

In Preparation of Apostasia: Equipping the American Church for Coming Persecution

Concept Paper

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2020

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Introduction

1.1 Exploring Christian Persecution

There are several fundamental tenets of the Christian faith such as Conversion, Baptism, the Eucharist, and Evangelism. All play crucial roles in binding together believers from diverse geographical and socio-political backgrounds, from all strata of class and economic disposition.

But one tie that unites Christians of all stripes in most parts of the world has been absent in the most affluent of cultures - and especially so in America. Peculiarly, it is the tie that universally links modern believers with those of the past, connecting them to the Apostles, to the Prophets, to the Church Fathers of the first four hundred years of the Church, to those who found themselves on the wrong side of the Inquisitions, and not a few during the Reformation.

This tie is persecution, and it is the foundation marker for both Christ and the Apostles during the first century. It served as a litmus test, a seal of approval on the lives of saints and martyrs who willingly, often joyfully, endured hardships and sufferings and even sometimes traded their own lives for their testimony of Christ.

1.2 The American Church is Not Prepared

In fact, since the founding of the United States, the American Church has never experienced widespread and severe persecution. There is no doctrine or teaching within modern North American Evangelicalism nor in Catholic dogma that provides instruction for the individual Christian on what they should do if subjected to severe physical or psychological or socio-economic persecution. It is not discussed in Bible Studies, and it is not addressed from the pulpit except for the occasional mention concerning the persecution foreign Christians endure. There are likewise no academic programs focusing on persecution in American Seminaries. In fact, the idea is rather an anathema in the Church. It simply has never seriously been considered by American Christians.

When persecution is brought up about Western believers, it is most often in relation to a kind of quasi social stigma that American Christians must “endure.” They have had to endure the “wrath” of comedians or are made fun of by neighbors or extending family members. Rarely if ever, though, are Americans called to genuinely suffer for their faith, to sacrifice their lives in defense of their testimony of Christ.

This reality has placed the American Church today in a precarious position.

Generationally untrained to even consider suffering as part of the Christian experience let alone a hallmark of and integral component to their witness, American believers are now finding themselves on the cusp of a fundamental transformation, a socio-political shift that will in short order, unless immediately and aggressively halted, swing a target onto themselves. Very soon American Christians may find themselves having to count the costs of their faith and weigh the choice of their profession of Christ seriously and soberly.

This research demands the question be asked: Is the American Church ready for persecution?

Problem Statement

2.1 No Current Western Curriculum

An informal survey of major Church curriculum and discipleship programs reveal few sections dealing with persecution generally and no sections that address persecution directed at the American Church specifically. There is simply little to no discussion of the issue at all, as if the very concept were unheard of. This, of course, is to be expected, since, as already stated, the American Church has never really been exposed to any kind of systematic or persistent persecution from either the culture or the state during its entire existence.

But this reality has left the Church vulnerable when persecution does come, with little to no means of expressing suffering as a gift from God rather than a punishment. This ill-equipped view will lead many individuals in the future to possibly misconstrue persecution as something “wrong” when it should be embraced, instead, as a hallmark of God’s favor.

2.2 Developing a Theology of Persecution

This research project proposes to not only determine the extent of American Christian atrophy concerning persecution, but to also develop a comprehensive theology of persecution so that this Christian subgroup can stand firm in their faith and testimony even against physical and psychological suffering, if needed even to the death.

This curriculum could be used by individuals as well as Church and para-Church organizations. It could be utilized by denominational groups and can be implemented and incorporated into already existing discipleship programs. It will train the individual believer to wrestle through the difficult issues that pertain to persecution, allowing them to answer important questions like: what would an individual or Church do if it found itself under ultimatum by the local, regional, or national government? What would their response be if threatened to have their tax-exempt status stripped or to lose their secular accreditations? What if they were harassed into or told they must compromise or be subject to heavier taxation, raids, imprisonment, or even death?

What would individual Christians do if they had to make the choice between a

compromised faith or having their job, home, or family taken from them, or if they were ostracized by their community, were jailed, displaced, or forced to flee? What would they do if the government, private entities, or the mob came for them in the dark of night, demanding a decision: denounce Jesus as Lord or die?

Until now these issues only affected Christian groups in far off countries and entirely different, unheard of regions. The only time American Christians encounter even a discussion of persecution was at a talk given by returning missionaries who often brought back wild tales of bravery and hardship and heroism. There was and still is a disconnect for many Christians in the United States, that this kind of suffering could never happen to them.

This is not the case anymore. Persecution is at the door and the American Church, unless a dramatic shift occurs within the culture itself, will no longer be spared and will have to make very difficult decisions in the future.

Research Relevance

3.1 Increased Christian Persecution

Persecution has increased globally in most recent years for the Christian Church. From 2019 to 2020 it grew by 6%¹ as government restriction over religious freedom tightened in the more severely oppressed countries. In that single year, there were nearly ten thousand Churches attacked, some 3711 believers detained or imprisoned without trial, and nearly 3000 Christians murdered for their faith.²

If these frightening statistics were not enough, it has become obvious that we are living in the age of the rise of the surveillance state, with Facial Recognition Systems deployed globally, in Federal and other governmental buildings, on street corners, interlinked with personal video and audio doorbell systems, their monitoring companies gleefully turning over footage to any law enforcement agency that asks (and without the permission of the public). There has also been an increase in hostility against Christians globally from alternative religious groups such as adherents of the Islamic faith.³ In fact, Christian Persecution is not only spreading geographically, but it is also increasing in its severity as well.⁴

3.2 Global Distribution of Christian Persecution

Of the 2.5 billion people on earth that identify as Christian, 260 million have experienced some sort of severe and sustained persecution.⁵ That works out to roughly 10% of the Christian population. In fact, some have said 2 from every 5 Asian Christians in the world face high levels of persecution,⁶ with the worst places on the planet to be a Christian in 2020 were places like Yemen, Iran, Sudan, Somalia, Eritrea, Pakistan, Libya, Afghanistan, China, and the worst of them all being North Korea.⁷

Estimates give the number of Christians worldwide to be martyred every 10 years is approximately 900,000.⁸ But, this is in no way a new phenomenon. By the year 325 AD, nearly 2 million Christians had been killed for their faith.⁹ Throughout the two thousand plus year history of the Church, 69 million have lost their lives for professing Christ Jesus as Lord.¹⁰

3.3 Historical and Practical Imperative

Historically, Christians have accepted their destiny of suffering as an integral part of their faith. After all, the Bible clearly states the believer will experience

persecution in their lifetime, especially during the great “falling away” that Paul predicted will come in the end times (2 Thessalonians 2:1-3). Yet, despite this long history, the American Church has mysteriously been immune to such high costs for their faith. They have been able to worship openly, have had the freedom to speak out in the public square with no consequences, and such speech has until very recently been legally protected for all.

The Church in the United States has never actually experienced persecution at all, for several generations, nearly 250 years. Despite this blessing (though some would argue a curse) American Christianity today is ill prepared to exact a cost at all for what they believe. In fact, it is expected that what constitutes the American Church would and will rapidly hollow out if and when persecution comes to its doors. Either professing Christians will simply denounce Christ at the mere hint of a genuine cost, or they will so compromise the basic tenets of the faith that such faith will be unrecognizable in the future. No longer would they adhere to the absolute truth of the Bible or the testimony held for the last few thousand years, but instead they would adopt a godless, humanistic religion in the name of comfort and safety.

But this research does not depend on the event of persecution actually occurring

any time soon. Just as the Church discovered within a few centuries after Paul's death, that the apostle had somehow misjudged the end of the world, so too is it possible that modern Christians will misjudge the signs present in this age.

Regardless, whether there are only a few short years remaining until the Return of Christ or there still is yet several decades to go before God closes the last chapter on human history, this research will be able to offer help and instruction to whichever generation has been predestined to walk in suffering.

We know from the predictions of the Bible, no one knows the day nor the hour, save God the Father (Matthew 24:36). But we are told that day will come and with great severity and rapidity. When it does, the forces of evil will overtake the forces of good (Revelation 13:7), and brother will betray brother and child will betray parent, and husband will betray wife (Matthew 10:21). It is not a matter of if but when, and the American Church needs desperately to prepare herself for that eventuality.

