting racism will demand attention.**
- 3. Consider another look at the Great Commission of Matthew 28. While not denying its call to global evangelism among all the peoples of the globe, look at these passages as Jesus' clear call to a nonracial gospel.**
- 4. The following books will give you insight into the mindset of a church that has lived under oppression for up to 1,400 years. See A Fragrance of Oppression by Herbert Schlossberg, The Arab Christian by Kenneth Cragg and Christians in the Arab East by Robert Brenton Betts.**
- 5. Moving the CBB church from a survival mode to an evangelistic mode is the greatest challenge in developing a partnership to reach lostness.**
- 6. Attempt to mobilize small numbers of key leaders within the CBB church initially. Be slow to pass judgment. Help your sending church in the West model nonracial ministry.**

6 The Missionary Task.

Many issues have been raised pertinent to incarnating Christ where suffering, persecution and martyrdom exist. Local believers repeatedly expressed the following concerns regarding the role of Western cross-cultural missionaries.

Missiologists and others have frequently called for a moratorium on sending Western cross-cultural missionaries. Some local believers might echo that sentiment. These share the view that Western missionaries are ineffective and expensive to send. They deplore the “more is better” missiology that seems to drive missionary numbers from the Western World towards the Two-Thirds World.

There was frequent criticism of those who use English as their primary vehicle for witness and who represent too forcibly the agenda of their sending agency, church or denomination. Local believers label such expatriates as missionary tourists. The perception is that Western cross-cultural workers avoid suffering, desire to be the leaders and isolate their children from the local culture. Coming from literate societies, it is difficult for Western missionaries to operate in oral cultures. These perceptions, difficult at times to document, need an honest hearing.

Local believers in the midst of persecution acknowledge that many expatriate cross-cultural missionaries serve faithfully. They express eternal thanks for those who brought them the gospel and have been partners with them in the faith. The interviews suggest that effective missionaries are those who can bridge cultures with the commonalities of the faith. Rather than cut off the stream of missionaries, Western groups should use mentoring and modeling to prepare them for an effective cross-cultural witness.

North African interviews illustrate some issues for local believers. When MBBs were arrested in a general roundup, the Western missionaries remained strangely silent. MBBs related that they believed the missionaries feared losing visas, their children’s place in school or endangering their platforms. MBBs often relate that they do not know what a Christian

marriage entails or how to raise their children in a Christian home. They depend upon expatriate missionaries to model such relationships openly and naturally within society. But often missionary housing needs and the location of their children in school preclude normal interaction.

Multiple interviews reflect the perception that most expatriate missionaries are incapable, one-on-one, of presenting the gospel in the local language. Many agencies and churches call everyone they send overseas a “missionary,” whether for two weeks or two decades. All are called missionaries, yet the expectation for learning language for those who serve two years or less is too low by most Western agency or church requirements. The perception remains, though, from the viewpoint of local believers who do not distinguish between different categories of “missionary.” The interviews highlight the need for high levels of language capabilities among those serving four years or more. Local believers assume that the title “missionary” includes the ability to communicate cross-culturally.

Information gathered among missionaries supports the perception that they lack communication skills. Five conferences were held, involving approximately 300 expatriate workers who had served four years or more. They represented 15 agencies and churches. When asked about language acquisition, more than 50 percent of these career missionaries admitted that it would be difficult for them to share Christ in the local languages. Most expressed their commitment to continued language acquisition as they had a great desire to share Jesus cross-culturally.

There is no need for a moratorium on sending cross-cultural missionaries from the West. This stand is not good for those who have not heard the gospel nor is it obedient to the Word and will of God. The cross-cultural missionary, grounded in cross-cultural communicative competence (CCCC) can be a vital tool for initiating and encouraging church-planting movements (CPMs) among the lost in environments of persecution. Nothing enhances the effectiveness of the cross-cultural missionary as much as a thorough grasp of the local language and culture.

Cross-cultural missionaries modeling a servant mentality and methodology can fuel church-planting movements.

Major challenges remain where non-government organizations (NGOs) are a necessary “platform” for entering societies within environments of

persecution. NGOs provide vital services through such things as education, food relief, disaster response and human rights advocacy. Often the nature of these NGOs requires them to follow funding from country to country. Seldom do they stay long in one place, and this precludes any depth in CCCC. They have a set methodology that seldom changes, whether they are in Somalia, Afghanistan, North Carolina or France. Their brief time in-country causes them to measure success in terms of the agenda of their donors. Any structures they might leave behind look and feel Western. It is estimated that 75 percent of these expatriate missionaries cannot share their faith unless the seeker already speaks English. If you're working within an area of persecution, you don't want to depend upon an interpreter or literature for your witness.

The effectiveness of the cross-cultural missionary increases as cross-cultural communicative competence grows. Conversely, as CCCC decreases, the incidence of persecution and corrupted Christianity increases.

The findings show in one country that significant numbers of MBBs were arrested and tortured because they had a relationship with the expatriate missionary and because of an ill-advised Christian research publication. Those persecuted were asked in the interview about their relationships to other believers and to the missionary. They stated clearly that salvation and baptism were of a higher quality when received from the hands of the expatriate missionary. They stated that one could not trust a local, even a believing brother or sister, with the knowledge that you also were a believer. The perception was that another MBB could not be trusted. The reality was that no MBB had caused another to face arrest and torture. They had been arrested due to their faith and their relationship to the outsider.

When the missionary takes the lead in evangelism, discipleship and providing worship space in his home, persecution accelerates because of the relationship with the missionary. This approach also can lead to corrupted Christianity.

The goal is to assist faith into second-generation believers and churches. Missionaries want to be effective in personal evangelism and church planting. The interviews suggest that effective evangelism and church planting occur as the missionary mentors local believers in witnessing and planting the church, moving the missionary out of the central role of

proclaimer as soon as possible. Where evangelism and church planting revolve around the expatriate worker, it is difficult for local leadership and reproducing churches to emerge. New believers do not trust each other. They trust the missionary. They cannot generate among one another what they received from the missionary in terms of resources, education and personal relationships.

One field-based expatriate leader suggests that the most difficult task for an expatriate worker is to be the shadow pastor and evangelist. This leader requires those he serves to be effective in evangelism and in planting house churches. For him, effectiveness is achieved when a missionary evangelizes through local believers and leaders, remains in the background and receives little credit for the role he is playing in evangelism and church planting.

One MBB stated that when Muslims approach missionaries for witness they also are seeking extraction, a job and a wife (all of the usual motives.) When he, as a MBB, leads people to Christ he informs them, “I don’t have a job, wife or education for you. I don’t even have an aspirin. I have a cross. Do you want to pick up the cross and follow Jesus?” Another MBB noted that, “All the people who followed Jesus in the New Testament gave up something, while all who follow a missionary today get something.”

Must missionaries be a witness? Absolutely. Must they creatively take advantage of every witnessing opportunity? Yes. Often the cross-cultural missionary arrives among a people where there are no believers, or none who is willing to make himself known to the outsider. Evangelism, discipleship, the functions of the faith and gathering into community must take place.

While local believers ask mission agencies to exercise wisdom in the ways their cross-cultural missionaries incarnate Christ, they are quick to point out the number of expatriate missionaries who are ineffective or unwilling witnesses. Local believers sincerely want the missionary to model being a clear witness for Jesus. They want to see the expatriate taking risks among those who do not know Jesus. This research suggests that the missionary is taking risks among those saved rather than among the lost. MBBs suggest that they want to see missionaries, on whatever platforms, witnessing naturally and normally to that policeman, the clerk in the store, the immigration officer. MBBs suggest that when missionaries take risks to be among local believers, then those local believers pay the higher price for

such risk taking. When the missionary presents a positive, culturally sensitive witness among lost people, then that missionary shoulders most of the responsibility that witness generates in the midst of persecution.

