

Reality Check: Don't Forget Your Persecuted Brothers

Last week many of our brothers and sisters lost their lives for Christ. How should we respond to the cry of the martyrs?

Last week while millions of Americans crammed into theaters to see *Alice in Wonderland* in 3-D, many Christians in other parts of the world were attacked, raped or killed for the cause of the gospel.

This past weekend I received an urgent message from my friend Christopher Alam, a evangelist, who was writing from Southeast Asia to inform me of a terrible atrocity in Myanmar.

"As long as our brothers and sisters are dying for Christ in other nations, we cannot take off our armor or live in a fantasy world of prosperity and instant blessing."

He told me that a Burmese husband and wife who have been planting churches in rural areas were brutally assaulted by

local military

forces. The wife was raped by a gang of Buddhist men who were upset because

locals had converted to Christianity and destroyed their Buddhist idols.

Said

Alam: "Monks at the local Buddhist monastery reported the Christians to the

local military authorities. The military and some Buddhist thugs then attacked

the Christians, beat them up, destroyed their property and threw them out of

the town. These believers were forced to flee to the jungles, where they are

right now." About 100 people from 20 families are now without shelter.

The

tragedy in Myanmar occurred just days before Muslims in northern Nigeria went

on a rampage on March 7 and killed an estimated 500 Christians with machetes

and other crude weapons. Christian leaders in the area told *The New York*

Times that the militants were chanting "Allah is great" as they broke into

houses, sliced up women and children with knives and burned down houses.

The

newspaper said Nigerian police in the city of Jos had arrested 200 people in

connection with the killings, and they confiscated 14 machetes, 26 bows,

arrows, 3 axes, 4 spears and 44 guns. They also reported that at least one of

the attackers admitted being a member of the al-Qaida

terrorist network.

Just

four days after the Nigerian massacre, six Pakistanis who worked for the World Vision organization in Pakistan were shot and killed by Islamic militants in the city of Oghi, north of Islamabad. A spokesman for the charity said about 15 gunmen arrived at the Oghi office on March 10. They dragged the aid workers, four men and two women, one-by-one into a room and shot them at point-blank range.

What

should our response be to grim reports like these? Typically we feel helpless.

After all, Myanmar, Nigeria and Pakistan are on the other side of the world. It seems easier to just forget the pain since we are so far away.

But

actually God calls us to stand in spiritual solidarity with our persecuted brethren. When the children of Israel were about to enter the Promised Land, Joshua gave a clear directive to the tribes of Gad, Reuben and Mannaseh who were already settled on the east side of the Jordan. These people had their territory; they could have just excused themselves from the battles ahead.

But

Joshua told them: "You shall cross before your brothers in battle array, all you valiant warriors, and shall help them until the Lord gives

your brothers rest, as He gives you,
and they also possess the land which the Lord your God is
giving them" (Joshua
1:14-15, NASB). The people of Gad, Reuben and Manasseh were
not allowed to enjoy
their peace and freedom until their brothers had possessed
their territories.

In the same way, we do not have permission to kick back
and relax just because it's easy to be a Christian in the
United States. As
long as our brothers and sisters are dying for Christ in other
nations, we
cannot take off our armor or live in a fantasy world of
prosperity and instant
blessing. We have these practical obligations:

1.

Pray for the persecuted church. I encourage American believers
to adopt at least
one country in prayer. You may sense a particular burden for a
nation where
Christians suffer. (The Lord has placed Iran on my heart and I
gather
information and news reports about it so I can intercede
intelligently.)

2.

Give to persecuted believers. Many missionary organizations
are working today in
sensitive countries to plant churches, provide literature and
train leaders.
Ask the Lord which ministries you should support. Open Doors
(<http://www.opendoorsusa.org>)
and Voice of the Martyrs (<http://www.vom.org>) are two excellent
organizations that serve the suffering church. Visit their Web
sites to sign up
for updates and to fund strategic projects.

3.

Visit your suffering brethren. Brother Andrew, founder of Open Doors, told me that the most important thing he could do for persecuted believers is to spend time with them and encourage them. They need to know we care. While travel into sensitive areas is not always advisable (and you should seek plenty of pastoral counsel before going), it is possible for us to visit many of the places where the church is under attack.

We live in a time when God is shattering our American fantasy world and jolting us back into reality. Let's stay sober. Please don't turn a deaf ear to the cries of our brothers and sisters who are on the front lines.

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Holy Spirit Is Not for Sale, is now in stores.