3.4 Personal Interest

I am not only a fellow believer in Christ, but I was raised and currently live and hold citizenship in the United States. In my near 30 years as a professing Christian, I have never experienced actual, physical, psychological, or socio-economic discrimination or persecution in any genuine way because of what I happen to believe. I have been free to write a blog about my faith, saying whatever I desire without fear of repercussion. I have been blessed to have an open Internet and local Churches that I could attend. I have even had the freedom to abstain from most if not all organized religious activity in the last several years without fear of expulsion from the universal faith.

But persecution has come to my attention because of the fundamental shift in American political and cultural ideologies as of late, especially with the presumed theft of the 2020 election by liberal/progressive activists who are agents of socialist/Maoist factions. Over the last several decades, these identitarian groups have infiltrated every aspect of American culture, from Hollywood to local governments, to academia, and technology. They have utilized the opportunities presented by the COVID pandemic to seize control and have already begun

discussion of systematic dispossession of what they would deem as enemies of the state. Their prime target is any individual who dissents from their officially or informally approved ideological worldview, but also those who profess or have association with conservative values, are professing biblical (or culture-only) Christians, or any ethnic group they perceive to be unacceptable.

Considering these developments, I have personally asked these questions: if demanded to choose life or Christ, what decision would I make? If subject to asset confiscation, loss of employment, unable to eat or find shelter, if forced to flee from my geographical location, if barred from medical treatment, all because I would not deny Jesus as my Lord, how soon would I compromise my faith for a warm bed and filling meal and the semblance of peace and safety?

Definition of Variables

4.1 Definition of Persecution

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines “persecution” as an act or practice of persecuting, especially those who differ in origin, religion, or social outlook.¹¹ It is overall a presumption in dealing with what is often termed “the other,”¹² either by government body or enforcer or the culturally dominant. It manifests most often in the form of social stigma, formal or informal ostracization, intermittent or systemic physical or economic discrimination, or outright physical torture.

4.2 Definitions of Death

The standard and legal definition of death is biological.¹³ This definition states death occurs at the moment the body ceases the ability to sustain life, continued conscious experience, and mental functioning. Such a death can be achieved in several ways, but typically by compromising one or more of the central bodily function systems (Nervous, Circulatory, Respiratory, etc). There are other definitions of death, such as brain death.

The Bible provides additional (though not necessarily alternative) definitions to death, such as the first and second death. The first death would be analogous to biological death, the cessation of physical, functioning life while the second death refers to an eternal state experienced by being cast into the Lake of Fire. This is marked, paradoxically, as persisting between existence and non-existence, being held-together (atomically) while simultaneously being (atomically) torn apart. It is a state unlike any other in the existent realms and includes both the physical body and the soul (the entire corpus of the individual being).

4.3 Definitions of Martyrdom

The definition of martyrdom is tangentially related to the definition of death but narrows characteristically to one who dies specifically for a purpose or cause (typically religious). Whether they die inadvertently through some indirectly related act, spontaneously at the hands of a vehement mob, or at the behest of a systematized neutralization program (often under government oversight and/or implementation), the murdered individual is targeted categorically because of their specific belief system.

Martyrdom is codified in the Bible as a primary means of death for the apostles, for many prophets and for those future witnesses who hold to a testimony of Jesus Christ.¹⁴

3.4 Definition of Worldview

The definition of a worldview is any formulation, systematization or codification of a particular belief structure pertaining to the reality of existence, the origin, nature, and future of the physical dimension, and how humans (and other sentient life) are positioned in and relate to that worldview.

3.5 Definition of Theology

The definition of theology is any informal or formalized philosophy (or worldview) that is specifically or haphazardly interconnected with a deity. The deification aspect is often the defining characteristic distinguishing between philosophy and theology.

It can be loosely collected (as a folk theology) or highly systematized and codified into rules or laws (as exampled in the Old Testament or Systematic Theology). A theology can carry only ecclesiastical weight or might dually carry both

religious and legal efficacy (such as exemplified in Islamic Law).

In many instances, a particular theology is founded and operates upon a given set of axioms or presuppositions that are considered ultimately true yet possess no physical, clinical, or logical evidence.

Questions to be Answered

5.1 Why has the American Church Abandoned Suffering?

This is a fundamental prerequisite to be answered before an effectual theology of persecution can be developed since persecution has been abandoned as any kind of legitimate expression of faith by the American Church.

Once this question has been adequately addressed it will serve in providing viable avenues for distributing the theology and curriculum to as wide an audience as possible given the scope of the challenge and ultimately the unknown timeline available before open and accessible training programs are suppressed by hostile efforts.

5.2 What Would Persecution Training Look Like in Today's Church?

Today's Church in the United States is progressively modernized and is predominately structured after and based upon the secular corporate entity. This is ultimately in service to its god Mammon and the Church will eventually be extricated from this systemization, either by choice or, more likely, through

exponentially increasing persecution and disenfranchisement in the future.

Immediate training can and should be implemented in a number of ways before overt persecution becomes widespread.

1. Once a comprehensive curriculum has been developed, effort needs to be made to make that curriculum available with as few obstacles as possible to any American interested or willing to undertake it. This could be done via online lecture and curriculum, through in-person and virtual workshops. There is (or will be) a potential risk to public facing instruction (and specifically toward the instructors) as they are targeted by the opposition and will be, along with pastors and teachers and leaders of the Church in general; they will be detained, arrested, charged, and imprisoned for a wide variety of “crimes” against the state (or against public health). The more self-based, self-directed, and anonymous the training can be presented and distributed to individuals and groups the better chance there is in both effectively disseminating the material and in protecting the participants and instructors.

2. Pastors, teachers, and Church leaders (in the modern organized Church) should be encouraged with as few impediments as possible to implement the

training with their existing discipleship programs. The curriculum should be developed in such a way as to aid in allowing pastors to incorporate the curriculum content as they see fit (before God) or teach it to their flock as a conceptual whole. There is consistent evidence that such curriculum and training will be targeted by the opposition early on and should be disseminated as quietly and as widely as possible.

3. This researcher needs to consider the possible call God has for him to take this curriculum to the American Churches in an itinerant ministry, coming alongside pastors, teachers, and leaders of the local Church to aid them wherever possible in providing this training. As few impediments should be placed in a local Church's way so that as many as possible can be properly and effectively equipped to stand for Christ if and when they are called to do so.

4. A loose, unofficial, untraceable, highly covert network needs to be developed of local affiliate operators who are trained in clandestine communication and operations for the purpose of acting as "handlers" to engage in missional and evangelistic work once persecution begins. These handlers would be operating on their own in conjunction with the support of the overall network to introduce new

individuals into the mission and work of God, to train new candidates, to conduct operations (bible and material creation and distribution, serve as communication conduits, as well as provide necessary resources and emergency protection and extrication for workers and Christians in jeopardy) and provide structure and resources for the underground Church.

5.3 How does the Philosophy of Death Inform Persecution Theology?

A particular philosophy of death would inform a theology of persecution by providing the necessary foundation from which to aid in the very construction of said theology. Without knowing what death is, or what it does, or how it affects the Christian who is offering himself/herself up to God by giving their own lives on behalf of their testimony of Christ, the Christian martyr is left with an empty and unanswered sacrifice. While the absence of a clearly defined philosophy of death does in no way invalidate the giver's sacrifice, it is one done in blind obedience to the cause of Christ, rather than a sacrifice informed and elucidated by clear understanding and consent.

It is said that all philosophy is a preparation for death and in no way is the

philosophy of death for the Christian martyr any less than this. Knowing the intricacies of death and its functional and predictive biological process, stages, and ultimate outcomes well arms the participant and lessens if not entirely eradicates apprehension and the fear of the unknown. To know death intimately and juxtaposed with a supernatural, Enochian worldview is one that orients the sacrificer within a cosmic reality, armed with an effectual understanding of both the futility of this life and the enduring utility of the hereafter.

5.4 How does the Enochian Worldview of the Apostles inform Persecution?

The Enochian worldview, one that establishes a divine council that shares in administrative duties with God the Father and Christ the Son, elucidates for the theology of persecution a broader and enriching and mysterious tapestry upon which one can place the self and the other into a fixed yet fluid continuity. Reality is often shunted in this world through a multitude of filters (of race, status, worldview, indoctrination, gender, and the hyper-subjective nature of individual experience) from which we cannot quite overcome regardless of our efforts.

