Martyrs of Jesus – Rev. 17:6
“They have conquered Satan by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony – for they loved not their lives even unto death.” – Revelation 12:11

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Living Bulwark is committed to fostering renewal of the whole Christian people: Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox. We especially want to give witness to the charismatic, ecumenical, evangelistic, and community dimensions of that renewal. Living Bulwark seeks to equip Christians to grow in holiness, to apply Christian teaching to their lives, and to respond with faith and generosity to the working of the Holy Spirit in our day.
“I tell you, my friends, Do not fear those who can kill the body…” Luke 12:4

Intro to this issue

The Christian martyrs throughout history have much to teach us and to encourage us in our call to take up our cross each and every day to follow the Lord Jesus Christ.

This issue focuses on the lessons we can learn from the Christian martyrs of yesterday and today.

“We live in the greatest period of persecution in the history of Christianity. In the twentieth century, noble martyrs like Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Blessed Jerzy Popieluszko gave their lives for Christ amid a cloud of witnesses greater in number than those martyred for the Name in the previous nineteen centuries of Christian history. That witness continues today in the self-sacrifice of men like Shahbaz Bhatti, a Christian cabinet officer murdered because of his defense of the religious freedom of all of his fellow Pakistanis. As Evangelicals and Catholics who seek to honor the witness of these and other martyrs, we pledge to work together for the renewal of religious freedom in our countries and around the world.”

quote from Evangelicals and Catholics Together: In Defense of Religious Freedom

Sincerely in Christ,
Don Schwager
editor
Martyrdom – For You and for Me?

by Tom Caballes

A few years ago my father-in-law passed away. He was 86 years old and he had lived a good life. Before he died, he was able to be reconciled with his loved ones and was able to prepare well spiritually. For me, that was a good way to die – all set and ready to meet his Maker.

Before my father-in-law’s death, I have had reflections about athletes who excel in their fields of expertise – those who are multiple champions, or consistent in their brilliance and endurance. But nothing beats entering or ending a sports career with a flash, like winning a championship as a newcomer, becoming the rookie of the year, or leaving the field as a champion. There are very few sports figures who achieve these goals at the start or at the end of their careers, at the beginning or at retirement.

Combining these thoughts brought me to an anticipation of my own “retirement.” Like an athlete, I know that life on earth is not permanent, and sooner or later I will pass on to a more permanent state. I do not know where and when it will happen, but wouldn’t it be great to “go with a bang,” as a “champion,” and an exalted way to enter into the more permanent state of being?
As a Christian, how can I go “with a bang?” What is the best way to die, if there is ever one? Death is one of those things that will surely come, sooner or later. Shall a disease, an accident, or old age be my passage way? I do not know. But one thought came to my mind as possibly the best way to die: through martyrdom.

Is the thought of martyrdom too radical or too extreme at this time and in this age? In the past, dying as a martyr was widespread. Persecutions and tortures for the faith were ordinary. Some of our forefathers in the faith had to shed their blood, and faced many forms of torture, including being whipped, in chains, imprisoned, and stoned. Some of them were sawed into two, thrown into the fire, or beheaded. There was nothing idealistic or romantic about dying as a martyr during those times. It did not look good and it did not feel good – but they glorified God literally with their own bodies.

As I reflect on passages in the Bible, I am more convinced that we should aspire to martyrdom. Didn’t Jesus say, “No one has greater love than this that a man lay down his life for his friends”? and, “Whoever loses his life for my sake and for the gospel will save it”? What about the disciples: their words and their lives? Most of the disciples died for their faith. The Lord Jesus honoured Stephen with a vision of heaven as he died the first martyr. Didn’t he die with a bang, and make a magnificent entrance into heaven? Saint Paul wrote in his letter to the Galatians: “I have been crucified with Christ, and I live; yet no longer I, but Christ lives in me. And that life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith toward the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself on my behalf.” And Paul died as a martyr according to Christian tradition.

Living in this time and age, most of us experience little or none of the persecutions or trials that the first Christians faced. There are now few opportunities to die for our faith, to live and die as a martyr. Does that mean we will not get a chance to die for God? We don’t know. I do not think we are all called specifically to die as martyrs, to seek to go where Christians are likely to be killed for their faith. To die as a martyr is a grace that God gives to some of us – and we cannot and should not “force” ourselves to martyrdom.

But I believe that God calls all of us to be martyrs in our hearts. Do our lives belong to God? Are we not citizens of heaven? Are we not called to die to ourselves day by day? Are we not supposed to sell all that we have, in order to gain something of greater value? If God is worthy of our lives, is he not worthy of our deaths? What do we value most, and what can we give God that is best? Are not our lives no longer our own anyway? How can we glorify God best with our life and also with our death?

I believe that as a Christian, I am called to become a “sleeper agent” who is willing to die for the cause that I believe in. “Sleeper agents” are spies who are placed in a target country or organization, not to undertake an immediate mission [that is where the comparison fails – we do have a mission], but rather to act as a potential asset if activated. Sleeper agents are also popular plot elements in espionage fiction and science fiction. But in reality, I believe I am called to become a sleeper agent for God, willing and ready to die for the glory of God if and when called to do so. And if and when that time comes, I think it will not be easy, or romantic, or idealistic. It will be a real test of faith – and I hope that I will succeed in the test.

What is modern martyrdom? For me, it is a life of sacrifice, a life of discipleship, to follow in the Master’s footsteps, and dying to my self-will, day by day. I want to practice the ideals that my life is no longer my own and I want to glorify God with my body. God is calling me to die every day to my selfishness, to the works of the flesh, to anger, and greed, among many other things, in order to become like him more and more.

One thing I do: I pray and hope that I will end in a high note and begin my life in heaven with a glorious entrance. I want to desire martyrdom. I want to aim for it. I want to set my eyes high! If I aim low, can I expect a noble ending with my life and a grand entrance to heaven?
May God give us the grace to die well, prepared to meet him face to face. But greater still, may God give us the grace to die for him – he who is our all – through dying to ourselves daily, or in one single act of martyrdom, to the glory of God. Whichever way, may we hear those glorious words that all of us await: “Well done my good and faithful servant! Enter into the joy of your master!”

[See related article: Lessons from the Martyrs, by James Munk]

Top illustration for book cover by Tim Ladwig for Fight the Good Fight of Faith by TUMI.org
See also interview with Tim Ladwig.

Tom Caballes is the National Senior Administrator and a National Coordinator of the Lamb of God, a community of the Sword of the Spirit with 7 branches located throughout New Zealand. Tom also leads Kairos New Zealand, an outreach program for high school, university, and post-university aged people.

Tom and his wife Mhel and their two daughters live in Wellington, New Zealand.
Receiving the Martyr’s Crown of Victory

Lessons from the Martyrs

by James Munk

During my last year of high school, I reached the pinnacle of my athletic career: the period of my life when I was the best I was ever going to be at any sport. And in truth, I wasn’t half bad. However, my sport was cross country – distance running – and even a pinnacle can feel pretty minor when not many people care about it. You see, in the pantheon of high school athletics, my sport was somewhat eclipsed by football – the American version. That sport is dominated by broad-shouldered Titans, muscle-bound and coordinated. I wasn’t then – nor am I now – built that way. I was skinny, a little lanky, and just coordinated enough to run the straight lines afforded by the cross country course. Nonetheless, I would often think about what it would be like to play football: to take the field under the Friday night lights and – held in awe by the entire student body – make a major play or a bone-crunching tackle.

But in truth, I can’t now (nor could I then) imagine what I would actually do. If I were given the ball, I would likely freeze. Not paralyzed by fear, but stupefied by ignorance. It wasn’t my sport – not my skill set. I would not have known what to do.

Red martyrdom

Recently, the Lord has been speaking to the Sword of the Spirit (and specifically to its young people) about martyrdom. “Red” martyrdom: allowing one’s blood to be spilled for the gospel.
When I think about this, my personal response is somewhat conflicted. On the one hand I find such an invitation stirs a solemn excitement: the opportunity to lay down one’s life for the Lord, to give what is most precious for what is beyond price. But I find this zeal muted by another sentiment – not primarily fear; rather, incomprehension.

Christians in the past have faced torture, burnings, beatings, crucifixions, and imprisonment – suffering difficult to imagine – but I’ve grown up in a nation that values religious freedom where my beliefs are legally protected. And in my mind, martyrdom doesn’t seem like an actual possibility. As such, when I hear about Christians persecuted for their faith – in history or today in other parts of the world – I’m hard pressed to imagine a plausible scenario with me in it. It’s football, and I’m a runner.

So what then? I don’t believe lack of familiarity (or imagination) exempts one from the Lord’s call. If the Lord is calling for martyrs, he will have them. What then should I expect? Axes, lions, concentration camps and the rack? Martyrdom in a vehicle fundamentally alien to any of my experiences? Perhaps – and if so, the Lord will give grace to meet that challenge. But it is my suspicion that my generation’s contribution – our martyrdom – will be by an agent chillingly familiar. I don’t know exactly what it will be, but I feel that it will be something we’ll know, a thing we will see coming.

I believe this for two reasons. First, a conviction that it is the Lord’s plan that we find ourselves in this era of human history, not any other. He made us for something; he made our communities for something; and for a certain time. We are to build Christian community in the modernized world, a civilization unlike any that has existed before; and we are to meet its unique challenges. While our society may not have lions to which we may be fed, it is certainly not without its killers. Ours is a new arena: a different sport – perhaps the one for which we have been conditioned. By living today, we may be the best ones currently suited to die.

**The quintessential act of courage**
The second reason is that martyrdom is the quintessential act of courage. Choosing for the Lord when it costs your life is to give a spiritual response when doing so means silencing the flesh; a flesh that knows it will perish if quieted. It is, as John Wayne said, “being scared to death, and saddling up anyway.” But this begs the question: of what is the courageous afraid – why is his flesh in rebellion? Is it the result of something beyond his comprehension? I don’t think so. Rather, it is because he comprehends the predicament that he fears, and it is precisely because he knows the possible outcomes that he has need of courage. The courageous man does not hedge his bets – win or lose, he is “all in”; the ignorant man who does not know he is risking all is not to be considered brave. Courage is not simply a bold response in the face of the undefined. It is steadfastness when definite hardship promises an uncertain outcome.

If martyrdom in my generation is to be courageous, it must be of the type we can comprehend: not an element of the Christian past that is vague in our understanding, but a very real, very possible outcome for our actions. It will be an instance where courage proves its necessity, because we’ll know we are in danger. We’ll know we need it.

For these reasons, I think we’ll find martyrdom to be more familiar than we might like. In fact, forms of it may already be apparent. And here again courage is paramount: the things we know to be dangerous, we also know to avoid. We can assume that a Roman Christian walking by the Colosseum knew well what sport was done inside. Perhaps this knowledge led some believers to choose a different path.

Dare I turn this accusation on myself? Jesus told us that the world would hate us; we can be sure that it
reserves special dangers for Christians – Christians in any time and any society.

Do I try to avoid these dangers? Have I looked for martyrdom in a form I won’t recognize so that I might distract myself from the one I do know? Thinking back to cross country, courage was essential to run the race – but not because I didn’t know what the race would be like – rather, because I knew exactly, and knew how I must respond.

**A sport we know how to play**

I believe that the Lord is inviting some of us to receive the crown of martyrdom. It is a concept difficult to grasp – hard to play out in the mind. But I take some comfort in the probability that we’ll know it when we see it. While it will not be any less difficult, ignorance will not keep us from responding – it will be a sport we know how to play.

May the Lord grant us the courage to respond to his invitation, and let us not run from the dangers we already see. Instead, let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us.

Happy running.

[James Munk is a mission director for Kairos North America and a member of the Work of Christ Community in Lansing, Michigan.]
Paul the Apostle martyred at Rome: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" - 2 Timothy 4:7

**Normal Christian Martyrdom**

by Josef Tson

Christianity is a religion of martyrdom because its founder was a martyr. Jesus was the faithful witness" – in Greek, “martyr” (Revelation 1:5).

Martyrdom does not seem a pleasant subject to most of us, and we do not usually speak of Christianity or Jesus this way. But that is because we do not see it as Jesus sees it. Martyrdom is really one of the greatest subjects in the world.

Jesus understood that his victory would be won by dying. His method for building his church, as he explained it to the disciples, was this: "I am going to Jerusalem. There I will be arrested, beaten, and crucified" (see Matthew 16:21).

This method was also to be his way of extending his church once he had established it. The most frequently
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quoted saying of Jesus to his disciples was "Take up your cross and follow me" (see Matt. 10:38; 16:24; Mark 8:34; 10:21; Luke 9:23; 14:27). In other words, Jesus told his followers, “I am going to build my church by my cross and by your crosses."

How many of us today "spiritualize away" the teaching of the New Testament on the cross? We draw back from a literal reading. But when Jesus told his disciples that they had to take up their crosses, he knew in fact that they were going to bear witness to the gospel with their lives. He was training them for literal crucifixion.

Blood and Seed

This literal call to martyrdom was one of the secrets of Christianity's success in its first centuries. In the second century a lawyer, Tertullian, was converted when he saw Christians singing as they went out to die. Later he wrote a book about martyrdom, in which he made a statement that became famous: “The blood of the martyrs is seed" – seed of new Christians, seed of the church.

In the first centuries, when Christians were murdered everywhere, everyone who became a Christian knew that martyrdom might be their portion. Those early Christians were far from trying to "spiritualize away" Jesus' teaching on martyrdom.

Indeed, they sought martyrdom. Some of them wanted martyrdom so badly that the church found it necessary to instruct people that if a person provoked his own martyrdom, he disqualified himself.

Origen, who became a famous theologian in the third century, was 17 when his father was sentenced to death. Origen said, “Tomorrow when my father is burned at the stake, I will go there and provoke the governor to have me martyred too." To save him, his mother took all his clothes out of the house that night. In the morning he could not go out because he had no clothes to put on. Only in this way was he spared.

In the same period Cyprian, an African bishop, said, "When persecution comes, God's soldiers are put to the test, and heaven is open to martyrs. We have not enlisted in an army merely to think of peace and to decline battle, for we see that the Lord has taken first place in the conflict."

In the next century Augustine wrote, "The martyrs were bound, jailed, scourged, racked, burned, rent, butchered-and they multiplied."

In the fourth century, Gregory the Great said, “The death of the martyrs blossoms in the lives of the faithful."

Those Christians in the first centuries understood the teaching of Christ that Christians win by losing, conquer by dying. This is what explains the victory of the church after 300 years of martyrdom. They conquered by their blood.

When I first read these things, I wondered what sort of gospel these early Christians heard. The preachers who made Christians who were willing to be martyrs-who even had to be held back from provoking their own martyrdom – must have preached a powerful message. Some of what I have learned about martyrdom comes from studying their reflections on the scriptures.

What Is Achieved?

What is the theology of martyrdom?

In Revelation 6:11 we read that the martyrs cried from under the altar for God's judgment to come, and they were told to wait until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren should be complete, who were to
be killed as they themselves had been." Why does God require a number of his children to be crucified, starting with his First Begotten? What does martyrdom achieve? How is martyrdom effective in God's strategy in history?

The first achievement of martyrdom is the defeat of Satan.

In Revelation 12 we have a scene of a war in heaven. Satan in thrown down. Then we read this comment: "They," that is, the martyrs, "conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, because they did not love their lives even unto death." In other words, when the martyrs made their testimony and were butchered for their loyalty to Jesus, Satan fell down.


There was an argument in heaven. God said that Job was perfect. Satan could not challenge that, but, he said to God, "What is Job's motivation? He worships you because you give him things. He is the richest man in the land. Of course, he worships you for that. Take away all he has, and he will curse you."

God's honor was at stake. All heaven watched trembling. What was God going to do?

God had no other way to defend his honor than to say, "Go and take away all I gave him, and we will see."

When the tornadoes came and destroyed all Job had, and when messengers came one after another telling him the horrible truth, all heaven was watching his lips for the curse that Satan had insisted was to come. But Job stood tall to make his comment: "God has given. God has taken away. God's name be praised."

At that moment all heaven applauded.

Satan went to God again and said, "Let him suffer. Let that pain go into the marrow of his bones, and then he will curse you."

Then as Job was in excruciating pain, his wife and friends came and said, "Don't you see it's the end? Why don't you curse God and die?" That was exactly what Satan wanted. But Job, fed up with those exhortations, replied, "Look, let me clarify my attitude to God. I believe he commits a terrible injustice against me and I don't know why, but even if he kills me I will still praise him."