While asking the expatriate worker not to become the primary focus for evangelism, discipleship, baptism and worship, local believers regularly state that the expatriate is often seen as a safe person with whom to have spiritual conversation and debate. The CCCC gifted missionary can generate broad seed sowing at local levels and to an extent that would not be possible were they immersed in the local believing body.

Lay cross-cultural workers from the West often claim they lack the theological background to be intentional cross-cultural witnesses. Local believers suggest that all types of expatriate workers should be called and equipped as intentional witnesses. Yet the cross-cultural missionary needs to borrow a creed from the medical profession to “first do no harm” in relation to those who would seek Jesus and believe. Dying for Jesus is a possibility for all who would follow Christ. Let persecution be a result of a positive Christian witness, not for secondary reasons.

Interviews too often recorded instances where a persecution event was triggered by a relationship with the outsider. When the local believer’s relationship with the expatriate missionary included worship, employment and direct one-on-one discipleship, these often led to premature persecution. Reasons other than witnessing to the Lordship of Jesus. It is suggested here that being persecuted for the missionary is secondary to being persecuted for Jesus’ sake. These interviews call missionaries to be clear and intentional witnesses while exercising sensitive cross-cultural skills. The following report was received that illustrates a positive Christian witness clothed in cultural understanding.

“The other day a Muslim friend came by to see us. As we sat on the couch in the living room he noticed one of our children’s books lying open beside him. He asked me what the words at the top of the page said. I asked him if he could figure it out. Trying to read the English, he guessed, "I love Jesus." "Actually," I responded, "it says ‘Jesus loves me.’" Immediately he asked me how Christians know that. Then he said, "How can Muslims know Jesus loves us?"

I referred him to a conversation we had had a month or two earlier. At that time he had claimed Christians reject all prophets except Jesus. I said, "Do you remember that conversation? You said, 'Islam has more than 120 prophets, why do Christians reject all of them?' The truth is we have many prophets also. We have Abraham, Noah, Joseph, Isaiah and many more. But Jesus is greater than them. If you want to know why we talk so much about Jesus you should learn His story. Do you know the story of Jesus?"

"No," he replied, "only a little. We know only a few things about him. You people say he is the Son of God, but he cannot be."

"In the story of Jesus," I said, "we hear that Jesus always called himself the Son of mankind, but whenever He talked about himself He always spoke as if God were His Father and He called God His Father. Christians call Jesus the Son of God because of what Jesus Himself said and did. If you learn the story of Jesus you will see this," I said.

"But no man can be God's Son," he said.

I replied that "in the language of the Koran, Arabic, the term 'son' always refers to the descendant of a man and woman who had sexual relations. But that is not so in your language. You say 'son of the mouth' for a lid and 'son of the lock' for a key, but no one had sex with the lock in order to produce the key! We call Jesus the 'Son of God' because of what He said and did, not because God had sex with Mary. We do not believe that. If you learn the story of Jesus you can see for yourself who He is."

He then asked me how he might study the story of Jesus. After we talked a while I showed him a New Testament and Torah in his language. I encouraged him to read the New Testament but told him it would only make sense in light of the Torah. He took the Torah and said he would read it. I promised to give him the New Testament when he finished the Torah. However, I am not sure he can read his language well enough to work through it. Perhaps the next time we meet he will be ready to hear the chronological Bible stories.

Some persecutors kill seekers before they get to Jesus. It is heart breaking when a believer is martyred. It is an eternal tragedy when one who would come to Christ is killed before arriving at faith.

Within the Horn of Africa in 1994, Muslim fundamentalists circulated a paper listing 150 names of “Christians” to be killed. When one expatriate worker received the list he was shocked with the systematic plan of elimination and surprised that three of his Muslim workers were on the list. He went with his Muslim workers to the fundamentalist headquarters to bear witness that these three men were “good Muslims” and should not be targeted. The extremists agreed to remove their names from the list. The expatriate worker stated to the fundamentalists that there were not 150 Christians at that time in the capitol city. The extremists replied, “We know that there are no more than 35 to 50 Christians in the city. But we know that if we kill all 150 on the list we will get all the Christians.” They were willing to kill part of the Muslim body in order to protect the whole. They were also willing to kill anything that appeared interested or friendly to the Christian faith.

In environments of persecution, one does not have to believe in Christ to face a severe reaction from within the community. Sometimes simply exhibiting interest is cause enough to be brutalized and rejected. What is needed is a well thought-through, expatriate, cross-cultural witness that creates a safe space. This space would allow the lost, the seeker and the new believer the environment necessary to hear clearly, believe and make informed cross-bearing decisions concerning faith. Persecution cannot be avoided. It is a part of following Jesus. Yet the advent of persecution before faith has a chance to emerge, deepen and be gathered into groups is detrimental to the establishment of first- or second-generation believing communities.

The issue is not whether to send missionaries or if they should be consistent witnesses. The issue is how to partner on mission fields so that Christ is glorified and the kingdom of God expanded and deepened. The following has emerged in a number of environments, which could serve to illustrate this relation between missionary, local believer and witness.

Missionary A and his family have lived for a number of years within environments of persecution. This family has paid the CCCC price. Missionary A’s entire family has been a witness to Mustafa and his family. They share meals, visit and attend social functions together. Witness takes place over many months and in hours of discussing the merits of Islam and Christianity. Christian family is modeled. The time arrives when Mustafa

quietly seeks Missionary A and states that he wants to seriously dialogue concerning the person of Jesus. Missionary A sends Mustafa home with the encouragement that God will send him the answer he seeks. Missionary A has meanwhile disciplined and cultivated a relationship with a number of more mature MBBs. He makes an appointment to see Brother B and tells this brother about Mustafa. By this time, Missionary A knows where Mustafa lives, the name of his wife, the number of children they have and where Mustafa goes to drink tea.

Brother B begins to follow Mustafa. He watches to see if Mustafa is still praying in the mosque. He listens to Mustafa in the marketplace. He begins a casual conversation with Mustafa. If Mustafa is a serious seeker, Brother B will lead him and his family to Jesus. Look what Missionary A has accomplished. He has enabled Mustafa to hear the gospel from someone within his own culture, clearly in his own language. Many of the agendas of coming to the missionary for a job, education, extraction, a wife, etc. are short-circuited. Also the missionary has empowered Brother B to lead someone from within his people group to Christ with the joy that brings. The expatriate worker has modeled evangelism and servanthood.

Missionary A has been a consistent witness himself but he has learned the harder task of being a shadow pastor and shadow evangelist. Mustafa now trusts the one who brought him to Jesus. Also the missionary has avoided the serious theological corruptions of “my baptism and my salvation are better because they came through the missionary from the West.”

There is little that is more difficult for a cross-cultural missionary than to pass off and partner the opportunity of leading another to Christ to a local believer in order to nurture and accelerate the emergence of a church-planting movement.

Brother B and Missionary A can partner at many stages of Mustafa’s pilgrimage. This witness relationship can be handed off to Brother B early or late in Missionary A’s relationship with a Muslim family. As Missionary A has multiple contacts with those similar to Brother B, witness explodes and community emerges. Missionary A is careful not to mix Brother B’s believers with those of Brothers C, D, E, F or G. With this model, evangelism, discipleship and worship will outlive the presence of the expatriate worker.

It is suggested here that the missionary is to serve the cause of witness rather than lead the process. One MBB asked if Western missionaries were willing to be “bait for Jesus,” allowing local believers the opportunity to shape what the kingdom of God would become in their midst. It is further suggested that one of the most damaging things that can happen to new missionaries is for them to gather around them, early in their service, 10 to 15 believers. Often they will spend the vast majority of their time among those already believing to the detriment of the lost hearing the gospel. Of course, if those 10 to 15 are multiplying themselves, then that can be a positive model. Yet the evidence suggests that groups formed around the missionary seldom multiply themselves.