The New Testament authors were apparently readily aware of and at least some

of them wholly ascribed to the concept of supernatural deity-like entities who shared some aspects of administration with God and the Son. The pictures we have formalized of heaven, hell, and afterlife are evidentially skewed toward an increasingly humanistic worldview, a philosophy that downplays or discards altogether the supernatural realms or its inhabitants. These non-terrestrial, multi-dimensional creatures have had their origin and full scope shrouded by the recorders of cosmic history. What second temple period writers clearly understood to be true has further still been clouded by propaganda and revisionism.

Once adopted, though, this worldview provides explanation with greater depth of how and why human would harm human, why there appears to be a concerted and exponential effort over vast tracks of generational time frames to erode a God-centric faith (however folkish it might be) and replace it with a human-centric, godless system of absolute oligarchy. The conspiracy can only be explained by evident and inherent evil found present within the human psyche from the beginning of the fall to today, with high powers and rulers in control. The Enochian worldview provides a consistent framework from which we can understand why persecution would be implemented, provides a necessary justification for Christ's command to

love our enemies and our rules and to pray for them, and ties together disparate biblical references that otherwise appear self-contradictory.

5.5 What does the Bible say about Persecution? What does it Predict?

There are numerous passages concerning persecution. This section will list the major references pertaining to persecution and Christian suffering with included annotation.

All who are Genuinely Christian will Suffer Persecution (2 Timothy 3:12; John 15:18-21; Matthew 10:22; Matthew 13:20-21; Mark 4:17; Mark 10:29-30; 1 John 3:13; Romans 8:17; Acts 11:19; 14:22; 2 Timothy 1:8; John 16:1-4, 33; Galatians 4:29; 5:11). This is a statement of fact: if you desire to “live godly in Christ Jesus you will suffer persecution.” It is an undeniable reality for most of Christendom. If the world hated Christ it will likewise hate you, the believer. By taking his name we subject ourselves to ridicule, to persecution, and by doing so we share in his suffering. But, in Matthew 13 we are warned, there are some who will not stand for persecution, but will reject Christ as soon as tribulation begins.

You are Blessed if you are Persecuted (Matthew 5:10-12; Luke 6:22-23; 1 Peter 3:14). Christ and Peter both assure us, we are blessed if we are allowed to suffer for our testimony. We are assured of great reward in heaven and instructed to be overjoyed at the sight of persecution, for it is the same lot as the prophets and the apostles.

There will be Persecution in the Great Tribulation (Matthew 24:19-25; Romans 8:35-39; Revelation 6:9-11; 7:14; 17:6; 20:4). We are told the great tribulation will be like no other persecution seen on earth. It will be severe and brutal and countless believers will suffer to the point of death for the Word of God and for their testimony. The multitude of martyrs will be a separate and distinct group of beings in the intermediate state, awaiting in rest as Christ avenges their deaths.

References on How to Prepare for Persecution (Luke 21:12-15; Romans 12:14-21; 13:1-4 1 Peter 4:1-4, 12-19; Matthew 5:44; Mark 13:11-13; 2 Corinthians 4:8-12; 12:10; 1 Peter 3:14-17; Revelation 2:9-10; Psalm 23; Philippians 1:12-14; 29; James 5:10; Acts 7:52). For we will be hauled before religious and secular leaders, persecuted and imprisoned, all because we confess Christ as King and Lord of the living and the dead. But the sole purpose of persecution is so that we might be given

the opportunity to witness to the lost. Therefore, we are told not to pre-plan our defense, not to consider our response, but to simply allow God to work through us. Christ will speak for us and through us so that “all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist.”

We are to bless our tormentors. Feed them. Help them. We are not to repay but should strive to do good and to live at peace. We are to obey every rule, every law, every authority over us, save for the Word of God and for the testimony of the faith in Christ. To suffer as anything but a Christian is futile, but to suffer as a Christian is our testimony before God. In fact, we are told that he who is subjected to persecution is one who has ceased from sin, that he lives no longer by the flesh but by the spirit. Persecution should not be viewed as strange or foreign, but we should rejoice in taking part in Christ’s sufferings.

5.6 What does Early Church History say about Persecution?

Throughout Church history persecution holds a prominent position, from the first four centuries and then during the Dark Ages, and again during the Inquisition and Reformation. As Tertullian put it, “the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the

Church.”¹⁵

The beginning of suffering for Christians was at the hand of the Jews, such as Paul’s persecutions (Galatians 4:29) and Stephen’s stoning (Acts 7:54-60). Rome, a religiously polytheistic culture, saw the Christian monotheistic extension of Judaism as a threat to their way of life. So disruptive was the spread of Christianity, Pliny the Younger in 111 A.D wrote to Trajan asking what to do with local Christians.¹⁶ Pagan temples were being abandoned because there were so many converts, and Christians were increasingly being blamed for natural disasters and for offending the local deities.¹⁷ Because of the Eucharist, Christians were being accused of cannibalism and were eventually subjected to all sorts of violent acts, such as beheadings, being thrown to wild beasts in the Colosseum, being skinned alive, being shot with arrows, beaten to death, boiled in oil, being whipped and of course being crucified.¹⁸

As Clement stated in his letter to Rome, “Through envy, those women, the Danaids and Dircae, being persecuted, after they had suffered terrible and unspeakable torments, finished the course of their faith with steadfastness, and though weak in body, received a noble reward.”¹⁹

He goes on to describe how the early saints were thrown into prison, persecuted, stoned, slain, yet they remained faithful just like the prophets.²⁰

5.7 What does Church History tell us about Persecution by Other Christians?

Certainly, Christians have been persecuted and martyred by the enemies of the faith, namely, non-believers or other religious groups hostile to Christ. But much of Christian suffering can be blamed on the Church herself, or, at least, those who self-identify as Christian.

During its first three hundred years Christianity had to fend off the Roman state, the multi-god mobs of Roman culture and heretical ideas external to the Church itself. But, after power was established in the Holy Roman Empire and Christianity, more specifically, Catholicism, was made the state religion, things began to change. In an attempt to rule - to gain and maintain power - the Church leadership opened member admittance to all who were willing. Soon, the Church became a power broker instead of the Church that Christ was building. In response to perceived heretical ideas, the Catholic Church launched the first of what would be many Inquisitions.

In trying to defend the faith against Gnosticism and Waldensians (proto protestants), the Church struck with a mighty force. In the 1100's the Medieval Inquisition targeted Cartharists who believed in a dualist creation, one physical world created by an evil god and the other spiritual world created by a good god. Unfortunately, caught up in the melee were innocents of all persuasions. Waldensians, who were by doctrine and theology obviously believers were targeted because of their rejection of papal authority among other rejections that threatened Catholic authority.²¹

Joan of Arc a famous individual from the 1500's, otherwise known as the Maid of Orleans, led the French armies in the 100 Years War against the English. She claimed God had called her to the aid of Charles VII and had several victories in battle before being captured and held on trial for heresy.²²

Though imprisoned for life, she was subsequently burned alive after renouncing her confession of guilt. A few decades after her death, at the petition of her mother, Joan was retried, her verdict overturned, and was subsequently made a saint by the Catholic Church in 1920.²³

The French historian Jean-Baptiste Guiraud defined the Medieval Inquisition as

a system of repression issued by the ecclesiastical and civil authorities to protect religious orthodoxy which were both threatened by theological and social doctrine²⁴ of individuals who today would be consider orthodox.

It was no better for believers during the Reformation in the 1500s who found themselves on the wrong side of those in authority. In Switzerland it was made punishable by death anything that authorities considered heretical and many people were burned alive, beheaded or both.²⁵

Those in history that have had a tremendous effect on the future of the Church and our entire evangelical freedom most often received the harshest treatment from other so-called Christians.