I told my interrogator: "Your supreme weapon is killing. My supreme weapon is dying. If you kill me, my sermons will speak ten times louder than before." He sent me home.

At that moment Satan was put to shame utterly and completely. He was dishonored. God had the victory.

Is that a once-upon-a-time story? No, it is a window open to heaven. In the New Testament we find it beautifully repeated in 1 Corinthians 4:9. Paul describes the apostles as they are scourged and beaten and thrown from one place to another, and then he says, "For God has made us a spectacle for the whole cosmos, both angels and man." Paul's view is that we are on a stage and the whole cosmos, including the angels, watches us.

Wherever I am, whatever I do, I am watched. Either I put my Father to shame by turning from his ways, or I put Satan to shame by giving glory to God. Whether I like it or not, I am a spectacle, watched by the whole cosmos. This is how we should understand that we are called to defeat Satan by our suffering and martyrdom.
A second purpose in suffering and martyrdom is the salvation of the world.

We are called to suffer and die for the salvation of the world? If I did not have the Scriptures to support that statement, I would not dare say it.

In 2 Corinthians 1:6, Paul tells the Corinthians, “I suffer for your comfort and salvation." How can Paul say it? Isn't Christ's sacrifice complete? Isn't his atonement sufficient? Yes, it is. But still there is a sense in which Paul can say, "I suffer for your salvation." What is that sense?

Paul explains it in 2 Timothy 2:10. “I suffer for the elect so that they may obtain the salvation which is in Jesus Christ." Salvation is in Jesus Christ, and nowhere else. But, Paul is saying, if I had remained a pastor in Antioch, in that affluent and peaceful city, in that wonderful church with so many prophets and such great blessings, nobody in Asia Minor or Europe would have been saved. In order for them to be saved, I have had to accept being beaten with rods, scourged, stoned, treated as the scum of the earth, becoming a walking death. But when I walk like this, wounded and bleeding, people see the love of God, people hear the message of the cross, and they are saved.

If we stay in the safety of our affluent churches and we do not accept the cross, others may not be saved. How many are not saved because we don't accept the cross?

Often in my country, Romania, people must accept demotions in their jobs when they become Christians. If someone in a very high position is converted to Jesus Christ and joins the church, immediately the authorities will hold a public meeting to expose him as a backward creature and have him publicly demoted or fired.

I had a man in an important position whom I baptized come to me and ask, "Now what shall I do? They will convene three or four thousand people to expose me and mock me. They will give me five minutes to defend myself. How should I do it?"

"Brother," I told him, "defending yourself is the only thing you shouldn't do. This is your unique chance to tell them who you were before, and what Jesus made of you; who Jesus is, and what he is for you now."

His face shone and he said, "Brother Joseph, I know what I am going to do." And he did it well – so well that afterwards he was severely demoted. He lost almost half of his salary. But he kept coming to me after that saying, "Brother Joseph, you know I cannot walk in that factory now without someone coming up to me. Wherever I go, somebody pulls me in a corner, looks around to see that nobody sees him talking to me, and then whispers, 'Give me the address of your church,' or 'Tell me more about Jesus,' or 'Do you have a Bible for me?'"

Every kind of suffering can become a ministry for other people's salvation.

Third, the ministry of suffering and dying enriches the life of the church.

In an epistle from prison Paul tells the Colossians, "I am rejoicing in what I am suffering for you, because I complete what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ for his body the Church" (1:24). How can we understand this mysterious saying?

It is actually very simple. Paul is saying, I am one with Christ, and Christ continues to suffer through me. He was her bride by suffering for her. He is working today to make his bride more beautiful, and he does it, again, by means of suffering: his suffering in us.
Paul says in Philippians 3:10 that he wants to know Christ and to become a fellow-sufferer with Christ. Peter says in 1 Peter 4:12-13, "Brothers, do not consider this persecution that has come upon you to be a strange thing. But rather rejoice because you are participating in the sufferings of Christ."

This union with Christ is the most beautiful subject in the Christian life. It means that I am not a lone fighter here: I am an extension of Jesus Christ. When I was beaten in Rumania, he suffered in my body. It is not my suffering: I only had the honour to share his sufferings. As Christ suffers in us, he enriches the church.

**The Impact of Death**

**Fourth, martyrdom is a witness to the truth.**

I mentioned that Jesus Christ is called the "faithful witness" in Revelation 1:5. Paul reminds Timothy, who apparently is going through a persecution, to "remember Christ who made that great testimony" (1 Tim. 6:13). He is referring to what John describes in his gospel: Jesus said to Pilate, “I was born into this world to bear witness to the truth” (18:37).

For years I wanted to save my life, and I was losing it. Now that I wanted to lose it, I was winning it. Somebody said those words before, but they had not sunk in.

Jesus is the embodiment of the truth. His coming to us to bear witness to the truth meant coming into the kingdom of this world, which is under the rule of the father of lies, the king of deception. When the truth came, it hurt. The light shining in this darkness immediately disturbed everyone – and they killed the truth.

But it is by dying that the truth makes its impact in this kingdom of falsehood. “When I am lifted up,” Jesus said, referring to his cross, "I will attract the whole world to myself" (John 12:32). The truth conquers by self-sacrifice.

Jesus gives us the assignment of bearing witness to the truth as he has done, even to the point of suffering and death. He says to his followers, “You are my witnesses. If you do not bear witness to me before this wicked generation, I will not bear witness to you before my Father.”

When I preached in Romania, I knew that people were afraid to bear witness to Christ because they might lose their jobs. So I described the picture: “Christ is up there near the throne of God. He looks at you, here in this auditorium, and all the angels in heaven follow his gaze. If you raise your hand and you testify, 'Christ is my Lord,' Christ turns to his Father and says, 'Father, that one is my brother or sister.' You witness here that he is Lord; he witnesses there that you are his brother or sister."

**Without Hope of Success**

This is my outline of the theology of martyrdom. Let us see how it works in practice.

Years ago I ran away from my country to study theology at Oxford. In 1972, when I was ready to go back home, I discussed my plans with some fellow students. They pointed out that I might be arrested at the border.

One student asked, "Joseph, what chances do you have of successfully implementing your plans?" I smiled and said to myself, "Now this is typically Western thinking." Chances of success? I never thought in those terms. My thinking was in terms of obedience. I knew that the king said, "Go," and I had to say, "Yes, sir," and go.

But I did turn the question around and ask God, "What if I ask you about success?"
And he said, "My answer is in Matthew 10:16: 'I send you as sheep in the midst of wolves.' Tell me. What chance does a sheep surrounded by wolves have of surviving five minutes, let alone of converting the wolves? Joseph, that's how I send you: totally defenseless and without a reasonable hope of success. If you are willing to go like that, go. If you are not willing to be in that position, don't go."

That experience deeply affected all my thinking. From that time I asked myself, Why does God send me in such a seemingly hopeless way? As I studied the question, I came to the understanding that I have sketched.

I started to teach my wife this insight into the gospel that suffering and dying is a ministry that God might require from me. If the Lord said, "Joseph, I want to seal your ministry with your life," would I say, "No, Lord, I won't give you that"? What a glorious day it was when Elizabeth, my dear wife, knelt down with me and said, "Lord, I give you Joseph for that ministry." From that day she was the best fighter of the two of us. She always helped me to stand up under the greatest pressure and threats.

After our return, as I preached uninhibitedly and wrote paper after paper, harassment and arrests came. One day during interrogation an officer threatened to kill me. Then I said, "Sir, let me explain that issue to you. Your supreme weapon is killing. My supreme weapon is dying. Sir, you know my sermons are all over the country on tapes now. If you kill me, I will be sprinkling them with my blood. Whoever listens to them after that will say, 'I'd better listen. This man sealed it with his blood.' They will speak ten times louder than before. So, go on and kill me. I win the supreme victory then." He sent me home.

One of the officer's colleagues was interrogating one of my colleagues, another preacher. That officer commented, "We know that Joseph Tson would love to be a martyr, but we are not such big fools as to fulfill his wish." That pastor came to me to tell me that even if I wanted them to, the authorities would not kill me.

That gave me pause. For years I was a Christian who was cautious and low-keyed because I wanted to survive. I had accepted all the restrictions the authorities put on me because I wanted to live. Now I wanted to die, and they wouldn't oblige. Now I could do whatever I wanted in Romania. For years I wanted to save my life, and I was losing it. Now that I wanted to lose it, I was winning it.

Somebody said those words before, but they had not sunk in my mind.

The greatest joy I have now when I communicate with the younger generation of Christians in my country is that I know that they consider suffering and dying for the Lord a privilege, not a calamity. When I hear that they are in trouble, I phone them and try to comfort them. But often the response I get is this: "Don't worry about that. I consider this a privilege."

**Martyrdom in Your Country?**

Every country has had to be opened to the Gospel by somebody's blood. Somebody had to sprinkle the ground with his blood in order to claim the territory for God. Only the kind of Christianity which understands suffering and dying as a ministry, a ministry that has effects in heaven, a ministry that has effects now and in all eternity – only that kind of Christianity is able to conquer.

Many hope that God will spare Christians persecution. But do not look at it like that. If persecution were to happen in your country, God would be saying, "Now I want my dear children to participate in the most glorious event in history – martyrdom. Now I want them to complete the victory over Satan. I want them to continue the salvation of the world through their blood. I want them to enrich the life of the body of Christ. I want them to seal their testimony to my truth." Persecution here would not be a disaster, but a great honor –
the greatest honor.

This article is adapted from the original article, *Normal Christian Martyrdom*, which first appeared in *Pastoral Renewal*, June, 1986, Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA.

Josef Tson is an evangelist and the former president of the Romanian Missionary Society.

top illustration: "The Martyrdom of St. Paul" by Robert Reid, an original painting at the Church of St. Paul the Apostle in New York City
“The Blood of Christians Is Seed”

by Jeanne Kun

Tertullian, a second-century Church Father, expressed a profound and enduring reality when he said, “The blood of Christians is seed.” As he looked beyond the suffering of the early Christian martyrs, he could see that their brutal deaths were not in vain. They would be like the mustard seed spoken of by Jesus (Matthew 13:31). From their sacrifice, the kingdom of God would blossom, strengthening the church and the faith of countless Christian believers.

Nearly two thousand years later, John Paul II made a similar observation. “Be certain of this,” he said. “The blood of martyrs is in the church a force for renewal and of unity.” His words were contained in a 1996 message to the Trappist monks worldwide in response to the slaying of seven monks by a militant Islamic group in Algeria.

Since the resurrection of Jesus, Christians have witnessed boldly to their faith in him as the Son of God. Millions of men and women have willingly suffered and died rather than deny their Savior. They believed that in death, they were not losers but victors, for “the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us” (Romans 8:18).
Reflecting this truth, Clement of Alexandria wrote: “Martyrdom is fullness, not because it finishes a human life but because it brings love to the fullest point.” The night before the German Lutheran pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer was to be executed by the Nazis, he told another prisoner: “This is the end – but for me, the beginning of life.” Anticipating his murder in Tibet in 1949, Maurice Tornay declared, “When we die, we have conquered.”

**A life of witness**

The Christian calling is to a life of *martyria*, which means “witness.” The word was first used by Christians to describe a life lived in conformity to Christ, in imitation of his holiness and obedience to the Father. However, over time the meaning was narrowed to denote “red” martyrdom or the shedding of one's blood, as Christ had done on the cross. Martyrdom is the supreme witness given to the truth of the faith: it means bearing witness even unto death.

The risk of martyrdom has always accompanied the proclamation of the gospel. Stephen, the first martyr, was stoned because his preaching and testimony to Jesus as the Son of God angered some of the Jews (Acts 6:8–8:1). Luke the evangelist tells us that on “that day a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem” (Luke 8:1). Peter the apostle was crucified head downward during the reign of the emperor Nero in Rome (probably in A.D. 64), where he had gone to spread the gospel. Church historians believe that Paul the apostle was also in Rome when he was beheaded several years later.

**A wave of persecution**

Following Nero, emperors of the pagan Roman Empire unleashed a series of official persecutions that reached their height at the beginning of the fourth century. Religions other than the state religion of the empire were tolerated. However, when Christians refused to offer sacrifice or pay homage to Roman emperors who claimed to be divine, many of them were beheaded, burned, or made the sport of wild beasts in the arena.

Martyrs young and old attested to Christ living in them as they imitated him in death. Ignatius of Antioch, who was martyred in 107, wrote that persecuted believers are “with the help of Christ, to run to death, to imitate his passion.” Just before Felicity was to face the wild beasts in the arena in Carthage early in the third century, she told her jailer: “Another will be in me, who will suffer for me because I also am about to suffer for him.”

The Roman persecutions came to an end in 313 through an edict issued by the emperor Constantine, and Christianity flourished. Moreover, it grew into a force that shaped the civilization and moral life of the Western world. However, in many countries, Christian missionaries continued to be martyred, along with many indigenous people who had been converted. For example, in 1597, native converts were executed in Nagasaki, Japan, and thousands of Japanese believers were killed throughout the seventeenth century. In the 1640s, Jesuit priests and Christian Hurons were killed by the Iroquois in North America.

**Modern challenges to Christianity**

In the last few centuries, tremendous social and political upheavals have resulted in a ruthless wave of martyrdom in lands all around the globe. Thousands of Christians have been killed because their faith conflicted directly with the political leaders in power. Unfortunately, in many places around the world today, it is considered a crime to be a Christian. Freedom of religion and basic human rights are denied in some countries with totalitarian governments and brutally repressive regimes.

In addition, as the churches have responded to the gospel call to protect the rights of the poor, uphold the sanctity of life, and promote just economic practices, Christians have often found themselves involved in
social or political actions. Sometimes these actions have cost them their lives.

A Christian martyr is someone who has willingly died for refusing to deny the faith or perform an act inconsistent with Christian faith or morals, typically at the hands of someone with a hatred for Christianity. In contemporary times, it is sometimes difficult to determine precisely what factors – ethnic animosities, political ideologies, economic advantage, or hatred for religious faith – motivated those who were responsible for these deaths. Churches worldwide cherish the testimony of all believers who, by their deeds in life and sacrifice in death, give courageous witness to Christ and his truth.

In 2000, John Paul II gathered leaders from many Christian denominations at the ancient Colosseum in Rome to celebrate the witness of the martyrs. “The example of the heroic witnesses to the faith is truly precious for all Christians,” he reminded them. “It is a heritage that speaks more powerfully than all the causes of division. The ecumenism of the martyrs and the witnesses of the faith are the most convincing of all. To the Christians of the twenty-first century, this shows the path to unity.”

The global nature of martyrdom
Recent studies have opened a window on the vast number of martyrs of the past century. The stories it has thus far been able to document represent only a fraction of the actual number of Christians martyred in the twentieth century. Many of these martyrs were members of local churches, communities, or families who suffered collectively for their loyalty to Christ and to the gospel. In the Soviet Union alone, it is estimated that over one million Christians went to their deaths, many of whom will remain nameless. Even today Christians are still persecuted.

The first years of the new millennium have already produced considerable testimony about Christians of various denominations martyred in countries such as China, the Sudan, Vietnam, Cambodia, Pakistan, India, and Colombia.

Not to be forgotten
During Lent 2000, John Paul II asked Cardinal Francis Xavier Nguyen Van Thuan, who spent thirteen years in a Vietnamese prison – nine of them in solitary confinement – to present meditations based on his own experiences.

The cardinal related that, when he was in prison, the police who were interrogating him provided sheets of paper so that he could write answers to their questions. Some of this paper he was able to keep secretly for himself. “So, little by little,” he explained, “I managed to make a tiny notebook. Day by day, I was able to write in Latin the more than three hundred sentences of Sacred Scripture that I recalled from memory. The Word of God, thus reconstructed ... was my precious jewel-case from which I drew strength and nourishment” (Testimony of Hope, 2000, Pauline Books, pp. 62-63).

At this very moment, many of our brothers and sisters are experiencing the same discrimination, suffering, and persecution that Cardinal Van Thuan endured. Some are also dying for witnessing to their faith in Christ. Let us remember that, in the body of Christ, “if one member suffers, all suffer together” (1 Corinthians 12:26). May we speak out and work in their defense, and may we lift up these Christians in prayer, asking for our Father's mercy on them. May we help sustain them through our constant intercession. The witness of the martyrs – past and present – must not be forgotten.
Jeanne Kun is a noted author and a senior woman leader in the Word of Life Community, Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA. This article excerpted from Jeanne's book, Even Unto Death: Wisdom from Modern Martyrs, published by The Word Among Us Press. Copyright (c) 2002 by Jeanne Kun. Used with permission.