When missionaries lead rather than nurture and serve the reproduction and multiplication of the salvation process by local believers, one informer--one weak MBB betraying others under pressure--can lead to entire networks being arrested. It requires a gifted, spiritually sensitive, cross-cultural missionary to manage relationships on a multiplicity of levels. It takes a servant’s heart to enhance the role of local believers, laying a foundation of trust among the national body itself.

The interviews show that when the cross-cultural missionary takes the lead in evangelism, discipleship and gathering the community, he will be fortunate to be allowed to remain in that environment for six months before being expelled, with all relationships closely scrutinized. If the missionary is willing to be “bait” for the kingdom, witness can flourish at multiple levels for decades. This, as just one example, calls for the missionary to serve--not lead--the cause of evangelism, discipleship and ingathering of the community. This avoids the charges of “foreign religion,” being an agent of the CIA, or of believers being bought with foreign money. It avoids the corruption of the local faith process.

Few practices are more dangerous for the local believer than to be seen regularly entering the expatriate missionary’s home. Only one thing is more problematic: having the expatriate missionary visit them in their community, singling them out.

Two MBBs were interviewed from a Horn of Africa country. Both had fled their country due to the expatriate’s insistence that they either worship in the missionary’s home or allow the missionary to worship with them in their location. This intimate and regular contact with the missionary in the house

church had increased persecution to a high level. They expressed that this increased persecution was a result of missionary practice rather than a result of a positive Christian witness. Conversely, many MBBs pressure missionaries to meet in the expatriate's home or for the expatriate to rent them a place. Neither practice will aid and sustain a church-planting movement.

The wise cross-cultural missionary working in an area of persecution will hesitate before engaging in actions -- such as attending baptism and house church services -- that increase the exposure of local believers. Withdrawal from incarnation at this point is painfully difficult, as is allowing another to lead one's contact to pray the prayer of faith. Yet this allows the church to emerge and forces the missionary to remain among the lost, building a witness that others can harvest.

A verse that the cross-cultural missionary could pray regularly is that of John the Baptist in relationship to Jesus, as recorded in John 4. The missionary, referring to the local believer, should pray, "He must increase, I must decrease."

Citizens of the Two-Thirds World find it difficult to say "no" to the visitor in their midst. Hospitality norms are sacrosanct. In one location in China, local believers always went to jail after the visit of the outsider, if the visit was discovered. When asked why they did not simply tell the outsider to stay away, they were horrified at the suggestion. Believers in the midst of persecution need the freedom to say "not now" rather than "no" to the expatriate in their midst. In a Muslim country where persecution is particularly severe, MBBs endured torture rather than break the hospitality norms of their culture.

A key concept is to empower local believers to be the decision makers. Sensitive cross-cultural missionaries and visitors will candidly discuss the implications of worship, baptismal events and visits. The assumption that the outsider is more aware of local consequences of witness and presence is wrong. Local believers need to have the power to say "no" to the outsider. Permission to say "no" is a tremendous gift and a shift from paternalism to empowerment.

The cross-cultural missionary needs to plan and structure for success, for God to answer prayers. If a church-planting movement breaks out, would

existing protocols of operation sustain or hamper the CPM? One mission agency amidst Islam has worked with approximately 30 MBBs for two decades. Most of the MBBs are extracted. This agency provides housing, education, funds, medical care and children's education to those connected with their agency. In many ways they are to be admired, as these Westerners share their food, their living space and their very lives with MBB families. One day potentially exciting news arrived as a clan elder from this unreached people group, in a nearby low income area, sent word to mission headquarters. This "brother" informed the cross-cultural missionary that he had a few dozen new believers he wanted to bring to the mission compound. The caller needed directions to the mission headquarters.

This was not welcomed news as the expatriate missionaries were short of staff, low on funds and all the apartments were filled. It would be difficult to accommodate more believers. The enquiry proved to be a hoax. When informed that material gain was unavailable, the "converts" said, "Never mind. We heard that if we became Christian all these things were available, but since this is not true, we will stay with Islam."

All involved in the mission endeavor need to incarnate Christ in ways that free the gospel to permeate the entire host society. Expect God to answer prayers beyond the ability of the cross-cultural agency to manage and control. Missionaries often gravitate toward the saved community rather than follow their call to labor among the lost.

One of the most volatile issues affecting expatriate workers and agencies is the practice of hiring local believers to carry out the agenda of the visiting mission entity. Nothing is more dangerous for local believers than the practice of being employed by outside individuals or organizations.

All the believers martyred in one country within the Horn of Africa between 1994 and 1998 had a relationship with NGOs from the West that hastened their martyrdom. The persecutors are aware, as are mission agencies, that many of those finding Christ in the midst of serious persecution do so by working for expatriate Christians. Believers working for outside agencies are more easily identified, targeted, persecuted and eliminated. Every effort should be made to help believers remain in their current jobs or become economically independent of outside funds and control. Helping believers become economically independent has its own set of problems. If word

circulates that local believers are being assisted with businesses, then “converts” will emerge rapidly.

Nothing substitutes for the experience of Pentecost where the emerging community, the church, assumes responsibility for its own.

It is common for missionaries and mission agencies to be expelled from countries awash with persecution. Virtually overnight, local believers who were dependent on these outsiders are left destitute and exposed. This problem cannot be solved by one agency alone. There is always an organization ready to hire competent believers to carry out its agenda, to the detriment of the emerging community. Others actually encourage believers who have a profession in society to leave it and come work for the outside Christian agency.

The expatriate worker should not use the problems outlined above as an excuse not to share in the sufferings of the local believers, in- or outside of persecution. Problems do arise when aid is institutionalized and when such assistance replaces or subverts the responsibility of the local church. Yet missionaries have a responsibility, as family, to stand beside the suffering church. One missionary stated that his family was willing to forego having meat on their table for a month so they could help a local believing family at least have bread on their table. Great wisdom will be needed as personal resources are shared.

One Asian country boasts 600 MBBs. They are gathered in approximately 30 house churches. Missionaries number nearly a thousand. Believers are going to the highest bidder and local believers who hope for an international position replicate Western evangelism methods. Such practices strip away leadership from the emerging church and raise financial expectations far above that which the local church can match.

In a country with 30 MBB house churches, three pastors were asked how many of these house churches were self-sustainable if expatriate missionaries were forced from the country. Two pastors said that three house churches could survive, while the third pastor believed that five would continue in the absence of outside support.

The global church has a spiritual and physical obligation to the persecuted church. That duty does not include making the Two-Thirds World church

dependent upon the outside for funds or structures. Some of the most anti-West local believers are those who have consistently depended upon Western funds and support. They have been stripped of their pride. One of the sins of Ananias and Sapphira was that their use or withdrawal of their material possessions jeopardized the very existence of the emerging New Testament church. Their sin was not simply an example of failed socialism; the way they used their funds jeopardized the very existence of the new congregation. Total interdependence is the hallmark of the emerging first-generation church in the midst of persecution.

The events recorded in the Book of Acts did happen. The early church did support itself. Additionally, the poor emerging churches sent offerings to the believers in Jerusalem, the sending church. Outside agencies must model for first-generation churches that the events within the book of Acts occurred. The church was born in the midst of poverty and persecution, and it flourished through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. The early church evangelized and shared its way into survival.