William Tyndale, an English scholar during the Reformation lived his life on the run from the Catholic Church and was inevitably betrayed by a confidant, arrested, strangled and then his body burned at the stake.²⁶ Others like Juan de Avila, who caught the ire of religious authorities, spent a year in prison because of his views and practices on prayer.²⁷ Those in the Spanish Inquisition fared no better as dozens were burned alive²⁸ while a total of 3000 to 10000 were executed.²⁹

5.8 How should Christians handle Persecution?

Christians are in a unique position in that they, as far as the Bible is concerned, hold dual citizenship, both in their home country of birth and in the Kingdom of Heaven. A literal reading of the biblical text reveals that Christians are born into a celestial kingdom, one ruled by Christ as King with God the Father being his only superior in all of Creation, and this Kingdom is ruled with and on behalf of Christ by other entities. These other beings consist of what is known popularly as the Divine Council, made up of angelic-like beings, supernatural in nature, mysterious in origin, yet in full submission to Christ's reign. These beings are higher in abilities, yet not so necessarily in importance (though such differentiations are murky at best) from their like-kind kin in human beings. In fact, humans are slated, at least those who are saved by Christ and share with him an eternal destiny at his side, to become like the angels in heaven and will fill the vacant seats in the Divine Council left open by the fallen angels of Genesis 6:1-4 once the Sons of God are revealed.

Because we are dual citizenry, as Peter puts it, Christians are, "...a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his

marvelous light... ” (1 Peter 2:9).

Those who have been selected to endure persecution are instructed to do so in a particular way. Of course, as the whole of the New Testament exhibited the end of the rigidness of the codified law of the Old Testament, so too there are no hard and fast rules for responding to persecution.

Certainly, we can attest, a Christian should do nothing to bring guilt in any other area of life. In fact, the Bible’s instruction is clear in how we should behave, “as much as it depends on you, live peaceably with all men...” and “let every soul be subject to the governing authorities.... whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God... ” (Romans 13:1-7). We are not to break laws, whether they are right or wrong, whether they are just or unjust, whether we happen to agree with them or not (1 Peter 2:13-17). By doing so we take away any accusation they have and so they will in turn, by our obedience, be judged by God for their wickedness.

At what point, then, should the Christian stand in defiance of human law? At the point of Christ. We see from Peter’s response to the governing authority over him, at the point where mans’ law violates God’s law must Christians obey God alone (Acts 5:27-29, 40-42). Only when man’s law attempts to suppress the witness of the

gospel of Christ should we stand as a witness of Christ to the world.

Christians are instructed to not fear those who haul us before government authorities or concern ourselves with our defense. God promises to give us words to say in the very hour we are to say them (Matthew 10:17-21; Mark 13:11-13; Luke 12:11-12; 21:14-15). We are not to seek vengeance or rise up against authorities (Luke 6:28; 23:34; Acts 7:60; Romans 12:14-17), but are to forgive them, do good for them and repay their evil with good (Matthew 5:44).

Our example is to follow Christ in his suffering (1 Peter 2:21-23). We are instructed to “take pleasure in persecution” (2 Co 12:10; Revelation 2:9-10), and to use such as an opportunity to witness to not only those around us but our persecutors themselves (Philippians 1:12-14). In our faith and practice, we are to be ready to give a defense (1 Peter 3:14-17), seeking advice and guidance from the prophets who provide an example for us (James 5:10; Acts 7:52).

Literature Review

6.1 Enochian Worldview, Angels, and Cosmic Conspiracy

Looking at the state of world affairs, it is apparent that there is a malevolent driving force behind a concerted effort to fundamentally transform the American governmental system as well as the whole of world affairs. It has its murky beginnings back in the major split in global governance at the turn of the 20th century as world powers predominately adopted either some form of democratic rule (by the people) or socialistic rule (by the elites).

Over the course of its 250-year history, the United States has thrived, building a world leading economy, a globally dominant military force, and a society largely founded upon the concepts of free enterprise, independent property ownership, and lofty ideals of personal and individual freedom and the pursuit of happiness. This prosperity and success have made the US attractive to all comers from all parts of the world and has brought stability and peace to much of the globe, while simultaneously destabilizing socio-economic powers in other geographic areas based on political and economic self-interest.

Yet, its antithesis has lingered in the shadows, seeking a crack or strain by which it could wrestle those idealized freedoms from an unsuspecting populous and seize power by political and social misinformation.

The latest of those cracks was found in the 2020 Presidential Elections, when progressive liberal elites managed to successfully stage a coup by compromising the entire election process through multi-pronged attacks of voter fraud and bribery, disenfranchising nearly half the voting country, which ultimately has resulted in the ushering in of an utterly corrupt and incapacitated puppet in Joe Biden.

This, of course, was not achieved solely by human hands. In fact, it was predicted long ago by the Apostle Paul that a tyrannical government would sweep across the globe as the populous abandoned the God of Christianity for a godless religion (2 Timothy 3:5-7), one based on the futile thinking of the fallen human mind (1 Corinthians 2:15; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Romans 1:28).

But Paul goes even further, giving credit for this global conspiracy not to humans alone, or to their own futile and debased thinking, but he credits this captive sway to the real enemy, stating, “we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world,

against spiritual wickedness in the supernatural realms” (Ephesians 6:12).

Upon unfiltered inspection, we discover the New Testament writers were fully aware of this supernatural worldview. It is an inversion of the various Mesopotamian myths³⁰ found in Babylon during the period of the Exile. Though, in Genesis 6:1-4 and other places in the biblical text, we find these popular myths transformed by a kind of “evolutionary monotheism,”³¹ where supernatural forces interject into and sway the outcome of human affairs, with God serving not as merely one among equals,³² but as God of gods.³³

This worldview was dominate in the Second Temple Period and up to the fourth century AD, until Augustine and others began struggling for a foothold against the heretics of their day³⁴ who capitalized on the supernatural worldview accepted by most Christians as a means of criticism.

These late Church Fathers shifted away from the supernatural interpretation, despite the biblical authors speaking about this topic as if it were common knowledge,³⁵ such as Jude and Peter both referencing it in their letters (Jude 1:6; 2 Peter 2:4) and Paul making mention on multiple occasions (1 Corinthians 11:10; Colossians 2:15), as well as an already long-established history within the Apostolic

Fathers, such as Evagrius and Origen, of accepting and supporting such views.³⁶

But, instead of fighting against heresy with truth, Augustine and others opted instead to replace supernaturalism outright with a more palatable, humanist formulation. Unfortunately, because of their willingness to abandon truth, the Christian world has lost its connection to its historical and metaphysical past, operating instead predominately upon tradition and humanism as artificial filters by which it sees and responds to the world.³⁷

This filter has, over the centuries, developed a great deal of anxiety in modern Evangelicalism concerning the supernatural realm. Many scholars opt to either dismiss the concept of angelic rule outright, painting them instead as mere men,³⁸ or simply imagine them away as literary flights of fancy - inventions of a simpler time and ignorant people.

This has formed in the Christian psyche a kind of quasi-selective supernaturalism,³⁹ with pastors either glossing over entire sections of the biblical text out of fear of confusion or controversy, or as Dr. Heiser recounts of one pastor's aversion when the pastor states at the beginning of his study, "we're going to skip over this section of 1 Peter since it's just too strange."⁴⁰

The reality is, our modern theology is less than biblical, and more often than not has been filtered through the prism of orthodoxy and humanism. If we are to look honestly at the text, we quickly discover a much broader and richer narrative unfolding before us. It is one in which only bits and pieces are available, yet we are able to still formulate the following assertions:

1. Humans are a creation of God.
2. Angels are a creation of God.
3. Angels were created before Humans.

Yet, despite this set of observations, we still come away from the Bible without a clear understanding of what Angels are, if they were God's first creative act or just part of a much grander succession of acts that took place before Genesis 1:1.

There is a preponderance of evidence that God rules in conjunction with the angels⁴¹ in what has been termed the Divine Council. These beings (lesser than God yet greater than humans) rule in submission to God's will and purpose and were present at the founding of at least the earth⁴² if not at the formation of the entire universe or what can be called the physical realm or this physical dimension. They constitute either a singular genus stock or are the product of an amalgam of

maturations from successive redemptive creative works⁴³ about which we know next to nothing.

This view holds that there were several rebellions in the unfolding of the History of Humanity, most succinctly: at the fall in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3), again at Genesis 6:1-4 which would constitute an angelic fall from the spiritual realms, and then a third event by humanity's insistence on meriting their own righteousness at the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11).

