

Doctrine Persecution

Are we prepared for persecution? Herbert Schlossberg, author of the soul searching and important book, *A Fragrance of Oppression. The Church and Its Persecutors*, published by Crossway Book Wheaton, Ill., asserts that persecution is the norm for the church. Already the writer of the book of Hebrews encouraged his readers to stand steadfast in the faith in the midst of persecutions, and he held up as their examples the lives of the Old Testament prophets (Hebr. 11:32-12:12). Our Lord Himself warned that His followers would face hardship for His sake. "They will deliver you up to tribulation, and put you to death and you will be hated of all nations for my name's sake" (Matthew 24:9). Wherever Christians take seriously the implications of their faith, reaction will follow. Effective Christian word and deed witness often takes place within an arena of confrontation. Why be surprised about persecution? We are involved in a fierce spiritual battle-the forces of Satan versus the force of God. Schlossberg argues that conflict between Christians and civil governments is inevitable because both compete for souls. That is why in the U.S.A. state governments have often come down hard on private Christian schools. Persecution is one of the norms of the Christian life. It is nevertheless unjust and illegitimate. Never has the church suffered so much persecution as in our so-called enlightened century. Schlossberg gives concrete examples of the suffering Christians experience, especially in Muslim dominated countries. Islam is by its very nature militantly anti-Christian. Intolerance toward other religions is deeply rooted in Islam. Muammar Gaddafi, the Libyan dictator put it this way in Rwanda in May 1985: "Africa must be Muslim. Christians are intruders in Africa and are agents of colonialism. We must wage a holy war so that Islam will spread in Africa." Yet Muslims demand religious tolerance for their faith in the West.

The blood of the martyrs has been called the seed of the church. Churches have grown in times of persecution. No one is willing to lay down his/her life for a cause he/she does not know whether or not it is true. Churches in duress have no lukewarm members. Christians faithful to the Gospel have a dual responsibility Schlossberg observes, "One task is to prepare ourselves-spiritually and intellectually-for the persecution the church will inevitably suffer in the future. The other is to continue to recognize our identity with fellow members of the Body of Christ and redouble our efforts to help them.

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