This study suggests that the bulk of missionary resources are to be used introducing the kingdom of God among the lost. It is the task of the church to care for its own members. In the pre-Pentecost environment in which the Gospels were formed, Jesus did not neglect the temple or the synagogues. Yet the majority of his ministry was directed outside of these structures of faith. He fed, healed, taught and even raised the dead in order to meet real human need and to point to the kingdom of God in their midst. Then when the church emerged in Acts 2, the believers brought all things common and their needs were met from within the fellowship of those same believers.

Outside agencies should not subvert the responsibility of the local church by the inappropriate use of foreign funds.

Mature believers within persecution still ask for outside assistance. They seek the type of support that would broadly sow the gospel while not corrupting the local church and church-planting movements. The greatest demand is for media programs that broadcast the gospel in the vernacular to the broadest lost audience. This type of pre-evangelism benefits the lost hearing the gospel and should address both literate and oral communicators.

The interviews overwhelmingly recorded large numbers of people listening to and watching Christian radio and TV. These broadcasts are too few and

too Western. Often they reflect the ego or agenda of the donor rather than focus on the needs of the lost to hear and believe. Among Islam, such broadcasts are often influenced more by the theological position of the CBB churches than the spiritual needs of Muslims. In some cases this has led to unintentionally humorous observations. One Middle East broadcaster struggled to get funding for a program that would target oral communicators. He received funding for a six-month broadcast that would be in story form, targeting the illiterate. At the end of the six months the donor wrote, asking for “all the letters that the illiterates have written who have listened to the broadcasts.”

In one Muslim country the interviews found conceivably thousands listening to Christian radio. All MBBs interviewed had been influenced by these broadcasts. Yet there were only 1,000 post office boxes for every 1 million citizens. Three of the MBBs interviewed had written to Christian radio programs. All three had been arrested for writing and receiving such correspondence.

In another key Arab country a local MBB professionally surveyed thousands of homes around the capital city. His goal was to see what people were watching and listening. His survey found up to 60 percent of Muslim families in various urban and rural settings were watching Christian TV or listening to Christian radio broadcasts. Wide sowing of the gospel in culturally sensitive formats can measurably increase the opportunity for witness in a country. Often the donors will need to trust that God is multiplying witness through these efforts, as gathering information is difficult and dangerous for seekers and believers in-country.

Further assistance is sought for first-generation evangelists among the persecuted. In most cases a clear distinction is made between support of an evangelist, especially where there is no church, and support of a pastor. The latter is seen as the responsibility of a local body of believers.

The Western church has learned a great deal in regard to making Christ known cross-culturally. Certainly no culture goes to the next, even nearest culture, without a need for cross-cultural communication competence. The Han Chinese are attempting to evangelize their eastern neighbors and the Muslim Hui people. They admit being concerned that, as believers emerge, they are quickly persecuted and many disappear. They are asking for help from the West in providing resources and personnel for understanding Islam

and how to reach their neighbors who are more severely persecuted than they. They admit that they need help in cross-cultural understanding and training.

Other interviews record where believers from an Asian country and church have been embracing the Great Commission with large numbers of their members. They are attempting cross-cultural ministry but their sending church is defined by rigid administration and clergy domination. These Two-Thirds World expatriate workers are imposing their cultural heritage upon other Two-Thirds World peoples, much as the West did generations ago.

Two-Thirds World missionaries are replicating among others the mistakes that Western missionaries make.

One Asian missionary to North Africa was asked to a conference with Western missionaries and local believers. In a dialogue concerning cultural appropriateness, this Asian lady was challenged with some destructive practices and behavior. Little common ground was found between East and West. Eventually the Asian missionary was asked by a Western worker to describe the history of her country in regard to the time when the West first brought Christianity to her country. For many minutes the Asian lady was able to articulate all the cultural mistakes that Westerners made in sharing the gospel in her country. Quietly a MBB turned to her and said, “This is exactly what you are now doing in my country. The West confused their culture with Christianity when they came to your country. You are now unable to distinguish between your Asian culture and the needs for the gospel to be free to move among the nomadic people in my culture.”

Exciting partnerships can develop as the Western, cross-cultural missionary and agency partner with other cultures. These equal partnerships can honestly share mistakes and insights from the past in order to reach a third culture.

A missionary who hails from a Two-Thirds World culture is seldom more willing to embrace another culture without serious attention given to CCCC. Each culture believes its culture and heritage is superior.

Sending agencies and churches may want to revisit the story of Gideon in Judges 7. Gideon understood the superstition and culture of those who opposed Israel. He understood the necessity of having men who would not

flee with their families when the opposition became fierce. Gideon had to have comrades who could operate for long periods of time behind enemy lines, without all the amenities and structures that they had left behind. Three hundred committed and well-trained followers were superior to 32,000 soldiers of questionable commitment. Most of all, Gideon was reminded the battle belonged to the Lord and was not dependent upon numbers in hostile environments.

In the midst of persecution the Father “neither sleeps nor slumbers.” In the darkest corners of the planet, He is making Himself known. Cross-cultural missionaries can partner with God in the midst of persecution as they seek to serve humbly alongside that part of the believing family who bear the greatest consequence for the witness planted in their midst.

Things to consider:

- 1. Increase the missionaries’ ability to operate cross culturally.**
- 2. Develop strategies that keep the missionary among the lost. Focus on lostness.**
- 3. Help missionaries find ways to broadly sow the gospel and remain catalytic to the enterprise, not becoming the center of ministry.**
- 4. Shadow evangelizing and shadow pastoring, by the missionary, through local believers helps avoid the twin theological corruptions of, “My salvation and baptism is better for it came at the hands of the Western missionary.”**
- 5. Use missionary resources to impact lostness and pray that the emerging church will care for its own. Acts did happen.**
- 6. Consult with partners concerning the destructive practice of subsidizing the church in persecution, making it dependent on the West.**
- 7. Define “missionary” and “church” so as to develop clear entry and exit strategies.**
- 8. Acknowledge that apostolic leadership, being “Paul,” might include the ability to walk through local cultures, being seen as an insider. Can an expatriate missionary ever be a “Paul” within cultures so different, especially those defined by persecution?**
- 9. These findings suggest that leadership must address missionary worship needs where there is no church and where it is dangerous for local believers to worship with the missionary. Where do missionaries meet God when persecution precludes gathering?**

10. Recognize that new believers have numerous agendas--education, extraction, a wife, a job, etc.--when they seek out missionaries for salvation. This can be called the “Jesus plus” syndrome.

7 Precedence of Unity in Christ.

The findings are clear. Denominational identities, artificially imported into environments of persecution, especially among first-generation believers, can be harmful to the cause of Christ and the emergence of a healthy, reproducible church. Many believers exist in situations where the church has yet to emerge. They have not experienced Pentecost. Isolated, these believers feel that their salvation was an aberration of history; they are the exception, no one else shares such a spiritual visitation.

God, through His Holy Spirit, enters history in power, gathers the scattered together and gives them community, boldness in proclamation, widespread response and endurance through persecution. Thus the church is born among a people group within their historical matrix. The interviews show that those who were once weak and scattered do develop to become bold, do become one in Christ and tend to share all things common. Vital to this process is the unity that comes by being one “in Christ.” In pre-Pentecost environments believers are isolated, scattered and often afraid. The interviews show that few denominational mission agencies are immersed in environments of persecution.

Sending churches and agencies from the West should be extremely careful in expressing their differences within the family of God before first-generation believers have experienced the unity that is in Christ. Problems develop when personal religious positions are externally imported in the midst of first-generation development and persecution.

The needs of the lost to hear, believe and lead within their culture must always take precedence over the needs of the witnesser.