The rebellion in the Garden was instigated by a spiritual being but was committed by human volition, while the Fallen Angel episode appears to be not only hatched by angelic self-determinant will, but likewise executed wholly by them, with limited human involvement. Babel, though certainly predicated by the wickedness of human beings, might very well be the result of the upheaval caused by the Genesis 6 event concerning their teaching of humans forbidden technologies and information, if indeed we can rely on the Enochian accounts still in existence.⁴⁴

As a worldview, a platform from which we can assess the development of the interactions between God and Israel, between Christ and the Church, the Enochian view provides a comprehensive understanding of both the past and the motivations

surrounding present and future events. It is an inevitable fate, predicted by Scripture (Matthew 24:10-12) that persecution will come upon the Church. If not during the course of historical human events (as the American Church can attest in escaping persecution thus far), then we know with certainty during the end days the beast is prophesied to “conquer the saints” (Revelation 13:7). This leader of the godless religion predicted by Paul will sweep the globe and will persecute and torment those who believe and confess the name of Christ.

Christians are or will be caught in the battle between two enemies: Christ and the powers of darkness in the spiritual realms. They are in no way equal in strength, in legitimacy, or in capability, but the fight must unfold, for God has ordained and predestined it to occur.

Many believers during this time (and throughout human history) will be arrested and hauled before authorities, beaten, imprisoned, tortured – all because of their confession and because of the Word of God. As God redeems the nations to himself, placing all authority and rule in the hands of Christ, a time will come when the Son will bring to heel all his enemies that he has already defeated on the cross.

These people from every walk, nation, and language, will bend the knee and

every tongue will confess that Christ Jesus is Lord and King. There is no stopping it.

There is no possibility of losing the war. It is foreordained by the will of the Father.

For Christians now in the present and those who come after, some will be called upon to share in the sufferings of Christ (1 Peter 4:13; 2 Timothy 3:12; John 15:20), even to the death. These persecutions ultimately serve as testimony against unbelievers, human and angel alike (Luke 21:12-13), as well as the testing of the spirit within us, for “through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22).

After discarding our long-held presuppositions, removing the generational and dogmatic filters from our eyes, we come away with the realization that we know little of the true ramifications of the Revealing of the Sons of God. We cannot appreciate the severity of our transformation (1Corinthians 15:51), nor what it entails to “become like the angels.”⁴⁵ We have glimpses. There are a few clues. But what comes after Revelation 22:21 remains all but a mystery, for the time where Christ makes all things new has not yet come.

6.2 A Philosophy of Death to Inform the Martyr

It is a topic not discussed in polite company in American Culture, nor between family members. It is not addressed in primary or secondary education or through any kind of social normalization. In fact, there are entire industries created in the United States to stand between the death of an individual and the rest of society. Whether it be the nursing home, the mortuary or hospice care, the process and reality of death is avoided at nearly all costs in the West.⁴⁶

Despite this cultural phobia, there remain several important questions surrounding death that need to be addressed, especially for the Christian who finds themselves under persecution or in a society that is increasingly hostile to their profession of faith. Even popular culture wonders if a person can survive their own death. There are pop-cultic books on the subject in all kinds of variety, wondering if there is an afterlife, if there are ghosts and how we can make contact with them.

Unfortunately, few people ever get around to asking less superficial questions like: what is death exactly? Are there different kinds of death? What does it mean to say someone or something is dying or has died?

The sequestration of death from modern society has left the Church, in

particular, prone to fear, to anxiety, and to outright avoidance of their own mortality and the mortality of their loved ones. This will need to change for the American Christian if he or she is to stand for Christ amidst persecution in the future. The reality is, although entirely ubiquitous to life, death is not even clearly defined. The modern, humanist world would have us believe death is biological alone, as a natural process and consequence of living. As mentioned in *Confrontations with the Reaper*, “death is the annihilation of a functioning biological organism...the disintegration of a living organism.”⁴⁷

Unfortunately, this view is, although prominent in the modern, scientific worldview, not at all logical or conclusive. While death appears, a least biologically, inextricably interconnected to cell division, or lack thereof, with the human cell capable of division only about sixty times before death,⁴⁸ the biological definition in no way addresses many of the questions that need to be answered.

Metaphysics pertaining to death generally grapples with the non-tangibles of death, most specifically those variables that cannot be satisfied by mere biology alone. This predominately resides in the area of consciousness, in the “I” identity that persists from birth to death in what we would define as the “individual”

inhabiting or expressing itself through the manipulation of the physical body. This includes and is grouped into a collective, the function of the mind, the recording, storing, processing, and recalling of memories both short and long-term, the emotions and the experience of those emotions along with all other experiential phenomena pertaining to the other senses (tactile, audible, visual).

As J.P. Moreland describes it, “All knowledge starts from experience. The world, our reality, it is perceived solely and wholly from our senses, from our conscious awareness of it, and is filtered by our senses, our emotions, our mind.”⁴⁹ To be conscious then is to exist, to experience is to exist, and this requirement for existence (to experience consciousness or to consciously experience) opens the door to a multitude of other definitions of death.

Straight away we must tackle the concept that the permanent loss of consciousness is itself a form of death. Modern medical advancements have likewise brought about questions of the definition of death. Is an individual dead if their brain ceases to maintain any kind of activity for a prolonged period of time? What if an individual freezes to the point that their systems required to maintain biological life have ceased operation? Are they dead, even though some have been brought

back to life?⁵⁰

This kind of thinking has likewise brought about questions concerning the ramifications of death in the first place. Viewed as a natural process, death is often seen as unavoidable, coming for each and every individual who has ever lived. Yet, the medical world is rabid in its denial of what the Bible has to say about the subject. Modernity rejects outright the concept that death is a curse or at least the indirect consequence of a curse.

If that be the case, and death is as natural as birth or aging, then would not animals likewise have the same characteristics as humans do? Emotions? Sensations? Experiences? We know with certainty one major distinction between humans and all other living creatures on earth - humans are the only beings who commit suicide.⁵¹ How would that be the case if death is a natural process and humans are just as much animals as the rest of the creatures who walk about on four legs?

This is, of course, explained biblically. Romans 8:20 states, "the whole creation has been subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope, that the creation itself will also be set free." Even Genesis 1-2 clearly

illustrates a decisive distinction between human beings and the rest of creation.

Thus, there is more needed than just a biological definition for the phenomenon of death. While death universally does, at least in most cases, include this definition within it, the physicalist definition cannot yield the comprehensive gravity of the situation. Most prominently, the biological definition of death does not in anyway - cannot - speak to the disposition of the experiential mechanism that previously resided within the body. Neither does it address the criminality component of death either.

A reductionist view of death abandons the individual, setting them adrift with no direction, no process by which to orient themselves. They would argue there is no purpose to life originally, and, likewise, no meaning to the cessation of life either. If the humanist view is correct in its assertion that there is nothing existent after death, in that death is merely the cessation of the function of life (when the body dies the individual ceases to exist), then nothing exists of the individual after death. There is, in fact, no knowledge of the individual, no persistence, no record perpetuated beyond the last conscious thought, the last draw of breath. In the modernist view, there is no recollection of being dead, no experience of death after

the point of biological death, since death is simply the cessation of something rather than an independent state that is actively being experienced.

The biblical view is much different. Rather than rely on a monistic view (or any alternate view outright hostile to Christian thought), the Bible describes the makeup, the process, the underpinning reality as largely dualistic in nature. Beyond a simply biological definition of death and exacerbating ignorance by accrediting all causal conscious manifestations to brain function, the Bible clearly identifies, not by definition but by clear assumption, a body and mind distinction.

Early on, Moses defined life as “the life of all flesh is in its blood” (Leviticus 17:11) and so, by delineation we can see death defined as irreversibility, or any event that would cause the cessation of the circulatory system, which maintains the primary function of oxygenation of the entire body system, and only when one cannot return to that primary function. Cessation of circulation, then, by extension, is the cessation of respiration or the interruption of the process by which blood delivers its O₂ load to the necessary organs and tissues.⁵²

Jesus also had a clearly defined view of death and what occurred after it, and what was possible concerning it. In Matthew 10:28, we see clearly how there is, at

least in the mind of Christ (who is ultimately God incarnate), there is a distinct body, a distinct soul, and a distinct geospatial location where it is possible to “destroy both soul and body.” It is clear, Jesus would argue the body is certainly capable of being destroyed (cease to maintain active function - definition of biological death) on earth and it can be destroyed in various ways - by the hand of other individuals, by our own hand, by natural causes, by an accident, by illness or disease, etc. But, what he stresses, while the body can cease viability on earth, it is not possible for the soul to be likewise destroyed.⁵³ The soul can only be destroyed in Gehenna (the Lake of Fire).