> See other articles by Jeanne Kun in Living Bulwark
Cross-Bearers of the King

The Mystery of Jesus’ Sacrifice

by Richard Wurmbrand

Suppose you were living 2,000 years ago in Palestine, that you were sinful, heavy with guilt, and Jesus told you, “Your sin is grave and deserves punishment. ‘The wages of sin are death.’ But tomorrow I will be flogged and crowned with a crown of thorns for you—I invite you to assist them when they drive nails into My hands and feet and fix Me to a cross. I will cry in anguish, and I will share the sorrow of My mother whose heart will be pierced by compassion for Me as if by a sword. You should be there to hear My cries. And when I have died, you shall know that your sins are forgiven forever, that I was your substitute, your scapegoat. This is how a man gets saved. Will you accept My suffering for your offense, or do you prefer to bear the punishment yourself?” What would you have answered?

I believe that this dilemma should be placed before a soul seeking salvation. Fifteen hundred years before the historical birth of Christ the Bible says, “Today I have begotten You” (Psalm 2:7). It also says to the penitent 2,000 years after Golgotha, “Today I die for you.” Jesus’ life and death are outside of time and space.

Would you accept? More than once in Communist prisons I have seen a pastor receive a beating to the blood in place of another prisoner. A name would be called and the pastor would simply say, “It is I.” In Auschwitz,
Maximilian Kolbe, a priest, offered to take the place of a Pole sentenced to death by the Nazis. The Pole was the father of many children. The commandant of the camp accepted the substitution and the Pole was spared. Kolbe died by asphyxiation. Had you been that Pole, what would you have decided?

I lived many years in an isolated subterranean prison cell, in timelessness, something akin to the weightlessness experienced by astronauts. Just as they know no difference between heavy and light, I knew no distinction between past, present, and future.

In my prison cell Jesus’ presence was immediate. His life did not belong to the past, nor was it a series of successive events. He put before me the problem I have just put to you. He told me, “You are a sinner and are condemned to eternal punishment for your transgressions, but I am ready to save you. Because of your sin, I will endure rejection, flogging, being spat upon, being crowned with a crown of thorns, the pains of crucifixion, and the agony of seeing my mother brokenhearted at the foot of the cross. My blood will cleanse you from all sin.”

I had to decide whether or not to accept the sacrifice of the innocent Son of God for my sins. I believed that to accept would be a greater wickedness than all I might ever have done in my life and I flatly refused this proposal. Jesus was glad about my “No.”

Then came the real question, the thing He had had in mind from the beginning. “What if I incorporate your being into Mine, if you become part of My body, if you deny yourself as an independent self, and I will live in you henceforth and you will be ‘crucified with me’ (Galatians 2:20), ‘buried with me’ (Romans 6:4), and share the fellowship of My suffering (Philippians 3:10)? People in churches will sing, ‘safe in arms of Jesus,’ while you will be safe as an arm of Jesus, nailed like His to a cross, but also imparting goodness like His. Do you wish to become My co-worker for the salvation of mankind, alleviating sufferings, filling up ‘what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ.’

I have accepted this proposal. Christians are meant to have the same vocation as their King, that of cross-bearers. It is this consciousness of a high calling and of partnership with Jesus which brings gladness in tribulation, which makes Christians enter prisons for their faith with the joy of a bridegroom entering the bridal room.

When George Vins, the general secretary of the Baptist Union of the USSR, was sentenced for his faith, believers in the courtroom covered him with flowers. His little daughter, hoisted on a stool, recited in front of the Communist judges, “Father, with Christ you are free in prison, and freedom without Him is prison.” The believers waiting outside the building received him with a Christian hymn.

The relative of a Christian prisoner in Red China said to someone who sympathized with her, “You should not feel sorry for us, for if he were not in that slave labor camp, how could the others here come to know the gospel of the Lord Jesus?”

In the same spirit we should receive the crosses of poverty, racial discrimination, personal betrayals, unfaithfulness of marriage partners, rebellion of children, and all other sorrows of life.

A man who smugly accepts Christ’s dying for him and shouts Hallelujah about the innocent Son of God receiving punishment he himself deserves should be more severely punished than before. The gospel, the good news, is the privilege of becoming a member of the Body of Christ, of suffering, of dying in pain with Him, and also of being resurrected with Him in glory.

Because sacrifice is implicit in a conversion, the call of an evangelist has the name “altar call.” Every being
placed upon the altar in Jerusalem—lambs, rams, and pigeons—died. Someone dies for you. This time it is not an animal, but the Son of God. He has decreed it and nothing you can do will change His mind. You can only ask for the privilege of henceforth being able to sacrifice yourself as well, for the glory of God and for the good of your fellowmen. In return you receive the right to die to sin and to the world and its laws.

The reality of a conversion is in becoming one with Him. It is shameful and abominable to accept His substitutionary death otherwise.


Pastor Richard Wurmbrand (1909-2001) was an evangelical minister who endured fourteen years in Communist imprisonment and torture in his homeland of Romania. He was one of Romania's most widely known Jewish Believer leaders, authors, and educators. In 1945, when the Communists seized Romania and attempted to control the churches for their purposes, Richard Wurmbrand immediately began an effective "underground" ministry to his enslaved people and the invading Russian soldiers. He was eventually arrested in 1948. Richard spent three years in solitary confinement, seeing no one but his Communist torturers. He was then transferred to a group cell, where the torture continued for five more years.

His wife, Sabina, also Jewish, was a slave laborer for three years. Due to Pastor Richard Wurmbrand's international stature as a Messianic Jewish leader, diplomats of foreign embassies asked the Communist government about his safety. They were told he had fled Romania. Secret police, posing as released fellow prisoners, told his wife of attending his burial in the prison cemetery. Pastor Wurmbrand was released in a general amnesty in 1964. Realizing the great danger of a third imprisonment, Christians in Norway negotiated with the Communist authorities for his release from Romania. The "going price" for a prisoner was $1,900. Their price for Wurmbrand was $10,000. In May 1966, Pastor Richard Wurmbrand testified in Washington before the Senate's Internal Security Subcommittee and stripped to the waist and showed 18 deep torture wounds covering his body. His story was carried across the world newspapers in the U.S., Europe, and Asia. Read a portion of this report. Communist Exploitation of Religion Pastor Richard's Testimony from 1966.

Pastor Wurmbrand has been called "the Voice of the Underground Church" and the "Iron Curtain Paul." His books are best sellers in over fifty languages.
Witness of the Early Christian Martyrs

Martyrdom of Polycarp

edited by Charles E. Moore

Polycarp died 155 AD
in Smyrna (Izmir in modern Turkey)

When a young Christian named Irenaeus first encountered the elderly Polycarp teaching in the metropolis of Smyrna, he was captivated. It’s not hard to understand why. According to Irenaeus, Bishop Polycarp was one of the few living disciples of the apostle John, who was the “beloved disciple” of Jesus himself. Polycarp preached what he had learned directly from eyewitnesses of Jesus. His connection with Christ’s first apostles served as a bridge between the first generation of believers and those who followed, including influential thinkers and theologians such as Irenaeus, who would live to be a prominent church father in his own right.

Polycarp led the church in Smyrna with wisdom and authority, having been appointed to leadership by men who had seen and heard the Lord. He was frequently called on to settle disputes or correct false teaching. Even the other leaders of the early church valued his insight. When Polycarp visited Rome, the bishop there deferred to him regarding when to celebrate the Lord’s Supper, as a sign of honor and respect.

Heeding John’s warnings against false teachers, Polycarp faithfully defended the apostles’ teaching against early heretics, including one Marcion, who held that the God of the Old Testament and the Father of Jesus were separate entities. Polycarp could be fiery, particularly when faced with such dangerous errors. In their only face-to-face meeting, Marcion asked, “Do you know me?”
“I know you, you firstborn of Satan!” Polycarp replied.

He was able to turn many away from such heresies, and thus strengthen the church’s witness. But Polycarp’s work as a pastor and leader would not continue freely. When persecution broke out in Smyrna, some Christians were rounded up for interrogation, and required to renounce Christ and bow before the Roman emperor as a condition of release. When they refused, they were tortured and executed.

Eyewitness accounts from this time highlight the public brutality of the persecution. Believers were lashed until their muscles were laid bare, forced to lie down on shards of shells, and thrown into arenas to be devoured by wild animals in front of the townspeople. There are striking examples of early martyrs welcoming these sufferings in the name of Christ. One Germanicus even embraced the wild beast and pulled it toward himself to meet death as quickly as possible. But not all withstood the brutal torture. A man named Quintus, who had come forward of his own free will rather than wait to be arrested, when confronted with the beasts of prey, renounced Jesus and took the oath of fidelity to the emperor.

Though some bystanders wept with pity for the persecuted Christians, these spectacles of death and drama in the arena also served to sharpen the people’s taste for Christian blood. Eventually the crowd took up the refrain, “Away with the atheists! Go find Polycarp!” (“Atheist” was a popular term for Christians, who in denying the Roman divinities in favor of a God who could not be seen, were thought of as atheists.)

Polycarp was undismayed by the growing public demand for his death. Rather than flee, the old bishop even resolved to remain in the city, where they could easily find him. His companions eventually convinced him to retreat to a farm outside of town, where the threat to his life was less immediate. There he spent his time in prayer, interceding for members of the church throughout the world.

Three days before his arrest, Polycarp fell into a deep trance. On regaining consciousness, he declared that he had received a vision. He had seen his pillow bursting into flame around his head. Polycarp had no question what the vision meant. Turning to his companions, he said, “I am going to be burned alive.”

Not long after, the Roman authorities captured two slaves. One of them broke down under torture and revealed the location of the farm where Polycarp was staying. When soldiers arrived on horseback to seize him, Polycarp refused to run. Instead, he offered his captors hospitality and food, requesting only that he be allowed an hour for prayer. When they agreed, Polycarp prayed so earnestly that one hour became two, and several of the soldiers regretted their role in the arrest of such a venerable old man.

They then put Polycarp on a donkey and led him back into the city. Upon arrival, his captors ushered him into the carriage of a man named Herod, the captain of the local troops. Herod tried to convince Polycarp to save himself. “Why, what harm is there in saying, ‘Caesar is Lord,’ and offering incense?” When Polycarp refused the very suggestion of renouncing Christ, the official grew threatening and forced him out of the carriage so roughly that he injured his shin.

Without even turning, Polycarp marched on quickly as they escorted him to the stadium, where a deafening roar arose from the throngs of spectators. As he entered, his Christian companions heard a voice from above say, “Be strong, Polycarp, and play the man.” He was brought before the proconsul, who urged him to deny his faith and bow before the emperor: “Swear by the spirit of Caesar! Repent, and say, ‘Away with the atheists!’”

Turning with a grim look toward the crowd calling for his death, Polycarp gestured at them. “Away with the atheists,” he said dryly.
Undeterred, the proconsul pressed him further to deny Christ. Polycarp declared, “Eighty-six years I have been his servant, and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my king who saved me?”

Once more the proconsul urged Polycarp to swear by Caesar. This time Polycarp replied, “Since you pretend not to know who and what I am, hear me declare with boldness: I am a Christian. And if you wish to learn more about Christianity, I will be happy to make an appointment.”

Furious, the proconsul said, “Don’t you know I have wild beasts waiting? I’ll throw you to them unless you repent.”

Polycarp answered, “Bring them on, then, for we are not accustomed to repent of what is good in order to adopt that which is evil.”

Next the proconsul threatened to burn him alive. To this Polycarp replied, “You threaten me with fire which burns for a little while and is soon extinguished. You do not know the coming fire of judgment and eternal punishment reserved for the ungodly. What are you waiting for? Do what you wish.”

The proconsul sent his herald out into the arena to announce that Polycarp had confessed to being a Christian. At this, the assembled crowd seethed with uncontrolled fury and called for Polycarp to be burned alive. Quickly, they assembled a pyre, gathering wood from workshops and the public baths. Polycarp removed his clothes and tried to take off his shoes, though his advanced age made it difficult. His guards prepared to nail him to the stake, but he told them calmly, “Leave me as I am, for the one who gives me strength to endure the fire will also give me strength to remain at the stake unmoved without being secured by nails.” They bound his hands behind him. Polycarp offered a psalm of praise and thanksgiving to God. His captors ignited the wood.

According to observers, as the flames grew, they did not consume Polycarp as expected. The fire formed a circle around him, but his body did not burn. Since the fire did not have its intended effect on Polycarp’s body, an executioner was ordered to stab him to death with a dagger. His blood extinguished the flames.

Observers that day were shocked by the contrast between Polycarp’s martyrdom and the deaths of non-Christians they had witnessed. They beheld the same faithful discipleship in Polycarp’s death that had characterized his life: a humble acceptance of God’s will; praise of God in the most extreme trial; and a joyful, unwavering commitment to Christ even when faced with death. Polycarp’s was among the first recorded Christian martyrdoms. His steadfast obedience to Christ was a powerful testimony, an inspiration not only to the church he pastored so faithfully in Smyrna, but to Christians throughout the centuries.

This article is excerpted from Bearing Witness: Stories of Martyrdom and Costly Discipleship, edited by Charles E. Moore, and published by (c) Plough Publishing House, Walden, New York Robertsbridge, England/Elsmore, Australia.

Perpetua's Victory Over Death

The heroic witness of the early Christian martyrs

Perpetua was a young lady who had it made. She was born into a noble Roman family in Carthage, a Roman city in North Africa in 181 AD. She was beautiful, well-educated, happily married around the age of twenty, and now the mother of an infant son. And then to the surprise of her family she decided to become a Christian. This appeared sheer nonsense to her father who saw it as breaking not only with Roman tradition but with family loyalty as well. Besides, what good had Christianity brought to Roman society? It seemed to mainly attract working class people and the slaves who had little or nothing to lose. Many emperors had tried to suppress it in the past, and the current emperor Septimus had decided to outlaw it once again, and threatened death to anyone who professed it.

The threat of death did not deter Perpetua from taking instructions in the Christian faith. She discovered that the Gospels were true and offered the way to eternal life and happiness. Jesus...
of Nazareth became a real living person to her, someone greater than the emperor, someone who was king of heaven and the whole earth as well. Despite the objections of her family, Perpetua pursued the Christian faith with great enthusiasm and conviction. Her brother Secundus soon followed in becoming a Christian as well.

Perpetua’s father had pleaded with tears to persuade her to give up her Christian faith. Her answer was simple and clear. Pointing to a water jug, she asked her father, "See that pot lying there? Can you call it by any other name than what it is?"

“Of course not,” he answered. Perpetua responded, “Neither can I call myself by any other name than what I am – a Christian.” Her father became so upset that he physically attacked her.

Sometime after the birth of her firstborn son, she was arrested, along with four other Christians who were new in the faith. Her brother Secundus had been arrested earlier and thrown into prison as well. Before being taken to prison she was baptized. The Holy Spirit gave her a prophetic gift and told her to pray for nothing but endurance in the face of her trials.

Perpetua was thrown into a crowded prison with no light anywhere. In her diary she described her ordeal:

Such darkness I have never known! What a day of horror! Terrible heat, owing to the crowds! Rough treatment by the soldiers! To crown all, I was tormented with anxiety for my baby.

Perpetua admitted she was afraid and was most at pain from being separated from her nursing infant. Another young woman in prison with her, who was a slave by the name of Felicity, was eight months pregnant.

Two deacons who visited the prisoners paid the jailers to move Perpetua and Felicity to a better prison cell where they could receive visits from family members and be better cared for. Perpetua’s mother brought Perpetua’s baby to her so she could nurse the child. When Perpetua received permission for the baby to stay with her, she said “suddenly my prison became a palace for me.”

Once again Perpetua’s father pleaded with kisses and tears for Perpetua to give up her faith. She told him, “We rely not on our own power but on the power of God.” When she was taken before the judge he also tried to persuade her to give up her faith. After

Then Saturus said to the soldier Pudens: “Farewell, and remember your faith as well as me; do not let these things frighten you; let them rather strengthen you.” At the same time he asked for the little ring from Pudens’ finger. After soaking it in his wound he returned it to Pudens as a keepsake, leaving him a pledge and a remembrance of his blood. Half dead, he was thrown along with the others into the usual place of slaughter.