Please note that the issue here is not doctrinal purity. Sound biblical doctrine is foundational to emerging faith in the midst of persecution. A faith firmly planted in sound doctrine finds strength for the journey. What the interviews suggest as counter-productive are premature alliances with external institutions, identifying oneself with an outside organization before being one in Christ within the local setting. Specific Western-oriented religious identities—denominations or otherwise--can hinder the Spirit’s ability to

unify the church into an instrument for proclamation and community. The more that a structured or organizational identity is shared alongside the gospel story, the more frequently the persecutors refer to faith as a “foreign religion.” The interviews note cases where missionaries overwhelm new believers with prerequisites related to the agenda of a sending agency or church. The findings record too many instances of first-generation believers being baptized two to four times as they pass from agency to agency. Baptism into the religious entity is often the prerequisite for employment and fellowship.

Identity with the body of Christ in environments of persecution is primary over expressing one’s identity with a specific portion of Christendom.

Where expatriate workers have failed to gain access, the church still represents all the divisions known to humankind. Those who read the Bible, test the Spirit and have honest differences of opinion will discover the need to form other groups. These differences deserve to surface from within a believing community that has experienced God as One. These differences should follow the experience of Pentecost, not precede it. Wedding a specific religious identity alongside the basic gospel witness short-circuits unity within the emerging family of God. Such unity is vital to the continued existence and reproduction of the emerging church.

During the many dark years of extreme persecution, the churches of the former U.S.S.R. never completely forgot their denominational identities. As persecution eased, doctrinal differences and their denominational identities naturally resurfaced.

In China, persecution was so severe, especially from 1949 to the mid-80s that outside denominations had little chance of surviving or crossing borders. The Chinese eventually were left with their faith and their Bibles. Demonstrating a faith that is Bible-centered, Chinese in nature, fueled by evangelism and fearless, they have demonstrated an explosion of faith seldom equaled in the history of Christianity.

At the same time, every division known to 2,000 years of Christianity is becoming apparent among the Chinese house-church movements. These differences are a result of an honest living-out of faith and Bible study. These differences were not imposed from the outside. The Chinese have

experienced phenomenal growth under the Communist system. While the churches of the former U.S.S.R. remained strong and faithful, they did not experience large numerical growth, as did the Chinese believers, into widespread, uncontrollable church-planting movements. One reason is the adherence to outside denominations and identities on the one hand and the likely movement to something uniquely and biblically Chinese on the other.

Church-planting movements will eventually develop doctrinal differences that may result in specific religious entities. No record can be found in persecution where institutional differences, imposed from the outside, ever contributed to a church-planting movement.

The challenge here is greater for sending agencies and churches that have strong denominational roots. But para-church groups are not immune from this malady. The challenge for sending agencies and churches is to teach the Word of God in its entirety and trust God that truth will be followed. The challenge is to trust the power of God, His Word and the recipient of witness to receive the Word and witness and make the “right” choices. To allow faith to grow and community to emerge, without imposing additional requirements from the sending partner, will remain a challenge. A commitment to plant New Testament churches must be intentional. Additional structures and alignments will evolve naturally in time. Sending agencies and churches should avoid inserting such agendas into pre-Pentecost environments defined by persecution.

There is another matter that calls sending agencies and churches to reflection. Billions have yet to hear and believe. The missionary task is demanding and vital. When missionaries stay in an area long enough for specific Western institutional entities to emerge, perhaps they have stayed too long. There is no implied, inherent evil in Western, Asian or South American denominational identities. What is suggested by the interviews is for first-generation believers in the midst of persecution to have the opportunity to experience the unity of the faith before divisions among the global Christian body are highlighted.

Inherent in this issue is the definition of the task of a missionary. Mission agencies and sending churches will continue to struggle with entry and exit strategies. The interviews suggest ways to keep the expatriate worker focused upon lostness. The interviews show that when first-generation believers in pre-Pentecost environments express a specific religious identity,

often that identity accompanies employment by outside entities. North Africa, India and the Horn of Africa contain interviews representative of this concern. Leaving a church-planting situation before mature leadership emerges may hinder church-planting movements. Remaining in an area so long that local believers fail to assume leadership is also harmful and may detain the expatriate worker from carrying the gospel to the ends of the earth.

What is advocated through the findings is a missionary lifestyle that will present the gospel clearly, the Bible faithfully and trust the Holy Spirit for the doctrinal soundness of the emerging believer.

Denominations have a strong foundation from which to send cross-cultural missionaries. Christian institutions bring resources to bear that are powerful tools for global evangelism. Serving with biblical and historical convictions lends strength for the journey. Western denominations, agencies and churches should have learned many hard lessons concerning the missionary task. Yet the interviews suggest that each generation needs to call itself to the task of clearly, primarily articulating who Jesus is and assisting believing communities to gather. The Bible and the Holy Spirit can be trusted to bring new believers to fullness of faith. The cross-cultural missionary can exit before all things are accomplished regarding emerging communities. Denominational and institutional identities should remain secondary to assisting a reproducible faith to emerge among a people group in the midst of persecution.

Things to consider:

- 1. It is crucial for various evangelical and Christian entities among your people group to model unity in Christ.**
- 2. Discuss with your evangelical partners ways that cooperation can be enhanced. Many believers are being counted numerous times as each agency reports the same convert when each particular group rebaptizes them.**
- 3. This research suggests a missionary exit strategy that predates the emergence of specific doctrinal positions. Planting New Testament churches remains a priority.**
- 4. The development of clear, working, entry and exit strategies are pivotal in allowing all the world's lost peoples a chance to hear the gospel.**

5. Divisions always emerge as local churches have the space to believe, study the Word and test the Spirit. Having divisions develop naturally, being home grown, is much healthier than their being imposed from the outside.

8 Persecution and Advocacy Issues.

Sending agencies and churches have a substantial challenge in regard to understanding, reporting and praying for the persecuted. The Christian community that monitors and reports on issues surrounding suffering, persecution and martyrdom is theologically diverse. Often the community is not aware that numbers and statistics emerge from definitions that have little agreement across agency, church and doctrinal lines. The problem is pervasive throughout Christianity.

Sending agencies and churches need to be clear in their definitions, accurate in their reporting and constant in their prayer advocacy concerning the persecuted.

Many agencies that monitor persecution, suffering and martyrdom have given totals of Christians who have been martyred for their faith in the twentieth century that are greater than in all preceding generations. They report that hundreds of thousands of Christians have been martyred annually since the 1970s. These statistics cannot be verified by this research. First-hand interviews with persecuted Christians, which included questions about the extent of persecution within their knowledge, do not corroborate the claims of extensive martyrdom in our day. Best computations within the parameters of this research methodology find far fewer people actually killed as martyrs according to the definitions applied in this study. This does not preclude the existence of other martyrdoms that the present study did not discover.

This research includes more than 450 interviews in 48 countries among specifically targeted believers who were known to be persecuted. The Persecution Task Force chose these countries from watchlists where persecution of followers of Jesus Christ is considered normal. One can assume that the information collected would allow the interviewers to learn of many, if not most, documentable cases of true martyrdom. The interviews show that lesser forms of persecution are not necessarily less “effective.” Such persecution is far more widespread and insidious than overt reporting of martyrdom might lead one to believe.

Persecutors are surprisingly effective in neutralizing the witness of believers by methods less dramatic than martyrdom.

Authentic martyrdom strengthens the believing community and enhances witness to Christ. The goal of the persecutors is to silence Christian witness, usually with the minimum level of persecution possible, and without drawing attention to their actions or to the faith of the believers they are persecuting. Persecution defined by imprisonment, torture and martyrdom is often an admission by the persecutors that they have failed to silence believers at a less public level.

Christian sending agencies and churches have an obligation to verify what they publish.