In fact, the biblical writers throughout both the Old and New Testaments presented a trichotomic view of individual identity. A three-in-one representation of the whole, of body, soul, and spirit comprising the Genesis 2:7 defining term, “living being” or “chay nephesh.” This is the first mention of the concept of soul, and is most often translated into Greek “psyche,” which is the fundamental, irreducible unit of “I,” the rational immortal, the self.

Created upon conception in interplay between traducian and creative acts (created by the parents or created by God), the soul constitutes the bundle of

mechanisms and attributes that make up the individual person. As already clearly illustrated from the previously provided Bible verses, without the soul the personal “I” ceases to exist as a totality loss. The loss of the soul (which can only be destroyed in the Lake of Fire) is the loss of individualized experience; it is the loss of the collective memories that form the coherence and locus of distinctiveness, it is the loss of sensational and mental experientiality.

If Moreland is correct and all knowledge derives from experience, then all knowledge of we, all understanding of ourselves, all evidence of the self that originates from that act of experience is the sum-total of the self. This core identity of “I” exists outside of the bodily form. It is possible to exist as assumed by Scripture. Though it would be difficult to argue for the “I” to be living without the body (or the Spirit which serves as the spark of life), one cannot argue that the soul cannot exist disembodied.

To be a “living being” is to be the trichotomic body, soul, spirit collectively. But to live, to be alive, is separate from existing, to be existent. This, of course, would not be considered the optimal or natural state of the human soul - disembodiment. In fact, as already described, it and death itself are unnatural states experienced

by the living (and all of Creation) as the consequence of the fall, which was brought about by deception and disobedience (commutatively, rebellion). Humans were not originally designed for death or disembodiment, yet, like the rest of Creation, the human has inherited this subjection because of sin.

The mind is theoretically the equivalent of the brain, though the mind is the individual because each soul has a mind and without a mind a soul cannot exist, though in no way proves or disproves bodily interchangability.⁵⁴ Consciousness is, by its very nature, unobservable,⁵⁵ and no amount of analysis of the physical brain can reveal any kind of mental property or process or trait of the mind. Likewise, the soul is not interchangeable with the human spirit as an independent elemental definition, as many instances in the Bible illustrate: Matthew 27:50; John 19:30; Luke 23:46; 24:37-39; Acts 5:5, 10; 12:23. It is the trichotomy which coalesces into a fluid whole of the living being. The breath of life (which is the Spirit) was added to the body (the clay) and the soul of the created sparked to life (Genesis 2:7). Upon the event of death (the disillusion of the tether that binds the body to the soul and the spirit to them both) the spirit is returned to God (Psalm 146:4; Ecclesiastes 12:7a; Job 4:15), the body is returned to the earth from whence it came

(Ecclesiastes 12:7b), and the soul is carried away to Paradise by the angels (Luke 16:22), awaiting captive to death until the Resurrection of the dead (Revelation 20:13).

In the biblical view of death, which is contrary to the humanist worldview prevalent in Western Culture, and which has infected the American Church, the decoupling of soul from body is the distinction between the living and the dead. Held sway by the power of death (Romans 5:17), those who have died can never again be alive until death has been dispossessed. The dead still exist as a disembodied soul, still with all the capacities and traits and states and experiences as the living, yet absent of life or the life-giving spirit, and, of course, absent the physical body in which the human soul was designed to inhabit. This decoupling from the physical body not only precludes the individual's ability to be alive, but it inhibits their ability to participate in the physical realm, the dimensionality of the physical creation.

It is the spiritual realm that, apparently, is corporeal in substance and in substrate. It and the beings that inhabit it are immaterial, other than physical flesh, or are of some unknown elemental form that is unknowable to those of the living.⁵⁶

Make no mistake. Death is temporary. It is a state in response to the penalty of

sin, likened to an infection caused by a curse. Why this is the case is unclear since we do not know the fundamental constitution of either life itself or that which steals life from the living (death). We are not given the entire story in detail but have only glimpses of information. Only two humans were present at the Garden when Eve took and ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. What this tree was or what purpose it served is unclear. How eating the fruit changed both Adam and Eve on a molecular level - or a spiritual level - is likewise unclear. Why the serpent was intent on deceiving the woman in the first place is just as unclear. How has the resultant curse altered the fundamental laws of reality, of the physical creation? Was entropy altered? Were there governing principles introduced? Removed?

Another confusion exists concerning the disposition of the soul once it has been disconnected from its physical body. Over the centuries this topic has run rife with all kind of heretical ideologies, from theories of soul sleep to purgatory, and even reincarnation - and all these still within the Church.

One of the greatest roadblocks to understanding the destination of the dead is a low view of Scripture. The main text describing this journey between death and the Resurrection is found in Luke 16:19-31 concerning the Rich Man and a beggar

named Lazarus. This account is often dismissed as a parable, or a allegorical example, but it is an error to disregard it so quickly.

The account describes the fate of two individuals: Lazarus and an unnamed Rich Man, and these few verses provide a wealth of information. First, the Rich Man is very wealthy and lives in luxury. Opposite this, Lazarus sits out by the Rich Man's gate, is terribly ill, and begs for scraps from the Rich Man. This is the sum total we are given of the lives of these two men while they were on earth. Next, Lazarus dies, and angels carry him to be in the presence of Abraham. There is no information about why this would be the case, where Abraham actually is, or what condition Lazarus is in.

Afterward, the Rich Man also dies, is buried, and immediately appears to the reader in Hades. He is in torment. He can look around. He can assess his situation at least to some extent. He is able to see Abraham (afar off) as well as Lazarus at Abraham's side. The Rich Man calls out to Abraham (apparently, the Rich Man is a Jew, since he addresses him as "father"), and begs Abraham to have Lazarus give him a drop of water to drink since the torment he is experiencing (some sort of sensation) is in some way related to, or at least is described by him as some kind of

fire that has an intense heat component (since he is asking for water to drink to cool down).

Abraham's response is telling, although quite enigmatic. He reminds the Rich Man that while he and Lazarus were alive, the Rich Man received good things while Lazarus received bad things. Now, after death, it is reversed. In addition, there is a "gulf fixed" between them so that no one can cross over to the other. Knowing from Abraham's response there is no help for him at all, the Rich Man then begs Abraham to send Lazarus to the Rich Man's family to warn them, so they will not end up in this place of torment (Hades).

Abraham's response is, "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them." But the Rich Man begs, asking Abraham to send Lazarus to them from the grave, since someone coming back from the dead would certainly convince them to change their ways and repent. But Abraham tells the Rich Man, "If they will not listen to Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead." This account provides a great deal of information for us concerning what is now referred to as the Intermediate State. It also generates many more questions than there are answers.

Though Abraham hints at the correlation, it is unclear why or how the Rich Man deserved torment in Hades while Lazarus deserved to be comforted. There are main distinctives drawn between them, especially the issue of money or wealth or more specifically the disproportionate distribution of welfare and comfort between the two. More to the point, though, this account explains several fundamental aspects of this transitional state of existence. The “fixed gulf” is pronounced to the point that even if someone wanted to cross over to render aid, it is consider impossible. This defines the presence of the individual will in the Intermediate State since it would be impossible to “want” for anything if the individual were asleep or non-existent.

The first request of the Rich Man illustrates an interesting reflection on the situation. The Rich Man still possesses his faculties. The account speaks of him having a tongue and of Lazarus having a finger. There is, apparently, water present somewhere within reach and the Rich Man was aware of it, though he seems unaware of the gulf between them and the impossibility of his request. His second request is even more telling, as Abraham responds with what is apparently the already established process by which men are saved. Living people have been given

the Word of God (Moses and the Prophets). They must listen to them. So, it is quite possible to receive salvation through just the Old Testament. Abraham makes the last point. If they will not accept the Old Testament message, then they will not accept the message of the New Testament either, which is the account of Christ who was raised from the dead. All of death seemingly culminates into what is known biblically and popularly as the Resurrection. It is spoken of in depth in both the Old (Job 19:25-27; Psalm 73:26; Daniel 12:2; Isaiah 26:14, 19; Ezekiel 37) and the New Testaments (Matthew 22:23-30; Luke 14:14; John 5:28-29) and pervades End Times prophecy and the prophetic record. Despite the physicalist argument that after death we simply cease to exist, or the monist insistence on soul sleep or unconscious rest, the Bible makes a clear case for bodily resurrection.