The people, however, had demanded that the martyrs be led to the middle of the amphitheater. They wanted to see the sword thrust into the bodies of the victims, so that their eyes might share in the slaughter. Without being asked they went where the people wanted them to go; but first they kissed one another, to complete their witness with the customary kiss of peace.

The others stood motionless and received the deathblow in silence, especially Saturus, who had gone up first and was first to die; he was helping Perpetua. But Perpetua, that she might experience the pain more deeply, rejoiced over her broken body and guided the shaking hand of the inexperienced gladiator to her throat. Such a woman – one before whom the unclean spirit trembled – could not perhaps have been killed, had she herself not willed it.

Bravest and happiest martyrs! You were called and chosen for the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[Historical note: This excerpt is taken from The Martyrdom of Perpetua. It is based on the first-person accounts of Perpetua and Saturus, which took place under the persecution of Septimius Severus in 202-3 AD. The popularity of the account spread rapidly in the third and fourth centuries. By the fourth century, a basilica at Carthage was dedicated to the memory of Perpetua.]
she refused, the judge sentenced her, along with the other four new Christians and Saturus their Christian teacher, to be thrown to the wild beasts in the arena.

Two days before the execution, the slave Felicity gave birth to a healthy girl who was adopted and raised by one of the Christian women of Carthage.

While in prison Perpetua shared a vision she had received. She saw a ladder leading to heaven. At the bottom of the ladder was a serpent, attacking the Christians trying to climb the ladder to heaven. Perpetua understood that she would have to fight Satan rather than just the beasts of the arena. The Lord assured her that she would not be defeated in overcoming Satan. This gave her great confidence and courage.

On the day of the games, the three men and two women were led into the amphitheatre. At the demand of the crowd they were first scourged. Then a boar, a bear, and a leopard, were set on the men, and a wild cow on the women. Wounded by the wild animals, they gave each other the kiss of peace and were then put to the sword.
Perpetua's last words to her brother were: “Stand fast in the faith and love one another and do not be tempted to do anything wrong because of our sufferings.”

An early eyewitness account describes the death of Perpetua:

“But Perpetua, that she might experience pain more deeply, rejoiced over her broken body and guided the shaking hand of the inexperienced gladiator to her throat. Such a woman – one before whom the unclean spirit trembled – could not perhaps have been killed, had she herself not willed it.”

Perpetua and Saturus wrote personal accounts of their ordeal while in prison. They include the testimony of Felicity as well. An English translation of the account, called The Passions of the Holy Martyrs Perpetua and Felicitas, along with an eye witness testimony of their martyrdom can be found online.

[The story of Perpetua is based on her personal testimony along with other early eye witness accounts, adapted by Don Schwager.]
Witness of the Early Christian Martyrs

Justin Martyr

edited by Charles E. Moore

Justin died 165 AD
in Rome

After the death of the last of Christ’s apostles, a new era for Christianity began. As the faith spread across the Roman world, it met many challenges to its claims and practices. Internally, heresies and cultic expressions began to confuse and divide the church, demanding response from its theologians.

Externally, persecution – never far away for the early Christians – grew, the Roman Empire having outlawed the Christian religion. A key reason that the Roman government – typically tolerant of the diverse beliefs of its many conquered peoples – so despised Christians was the exclusive devotion of these men and women to the rustic Hebrew figure of Christ, whom they worshiped as the Son of God. Accustomed to pantheons of lesser and greater divinities, Rome might have better tolerated Christians if they had not refused to participate in the obligatory emperor worship – a required show of loyalty not just to a god but to the empire itself. Refusal to profess Caesar as lord was seen as treason and prosecuted with torture and summary execution.

It was into this world that Justin was born, to a pagan, gentile family living in Flavia Neapolis (the biblical town of Shechem). His education left him unsatisfied, as his teachers failed to engage the bright boy’s mind.
Always curious about God, Justin bounced from one school to another, seeking answers to his questions with teachers from the refined Stoic, Aristotelian, Pythagorean, and Platonic philosophical traditions.

While Plato’s ideas very much appealed to him, it was not until Justin met an old Christian man while walking near the beach (possibly at Ephesus) that he found the truth he was looking for. Their conversation convinced Justin that the ancient prophets were a more reliable source of truth than the philosophers. He changed the course of his life and study, giving his heart and well-trained mind to God. Traveling and teaching, he began to speak of Christianity as the “true philosophy.” He adopted the traditional gown of a philosopher, eventually traveling to Rome, where he founded a small school after the custom of the classic philosophers.

This began a period of public work and teaching. Justin was an outspoken apologist for the faith, addressing his First Apology directly to the emperor in response to persecution of Christians. Well-versed in philosophy and comparative religions, he sparred with opponents both inside and outside the faith, refuting heresies and advocating for Christians in the wider public sphere. His position that “seeds of Christianity” predated Christ’s incarnation allowed him to look favorably on elements of pagan thought that corresponded with or supported the tenets of Christianity, and thus he could refute the accusations of even the most educated of his pagan neighbors.

But his combative defense of the faith eventually made him enemies in the city. One of the philosophers he had argued with, a Cynic named Crescens, became a bitter enemy. According to Tatian, one of Justin’s students, Crescens plotted against Justin and likely betrayed him to the authorities.

Whatever prompted their arrest, Justin and a group of his fellow Christians (likely his students) were captured and brought before the Roman prefect, Junius Rusticus. He addressed Justin, the obvious spokesman of the group. “Obey the gods at once,” he demanded, “and submit to the emperors.”

Justin, accustomed to defending his faith, replied immediately, “To obey the commands of our savior Jesus Christ is not worthy of blame or condemnation.”

“What kinds of doctrines do you believe?” Rusticus asked.

“I have studied all faiths,” Justin returned, “but I have believed in the true doctrines, those of the Christians – even though they do not please those who hold false opinions.”

Rusticus felt the barb. “Are those the doctrines that please you, you utterly wretched man?”

“Yes,” Justin replied.

“What do you believe?” the prefect asked again.

Justin answered, “We worship the God of the Christians, whom we believe to be one from the beginning, the maker and fashioner of the whole creation, visible and invisible, and the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who has been preached beforehand by the prophets as the herald of salvation. Since I am only a man, anything I can say is insignificant compared to his boundless divinity as the Son of God.”

Rusticus questioned him further. “Where do you Christians meet?”

“Where each one chooses and can,” Justin said, “Do you imagine we all meet in the same place? Not so – the God of the Christians is not limited by place, but being invisible, fills heaven and earth. He is worshiped and glorified everywhere by the faithful.”
“Tell me where you assemble,” Rusticus pressed, “or into what place you collect your followers.”

“I live above a man named Martinus at the Timiotinian Bath,” said Justin. “I don’t know of any meeting in Rome other than this. If any wish to join me, I teach them the doctrines of truth.”

“Are you not, then, a Christian?” Rusticus demanded.

“Yes,” Justin said. “I am a Christian.”

Justin’s companions were also questioned, and gave steadfast witness to Christ. With their loyalties established, the prefect addressed Justin once again. “Listen, you who are called learned, you who think you know the truth. If you are scourged and beheaded, do you believe you will go up to heaven?”

Justin replied, “I hope that, if I endure those things, I shall have God’s gifts. For I know that all who have lived faithfully will abide in his favor until the end of the world.”

“You think you will ascend to receive some reward then?” Rusticus asked.

“I do not ‘think’ it, but I know and am fully persuaded of it,” Justin declared.

“Then let us come to the point of the matter,” the prefect continued. “You have come here together. Now sacrifice, with one accord, to the gods.”

“No right-thinking person falls away from piety to impiety,” Justin said.

“Unless you all obey, you will be mercilessly punished,” Rusticus threatened.

“Through prayer,” Justin replied, “we can be saved on account of our Lord Jesus Christ, even when we have been punished. This shall become salvation and confidence for us at another judgment seat – the more fearful and universal one of our Lord and Savior.” The other Christians agreed with Justin’s witness. “Do what you will,” they said. “We are Christians and do not sacrifice to idols.”

With this, the trial was concluded. Rusticus pronounced their sentence. “Let those who have refused to sacrifice to the gods and yield to the command of the emperor be scourged and led away to suffer the punishment of decapitation, according to the laws.”

Justin and his companions were taken to the customary place of execution. In accordance with their sentence, they were beaten and then beheaded. Their fellow Christians secretly retrieved their bodies and gave them an honored burial as martyrs, rejoicing that their companions had remained faithful and inherited eternal life.
Living Bulwark

top illustration: Mosaic of St. Justin Martyr, Mount of the Beatitudes, Galilee, Commons Wikimedia
The Uganda Martyrs are a group of 23 Anglican and 22 Catholic converts to Christianity in the historical kingdom of Buganda, now part of Uganda, who were executed between 31 January 1885 and 27 January 1887.

The Story of the Ugandan Martyrs

Christian missionaries, both Catholic and Anglican, arrived in the interior of Africa during the late nineteenth century. The first of the Catholic missions was established in what is now Uganda by a missionary society called the White Fathers. [The White Fathers took their name not from the color of their skin but from the color of their long tunic.] As early as 1878, when he was asked by Pope Leo XIII to take charge of the missions in equatorial Africa, Lavigerie began a series of annual caravan journeys to central Africa as part of the Catholic evangelization of the area. The next year, a Catholic mission was founded in what is now Uganda.
The largest and most powerful of the local ethnic groups was the Baganda, a group in which European missionaries took particular interest. Edward Rice (a friend, incidentally, of Thomas Merton) offers an overview of the importance of the region and the Baganda people in his book Captain Sir Richard Francis Burton, a biography of the Victorian explorer and linguist. Rice recounts that the Baganda were among the richest and most advanced tribes in central Africa. Moreover, they “bore a certain patina of civilization that was to astound Europeans later, with well-organized bureaucracies, statesmanship of a superior order, finely developed arts and architecture, and unusual handicrafts.” Yet the civilization also had a dark side, according to Rice, with both rulers and subjects having the reputation of being “unnaturally cruel.”

Mutesa, the ruler of the Baganda, exemplified this cruel streak. When he took the throne in 1860, to ensure his own political survival he buried his brothers alive—all sixty of them. Yet he adopted a more or less benign approach to the Christian missionaries. (Butler’s Lives of the Saints calls him a “not unfriendly ruler.”) In essence, Mutesa allowed his subjects to choose among any of the faiths being imported into his kingdom—Catholic, Protestant, or Muslim. In turn, each group attempted to assert its influence on the king’s court through the conversion of high-ranking officials. Mutesa, however, pointedly did not choose any one creed. In 1884 he died, still adhering to the local traditional religions.

Conversion to Christianity among the Baganda meant a rejection of the traditional religions. It also implied a setting aside of some of the traditional ways of life, an adherence to a new set of moral and religious standards, and, often, the establishment of a new set of alliances, based on religious belief. As a result, the group of new believers (called abasomi, or readers) came to be regarded with suspicion by other Baganda as a dangerous rebel faction. During the reign of Mutesa, however, these suspicions were kept under check.

With the accession of his son, Mwanga, the situation altered dramatically. As a young man, Mwanga had shown some favor to the Christian missionaries, but his attitude changed as soon as he took the throne. According to tradition, the kabaka was the center of all authority and power in the kingdom, and he could use his subjects as he wished. But the presence of the missionaries was severely diminishing his authority among the converts. Mwanga was also a practicing pedophile, and upon discovering that the young men who had converted to Christianity were beginning to reject his sexual advances, he grew enraged. As a result, the king sought to eliminate Christianity from his kingdom and began a violent persecution of the missionaries and the new Christians.

In January of 1885, Mwanga had three Baganda Anglicans—Joseph Rugarama, Mark Kakumba, and Noah Serwanga—dismembered and their bodies burned. In October of that same year the newly arrived Anglican bishop, James Hannington, was murdered along with his caravan on their way to the region. In response, Joseph Mukasa, a senior adviser to the kabaka and a recent Catholic convert, reproached Mwanga for executing Bishop Hannington without having offered him the customary opportunity to defend himself. Mwanga, furious at what he saw as Mukasa’s insolence, had him beheaded on November 15, 1885. Mukasa became the first of the black Catholic martyrs on the continent.

Among those now in obvious danger was the head of the royal pages, Charles Lwanga, who had been instructed in Christianity by the White Fathers and who was now Mukasa’s successor in guiding the young converts. The day of Joseph Mukasa’s death, Lwanga went to the Catholic mission with other catechumens (those who were receiving religious instruction), and together with them he was baptized by Siméon Lourdel, one of the White Fathers. Among the pages was Kizito, age fourteen.

Their saga is retold by a current-day White Father, Aylward Shorter, of the Catholic University of East Africa, in Nairobi. (Today this order has reverted back to its official name, Missionaries of Africa.) According to Fr. Shorter, the next day the pages were summoned into the royal court by the enraged kabaka. The King had
learned that one of the young pages in his court, Mwafu, had been receiving religious instruction from another page, Denis Sebuggwawo. The king demanded that the pages confess their allegiance. All but three of the Catholic and Anglican pages did so. Mwanga, apparently baffled by this solidarity, put off their executions. At one point Charles Lwanga—echoing the stance of another, earlier, martyr, St. Thomas More—stated his allegiance to the kingdom of Buganda, declaring his willingness to lay down his life for the king. He would not, however, abjure his faith.

In February, a fire in the royal palace impelled Mwanga to move his court to a lodge on the banks of Lake Victoria. While there, Charles Lwanga protected several of the pages against the king’s violent sexual advances. Mwanga by this point had already obtained the consent from his chiefs to kill the Baganda Christians. Around this time, Lwanga secretly baptized five of the catechumens.

On May 26, the pages were called into the royal courtyard to hear their fate. From this point on, the story of the Ugandan martyrs closely resembles those of the early Christians. Fr. Lourdel, who had repeatedly pleaded for an audience with the king, was an unwilling witness. All of the men declared that they were prepared to remain Christians until death. In the end, Mwanga decreed that all of them—sixteen Catholics and ten Anglicans—be marched to Namugongo, eight miles away, where they would be burned. On their way to execution, bound by ropes and shackles, they were marched past Fr. Lourdel, who would later attest to their remarkably calm disposition.

They were marched to Namugongo, where, bound with ropes, shackles, iron rings, and slave yokes, they waited for one week. During that time the martyrs prayed and sang hymns; the Catholics among them recited morning and evening prayers, grace before and after meals, as well as the Angelus and the rosary, in preparation for their deaths. On June 3, before the execution of the rest of the young men, Charles Lwanga was put to death by the king’s men. He was wrapped tightly in a reed mat, a yoke was hung on his neck, and he was thrown onto a pyre. Taunting his executioners, Charles is said to have shouted, “You are burning me, but it is as if you are pouring water over my body!” Before he died he cried out, “Katonda,” or “My God.”

His companions were killed in the same gruesome fashion. Aylward Shorter writes, “As the flames rose, their voices could be heard praying and encouraging one another.” The last words of the young Kizito were “Goodbye, friends. We are on our way.”

In all, forty-five Christians were martyred at Namugongo: twenty-two Catholics and twenty-three Anglicans.

Again the story brings to mind the tales of the early Christian martyrs and recalls a quote from the third-century Christian writer Tertullian: “As often as we are mown down by you, the more we grow in numbers; the blood of Christians is the seed.” For after the White Fathers were expelled from the region, the Baganda Christians continued with the process of evangelization, translating the catechism into Luganda, offering secret instruction in the faith, and encouraging one another to persevere. Upon their return after Mwanga’s death, the White Fathers discovered five hundred Christians and more than a thousand catechumens awaiting further instruction.
In 1964, Pope Paul VI canonized all twenty-two of the Catholic martyrs. Five years later, as the first pope to visit sub-Saharan Africa, he laid the foundation stone of the shrine to be built in Namugongo in honor of St. Charles Lwanga and his companions. The shrine was completed in 1975, on June 3, now the feast day of the Ugandan martyrs.

source: https://www.americamagazine.org/content/all-things/story-ugandan-martyrs

Marvelous Growth of Christianity in Uganda
by James Kiefer

On 3 June 1886, thirty-two young men, pages of the court of King Mwanga of Buganda, were burned to death at Namugongo for their refusal to renounce Christianity. In the following months many other Christians throughout the country died by spear or fire for their faith.