Verification is more than quoting another agency, which may have failed to substantiate its source of information. With all the differences within Christendom, one cannot automatically transfer another's theological definitions into his reporting mechanisms. As mentioned in the introduction, Paul Marshall of Freedom House does the believing community a favor by acknowledging the multiple definitions of "Christian." In the "International Bulletin of Missionary Research," January 1998, he cites five ways that "Christian" is commonly used.

A "census Christian" is a person who would answer that he or she is a Christian in response to a question. "It says nothing at all about what they actually believe..."

A "member Christian" is one who claims "membership in a particular Christian church."

It is not until "participating Christian" that one finds a "Christian" who participates in the life and rituals of a church.

Next are the "committed believers" for whom faith is central in their lives. Often these would refer to themselves as "born again."

Marshall calls another group, quoting David Barrett, "crypto-Christians" who, because of persecution, keep their faith secret.

The numbers of martyrs reported will be related to the definition(s) used from the above list of five.

The word “martyr” derives from the Greek for “martus.” A martus is one who was an eyewitness to an event or to a truth. In the early church a martyr came to be known as one who was killed because of his or her witness. Barrett, in the World Christian Encyclopedia, Second Edition, Volume 1, 2001, helps the believing community with a definition of a martyr. In a phone conversation in 1999, Barrett listed the following “elements” present for one to be considered a Christian martyr. These elements are also included in his glossary in Volume 1, page 29.

The one involved was a follower of Jesus Christ.

He was killed.

He was killed in a “situation of witness,” that is, a witness concerning the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

His death was a result of human violence.

David Barrett has made a serious and positive contribution to the accurate reporting of verifiable martyrs. Yet the problem remains within the Christian community as it interchanges definitions, reports numbers the organization cannot verify and introduces the martyrdom issue undefined into the political and public arena. A common scenario is as follows:

The regime in Khartoum, Sudan, deliberately and indiscriminately murders people in the south. Many factors are involved. The north and south are different in language, religious orientation, race, cultural norms, history and political affiliation. The legacy of colonialism left confused and unnaturally defined borders. There are issues of power, oil and influence. Everyone interviewed from southern Sudan, when asked what would change if the element of Christianity was removed from the equation, responded that nothing would change in their relation to the Khartoum regime. Yet large numbers of “martyrs” continue to be reported from southern Sudan. The justification goes, for illustrative purposes, that 10 villages in southern Sudan were systematically eliminated by bombings, enslavement or forced starvation. Each village is home to 5,000 people. Twenty percent of that area is “Christian.” Therefore, it is reported that Christianity has 10,000 new martyrs.

Reflect on what is not known. It is not known which definition of “Christian” is being used. It is not known if they were in a “situation of witness.” It is not known if the persecutors themselves would list Christianity as a contributing factor within the conflict. Their names are

unknown. Is this genocide? Yes. Must the international Christian community express outrage in this matter, be they animists, Muslims or Christians in the south? Absolutely. Can one clearly defend this as martyrdom? No.

A week was spent in a refugee camp among an ethnic people on the borders of Thailand, Laos and Burma/Myanmar. They, along with the southern Sudanese, are two of the most often-noted groups experiencing severe persecution and martyrdom. These people were also very candid. They have embraced Christianity for at least the dual reasons of the attractiveness of Christ, and for nation building. Their leadership was acutely aware of the role and distinction that religion plays in nationhood. They deliberately chose Christianity as a foil to the millions of Buddhists surrounding them. They, too, admitted that their plight would change little if the element of Christianity was removed.

In reporting persecution, suffering and martyrdom, there are serious flags that must be raised. The findings note that a majority of the persecution reported in the West is due to issues incorporating ethnicity, power politics and inappropriateness in witness. Care must be given to retain a high standard of verification regarding issues as volatile as persecution and martyrdom.

Organizations that generate funds from reporting suffering and martyrdom must be accountable for truthfulness and the management of funds.

The church at large seldom wins when it partners with government in advocating for the rights of its global adherents. Government seldom has the best interests of the church as it formulates policy. Oil-rich states get scant attention in regard to persecution within the corridors of power, while less affluent countries bear the brunt of international condemnation.

Inflated reports of martyrs generate at least two problems. The persecutors know who they have killed for their faith. The believing community must use the highest ethical standard and resist accusing unbelievers of mistreating Christians when motives other than suppressing Christianity were driving the event reported. Second, to highlight unsubstantiated deaths as martyrs cheapens the testimony of those who were truly martyred for their faith and witness.

Is the issue only suffering, persecution and martyrdom? Persecution and martyrdom are evidence that believers and churches exist. The global Christian community has yet to devise terminology for the Saudi Arabias, the Afghanistans and the Kuwaits that are so repressive that believers are unable to emerge. Actually these countries have little persecution as they allow few believers in their midst. Governments seldom make a member state an international pariah solely due to the manner in which Christians are treated inside their borders. There are always other agendas and realities. Rome can make for a deadly enemy. Rome can be even more dangerous as a partner.

The persecuted deserve any sensitive and secure advocacy that can be generated. Persecution is sinister and pervasive. It is endemic in much of the believing world. It is difficult to legislate against, as its most evil forms reside in the family unit. When the persecuted speak of any debt owed to the Western Christian world they highlight the debt of prayer that has been given on their behalf. Advocates for the persecuted may need reminding that partnerships with secular governments are no substitute for the power of prayer.

It is not uncommon for organizations that monitor and report on persecution to have the twin goals of eliminating persecution, coupled with a desire to punish the persecutors. Neither goal is biblically centered.

The persecuted seek Spirit-filled prayer advocates. They cry for others to intercede on their behalf and to stand alongside and suffer with them, where and when appropriate. Advocacy is most helpful after believers are arrested or in danger of losing their lives. Premature intervention often informs the persecutor about who, what and where to investigate.

During the U.S.S.R. era, one prominent monitoring group in the West wanted to intercede for some of the suffering congregations in an Eastern Bloc country. Attempting to hide the identity and location of those being persecuted in the southeast of the country, they invented a fictitious community of believers in the northwest. The government, on the basis of the report, uncovered multiple house churches in the northwest of which no one but God had previously been aware. A prominent researcher noted in his publication that approximately 200 believers existed in a hard core Muslim

country. The Muslim authorities obtained a copy of the missionary publication. They arrested and tortured scores of believers and workers surrounding the only expatriate Christian institution in country, in an attempt to uncover these 200 subversives.

The believing community needs to forego publishing in the secular realm what belongs in their prayer closets.

The lust for instant information needs to be balanced with well-researched reporting. One key element missing in Barrett's research is that martyrdom must stand the test of time. God will not waste the witness or the blood of His children. One of the clearest "tests" concerning martyrdom is what transpires within the believing and unbelieving communities following the death of a follower of Jesus Christ. Sometimes this witness takes many months or years to emerge. Instant reporting of a supposed martyrdom can feed agendas that become difficult to manage or recognize. Jesus calls the believing community in Luke 4 to be personally present and involved in the plight of the hungry, the diseased, the lost and those in prison.

It is a suffering to be shared, more than a news item reported from a safe distance. The witness of the one martyred will stand the test of time.

It is the nature of religious organizations to perpetuate themselves by raising funds and generating personnel. There is a drive to publicize needs, generate prayer, enlist new personnel and raise the necessary resources to accomplish godly tasks. What these findings suggest is that "numbering Israel" is always a challenge and often has the opposite effect to that intended. God so sought to protect His own children in the first century church that He did not allow the New Testament to be disseminated in literate form, accessible to the general public, until those named in its stories were already with the Lord or out of harm's way. Is this a principle of biblical revelation that Western literates need to take to heart?

Perhaps one lesson we should take from biblical revelation is that testimonies of the persecuted should be held in oral form for the current generation and translated into literate form only for succeeding generations.