Plato and other ancient philosophers believed the soul to be eternal, and after death entered the Underworld, eventually being recycled back to the realm of the living through rebirth. Despite modern attempts to revise the record, it is established history that several Church Fathers believed in one form of reincarnation or the other. Paul and John are the best New Testament authors referring to the Resurrection specifically. Paul stated, “We shall not all sleep, but

we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality" (1 Corinthians 15:50-53) and "we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus, we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:17). This trumpet is found in Revelation 11:15, "Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever."" John also describes the resurrection, "They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection" (Revelation 20:15).

From a biblical view, in comparison to the secularist, a philosophy of death is approached much differently. Paul held a much different view of death than the common person of his day, "For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21). Further on in the letter Paul states, "I count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all

things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.” (Philippians 3:8-11).

It is not hard to see Paul’s alternate view. That which the world lives for, he considers to be rubbish. Instead, he seeks several things:

1. Knowledge of Christ Jesus
2. Gain Christ and be found in Him
3. Not have own righteousness but that which is through faith in Christ
4. Know Christ
5. Know the power of His resurrection
6. Fellowship in His sufferings
7. Be conformed to his death
8. Attain to the resurrection of the dead.

The value placed on death is a judgment by the observer. Though many

proponents within the philosophy of Death would argue there is a universality to life's value, there is also an argument for this value being subjective.⁵⁷ A serial killer holds no value for the lives he takes, often with extreme brutality, yet he is one and the same who would plead for mercy on death row. His value of life is subjective to his own circumstances, opinions, and thinking. He places higher value on his own life than he does on the lives of his victims.

This is the same as the case of the woman who aborts her child, weighing value of unborn life against her own convenience, against her own poor choices, against her own personal circumstances and how the life of the child will affect her own quality of life. But this is exactly the kind of opinion the majority of professing American Christians hold today. If put to the test, they would choose life over Christ even though they have been warned beforehand “Whoever finds his life will lose it and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it (Matthew 10:39) and “Do not be surprised that the world hates you” (1 John 3:13), or “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you:

‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they would also persecute you. If they kept my word, they would also keep yours. But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me.” (John 15:18-21).

American Christianity up to this point has had no cost associated with it. There is no downside to a profession of faith, and thus, the multitude has rushed in for all sorts of reasons other than genuine belief. But the times are changing, and a time will come now or in the future, where Americans will have to consider long and hard whether they want to be associated with Christ or with other Christians. Those who do, those who are called according to God’s great purpose, they will need to be equipped with an effective philosophy of death, so that they might see what is truly important and not be taken over by the thorns and thistles of this life (Matthew 13:20-22).

6.3 Christian Persecution as a Gift from God

It is estimated that 160,000 Christians are martyred every year.⁵⁸ Yet, persecution is an all but forgotten concept in the United States. Given the religious

freedoms afforded by the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, Christians in America have been spared any real kind of discrimination or limitation based on their beliefs or the exercise of those beliefs in individual or corporate expressions of worship.

Certainly, there have been American Christians who have experienced persecution and have even been martyred for their faith in the past. But this typically occurs only for missionaries active in foreign fields in either hostile environments or in cultural, social, or economic contexts that have erupted into full scale hostility with little notice.

At home, though, this is not the case. It is not surprising then to discover that the American Church, in her full expression as a faith, in her worship, in her theology has all but abandoned the very concept of persecution in exchange for a quasi-physicalist worldview, abdicating entirely the idea that persecution is a fundamental hallmark of Christian orthodoxy. The very instruction from Jesus himself, “You will be hated by everyone on account of My name,” (Matthew 10:22) and “In the world you will have tribulation” (John 16:33) has fallen on deaf ears, giving way to an antipathy to pain, to any kind of suffering in the name of Christ.

Much unlike the Christians of the first few centuries of the faith, who held that to receive persecution was to share in the sufferings of Christ,⁵⁹ American Christians over the last two and a half centuries have developed alternative ideologies of social purity and economic prosperity. To many a modern professing Christian, a true faith is one of perpetual happiness, of blissful satisfaction and joy, of abundance, supremacy, and fiscal prosperity. In this Americanized worldview, if a Christian experiences illness or poverty or any kind of ill will, it is the result of present sin and a means of sanctification in the believer's life.

As already mentioned, this was not the view of the Church throughout most of its history. In fact, from the early Church Fathers to the Protestant reformers, there were three distinct views held predominately on suffering, especially the early Church of the first 400 years, which was marked almost exclusively by the secretive Church, utilizing catacombs and individual homes, always fearful of persecution or the threat of death.⁶⁰ The Catholic Church viewed suffering as a means of redemption, while Enlightenment thinkers saw suffering as a repayment for sin. Lastly, Christian rationalists viewed suffering as a human ill that could only be addressed and alleviated through human diplomacy and government intervention.⁶¹

Justin Martyr saw Christian suffering in light of two distinct views: one type for the believer and another for non-believers.⁶² Of course, non-believers in this view included not only atheists, but also heretical Gnostics whose suffering Martyr referred to as empty and without benefit, leading only to ignorance and futility.⁶³

Christendom through its 2000-year history has seen unprecedented persecution of the saints. At different times and in different locations this persecution could be attributed to either external or internal forces and sparked by various motivations. A perfect example of this variety is the Europe witch craze during the 1400-1700s which saw over 100,000 people murdered at the hands of the civil and religious authorities, mostly innocent believers.⁶⁴

Tradition and time often have a way of blurring both source and motivation, even though the Bible is clear that persecution is a blessing on the one being persecuted. This was felt by those during the French revolution when there was a concerted effort to force Christians out and replace it with a religion of reason.⁶⁵

But, often, especially in highly volatile countries like North Korea or China, where hostility toward the Christian faith is high, Christians often view persecution as a means of evangelism. The biblical writers also view suffering in the same way.

In fact, persecution was viewed as an integral part of their faith.

This was evident in the early 14th century during the Ottoman Empire when massive persecution was wrought by Islamic adherents against Christians, with the dead of more than 2 million believers. The same is true for Japanese Christians in the early 1600s, when widespread persecution resulted in the crucifixion of 26 believers in Nagasaki and drove the Japanese Church underground, where they would worship in remote places and would camouflage their faith under the guise of other religions to avoid being singled out. This was also seen in the Soviet Union, when Ukrainian Greek-Catholics were forced underground when their bishops and priests were imprisoned.⁶⁶

Time and again, the witness of the faithful has stood the test, even to death. Native Mexican Indians who converted only to be later slaughtered in 1519 resulted in 2.2 million killed. In the 1550's, at the hands of King Henry II, over 10,000 Protestants were burned at the stake for heresy.⁶⁷ From 1950 to 1980 a sum total of 5 million Christians died in soviet prison camps.⁶⁸ Yet, none of this information is ever disseminated to the local congregates in American Churches. Few pastors from the pulpit ever cover why Christians are persecuted or how unique it is that

Christians in the United States have escaped such suffering firsthand.

It is a malformation of theology to exclude what the biblical authors and the Church Fathers clearly taught and what they all experienced themselves.⁶⁹ It is ill-conceived that the American Church will continue much longer without significant hostility directed in at her specifically. What is now termed “Crypto Christianity”⁷⁰ was throughout Church history simply the status quo, and it is predicted that this kind of cost is coming for believers in America and all believers around the world. It is estimated that Churches in Muslim countries will be forced underground and into clandestine activities,⁷¹ simply because the hostility they face will be too great. As the breakdown in law and order that many in the United States have already witnessed the last few years increases, there will be an increase in mass panic, in chaos, in instability and martyrdom.⁷² By 2025, data suggests the organized, denominational Church will be destroyed completely, resulting in mass apostasy.⁷³

Without a proper theology of persecution, the American Church will not be able to stand against the onslaught of social and cultural and legal propaganda and hostility leveled against her. Individuals who have only known peace for over two hundred years will quickly compromise their faith and denounce Christ in hopes of

saving themselves and their families.

Yet, this is the exact opposite of what Christ has called his Church to do. “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:43-45).