These martyrdoms totally changed the dynamic of Christian growth in Uganda. Introduced by a handful of Anglican and Roman Catholic missionaries after 1877, the Christian faith had been preached only to the immediate members of the court, by order of King Mutesa. His successor, Mwanga, became increasingly angry as he realized that the first converts put loyalty to Christ above the traditional loyalty to the king. Martyrdoms began in 1885. Mwanga first forbade anyone to go near a Christian mission on pain of death, but finding himself unable to cool the ardor of the converts, resolved to wipe out Christianity.

The Namugongo martyrdoms produced a result entirely opposite to Mwanga's intentions. The example of these martyrs, who walked to their deaths singing hymns and praying for their enemies, so inspired many of the bystanders that they began to seek instruction from the remaining Christians. Within a few years the original handful of converts had multiplied many times and spread far beyond the court. The martyrs had left the
indelible impression that Christianity was truly African, not simply a white man's religion. Most of the missionary work was carried out by Africans rather than by white missionaries, and Christianity spread steadily. Uganda now has the largest percentage of professed Christians of any nation in Africa.

Several years ago I heard an African clergyman, born of pagan parents, tell of his conversion. He said:

One afternoon I was bicycling along a road and met a young man about my own age bicycling in the opposite direction. He promptly turned about and began to ride beside me and to talk. He spoke with great enthusiasm about Jesus, whom I had never heard of before, and how He had destroyed the power of death and evil by dying and rising again, and how He was God become man to reconcile man with God. I heard what my companion had to say, and before we parted I had accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. Now, the young man who preached the Good News of Jesus Christ to me that afternoon had himself heard of Jesus for the first time that morning.

Renewed persecution of Christians in the 1970's by the military dictatorship of Idi Amin proved the vitality of the example of the Namugongo martyrs. Among the thousands of new martyrs, both Anglican and Roman, was Janani Luwum, Archbishop of the (Anglican) Church of Uganda.
Africa is critical for the future of global Christianity. In the next 10 years, Africa will likely grow to have the most Christians of any continent: 700 million.

www.globalchristianity.org

source of infographic above on Christians in Africa:
http://www.gordonconwell.edu/ockenga/research/documents/1ChristianityinAfricaFINAL.pdf
Ecumenical Witness of Christian Martyrs in Our Present Age

“We live in the greatest period of persecution in the history of Christianity. In the twentieth century, noble martyrs like Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Blessed Jerzy Popieluszko gave their lives for Christ amid a cloud of witnesses greater in number than those martyred for the Name in the previous nineteen centuries of Christian history. That witness continues today in the self-sacrifice of men like Shahbaz Bhatti, a Christian cabinet officer murdered because of his defense of the religious freedom of all of his fellow Pakistanis.

As Evangelicals and Catholics who seek to honor the witness of these and other martyrs, we pledge to work together for the renewal of religious freedom in our countries and around the world.”

quote from Evangelicals and Catholics Together: In Defense of Religious Freedom

A New Ecumenism of Blood

“Today there is an ecumenism of blood. In some countries they kill Christians for wearing a cross or having a Bible and before they kill them they do not ask them whether they are Anglican, Lutheran, Catholic or Orthodox...They are witnesses to Jesus Christ, and they are persecuted and killed because they are Christians. Those who persecute them make no distinction between the religious communities to which they belong. They are Christians and for that they are persecuted. This, brothers and sisters, is the ecumenism of blood.”

- Pope Francis

“The ecumenism of suffering and of the martyrdom of blood are a powerful summons to walk the long path of reconciliation between the Churches, by courageously and decisively abandoning ourselves to the working of the Holy Spirit.”

- Pope Francis' address to the Armenian Orthodox Patriarch
“The blood of martyrs is in the church a force for renewal and of unity.”
- Pope John Paul II

“The only way to overcome our enemy is by loving him” (quote from The Cost of Discipleship by Dietrich Bonhoeffer). When the German Lutheran pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer was led from his cell to be executed by the Nazis, he told his prison companion: “This is the end – but for me, the beginning of life” (April, 1945).

“He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose...God, I pray Thee, light these sticks of my life and may I burn for Thee. Consume my life, my God, for it is Thine. I seek not a long life, but a full one, like you, Lord Jesus.”
- Jim Elliot, Baptist missionary in Ecuador who was martyred with four companions in 1956

“I ask of you this day the grace to become a servant and to give my life here as a ransom for peace as a ransom for life. Jesus draw me into your joy of crucified love.”
- Journal entry by Father Christophe Lebreton who was martyred in 1996 along with his six companion monks from the Trappist monastery in Algiers

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Articles on Modern Christian Martyrs in previous issues of Living Bulwark

- Witnesses in the Jungle: Jim Elliot and Fellow Missionaries, by Jeanne Kun
- Heroes of Faith: The Witness of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, by Donald Bloesch
- Stations on the Road to Freedom, by Dietrich Bonhoeffer
- A Soldier’s Higher Allegiance – Ivan Vasilievich Moiseyev, Russian martyr
- United in Love, the Trappist martyrs of Algeria, by Jeanne Kun
- Courage Forged Under Fire: The heroic witness and martyrdom of Sophie Scholl, by Don Schwager
- Witnesses in the Jungle: Jim Elliot, Nate Saint, and Fellow Missionaries
- Blessed by the Cross: The Heroic Life of Edith Stein, by Jeanne Kun
- Joy in the Face of Death: The Witness of Alfred Delp, by Jeanne Kun
- True Happiness: A Selection of Prison Meditations for Advent, by Alfred Delp

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Persecuted Christians Today

The Church in Chains Global Guide lists 60 countries where Christians face persecution because of their faith. The Global Guide divides the 60 countries into three colour-coded categories – severe (many or all Christians face persecution including imprisonment, torture, murder or violent mob attacks), significant (some, but not all, Christians face arrest, attack or serious restrictions) and limited (some churches or individuals face restriction or discrimination).

In 25 years of “chronicling and ranking” the political and societal restrictions on religious freedom experienced by Christians worldwide, Open Doors researchers identified 2016 as the “worst year yet.”

“Persecution rose globally again for the third year in a row, indicating how volatile the situation has become,” stated Open Doors. “Countries in South and Southeast Asia rapidly rose to unprecedented levels and now rank among such violent areas as the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa.”

The findings and trends noted by Open Doors are stark:

- Approximately 215 million Christians experience high, very high, or extreme persecution.
- North Korea remains the most dangerous place to be a Christian (for 14 straight years).
- Islamic extremism remains the global dominant driver of persecution, responsible for initiating oppression and conflict in 35 out of the 50 countries on the 2017 list.
- Ethnic nationalism is fast becoming a major driver of persecution. “While this took an anti-establishment form in the West, in Asia it took an anti-minorities form, fueled by dramatic religious nationalism and
government insecurity. It is common—and easy—for tottering governments to gain quick support by scapegoating Christians.”

- The total number of persecution incidents in the top 50 most dangerous countries increased, revealing the persecution of Christians worldwide as a rising trend.
- The most violent: Pakistan, which rose to No. 4 on the list for a level of violence “exceeding even northern Nigeria.”
- The killings of Christians in Nigeria saw an increase of more than 62 percent.
- The killings of Christians were more geographically dispersed than in most time periods studied. “Hitting closer to home, 23 Christian leaders in Mexico and four in Colombia were killed specifically for their faith,” said Open Doors of the “rare” event.
- The worst increase: Mali, which moved up the most places on the list from No. 44 to No. 32.
- Asia is a new center of concern, with persecution rising sharply in Bangladesh, Laos, and Bhutan, and Sri Lanka joining the list for the first time.

Open Doors noted that India rose to its highest rank ever, No. 15, amid the continued rise of Hindu nationalism. “An average of 40 incidents were reported per month, including pastors beaten, churches burned and Christians harassed,” stated Open Doors. “Of the 64 million Christians in India, approximately 39 million experience direct persecution.”

In Central Asia, persecution spread due to both Islamic extremism and government attempts to restrict it. “In many countries, governmental raids of suspected Christian households increased, certain Christian books have been banned,” stated Open Doors, “and the membership requirement to remain a legal church doubled, resulting in many churches to be deemed illegal overnight.”

article sources: Christianity Today, 2017, and Open Doors World Watchlist, 2018

top chart source: Church in Chains Global Guide

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A few years ago I attended a Kairos Conference for university outreaches in North America that impacted me greatly. The theme was "Love for the World." We talked much about martyrdom. We talked about what it means to give a complete "Yes" to the Lord.

One of my favorite examples of someone who gave a definitive "Yes" to the Lord is Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ. In the Gospel of Luke, we see the angel Gabriel appear to her, exhort her not to be afraid, tell her that God favors her, and that he wants her to be the mother of God’s Son, Jesus Christ. And in response to these revelations, Mary says "Yes." George Weigel, a Christian writer, has made four observations about Mary's "Yes" which I have considered and been challenged by:

1. She did not keep her options open
2. She did not negotiate
3. She did not have an 'exit' strategy
4. She did not ask for a contract.

And I am inspired when I see someone living them out. One such person is my friend Amanda, a young woman who once told me that her one dream was to be a "pink" martyr. When I first heard her say this, I was shocked and confused. I was shocked because I had never heard of someone – in the twenty-first century, and certainly not
someone I knew – wanting to be an actual martyr. I mean, using the word “martyr” seemed a little overly-dramatic to me. Weren’t martyrs a set of super-holy people who had died for the faith centuries ago in countries other than my own, whom we admire in hindsight but couldn’t hope to imitate? And I was confused. Was Amanda saying she wanted to be a pink martyr because pink is often labeled a feminine color? Amanda explained to me that she wanted to be both a "white" and a "red" martyr, to live her life fully for Christ and also to die as a martyr. White + red = pink. Amanda was, in essence, talking about radical discipleship and had caught the vision of what it means to truly be a witness, a “martyr,” to the Gospel.

This would-be pink martyr, Amanda, was a university student studying music performance. She thought for a long time that her vocation was to be a professional musician. But when she heard the Lord calling her deeper into life with him, she dropped out of school after her second year, and never looked back: her one desire was to seek God and give herself to him. Those closest to her were confused and upset by Amanda’s sudden loss of interest in music, and many didn’t understand her thirst for God. They thought she was confused and was wasting her God-given talent. But Amanda wasn’t confused. She just felt God was calling her to live single for him, and so after stopping her music studies she prayed throughout the next year about what faith community she was to join and how she was to express her call to celibacy. She has responded to God’s call to live single for the Lord and now lives in a cloistered monastery with other celibate women. Like the other sisters in her order, she has vowed that she will not go outside those walls and will spend her days and nights in service and in prayer for those around her life and those whom her faith community has agreed to pray for.

There was nothing fancy about Amanda’s everyday life. But the way in which she lived it was graceful, grace-filled. I knew Amanda for almost three years, but got to know her particularly well for two weeks while I was staying as a guest in a Christian discernment household. What she did were things such as: pray, laugh, speak of the Lord, read Scripture, serve her housemates, be my friend, babysit, sing, slide down banisters, and go for walks. She also loved to drink coffee, three cups in the morning, and three cups at night. Now I like to tell myself that you can be a martyr and drink your share of coffee too! During those two weeks, I observed Amanda’s everyday life carefully, and I continue to be inspired by what I saw: a simple, normal life lived in light of supernatural grace.

For me, Amanda is a martyr, what some of us might call a "walking saint." Some wonder at the idea of living one's life in a cloister, within walls, set apart from the world. Some people say, "What a waste! She just sits inside those walls praying, and she could be changing the world!" But Amanda knew well enough that even if she weren’t living in a cloister, if she were in the world, she would seek to live fully for Christ in whatever way he called her to serve him. Amanda knew that she couldn’t change the world – only Jesus Christ can change and love the world. She has chosen, as we all have a chance to do, whether in the world or in a monastery, to give her life to God and let herself be hidden in him. Amanda knew she had gifts – she didn’t go to a monastery because she thought she couldn’t do much else with her life. Amanda’s joyful confidence in God's love for her was the foundation of her life and, having experienced God’s love for her, knew it was enough for her.

At the Kairos Winter Conference Women's Session, we talked about how full confidence in and knowledge of God's love for us are the keys to giving that love to others. We can become martyrs because we know that God’s love frees us to love the world. This is the core of John’s message in his First Letter, "Perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18). While I don’t think God is calling me to the cloistered life, I have already learned a lot about discipleship from the example of Amanda’s life and from the message I heard at the Kairos Winter Conference, which reminded me, once again, that we are all called to be martyrs in our everyday lives by dying to ourselves so that we can live for Christ, so that Christ can be fully alive in us and in the world! Perhaps, if God wills it, some of us may witness to Christ by shedding our blood for him as well, and thus become the kind of pink martyr Amanda yearns to be.

So: Is martyrdom hard, intense work? Is it nearly impossible to be a living martyr in the twenty-first century? I
suppose it could feel so at times, and Satan would like us to think it really is. But my cloistered friend Amanda, my brothers and sisters in Kairos, and the Lord himself, who says "My yoke is easy, and my burden is light," all remind me that martyrdom is an expression of love – a response to and a reflection of Love Himself. And Love Himself says to us, just as he said through Gabriel to Mary, "Do not be afraid, for the favor of the Lord is upon you." We are God's children, and we need not be afraid, for his favor is upon us.

[Lynne May is a member of the Work of Christ Community in Lansing, Michigan, USA]
I have been reflecting lately on my experience of suffering hardships and trials and how God can use these to strengthen me in faith, hope, and love. Jesus stated that a grain of wheat must first die and be buried, covered completely, before it can bear fruit and become what it was made to be (John 12:26). I think that is an image of what God does in each of us as we die to ourselves, even in our times of suffering, and rise to new life in Christ. Jesus showed me that, because of his life, death, resurrection, and ascension, suffering is now a gateway to hope. And hidden within the ground of suffering lies the treasure: the priceless gift of eternal life with God in heaven.

Faith tested and strengthened by fire
The story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Book of Daniel, Chapter 3), who were thrown into the fiery furnace has been as inspiring example for me of how suffering can allow faith to grow and also be a witness to help nonbelievers find God. Three men, in a pagan land, are commanded to bow before a golden image, to commit idolatry. They say no, and are thus thrown into a fiery furnace – a furnace with real fire, a fire whose heat killed the men who threw the three in. The three who chose to be martyrs rather than idolaters, were engulfed in the flames and felt the heat, and yet they lived. They are thrown into the furnace bound, yet in the furnace – and not before – they are “unbound, walking in the middle of the fire, and they are not hurt,” Scripture says. I think, if we pass this too quickly we may miss the reality that they felt the fire, that they were touched by it, in their bodies, but ultimately were not harmed. This preservation is the cause of Nebuchadnezzar’s change of heart: “I see [he physically saw] four men walking in the middle of the fire and they are not hurt.”

Walking in the furnace of this world
The witness we can offer, perhaps the most provocative one, is that, if we find ourselves in the midst of trial, is to keep walking – keep walking in the furnace of this world and to live as “unbound” men and women. And we are called to live as “three,” as a community and not as individuals, confident that we do not walk in the furnace alone but with Jesus Christ, who is much more, “more” in every sense of the word, than the “angelic being” who was with
Living Bulwark

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

During some recent trials of mine I have felt a little like I was being bound and tossed into a fiery furnace, but I now realize more clearly that Christ has set me free. I can choose to walk in faith – to get up and live my life each day with Christ beside me, even in the midst of the heat of temptation. This is one concrete way I can witness to others around me. Satan wants me to be bound in fear and discouragement, and one of the best ways I can thwart his strategy, is to continue to pray, serve, and share the gospel joyfully, even in the midst of sorrow, pain, and suffering.

Because of what Jesus has accomplished through his incarnation, death, and resurrection, we are free to choose for eternal life with God.

**Your response to suffering**

I think it’s helpful to ask ourselves, How do I respond to personal suffering? Do I pull away from the Lord and from others? Or do I embrace the Lord in my suffering and, as the psalmist says, “pour my heart out before him” and proclaim that the Lord is my refuge? (Psalm 62: 8).

In our daily life, the Lord will at times give us a foretaste of the glory that awaits us. As Paul says, we are being transformed “into the same image from one degree of glory to another” (2 Corinthians 3:18). For me the most powerful and richest taste of this heavenly reality has come in the midst of suffering because it reminds me that I am made for something more – for glory with God.