Sending agencies and churches must understand the nature of persecutors and the depths that evil will reach. Countries like Somalia will welcome the Christian community and allow believers to feed the hungry, clothe the naked and spend their millions on the down and out. These kinds of countries will allow believers to come and stay until witness begins to bear fruit. When fruit emerges, persecution intensifies until believers are martyred and the expatriate worker is driven out. Countries like Saudi Arabia are different. These persecutors will not let you cross their borders. They will not let you spend your time nor your millions. If they discover that you have any spiritual agenda, they will stop you at the border and never grant legal entrance.

Then there are countries like North Korea who do not allow one to gain entrance and spend quality time among the lost. Neither do they simply stop believers at the border, denying entrance to well-meaning gospel transport entities. The North Koreas of this world will not hesitate to cross borders to murder, kidnap and harass anyone who hints that he might have a different message, a word of grace or of hope. All of the above can be deadly in their persecution. Reporting mechanisms, especially those within sending agencies and churches, must be aware of the potential for persecution inherent in the task. Many field personnel have a low level of trust in their home headquarters where matters of security and publicity interact. If field personnel and local believers cannot verify reports of persecution, suffering and martyrdom, reporting bodies must resist placing such speculation in literate form, especially among the general public.

The persecuted and field personnel should determine if and how field events are reported.

In many ways the findings from China were remarkable. Chinese Christians were so isolated they knew little about believers in other countries. They were shocked at the level of persecution their brothers and sisters in other countries had to endure. Following long periods of interviews, house church leaders would ask the interviewer question after question concerning believers in the outside world. These isolated believers wept over the stories shared from countries within the Horn of Africa and the Middle East. At six o'clock the following morning the interviewer was awakened early by voices crying out to God. It did not require fluency in Chinese to pick out the names of the countries shared the previous day. These house church leaders arose an hour earlier every morning to intercede on behalf of their

brothers and sisters they had never met nor heard of until the day before. This is advocacy.

In the ebb and flow of history, sending agencies and churches must do their homework. They must be slow to publish and quick to understand the opposition. Evil is not static and fixed. It assumes many shapes and forms and it is seldom frustrated by anything less than the incarnation of Christ Himself, evidenced through the Holy Spirit and through His children. Amnesty International and the U.S. State Department's annual report on human rights should never be the conduit for clear and accurate information among the believing community. The reality of persecution, suffering and martyrdom should be included in the balanced diet of all believers, not simply those in the Two-Thirds World. Such missiology is the rightful heritage of all the children of God.

Sending agencies and churches should handle information and pray as if lives hang in the balance, because they do. As persecution, suffering and martyrdom visit the community of faith, let it be for Jesus. No other cause is of real worth.

Things to consider:

- 1. Do not contribute to the reporting of persecution stories and martyrdoms in your particular geographical location unless you can substantiate them.**
- 2. List ways that churches in freedom can advocate for those believers in persecution, without making their plight worse.**
- 3. This research suggests that a primary dependence upon government alliances, interceding for the persecuted, denies the power of prayer.**
- 4. The West needs to intercede and to stand beside the persecuted in their suffering. Suffering is to be shared.**
- 5. Much of the advocacy for the persecuted should be kept in oral forms.**
- 6. In all levels of evangelical life--the family, church, Christian schools--the reality of persecution, suffering for Jesus and martyrdom needs to be taught, preached and modeled.**

9 Toward a Missiology of Suffering.

Missionaries from the West must embrace a lifestyle that represents a biblical view of suffering, persecution and martyrdom.

In places of suffering, persecution and martyrdom, there is a great need for caution, discernment and a deep concern for those who respond positively to a clear gospel witness. This caution need not become paralyzing.

“Missionaries have taught us to be afraid,” was frequently recorded in interviews with local believers. Western missionaries often hold a non-biblical missiology of suffering. The interviews sought to capture and understand the relationship, where it existed, between local believers and expatriate workers. What effect did the presence of expatriate workers have on the security and safety of local believers? Those interviewed called for the cross-cultural witness to exhibit the confidence of faith and the power of the Holy Spirit in situations defined by persecution.

There is perhaps no greater challenge for sending agencies and churches than recapturing the biblical call to cross bearing, accepting with joy the suffering that accompanies a positive Christian witness. The security and safety of missionary personnel is a weighty matter for those who send. If, however, it is the most important agenda item, stated or unstated, then sending missionaries to places where persecution is the norm should be questioned.

The nature of witness among the persecuted has the missionary asking seekers and new believers to place themselves and their families at risk for the sake of the gospel. Shared suffering validates both the message and the messenger. Asking others to place their lives at risk while the witness resides in relative safety undermines the validity of the testimony and calls into question the missionary’s moral right to witness.

Sending bodies need to be clear. They are sending their representatives out as “sheep among wolves.” Missionary safety is important. Yet the interviews show that missionary safety should become secondary to the goal that all peoples hear and have the opportunity to respond to the gospel of

Jesus Christ. Churches must recapture the biblical truth that positive responses to the gospel and persecution have always been biblical and historical partners. For millions of believers in the world, persecution is the norm. Persecution is neither sought nor avoided. Persecution just is.

The implications of these findings require biblical preaching and orientation at all levels of church, agency and Christian life to develop, teach and model a theology and missiology of suffering.

Interviews highlight, and conversations with expatriate workers confirm, that missionary fear is manifested in various manners. In country there is concern for continued residency in the host environment. Typically, missionaries are afraid of being arrested, of having to leave the country or of losing their visas. Great is the concern for the missionary kid (MK). According to local believers, missionary effectiveness is enhanced by the integration of MKs into their parents' ministry and into the local setting. Location of housing, access to medical care and school opportunities are a few of the issues that interfere or can interface with incarnation and identification.

Living with the constant threat of persecution is not a normal life experience for the expatriate worker born and trained in the West. There is little to prepare one for evil so intense that it attacks the fruit of missionary labor. Most Westerners are victims of hearts so tender that they cannot fathom, in essence, being a partner with persecution where suffering is a natural result of a successful, cross-cultural witness. Westerners do not want others to experience a level of suffering that they are not willing, prepared or called to endure.

The book of Acts and modern settings of severe persecution are indicative of pre-Pentecost environments. Before community becomes self-sustaining, the basic unit of witness is the family. A non-believer needs to observe Christians, expatriate workers, as family. How God calls and uses missionary families to reach and encourage emerging believing families is a significant issue. Western missionaries need to struggle with a call as family, not simply as a husband and wife.

A pastor's son in the former U.S.S.R. related a story of family faith that illustrates this issue well. His father, who was a pastor, knew that he was facing imprisonment. The night before his arrest he gathered his wife and

children in his arms in the kitchen, the only heated room in the house. Through his and his wife's tears he told his children, "Throughout this region the government is hanging those who profess to be Christian. If, while I am in prison, I hear that my family has been hanged for their faith in Jesus, I will be the most proud man in that place."

An elderly woman related in another interview that her grandfather, an evangelical minister, was taken to prison in 1917. He disappeared a few days later and they did not discover his true fate until the mid-1980s. The day after his arrest, his wife and granddaughter took some warm clothes and food to the prison. Through the prison wire the minister pressed a scrap of paper into his wife's hand as he touched her for the final time. Arriving home, she saw that the scrap of paper had directions for them to dig in a certain spot in the yard. There she uncovered the family Bible her husband had hidden just before his arrest. In it he had carefully marked his final words to his family from Revelation 2:10, "Be faithful unto death." The family discovered decades later that this man of God had been martyred two weeks after his arrest.