Research Objectives & Hypotheses

7.1 Preliminary Analysis

A preliminary analysis was conducted for this project to determine just how out of touch the American Church is from any kind of formalized theology of persecution. This was completed by first investigating three separate websites for individual para-Church organizations specifically focused on aiding Christians under persecution. Second, an analysis was completed on a Church based out of Washington D.C. founded by a missionary who spent time working with the underground Churches in China. Third, searches were conducted online for dissertations, popular articles, and eBooks using the keyword “persecution.” Lastly, a review was conducted on three separate local or regionally networked Church organizations that have a large online presence to determine if they have any resources available for the American Church population specifically pertaining to Christian persecution in the United States. The results are as follows:

Open Door USA⁷⁴

This para-Church organization is focused on providing aid and support to persecuted Christians around the world. They have a large online website with many moving anecdotal accounts of family and ministers under persecution in various parts of the world. Unfortunately, there were no articles on the front page or on their blogging site pertaining to persecution in America. They offer no formal courses or informal information on the subject. There is likewise no discussion or mention of the threat of Intersectionality or Critical Race Theory. The site appears to serve the main purpose of raising financial support from Christians in the United States to provide aid to Christians in other geographical areas.

Persecution.org⁷⁵

This para-Church organization is similar to the first one consulted, though Persecution.org does provide a video on the home page describing the basics of persecution for the general public. American Christians are encouraged through various programs to write letters to Christians under persecution, and there are options for Americans to volunteer. But, like the previous site, there is no formal or informal educational material available on Persecution, and there is no reference at

all to persecution against the Christians in America, nor anything about the progressive agenda.

Samaritan's Purse⁷⁶

The third website consulted did provide some discussion concerning natural disasters in the United States, as well as a section on discipleship training. Unfortunately, the only information on the Discipleship page was about foreign workers in countries other than the US. Like the others, there was no reference to persecution coming to America, nor about the threat of the progressive agenda.

Radical Church⁷⁷

This organization is particularly interesting as it was founded by a missionary who spent his time working with the hidden Church in China. After returning to the US, he founded the Radical Church in Washington D.C. and has modeled some elements of his organization based on how Churches operate under persecution. The main thrust of this organization appears to be a program they call Secret Church. This is a seminar type event that happens several times a year. It is a large gathering that is telecast around the globe for an entrance cost. During this seminar they focus on worship, teaching, and prayer with the claim that this is the

focus of the secret Church in China. Unfortunately, despite the surface level references given to the Church under persecution in other parts of the world, there is no real education being done concerning how a Christian should face suffering or how they should evangelize amidst persecution.

Dissertation Search

Utilizing the Digital Commons Archive at Liberty University, a search was conducted for all documents pertaining to the search criteria of “persecution.” Once filtered for “dissertation only” 200 results were returned, but only four dissertations met the specific criteria.

One dissertation focused on Persecution of the Church in general,⁷⁸ while the second dissertation addressed the impact of persecution on Evangelical Christians in an attempt to give American Christians a glimpse into how persecution and suffering changes the Christian expression of faith and worship.⁷⁹ A third dissertation focused on the research of a particular Baptist Church’s knowledge of End Times and how that knowledge prepares those members to expect religious persecution in the future.⁸⁰ A fourth article showed up in the search results about the persecution of Christian groups who chose not to participate in the American

Revolution.⁸¹ These results produced some intriguing questions that need to be investigated further.

Popular Article Search

A search on Google for the term “Christian Persecution in America” resulted in two interesting articles. The first was an online article on the Gospel Coalition website pertaining to the research results of several survey inquiries to answer the question, “Is there really Christian Persecution in America today?” The research covered personal beliefs about Christians from progressives surveyed, what religious groups were most disliked in America by the overall public, and if progressives in academic institutions would actively discriminate against a publicly professing Christian. Not only did the results suggest a great deal of active discrimination against Christians, but there appears to be a growing, deep-seated disdain and hatred for Christians among progressives in the United States.⁸²

The second article of importance was a Wikipedia entry that identified Christians who believe there is persecution against Christians in the United States as individuals suffering from a mental disorder they termed as the Christian Persecution Complex.⁸³

Amazon Kindle Search

A search was conducted on the Amazon.com website for the search term “persecution,” which resulted in several hits, a few interesting ones listed below.

A book titled, *A Theology of Persecution*, by Christian Poleynard,⁸⁴ discusses the expectation of Christian persecution amidst greater socio/economic and political tribulation, as has been evident throughout most of Church history. The author discusses how this reality affects the modern Church with a special emphasis on believers in the West. It analyzes the realities of persecution and how Christians can be equipped to address it (this particular title is unavailable for this research, but the author has made available to the public a five-part lecture series under the same title).⁸⁵

A book titled, *Killing Christians*, by Tom Doyle⁸⁶ discusses life for Christians in Middle Eastern countries like Syria, Iran, Egypt, and Lebanon where believers must decide between Christ and surviving day to day. It explores the hidden Church meetings, the tortures, the prisons, and the executions of countless believers who are called to share in the sufferings of Christ. It discusses the joys, the perils, and the riches of suffering for their faith.

A book titled, *Global War on Christians*, by John Allen,⁸⁷ discusses the current state of persecution against Christians around the world, claiming a new generation of martyrs are being raised up to proclaim the faith to the lost by their testimony. It discusses how many Christian communities are minority groups in other locations other than the West, under governments that are hostile to Christians. The book argues for the reality that Christianity is the most persecuted group on earth.

Lastly, a book titled, *The Myth of Persecution*, by Candida Moss⁸⁸ claims that not only is there no persecution of the Christian Church today, but the persecution claimed during the first four centuries was fabricated by Christian extremists and Church propaganda.

Online Church Discipleship Content Search

A search of online Churches for discipleship programs in persecution resulted in several interesting findings.

Faith Bible Church⁸⁹

This Church provides nothing on its podcast or in its search results concerning persecution, let alone the persecution of the American Church. There are no courses available on persecution either. A discussion had with the Executive Pastor

via email returned a reply stating he had no knowledge of Intersectionality or

Critical Race Theory.

Grace To You - John MacArthur⁹⁰

This website's search returned several sermons and blog posts related directly to not only persecution globally but specifically to coming persecution of the American Church and how Christians in the US should prepare for such events.

Calvary Chapel⁹¹

This website did provide a few blog posts on the subject in its search results, but not many.

Despite the faith being founded on sporadic as well as systematic persecution and ultimately the martyrdom of most if not all the apostles and Old and New Testament writers, modern expressions of Christianity in the United States and especially Evangelicalism have all but abandoned the very concept of persecution as a gift from God or that suffering is an integral part of the Christian identity.

From the analysis of the sources above, it is clear, the American Church is ill-prepared for increased persecution on its shores. A modern-day Evangelical has no concept by which to gauge how to respond to suffering for their faith, or what will

be expected of them by their persecutors, the believing and non-believing population around them, or even God. Ultimately, they will not understand the supernatural forces at work to move them by deception or by force to denounce Jesus Christ as Lord. It is the objective of this research project to develop and provide the individual American Christian and the American Church collectively a comprehensive curriculum on the Theology of Persecution so that in that day they will be able to stand for Christ and proclaim their faith, even to the death if called by God to do so.

7.2 Development of Comprehensive Theology Checklist

For this research project to be successful, a comprehensive and effective curriculum must be developed, along with a detailed analysis explaining why the curriculum is needed in the first place. To do that, a research process must be outlined.

1. Need to discover what the Bible says about persecution (then and now).
2. Need to discover what the apostles did in the face of persecution.
3. Need to discover what the disciples did about persecution from 33 to 400 AD.

4. Need to discover how Christians responded to persecution (400 -1400 AD),
5. Need to discover how Reformation Christians responded to persecution.
6. Need to discover how Christians respond today (modern history) to persecution (most specifically in hostile regions: North Korea, China, India, Middle East, Russia, etc).
7. Need to determine what kind of persecutions there are or have been.
8. Need to determine most probable scenarios of persecutions to come to the US.
9. Need to develop biblical, theological, and historical responses to scenarios.

7.3 Hypotheses to be Answered

There are two basic possible outcomes to this research: confirm or reject the following hypothesis: American Church (and all members worldwide) to effectively equip believers for what surely will be severe and persistent discrimination and persecution in coming years, up until the return of Christ our King.

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End Notes

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- ⁵ Ochab, "Hope," Para. 2; Johnson, "Status," 1.
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