As I experience God bringing me through trials, I experience, in minute ways, the redemption of my body, from which God’s own life of grace flows, just as the Psalmist promises will happen: “As they go through the Valley of Baca / they make it a place of springs” (Psalm 84:6).

Lynne May is a member of the Work of Christ Community in Lansing, Michigan, USA
Raising Up Disciples

A Pastoral Approach for Parents in Sword of the Spirit Communities

by Bob Tedesco

Introduction
Our mission involves evangelism, service, discipling (local and world-wide), community building, etc. These elements can further break out into their own subdivisions. For example, evangelism can subdivide as adults, our children, non-members’ children, etc. Discipling can subdivide as to adults and children. In this article, the topic is somewhat focused on raising our own children to be disciples.

In a community setting and over the passing of time, we can drift into parenting approaches which might be described as “natural” but infused with Christian overtones. Decisions for the family are more often influenced by the school culture than by the kingdom of God. Schedules, activities, recreation, etc. can look almost identical to the world around us. This approach to parenting does not produce disciples…certainly not radical disciples.

In the Sword of the Spirit network of communities, we have a paper called “Raising Up the Next Generation”, which provides a strategy for parenting for radical discipleship. We can draw the overall vision from that.

Some Preliminary Questions
First, perhaps most importantly, are we radically (wholly, thoroughly, entirely) committed disciples? Are we all in? Is it our identity? Is it our passion to see the kingdom of God here on earth? Do we think about the mission a lot? I think it was Benedict who taught that you cannot lead anyone beyond where you are and
usually they will trail behind about two steps. If we use natural parenting techniques we won’t get radical disciples. If our children become radical disciples it will be due to the good work of someone else and/or a sovereign work of God (which is always needed). We know that parenting is not all of the equation, but if our way of life and parenting teaches that low commitment Christianity is a viable option…they will be unprepared and unprotected against the enemy that stalks them.

“You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people, that you should show forth the praises of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”

1 Peter 2:9

We’re to be a “peculiar people; not “normal”. As Christians we should stand out not only in the way we raise our children, but also in our expectations for them. As followers of Christ, we should look somewhat odd, somewhat unusual, and somewhat uncommon. We’re called to be a unique people; a ‘peculiar’ people. How we live and raise our children should look oddly different from the secular culture in which we live. It would be wise to question – are we trying too hard to fit in? Are we just trying to go with the flow? Are we committed to the call to community? Is it ‘our way of life’ or just one part of our life? Those are all questions we should be asking ourselves.

If community is just one slice of the pie, it’s not going to look like discipleship to the children we’re trying to call on to our way of life. We want to take seriously the call to follow the Lord and make the rest of our life support that decision. That would mean grabbing your life by the neck and saying, “You’re going to support the decisions that I’ve made. You will follow the Lord. You will make the kingdom first!” Many other areas of life will try to lead you in different directions, e.g. your boss, school, your job or career, etc. You have to grab your life by the neck and say, “You will make the kingdom first!”

**Biblical Parenting**

In the Sword of the Spirit one of the common scriptures we refer to is Ephesians 6:4, which says, “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” That’s the scripture we refer to most in raising up our children. If we had initiations courses in this area of parenting, we’d see that scripture used a lot. The word ‘discipline’ usually makes us think of punishment. But ‘discipling’ our children and instructing them in the ways of the Lord is also a part of it.

Some ways in which we ‘disciple’ our children would include: teaching them to take a prayer time at an early age; engaging them in family prayer and scripture; encouraging them in some area of service without monetary compensation. Our Summer Camp program encourages our children to memorize scripture. It teaches them at an early age that scripture is important and they should memorize it. They are being instructed in the Word of God.

From Matthew 28:18 “All authority has been given to me. Go, make disciples... teaching them to observe all I have commanded you.” This scripture should be coupled with the above scripture from Ephesians. If we consider the whole span of parenting, the goal is to make disciples. This scripture from Matthew is an apostolic one: go forth and make disciples. What could be more important for parents and for the community as a whole than discipling our children? We’re not just raising our children to be good, decent, moral human beings. We’re called to be raising up disciples. For parents, that means following Jesus’ example from the gospels and using every teachable moment, e.g. mealtimes, car trips, etc. Even those moments when discipline is necessary can be turned into opportunities for training and instruction. Fathers should be encouraged to take their God-given role as the authority figure and head of the house and not leave these tasks to the mother.
Some of the elements of discipleship may be worth mentioning here. Such things as prayer, service, tithing and corporate decision making are all a part of making a disciple. Corporate decision making is an important one to teach our children – to learn the importance of making decisions with the input and discernment of other trusted brothers and sisters. That’s a part of discipleship.

There is a lot of talk these days about ‘intentional’. It started with ‘intentional’ community. We have heard of intentional discipling, intentional pastoring, and intentional relationships. How about ‘intentional parenting’ for discipleship? Intentionally introducing the elements of discipleship on purpose for the sake of raising our children for the Lord!

The Call

Jesus repeatedly said, “Follow me.” In Matthew 4:19 he said, “Follow me and I will make you fishers of men. There is another in Mark 2:13-14 He went out beside the sea, the crowd gathered around him and he taught them. And as he passed on he saw Levi, the son of Alphaeus, sitting at the tax office and he said to him, “follow me.” And he rose and followed him. That’s the call. “Follow me.” It is not just a call for us individually, but it is also a trans-generational call.

The call to be an inter-generational community was a part of the People of God from the very beginning. Some of us in the People of God community had older children when we began to build community, and we had a concern for them from the start.

In the early 90s we passed on to the region the trans-generational call. The Sword of the Spirit has given us so much: all of our initiations courses, the template for community…so much! Passing on the call to be inter-generational was our gift to the Sword of the Spirit. In the early 90s we took that call to the communities in our region and said, “The Lord is calling us to be after our own children to receive the call we have received.” The communities in the region enthusiastically received it. That was followed by an invitation to present the trans-generational vision internationally as well. Here, too, it was warmly received. So this is our little gift to the broader Sword of the Spirit and it’s an important one.

“Follow me” is the call. It’s an inter-generational call. The word ‘inter-generational’ or ‘trans-generational’ says something about us transferring it to our children. We want, as parents, to be able to transfer the call that we have received to our children. Do we have that expectation? Do we believe that our call to community is also their call?

The Our Father implies that we are part of a family. We say, “Our father…give us…our daily… forgive us…as we…lead us…deliver us. It is not just a nuclear family, but a much bigger, broader family. It is our call to expand the Father’s family by making disciples, and we begin with our children.

Some Potential Blocks

The Youth Culture
One of the blocks to forming our children into disciples is the broad spectrum area of the youth culture and the accompanying problems we encounter as parents in our efforts to curb its influence in our families.

The amount of time we allow our children to be invested in after-school activities can be key. If your children are overly committed to activities, too much of that will shape and form the child in the mold of the world. Activities are good for scholarships, etc., but too much ends up producing a child who’s just like all the other children rather than a disciple. If they spend all of their time in activities and very little time in the kingdom of
God they will, in fact, become ‘normal’. Have you seen normal? Look around. What’s ‘normal’? Is ‘normal’ what we want for our children?

**The Decision to Work**

If we allow our children to take on the responsibility of having a job we should ask some key questions: Where? What hours will they be working? Will they be home for dinner and shared mealtimes? Will they be available for Lord’s Day? Will they be able to attend gatherings and Sunday church services? Teaching them this kind of responsibility should be coupled with developing a heart for the things of God and seeing them as a high priority for their lives.

**Premature Courtship**

We should remind our children of the purpose for courtship. In the SOS we say that sex is for marriage; marriage is for family; family is for the kingdom of God. That’s our stand and that’s the biblical stand. If they aren’t ready for marriage, why are they into courtship?

**Choice of University**

We should do everything we can to keep our children in a local Christian community or Kairos environment (our university outreach programs throughout the Sword of the Spirit regions). We should try to block them from entering “party schools” and schools known as leaders in the fallen culture.

**Choice of Career / Job**

It seems today that every person who has an aquarium thinks they are called to be a marine biologist! We should help our children with that decision. We should help them to know that if they’re called to get married they will need a career that can support a family. If I followed my hobbies, I would have attempted to make a living by building model airplanes! Professional athletes and some others have been able to make a living at something the rest of us would call a hobby. But in sports generally, only 1 in 1000 are able to make money at it. The rest of us just have bad knees!

**Media**

Be careful with the cell phones, T.V., computer, gaming (especially for boys), social media and all the ‘tech toys’.

If all the time spent on Instagram and Facebook were put into something useful what would we have? We’d have a lot of PhD’s!

Recently, Mike Shaughnessy posed a thought provoking question: “Are we more interested in raising church-going, conservative, white-collar, educated suburbanites or saints, missionaries and martyrs? He encouraged us to address that question personally. Do we really want to raise a child who can be a disciple? Who can be a saint? A missionary? Or a martyr? Or do we just want a conservative, church-going, educated, mostly ‘normal’ child?

**Using What We Have to the Max**

I would encourage involving our children in the social aspects of our life in community – Summer Camp, retreats, Youth Group, Lord’s Day, etc. as they create links to other parts of our community life. These events, particularly for high schoolers, should be seen as a priority over work, school activity and sports. They should be more important.

**Sword of the Spirit Regional Events and Programs**
We should maximize opportunities for sending our children to University Christian Outreach retreats, GAP years, and Kairos regional conferences. It is a corporate venture because it involves more than just the parents. Many of us are now empty-nesters and we could say, “Why does that apply to me?” Our single brothers and sisters could ask the same.

But all of us – singles, parents, empty nesters, and grandparents can be involved in encouraging our young people to attend regional events like the YES Retreat, mission trips and youth events. We can participate by contributing financially so that all of our children have the best opportunities to engage other young people from across the region and hopefully encounter the Lord! It is a corporate call. It is a part of our mission; the most important part!

Reaching and winning our young people should be one of our highest priorities. We should curb our own materialism so we can set aside finances for these things. We should be tithing and expecting the Lord to bless our efforts. In Malachi 3:10 we read, “The Lord says, ‘Put me to the test if I will not open the windows of heaven and pour down for you overflowing blessing.’”

The last line of the Old Testament says, “He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers.” Malachi 4:6. Some translations say ‘parents’ rather than ‘fathers’. It is generally not a difficulty to turn the hearts of mothers toward their children, so the better translation would read ‘fathers’. The second half of the verse says, “...or else I will come and strike the land with a curse.” It hasn’t happened yet because we’re still here! We still have time!

The Lord is in it! The call is to your children, not just to you. As singles, the call is to these children, not just to you. As empty-nesters and the entire community – the Lord is in it with us! So we can all can count on that!

**A Prophetic Word for Mothers and Fathers**

The following prophetic word summarizes the call we have received from the Lord to raise our children to be disciples; to be saints, missionaries and martyrs:

**MOTHERS AND FATHERS IN THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT**

I have called you and prepared you to serve me
And I have also called your children and prepared them
    to march with me in the battle.
Have you given your children permission
    to join me in the battle?
Have you trained and prepared your children
    to join me in the battle?
Have you given your blessing to your children
    to join me in the battle?
There will be sacrifice for your children, but
    what I have called them to will be the
    fulfillment of what you have hoped, prayed
    and prepared for.
I call your children to join me as I called you
    to join me, to be a part of my battle as
    I march on to victory.
Let go of your children so that they may follow
    me and so accomplish what I have formed them to do
    in the advancement of my Kingdom.
Bob Tedesco is past President of the North American Region of the Sword of the Spirit. He is a founder of the People of God community in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA, and has been one of its key leaders for the past 45 years.
Some Elements of Discipleship in Christian Community

by Bob Tedesco

Background
In our network of communities in the Sword of the Spirit we have an “Entering Formations Seminar.” The third presentation in that series is titled “Elements of Discipleship.” It deals mainly with men’s and women’s small groups, keys to making them work well, working with a pastoral leader and getting the most out of pastoral care.

This presentation covers some elements of Christian discipleship, the ones that I have chosen to highlight in an effort to give a “snapshot of discipleship” in our approaches. There are other approaches and we know that there are many disciples of Christ in congregations, parishes and groups around us. We think that our approach has something to offer the broader church, and we continue to learn and refine.

Most folks who are drawn to Christian community wrestle with the decision to become a member … a big question. But really, who would not want to join a pleasant social group with good people and membership “perks” as well? In many ways, the decision for discipleship is really the question. Discipleship is a discipline, and the Lord wants to train us, and form us to be effective in mission, a good brother or sister, as we take on more of his character and nature. We rightly wrestle with the cost of discipleship, and there is a cost.

The Call
“He went out beside the sea, the crowd gathered around him and he taught them. And as he passed on he saw Levi, the son of Alphaeus, sitting at the tax office and he said to him, “follow me.” And he rose and followed him.” - Mark 2: 13-14

The call is, “Come follow me.” The best response is to stand up and follow the Lord Jesus. I is likely that the biblical examples had some preconditioning and earlier exposure to Jesus. It is unlikely that a stranger would walk by a person and say, “Come follow me”, and get a good response.
There are at least two broad difficulties with the call: 1) the cost (mentioned earlier), and 2) the call is no longer from a physical Jesus, but it is a call that we experience internally. How are we to respond? Who gets to say what “Follow me” means?

**Corporate Discernment**

The right response to “Follow me”, has a wide range of expressions across the broad spectrum of Christianity. On the one end you have parishes and congregations that have some form of initiation (usually with children) and then the adult is left to personally discern where the Lord is leading and to respond as an individual. On the other end of the spectrum would be a religious order with vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. Together they follow the Lord, often with some form of leadership council that discerns where the Lord is leading.

Between those poles of discernment, are many different approaches: movements, prayer groups, communities, settlements (Amish, Bruderhoff, Menonites), etc. In the Sword of the Spirit communities we are called as a people, we follow the Lord together, and we struggle to have our personal lives and families be subordinate to that decision to follow the Lord together. We get pastoral help and assistance in living out that decision. So, you can say that the threshold of community is the step into corporate discernment for our lives. In our experience, it’s safer and bears more fruit for the kingdom of God.

**Community and Discipleship**

In the “good old days” we were often trying to build community with some folks who had not yet decided to be disciples. Some embraced community but not discipleship. We were often at crossed-purposes and it was two steps forward and one step back.

The experience of entering into a relationship with the Lord should result in: discipleship, community and mission.*

Discipleship is a new way of life, different from the world and many Christian models.

**Some Elements of Discipleship**

Again, these will be some of the elements, not necessarily the most important and not in any particular order. These particular elements need to be occasionally emphasized and they can drift into indifference or misuse. The key word or phrase will be italicized for those who desire shorter lists.

- **Teaching**: Take your initiations courses seriously. We are not just getting our card punched, but topics of value to a disciple are being explained.

  *Jesus answered him, “What I am doing you do not know now, but afterward you will understand.”* John 13:7

- **Training**: Receive pastoral care and input about the application of teaching whether initiations courses or at the gatherings. The real life experience of trying to live a new way of life as presented in the teaching needs to be reflected upon, improved and perhaps re-learned for each stage of life.

  *If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.* John 13:17

  *Jesus answered him, “If a man loves me he will keep my word and my father will love him, and we will come and make our home with him.* John 14:23
You are my friends if you do what I command you. John 15:14

Support: We should attend our small group faithfully and get support, encouragement and correction to help our personal lives conform to scriptural teaching.

*As a disciple of Christ in Christian community, when you choose a spouse, you choose family, children, extended family, small groups, shared purposes. When we choose to be the spouse of Jesus…

- **Body life**: Regularly attending community gatherings, retreats and conferences faithfully is a key element of our corporate life together as a people. We come together to corporately hear the Lord speak to the wider body and get a more complete view of what the Lord intends for our people.

- **Tithing**: We practice tithing in the Sword of the Spirit with some kind of split between our community and our denominational body. Perhaps more importantly, we teach an approach to our finances which supports certain financial practices such as tithing, almsgiving, supporting our outreaches, and generosity.

  “The Lord says, ‘Put me to the test if I will not open the windows of heaven and pour down for you overflowing blessing.’” Mal. 3:10

And he sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the multitude putting money into the treasure. Many rich people put in large sums. And a poor widow came, and put in two copper coins, which make a penny. And he called his disciples to him, and said to them, “Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For they all contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, her whole living. Mark 12: 41-44

- **Service**: Do some service for the Christian body (or bodies) that you are a part of. Each member should be making some substantial contribution of service (time) to our mission.