Though the granddaughter was now over 80, her family, including her grandchildren, had never completely heard her story. They were spellbound as she chronicled the suffering of her family, produced photos and documents illustrating the terrible years of persecution. The entire family wept at the conclusion of the narrative, prayed together and vowed to remember their rich Christian heritage. Witnessed in this interview was the passing of a missiology of suffering from one generation into the succeeding generation. This family had inherited a missiology of suffering.

Are such experiences to be sought? Those interviewed would question the sanity of anyone who desires persecution. They suggest that persecution is often hard on the body and the soul. Persecution can be defined by loneliness, deprivation and loss. One Eastern European leader who had suffered greatly stated that persecution is, "never fun."

The goal is not to put families or innocent MKs at risk. The challenge is to embrace and incorporate a missiology of suffering into the believing and serving matrix. This can lead to more appreciation of what the missionary presence and witness is calling the recipient of the message to place at jeopardy. Dare Western sending agencies and churches send their missionaries cross-culturally, advocating a faith filled with sacrifice and

suffering that is unfamiliar and avoided in the West? For the sake of the gospel, dare we not?

Candidly, most of the missionary fear is directed externally. They are not afraid for themselves. They are afraid for the local believer. Missionaries often are unprepared to learn that the consequences of their witness are more serious for the one receiving the witness than for the expatriate sharing the witness. Often the end result for the missionary is expulsion from the country. Realities for the new believer could include loss of job, children being removed from school, imprisonment, torture and death.

This is how Satan works. He attacks one's fruit.

This fear can lead to a timid witness. Missionaries need maturity and spiritual toughness when the fruit of their witness is required to walk through the fires of suffering. The missionary needs to resist the almost automatic attempt to rescue them. A large percentage of the persecuted are being extracted, in some places up to 70 percent. Findings show that emigration to the West, for the benefit of a better life and to escape persecution, is devastating the emerging and existing church.

Organizations have arisen globally that report, measure and intercede on behalf of the persecuted, often with the intent of eliminating persecution and punishing the persecutors. A biblically sound missiology and theology of suffering might lead to a different focus. Persecution is biblically and historically normative for the emerging Church; it cannot be avoided or eliminated. The task is to reduce persecution for secondary reasons. Believers in the midst of persecution, victorious in their walk with Christ, share many commonalities. Two of the most important issues are that they have claimed their freedom and they have lost their fear, as was noted earlier. Such components of faith are foundational to incarnating Christ within environments of persecution.

Ministry among the suffering and persecuted requires a spiritual sensitivity that is centered in the will and ways of God. Those who know that Joseph is in Pharaoh's prison have the responsibility to intercede on his behalf, but should the believing community remove him from such unfair incarceration before Joseph has had the chance to interpret Pharaoh's dream? As the Last Frontier is more fully embraced, there is a foundational need for the Western church, sending agencies and their cross-cultural missionaries to revisit the

fact that suffering, persecution and martyrdom have always accompanied real response to the gospel.

To embrace suffering that is a result of a positive Christian witness is to enhance the growth of the Kingdom of God.

Things to consider:

- 1. Describe for your family, for those you lead and serve, what a missiology of suffering would include. Decide what the acceptable risks are for missionary families that include children.**
- 2. Strive to design ministry that revolves around the entire missionary family.**
- 3. Lead those you lead to accept that suffering is normal. Reread the Bible, noting the normalcy of suffering for righteousness.**
- 4. Discuss with your family and colleagues what it means to be “sheep among wolves.”**
- 5. Discuss with your sending agency or church the responsibility of the sender, one who sends others to be sheep among the wolves.**
- 6. Discuss how believers might lose their fear.**
- 7. Note that, generally, the chief means of spiritual attack on missionaries is when Satan attacks their fruit.**
- 8. Remember that it takes great spiritual sensitivity and toughness to leave Joseph in Pharaoh’s prison so that he can be the salvation of both Israel and Egypt.**

Conclusion

Luke 12:48b says, “From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked” (NIV). The Church in the West has been entrusted with many resources vital to expanding and deepening the kingdom of God. Resources that encompass money, employment, the provision of education and a life in the West pale sadly against the gift of prayer and the giving of sons and daughters. The call of the cross looms large over a civilization comfortable and affluent by the world’s standards. This includes most of the churches in the West.

The persecuted call the sending agencies and churches in the West to prayer, to sacrifice and to partner with their sufferings. They call Western believers to sacrificial living as they reach those Muslims and other non-Christian peoples living in the West, as they attempt the same across cultures. The persecuted speak appreciatively of those who brought them the gospel. They acknowledge that their suffering would be unlimited except for the millions of prayers offered on their behalf, especially in the past decade. They continue to challenge the West by asking that we “not feel sorry for them, as they have never felt so close to Jesus as when they were suffering for their faith.” Persecution is normal and the price paid for following Jesus.

Many believers globally do not ask for deliverance from suffering. They ask to be faithful through suffering.

They ask the West to be aware, to pray, to advocate and to become partners in their suffering. One believer in Eastern Europe was a young man when his minister father was imprisoned and tortured. His and two other families lived in the basement of the church for 10 years. He also went to prison for his faith as he served the church of Jesus Christ under communism. This believer related that he “took great joy that he was suffering in prison so that believers could be free in other countries to practice their faith.” He understood and spoke eloquently about the inter-connectedness within the Body of Christ. His was a call, not to work harder, but to labor smarter. His, as others, was a call to empathy, to prayer and to shared sufferings. He called the West to love and share the gospel with no strings attached, making

all else secondary to making Christ known among those eternally lost. This brother suggests that there is no “free” or “persecuted” church. There is simply the Church where Jesus is Lord, both free and persecuted at all times throughout history. This book and ministry represent a call to honor those who carry particularly heavy crosses so that all people might have a chance to hear clearly about the grace of Jesus Christ. Faithfulness is the issue, whether believers live in countries defined by persecution or freedom.

Finally, a colleague suggests a typical believer’s response in the face of evil and persecution. He suggests these responses deepen as we assume the nature and mind of Christ. They are:

“Lord save us.”

“Lord judge them.”

“Lord forgive them.”

“Lord forgive us as we forgive others.”

“Lord, above all else, glorify Yourself.”

Servants in the Crucible Glossary

Believer--commonly called a Christian in evangelical circles; here refers to a person who has made faith in Jesus Christ as Lord for life.

Cell church--small bodies of believers, usually four to 10 per group, which meet where persecution is particularly severe or where house churches have yet to emerge.

Christian--a follower of Jesus Christ, born again by faith. Most commonly Christians will live according to the teachings of Jesus and the Bible and they will share their faith with others whenever possible.

Christian-background believers (CBBs)--denote multi-generational Christians who normally experience internal, biological growth and are defined by buildings, a specific religious identity and are clergy led.

Chronological Bible storying--a method of reproducing the Bible for oral communicators and for literate persons in environments of severe persecution where it is dangerous to possess literate materials.

Church-planting movement (CPM)--a rapid and exponential increase of indigenous churches planting churches within a given people group or population segment.

Cross-cultural communication competence (CCCC)--the ability to transmit truth across cultural differences.

Extraction--the removal of a believer by an expatriate worker from an environment of persecution to another country and culture.

House churches--small bodies of 10 to 30 believers who function fully as a church--self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating.

Martyr--a follower of Jesus Christ who was killed in a “situation of witness” as a result of human violence. A martyr must stand the test of history.

Muslim-background believer (MBB)--a believer from Islam who has decided to follow Jesus as Lord.

Persecution--a negative reaction by government, ideologies, society and family to the presence of Christ, incarnated through a positive witness by believing individuals and communities.

Pre-Pentecost--that time in spiritual history among a people group before the Holy Spirit gathers scattered believers into sustainable communities.

Second generation--represents when faith has moved from the individual to the corporate, from parent to children and from pre-Pentecost to Pentecost.