

PERSECUTION, ADVOCACY AND MISSION IN THE 21ST CENTURY *Reg Reimer*

“... WAIT A LITTLE LONGER. . .” (From Rev. 6:11)

Introduction/Scope

Oppression and persecution have been the lot of the church from its founding and the scripture informs us will be until the final climax. This kind of suffering has become much more visible and/or noticed in recent years than formerly. It behoves those of us in mission to understand the phenomenon - its root causes, its types and manifestations, in order to know how to act in it and teach others how they may respond.

Some reference will be made to the much-needed theology of suffering, the mystery of suffering, though in our scope it can only be suggestive.

We will also speak to the question, “If persecution is the church’s lot, God’s will, in this age, and since the church often grows during persecution should we interfere to try to ameliorate its painful and harmful effects?” Or, “Is it Christian to struggle for human rights such as religious freedom?” I come out for advocacy.

We will provide some practical suggestions on how mission and missionaries may be involved in helping support and advocate for the persecuted church. Some do’s and don’ts.

Some Definitions

The Worldwide Phenomenon of Persecution

Its ideological, political and religious sources – from humanism, to communism, to the world’s other great religions (Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, etc)

The Anatomy of Persecution

Kinds or typology of persecution - such as from ideology, from the state (government) from community, from family, or from unwise conduct or unnecessary boldness. Either here or under the topic above I need to give considerable attention to Islam and communism.

The Effects of Persecution

Including personal, community and on the church body. Some positive but negative prevails I’m afraid.

Christian Response to Persecution

Historic ones include flee, fight (resist) and the one most commonly described in the scriptures, endure! Will include some theology of suffering.

Advocacy for the Persecuted

This is an expansion of the fight or resist mode of responding to suffering. To include a discussion of human rights and the Gospel emphasizing dignity (image of God) reasons rather than rights as a demand approach.

Missionaries and Advocacy

Inherent in the Gospel they bring, missionaries contribute to sewing the seeds of destruction to all kinds of totalitarian regimes which would deny or denigrate the Imago Deo in his human creation. The long-time Evangelical shibboleth that missionaries are not involved in politics is a fallacy using the broad definition of politics as the way human organize their relationships.

By personal and organizational division of labour, missionaries have been and are involved in advocacy for the persecuted. What are appropriate precautions? What are the limits of the Western approach for to place personal safety at the top of the list?

The Victorious End

Revelation 8.