- **Spiritual life**: Prayer, scripture study, fasting and spiritual reading are all a part of our spiritual life. We should have a plan for all of these: personal prayer, family prayer, scripture study, etc.

- **Corporate discernment**: As mentioned earlier, depending on the body that you are in, discernment of life’s path and decisions can fall somewhere between, “Do as you see fit,” and the vow of obedience. Most folks that are in some kind of community will get some pastoral input and help with life’s decisions. I’m building a small, two-seat airplane in my garage. I just passed a first preliminary electrical inspection. I would never move on from one stage to the next without a “second set of eyes” signing off on my most recent work. Similarly, life’s decisions, which can affect my near or long-term future, can benefit from a second set of older or wiser eyes.

**A Few Purposes of Discipleship to Prepare for Life in the Body of Christ**

We are probably well acquainted with life in our part of the world, but Christianity is a new way of living. If relationships are closer, as in a community, the need for training in how to apply scriptural principles in a modern setting is even more important. In general, high exposure, close relationships as in a family or some sort of Christian living situation, requires more clarity as to expectations and responses to various situations.
To Grow in Commitment to the Body of Christ and its Mission
A young couple entering into marriage makes a few general vows at the ceremony. Most of us would agree that many other commitments are implied but never mentioned. We don’t normally promise to come home each night, or to have meals together or to share a common “purse”. These are implied. When we give our lives to Christ, certain commitments are implied and one purpose of discipleship is to help us to understand what it means to be a committed member. One of our members lost his job as a manager in a company that was cutting back on its way to eventually shutting down. In his search for another job, he had options that required him to move to another city. Yet, he was committed to this body and to this mission. He was out of work for quite awhile before he took a lower paying job so that he could stay in this body. That’s inspiring commitment!

To Learn to Love the Lord on His Terms
The earliest stage of Christianity is rightly a celebration of our new life in Christ. We celebrate his mercy and forgiveness. We go from brokenness to being a new creation. We love the Lord for what he has done for us. Eventually, we begin to wonder what he requires for us beyond, “Sin no more.” Slowly, he trains us and reveals how he wants to use us in his body. He intends for us to be useful and to bear fruit.

To Give Glory to the Lord by Modeling the Relationship
The world needs to see people living in relationship with the Lord. The world needs to see Christian marriages. I call this ‘prophetic’ modeling. It’s almost as if the Lord is speaking to the world through good Christian lives and good Christian marriages.

To Learn to Make Decisions for the Kingdom of God
Once we have made a decision for the kingdom of God, discipleship helps us to make smaller decisions that support that decision. Just as Gulliver was held down by tiny strings, our decision to be set apart (holy) for the Lord can be paralyzed by many smaller, selfish (unholy) decisions.

To Grow from Being Selfish to Selfless
As an older person (76 is the new 75!) I think that one way of describing the Christian life is this: we are born totally selfish where only our food and comfort are important. If we progress well under the influence of parents, family, teachers, etc., we slowly grow through stages of empathy, compassion, etc., to where the needs of others grow in importance. So, we progress from being almost totally selfish to being purified into an other-centered life. Jesus on the Cross is the perfect example and symbol of a life well-lived. When we embrace the Cross, we embrace the path to other-centered living…and discipleship helps us with that.

To Grow in Love for the People of God
Whatever body we are a part of, discipleship helps us to grow in love for the people we are a part of. Not just fuzzy, warm feelings kind of love, but committed love, faithful love, loyal love that endures hard times.

See other articles by Bob Tedesco

Bob Tedesco is past President of the North American Region of the Sword of the Spirit. He is a founder of the People of God community in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA, and has been one of its key leaders for the past 45 years.

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Postmodernism, Instability, and Identity Issues

by Michael Shaughnessy,

Through the 1950s teens were taught that absolute truth and morality existed. Almost everyone believed in the traditional point of view and tried to live accordingly.

By the 1970s teens were taught a relativist worldview. It said, “Truth exists, but you need to find it for yourself. No one can determine it for you.” Truth was no longer absolute but relative to you. Still, you were expected to find and live out a consistent and mostly traditional morality.

Today’s teens grow up in a postmodern world. They are taught that there is no correct point of view. This shift has a powerful effect. It can kill the natural human instinct to search for truth. There is no truth, just opinion. You cannot tell if any opinion is more right than any other, and opinions are everywhere.

A teen’s parents say one thing, their favorite singer another, Hollywood a third, and their volleyball coach something else. Who is to decide? Most teen’s own experience of life seems to validate a world of opinions devoid of truth. “What I felt was right last week doesn’t feel so right this week. Things have changed.”

Truth has been demoted to opinion and opinion demoted to feelings. Reason has lost value.

Defining Postmodernism

Postmodernism defies definition intentionally. Defining it would violate one of its key principles: “no definite terms or absolute truths exist.” The assertion that “no truth exists” is a self-contradicting statement. In response, postmodernism says, “contradiction is unimportant.”
The acceptance of contradiction is one of the most distinctive qualities of postmodernism.

In dismissing contradiction, postmodernism “justifies” never justifying anything. It also allows an odd answer to this question: Which of the following is the correct answer?

1) Absolute truth exists
2) Truth is relative to you
3) Truth does not exist
4) All of the above.

At first, it would seem that postmodernism would answer 3) Truth does not exist, but in fact, the postmodern answer is 4) All the above are correct.

Postmodernism accepts the contradiction of answer 4.

Thus, a politician can assert as a traditionalist that we should follow the Bible, yet live in open adultery as a relativist because marriage just isn’t working for him. As a postmodernist, he can dodge taking a stand by saying, “who am I to judge” and then pass laws he expects us all to follow as a traditionalist.

In the postmodern world, we let him get away with the contradiction.

**Instability**

Contradiction leads to instability of belief and morality, and instability is another characteristic of postmodernism. Oddly, instability is one of the most stable, reliable, and permanent things in modern life. Everything is subject to change, not just beliefs and morality, but also “place” and relationships.

Today we move with ease and frequency from one place to another. We are not grounded geographically. Our ancestors were grounded in the village and it did not change very much. Then the old mom-and-pop restaurant by the oak tree was replaced by a Big Boy which has since become a MacDonald's. We have no stable geographical village.

We also have an unstable relational village. Neighbors move. We move. Siblings move. Youth have cousins they have never met, but might be having Thanksgiving dinner with their step-granddad and his unknown grandchildren. Best Friends Forever don’t last and families break down often.

Adolescence is a time of natural instability. Our ancestors went through it also, but they expected to become stable adults, with stable beliefs, in a stable village, and that all helped create a stable identity. That is not the case today. Instability is the new normal and that makes it even harder on teens.

**Identity Issues**

Jean Valjean, in *Les Misérables*, asks the question, “Who am I?” He is fighting to establish his identity as a man and not just a prisoner numbered 24601.

But when the modern teen asks, "Who am I?" He answers, "Anyone I want to be!"

Unlike Jean Valjean, who is trying to assert one, true, integrated, consistent identity, the modern teen juggles multiple identities with no felt need to integrate them. This reinforces a teen’s instability in faith, relationships, morals, emotions, and intellect.

The result is long-term confusion (often unrecognized) and an inability to make commitments – one of the best
ways to overcome instability.

Postmodernism is a vicious circle, but if you ignore contradiction, the free floating world of youth makes a bit more sense.

Obituary

Is youth culture dead? It began as an alternate culture in the 1890s but it has become the primary culture of the western world. And it is run by adults! Youth do still influence the culture some via pop music, YouTube, new slang, and cutting-edge apps, but fashion (jeans and yoga pants) are worn by all ages. Hair style is no longer a defining issue, nor are drugs, sex, or suicide.

R.I.P.

Michael Shaughnessy is the Kairos director for the Sword of the Spirit both in North America and Internationally. He is the editor of the Kairos Youth Culture Newsletter. Kairos is an international federation of outreaches to high school, university and post university aged people.

top illustration (c) by Kevin Carden
Report of the International Assembly 2018

by Juan C. Aragón

The International Assembly of the Sword of the Spirit took place between the 25th and the 29th of May of 2018 in the Catholic Diocesan Centre in Turcifal, Portugal. The event was hosted by the A Boa Nova (the Good News) Community, who did an excellent job of welcoming all those who arrived to take part in this international governing body of the Sword of the Spirit.

The International Assembly is made of the Senior Coordinators of the member communities of the Sword of the Spirit that have finished their formation process and have been approved as formed communities, as well as the Regional Coordinators and Regional Missionary Coordinators who oversee the formation of new communities and the care of the member communities. The members of the International Executive Council are also a part of the Assembly.

The Assembly is a time to discuss the direction of the Sword of the Spirit, to make decisions to help protect and defend the unity that is such a characteristic of the Sword of the Spirit. It is truly inspiring to see the unity in which decisions were made, in spite of differences of opinion.

Some of the most significant decisions made:
Jean Barbara was elected International President for one more term
Anton Colella, Manny de los Santos, Dave Hughes, Andy Juan and David Mijares were elected to the International Executive Council and joined Jean Barbara (International President) and Ken Noecker (current Presiding Elder of the Servants of the Word)
Betania (Acapulco, México), Cristo Resucitado (Chontales, Nicaragua) and Verbum Dei (Mexicali, México) were approved as full member communities in the Sword of the Spirit.
There was an in-depth discussion about how local communities should protect the well-being of children and young people.
There were reports of the progress of every region as well as the Youth Bridge, the Ecumenical Commission, the International Community Building Committee, the Leaders Formation project and others.
A revision of the Irreducible Common Nucleus, which is a foundational document for the Sword of the Spirit, was approved.
The work of the International Executive Council was reviewed.

But it is not all work. The Assembly is a rich time to strengthen the brotherly relationships between the leaders. Every day there were times of relaxed fellowship, and one night the brothers gathered in small sharing groups. One day we traveled to some of the touristic areas of Portugal where we took the official photo of the event. This photo was with Portugal’s iconic Belem Tower as background. The tower is a Bulwark built during the sixteenth century, and it served to protect the Portuguese capital. It is shaped like a caravel, a light sailing ship on which the Portuguese took the Good News of faith to new lands. It is a very symbolic picture.

As a part of that trip, we visited the Jeronimos Monastery. There, in the high-ceilinged church, we had the chance to sing “God Alone,” written by our brother John Keating. It was a moving experience of the Holy Spirit as we sang in one voice but in 7 different languages (watch the video here).

We had very good prayer times every day, as well as a special time to celebrate the Lord’s Day opening meal together with the members of the A Boa Nova Community, followed by a time of typically Portuguese cultural entertainment.

We took some time to pray for the political situation in Nicaragua after hearing the testimony of the Senior Coordinator of the Ciudad de Dios community in Managua.

We also had a session to honour our brother Bruce Yocum and thank him for so many years of tireless service as a leader, a prophet and a servant among us.

We did the symbolic presentation of the new Sword of the Spirit maps, and several maps were sent to each member community.

This was, without a doubt, a greatly blessed time that created a lot anticipation about what the Lord is going to do among us in the Sword of the Spirit.

Juan Carlos Aragón is a member of the Arbol de Vida Community in San José, Costa Rica. He attended the International Assembly as a translator. Photos thanks to Romeo Fernando from the Good Shepherd Community in Vasai, India.

Juan Carlos Aragón is a member of the Arbol de Vida Community in San José, Costa Rica. He attended the International Assembly as a translator. Photos thanks to Romeo Fernando from the Good Shepherd Community in Vasai, India.
“Taken By Love” — A Tribute to Beth Melchor

A Senior Woman Leader of the Sword of the Spirit
and a Founding Member of Bethany Association

Our dear sister Beth Melchor passed away on June 26, 2018, in Manila, Philippines, after enduring a long and valiant fight with cancer over the past several years.

Beth was one of the founding sisters of Bethany Association, the international network for women living single for the Lord in the Sword of the Spirit. A member of Ang Ligaya ng Panginoon (The Joy of the Lord), she served as a senior woman leader in the community and outreaches since she was a young woman and was a member of the International Women’s Coordinating Committee of the Sword of the Spirit.

In a tribute spoken to Beth shortly before she died, Mae Legaspi, also a senior woman leader of Ligaya and member of Bethany Association, said:

“You have always been so simple, always seen by all as loving the Lord with all your heart, mind, and strength, always willing and ready to go the length to express your love for Him. . . . You love God’s people as well. You are kind and generous to them. You live so simply to give to the Lord and to His work! . . . You are a deeply loyal and faithful friend as many attest. You keep in touch. You remain a friend in spite of distance, circumstances, different beliefs and lifestyle. . . . Your greatest legacy to me is showing me how to live as a child of God, as a disciple, in good and in bad times, in plenty and in need, in sickness and in health, in joy and in pain. You are doing it very well, Beth! Your spouse and friend is mighty proud of you.”

And from Jhola Salazar, a fellow Ligaya member who serves in CYA and is also currently on the Bethany Association council:

“Our dear sister, Beth, has finally come home to her Beloved. We pray that the Lord will bestow upon her the crown of glory and the joy of everlasting life which she has lived for all her days.”
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Jeanne Kun, Past President of the Bethany Association council and a senior woman leader in The Word of Life community (Ann Arbor, Michigan) who frequently served internationally with Beth, writes:

“When I reflect and think of Beth, I could tell of her many gifts and virtues. In her professional life, Beth was a highly intelligent and talented professor of Mathematics, Physics, and Theology, as well as a skilled and efficient administrator. And regarding Beth's more than 40 years of community life and service in Ligaya and internationally in the Sword of the Spirit, I could recount how she was insightful, kind, steadfast, trustworthy as she gave of her time and resources and energy with generosity and fervor and zeal for the Lord and for us, His people. And in her life consecrated to living single for the Lord, Beth was an ardent and fervent lover of God.”

“So now, as I think of Beth, I most of all remember her as a dear friend and as a woman who had been ‘taken by love’ as she titled the book she wrote about her journey from being a rebellious youth to being a missionary of the Lord. Let me end my reflections here with the words that Beth herself wrote at the conclusion of that book:”

*Life is a pilgrimage, and we are on our way home. What awaits us our minds cannot comprehend. ‘Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor has it so much as dawned on man what God has prepares for those who love Him’ (1 Corinthians 2:9). So let us run the race and see each other at the finish line. I began my race “taken by love.” At the finish line, love will take me home. Love is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. And when our race is done on earth, we will rest forever in the eternal embrace of love.*

From Andy Juan’s Eulogy at Beth Melchor’s Funeral

(Presiding Coordinator of Ligaya)

I thank the Melchor family for sharing a wonderful woman with us from the very early stages of her life. We thank you for raising up a daughter like Beth, for planting seeds of love and generosity in her heart that allowed her to be generous to us and to all those whom she has served. Generosity begets generosity. Beth slipped out from this earthly life last Tuesday, your 89th birthday Tita Charito (Beth’s mother). And yet you call it the greatest birthday gift - because you fully know that you have a ‘saint’ in heaven! Only a spiritual woman can have that perspective and utter those words. We thank you for your strength and inspiration!

And to us in the Ligaya, we can only be thankful and grateful for what the Lord has done for Beth and for
us. How blessed are we to once again, witness and experience the love and offering of a person, and be amazed of what God is capable of doing, if only one is willing to give one’s life fully.

“My life is not my own, it’s yours for whatever you choose to do with it.”—a line from one of the songs sang at Mass last night. Its a declaration of total surrender, of complete abandonment, of not holding back, of giving it our all. May we all be inspired and be given the grace to do the same. And brothers and sisters, Beth would be happiest, if we continue running the race, faithful to our way of life, loving and serving one another and bringing others to a personal knowledge of Jesus Christ. While we mourn her loss in this earthly life, we celebrate the victory of Christ in her immortal life.

Beth, a grateful Ligaya wants to thank you - for a life well lived and shared. Yes, you have fought the good fight, ran and finished the race. You have kept the faith! Pray for us that we too may finish ours one day.

*Taken by Love: From a Rebellious Youth to a Missionary in China*

*by Elizabeth Melchor*

The collection of personal stories and reflections in this book traces the author's experience of encountering the immense love of God - from her conversion to her entry into the renewal; and her experience of God's love even amidst sickness. It tells of amazing miracles and numerous blessings. The stories relate how God leads His Beloved in this wonderful pilgrimage of life from a once rebellious youth to a missionary in China.

