

The Line Is Drawn

When I was in China in January I interviewed a brave senior leader of the underground church to learn how God has used her to plant churches all over Henan Province. When my friend and mentor Barry St. Clair asked “Sister Deborah” what kind of training he could provide her youth leaders if he returned to China, she didn’t have to think long before answering.

“We need two things,” she said immediately. “First, we need to know how to train teen-agers in Christian discipleship. Second, we need to know how to gain access into closed Muslim countries like Afghanistan and Kazakhstan. We want to send teen-agers there to plant churches.”

This has been Sister Deborah’s strategy for many months. While she and her co-workers in the unregistered church have seen phenomenal success reaching China—at the rate of 25,000 converts per day—they believe they will soon gain the freedom to go from China as missionaries. She is grateful for the imprisonment, torture and harassment she has suffered in China because, she says, it has prepared her for future ministry in an even more hostile environment.

When China gains political freedom, she will not relax. She plans to take the gospel to some other country where Christians are tortured and killed. “To reach the Muslims, it takes the ability to endure hardships so we can understand and relate to them,” Sister Deborah said.

I felt ashamed as I listened to this woman’s selfless

commitment. During her years in prison she was beaten and shocked with electric cattle prods. Today she can't live in her own house with her family because police will arrest her if she is identified. Yet her eyes light up when she talks about the next risk she must take.

When I returned from my trip I couldn't help but notice the difference between Christianity in China—where serving the Lord is a daily sacrifice—and in the United States, where our message is so self-absorbed. The “gospel” we preach here is nauseating at times:

- * Recently I learned that a prominent evangelist routinely double-books speaking engagements and then determines which church plans to pay a bigger honorarium. Then he cancels the church that is offering the smaller amount.

- * At many popular charismatic conferences, celebrity speakers demand luxury accommodations and five-figure speaking fees. Then when they “minister” on the platform, they fake the anointing by pushing people to the ground after praying for them.

- * So much of what is preached on the charismatic conference circuit is self-centered drivel. It's all about using God to get “my breakthrough,” “my blessing” or (the worst yet) “my anointing.” There's no brokenness in the preacher's voice, no surrender in his tone and no cross in his message.

I think God is drawing some lines today. The handwriting is on the wall. Ministries in this country that are focused on money and ego are coming down. God's people are sick of what doesn't satisfy. What we want is the true message of Jesus, modeled by

selfless leaders who are willing to walk through the fire until they become consumed with God's agenda alone.