Published in 2015 through Shepherd's Voice Publications, Inc., under its self-publishing arm: lifedreams books, Quezon City, Philippines.

See previous articles written by Beth Melchor in past issues of *Living Bulwark*:
> A Bride of Christ, August 2017 Issue
> An Invitation to Joyful Witness of the Gospel, June 2014 Issue
> Embracing the "Present, February 2014 Issue
> Celebrating Life's Blessings, May 2007 Issue
Uneasy With the World and Longing for Home

by Tom Caballes

"How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD of hosts! My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the LORD; My heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God."
- Psalm 84:1-2 ESV

Some time ago, I went on an overseas trip that lasted a month. I visited beautiful buildings, historical places, and nice hotels, but after a few days, I felt uneasy and restless; there is something amiss and does not feel right – I am not at home. I started longing for home in far-off New Zealand. No matter how beautiful or majestic things I visited are, I know I will only be there for a short time. I then started reflecting – “Where is my true home?” I asked. Is it in Wellington, New Zealand, where I live, or in Manila, Philippines, where I grew up? I realised that my true home is with God in heaven, where all my hopes, dreams and joy reside. As I walk in this life, I look forward to when I will finally see God face to face and enjoy His everlasting presence. I realised that I will always be uneasy and restless in the world because I am just a short-term visitor here. How about you – where is your true home? Do you long be in heaven? Is being with God in heaven your true hope, focus, joy, and security? Or are you very comfortable, contented, and at ease in the world?
So What Do We Do Now As We Long for Our True Home?

1. Do not settle for anything that the world offers. No matter how rich and famous we become, we cannot bring them to where we are going. No matter how gratifying anything in this world is, that pleasure is just temporary. We are meant for things eternal, not just for temporal things. We are just passing guests here.

2. Focus on being rich in God’s eyes. "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." [Matthew 6:19-21 ESV] We should focus on serving God and others in this life, not amassing wealth.

3. Let God be your true source of security and joy and not material things. If your heart is focussed on your material wealth, you would naturally rely on them as your sense of security. But riches can come and go; God is always with you. Your only attachment in this life should only be with God; not money or riches, not achievements, not fame, and not even good relationships. All those things will one day go away.

4. Because of sin, you encounter various hardships and trials at different points in your life – live out your life well. Never give up. Stand up when you fall. Glorify God in all that you do. Fulfill what God has called you to; seek His will in everything. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. [1 Timothy 6:12 ESV]

5. Share the good news with all people you meet. All our relationships in this life are only temporary; if we care enough for our friends, we want them to go to heaven, too. There, we can be truly BFF – best friends forever.

6. Anticipate your heavenly reward. It is good to visualise and contemplate what heaven would be like. Imagine having an immortal body. Imagine you will meet all the saints and martyrs of the past, and all family members and friends who have won the victor’s crown. Imagine no more death, disease, pain, and sorrow. Imagine that at the centre of it all will be God, whom you will walk with forever and ever. Isn’t that something worth longing and waiting for? Then we will truly be at home - our lasting, satisfying, fulfilling, and perfect home.

Other Scripture passages:

1. But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. (Philippians 3:20 ESV)

2. Seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. [Colossians 3:1-4 ESV]

3. But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him." [1 Corinthians 2:9 ESV]

4. Other Bible verses: Matthew 7:13-14; John 14:2-4; Galatians 2:20; and Revelations 21:4-8.

For personal reflection or group sharing

How focussed and invested are you on the things of heaven rather than things on earth?
Tom Caballes is the National Senior Administrator and a National Coordinator of the Lamb of God, a community of the Sword of the Spirit with 7 branches located throughout New Zealand. Tom also leads Kairos New Zealand, an outreach program for high school, university, and post-university aged people.

Tom and his wife Mhel and their two daughters live in Wellington, New Zealand.
**Hearing God in the Abundance of His Methods**

by Sam Williamson

Most believers long for—desperately long for—God’s voice, but most of us experience silence. Scripture says, “God speaks in many and diverse ways, but nobody notices” (Job 33:14). We miss his voice because he’s not a paint-by-number God. He speaks in ways we don’t expect.

Well-meaning people often mislead us when they describe their conversations with God. Their exchanges with God sound like dialogues written by master playwrights:

I asked God: *What should I do with my life?*
God answered: *Are you willing to take a risk?*
I replied: *Yes, but I don’t know what to do.*
God said: *Move to Timbuktu.*

When people tell us these stories, we think, I never hear God so clearly. Let me tell you a secret: neither do they. At least not most of the time. Their stories are usually shorthand summaries of hours spent reading Scripture, reflecting on his words, praying, getting Godly nudges, and recognizing God’s voice in circumstances or through friends.

Because God speaks through his infinitely imaginative, artistic mix of methods.

**Methods**

Let’s not put God in a box. If we limit his voice to a few methods—the scripted dialogue or heavenly visions—
Living Bulwark

we will miss his voice when he paints his words with different brushstrokes. Below are seven common methods in which God speaks.

**Responsive Resonance:** God’s Spirit often resonates in our spirits as a response to external events. Perhaps it’s a burning in our heart or a sense that God has something significant for us in this moment: a Scripture passage leaps out at us in prayer, or we overhear a “chance” comment in the coffee shop. God moves speaks to our hearts to pay attention.

For example, “While waiting in Athens, Paul’s spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was full of idols” (Act 17:16). Now, think with me: there were idols in every city Paul visited, but God stirred something in him in that moment in Athens.

**Spontaneous Nudging:** Sometimes God nudges our heart out of the blue: to pray for a friend or to act on an issue. It comes more as a sense on the heart than as a direct word.

I once got a sense to pray for a friend, so I phoned him. He had been let go from his job just hours before. We prayed on the phone and he thanked me for my concern. Only I hadn’t been concerned—I hadn’t even known—it was a concerned God who spontaneously nudged me.

**Direct words:** Sometimes God speaks direct words—usually just a sentence or two, or perhaps just a phrase. The first time I heard God speak, I had just become a ten year-old atheist. He simply said, “Sam, I am real and you don’t understand.” For me, most direct words—if any—usually only come after I pursue God in prayer and reflection following a resonance or nudging.

**Unbidden Memories:** Sometimes God brings to mind a past event. I once remembered my twelve-year old self saying something harsh to a neighborhood kid. Weeks after remembering, I bumped into that kid, now a grown man. I reminded him of the story and repented. He too remembered and wept when I repented. (My eyes teared up as well. Just don’t tell anyone.)

**Planted Images:** God isn’t limited to nudges and words. Sometimes he even paints pictures.

Around 1915, my grandfather received a mental picture in which the letters KWANGSI were spelled in red letters across the sky. In the local library he discovered that the letters spelled a province of China (now spelled GuangXi). He spent the next two decades living in that very province, founding four churches. Should we tell God we won’t accept a vision?

**Recalled Passages:** God often brings unbidden passages to mind at just the right moment.

Once while talking with a man—and when I had zero wise words to say—a verse popped to mind: *We comfort others with the comfort we’ve been given* (a paraphrase of 2 Corinthians 1:4). I told him of a comforting word God had recently given me. Nothing wise, just comfort. It answered an unspoken question of his. Since my Bible memorization is abysmal, it simply had to be God.

**God Shaped Thoughts:** Perhaps these are the hardest to recognize because our thoughts feel like our own. Yet how many times have you felt utterly empty, no words to pray, and then a brilliant (and obvious) thought streaks through your mind? C. S. Lewis expressed it like this:

Then, seeing me empty, you forsake
The listener’s role and through
My dumb lips breathe and into utterance wake
The thoughts I never knew.

God speaks in many and various ways. Let’s not box him in.

Sam

P. S. This article is an excerpt from my book Hearing God in Conversation. Its topics include:

- Learning to recognize the sound of God’s voice
- Hearing God in his silence
- Hearing God for another person (and how to respond when someone gives us “a word”)
- Hearing God in the ordinary
- Hearing God for guidance

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Sam Williamson has published numerous articles and has written two books. He has a blog site, www.beliefsoftheheart.com, and can be reached at Sam@BeliefsoftheHeart.com.


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An Update on Koinonia Outreach to University Students in London, UK

Understanding Our Mission in Student Evangelism
by Rita El Hachem

Last March, Koinonia in London, UK participated in a Kairos Student Worker Outreach Training (SWOT) weekend on the topic of strategy in our mission work. It was a great opportunity for us as a university outreach to reflect on signs of hope that keep us going in our mission, but also time to set goals, make our goals as specific as possible, and find practical ways to get to it. It was a reminder that Koinonia's needs are not always the same as those of other University Christian Outreaches and that God wants us to tackle those particular needs. We discussed two specific character traits essential for mission and crucial to implement strategy: diligence and discipline. Planning takes time and always starts with our own repentance, confession of sin, and baptism in the Holy Spirit which will lead us to obedience and to a better knowledge of Christ.

We were asked to think of some biblical figures, and try to see where they needed to show discipline. I particularly remembered Joseph's story in the Bible - a young man sold into slavery, to become later on, a high-ranked official in Egypt. Not only did he have a close relationship with God, but he dealt decisively with temptation and sin, constantly growing in discipline. He thought wisely, acted prudently, and most importantly, he lived morally a good life that is conformed to God’s will. Joseph’s story is a great example for us not to fall in the trap of boasting in ourselves by thinking we are self-disciplined. This virtue of discipline is truly a gift of the Holy Spirit, that would make us more humble. Once we give God more room to work in various areas of our lives, we realise it is Him who makes us grow in discipline. Taking this step is not always easy, it comes with its own challenges, but “God disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness.” Hebrews 12:10

During the weekend, I learned to seek after the Lord, not only for myself, but for those around me. Those two days helped me better understand our call and our mission as an outreach. We build community by bringing people to God and offering them a taste of the joy it is to know the Lord. When we approach them with a spirit of fellowship and
service, we can invite them into life in the Holy Spirit; receiving baptism in the spirit and developing a relationship with God that will give new meaning to their lives. To many of the people around us, we might be the only witnesses of God’s love in their lives. Let’s not miss a chance to bring them closer to Him!

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**No Easy Answers**

by Meggie Gretzinger

I hate it when you ask someone a question and they give you an easy answer. The kind that’s only half-true, that’s only black and white.

I remember being fed up with those as a teenager. I'd been brought up as a Christian, but I was starting to ask a lot more questions. I was involved in a Catholic charismatic youth group, and one thing I learned there was that I could ask God those questions myself, and expect an answer.

A few years later some family members became seriously ill, and I decided to postpone going to university to have more time with them. I love my family but it was all a bit exhausting, and I found myself asking God: what are you doing here? Why is this happening?

I'd missed application deadlines at this point, but when spring approached I felt that God was telling me that it was time to move on, and that I should apply to unis in London. When I was there, I met Koinonia. Having a place to worship God alongside brothers and sisters was so helpful for me, and the Lord used Koinonia to bring some healing from the past year. But I still wondered why it all happened the way it did, and when God would bring some good out of the situation.

I remember reading John's gospel about that time and being struck by Jesus' appearance to Mary Magdalene. Jesus sees her standing there, weeping by his tomb. But he doesn't come in and start explaining everything, he asks her why she's crying, and he listens to her. That struck me, especially as she's my namesake, and I felt the Lord saying to me that he was listening to me and my questions and that he was with me.

And then I noticed what he does next - he sends her on mission.

As I was having this experience, Amy, a Koinonia staffer, came up to me and asked me if I wanted to be part of a team of students who were going to meet and encourage each other in evangelism. We do a Bible study looking at how Jesus talked to people, we pray for each other and share about how it’s been going, and we fast for it once a week. I think prayer and mission really need each other, and having other people pray for the ones you’re reaching out to, and vice versa, is brilliant. And the fasting – that’s practical, isn’t it? You’re saying to God ‘I’m really serious about this. Please use me here.’

At the same time, Mica, my Koinonia small group leader, asked us if we wanted to read a book called 'Questioning Evangelism'. She said it was about using questions to start evangelistic conversations. I said 'Yep, sounds perfect for me.' People love being asked questions! I was very curious about my Muslim friend's faith, so I asked her about it. And then, of course, she asked me about mine. We had a good chat, and that seemed to be all for the present. But recently, when her uncle was stabbed, she asked me to pray for her.

It can be scary to ask our friends ‘big questions’, but I’ve been amazed at how effective it’s been at building friendships. And it’s the same with us and God – we’ve got to ask him about our lives. He's God, after all; he's not going to change. He’s with us as we wait for him in the here and now, and one day we will be with him forever and our waiting will finish. Ask him the big questions. Who knows what will happen?
Meggie Gretzinger is a third year Children's Nursing student at the University of Greenwich, and Rita el-Hachem is finishing a master's in Health Psychology at UCL. In the past year, both were very involved in Koinonia, the student outreach of the Antioch community in London.

For more information about Koinonia in London, UK, visit their website and facebook page.
Stephen (A Garland)

poem by Ana Teresa Perrem

His blood fell
Like the first drops of paint
On the white canvas.
Witness witnessing,
Because he had seen
First jewel of the crown.

And life kept dripping, mixing, creating
Of colours and shapes,
Of light and of shade,
Beauty.
And what you and I do, today, and tomorrow —
We paint;
Because we have seen,
Witnesses witnessing,
Living or dying, we paint
New jewels of the crown.

> See more poems by Anna Teresa Perrem in Living Bulwark

- For his Glory
- Come, Run After Me
- Trees by the Stream
- Stephen (A Garland)

Ana Teresa Perrem and her husband Dominic are members of Nazareth Community in Dublin, Ireland
I see his blood upon the rose
And in the stars the glory of his eyes,
His body gleams amid eternal snows,
His tears fall from the skies.

I see his face in every flower;
The thunder and the singing of the birds
Are but his voice – and carven by his power
Rocks are his written words.

All pathways by his feet are worn,
His strong heart stirs the ever-beating sea,
His crown of thorns is twined with every thorn,
His cross is every tree.
Joseph Mary Plunkett (1879-1916) was born in Dublin, Ireland. He was educated at Catholic University School, Belvedere College and Stonyhurst College. His study of the mystics John of the Cross, Theresa of Avila, and Francis de Sales is discernable in his poetry. He was a close friend of Thomas MacDonagh and Padraic Pearse, noted Irish poets. He was for a short while editor of the literary publication, the Irish Review. Along with MacDonagh and Edward Martyn, he co-founded the Irish Theatre. During the 1916 Rising he was one of the signers of the Proclamation of the Irish Republic. He was imprisoned by the English army in the Richmond Barracks. Shortly before his execution in the courtyard of Kilmainham jail, on the morning of May 4th, he married his fiance, Grace Gifford, in the jail's chapel. He died at the age of 28.
Flowers of Lebanon

new art work series by David Kurani

From the artist: I love painting landscapes and nature - just going outside and looking at it is medicine for my soul. I feel palpably better after gazing at it. To try and capture some of its beauty and upbuilding effects can be both a challenge and a relaxation at the same time. And I feel happy contentment if I am able to capture some of it and bring it inside to those who cannot go outside so much, or to the particularities of that interesting place/time/light.

Of course God is behind it all. The scenery is his handwriting, the weather his mood, the appreciation of them his inspiration and the creative process his impulse built on his precedent. I am reminded of a thought offered by Bernard of Clairvaux which goes, in effect: "The beauty around us is meant to remind us of, and point us towards, the perfection of beauty in its author and creator, our God." I thank God every time I finish a picture; I
feel each one is a gift from him.

"Poppies", watercolor on paper, 44×62 cms, by David Kurani

Note: That's the corner of the Franciscan monastery I go to attend the liturgy - so the scarecrow is dressed in a (faded) Franciscan robe. Which is a little funny because scarecrows are supposed to scare away birds but since St Francis reportedly attracted them one wonders which way the birds might go (!)
"Hollihocks", Watercolor & ink, 50×72 cms, by David Kurani
"Wysteria Blooms", watercolor on paper, 40×51cms, by David Kurani
(Beirut is barely seen in the distance)
"Queen Anne's Lace", watercolor, 50×72 cms, by David Kurani

David is a noted Lebanese landscape artist. He teaches classes in art and theater at the American University of Beirut, Lebanon. David has exhibited widely in art galleries and private collections throughout Lebanon, Europe, and the USA. He and his wife Gisele are active members of the People of God in Lebanon, a member community of the Sword of the Spirit.

> See other art work series by David Kurani in Living Bulwark