

In Preparation of Apostasia:

Persecution Against American Christians
within an Enochian Worldview as Informed
by a Philosophy of Death

By

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Dedicated to
the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End,
the First and the Last.

“For it is the land of carved images,
and they are insane with their idols”
(Jer 50:38).

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Abstract

It is clear from both the prophetic accounts in the Bible as well as the signs of the times that persecution of Christians is on the rise. An important revelation that seems oblivious to many Christians in America, though, is that persecution is a central tenet and a litmus test for faith around the world and throughout the Church's two-thousand-year history. Only after a short span of time did the founders and first settlers of America abandon their theology of persecution in exchange for a kind of quasi-prosperity doctrine that has all but removed the concepts of suffering and persecution from American Christian teaching.

This research explores the important data that points to a cultural, political, and theological shift in America, both in and out of the Church, that indicates Christian persecution on the horizon. Further explored are the necessary elements needed in developing an effective theology of persecution specifically for American Christians that is adequately informed by both the second temple period Enochian Worldview that dominates the writings of the New Testament authors as well as how believers in the US will need to ground their newfound theology in a biblically sound philosophy of death, so that they might be adequately prepared not only to suffer with all joy for Christ's sake and for the sake of the gospel, but that they might also stand firm in the faith and provide an effective witness in their own lives as a testimony against what is moving toward an increasingly fallen and debased society.

Presented by the research is not only a review of the many factors that have produced the environment that is ripe for Christian persecution to spread and intensify in America, but also a detailed examination of persecution theology from other parts of the world that inform what these believers will need to withstand the onslaught in the coming months and years ahead. Likewise included is an analysis of how American Christians might be able to effectively stand

strong in their faith without compromise, ending with a historical and practical examination of the ultimate sacrifice of martyrdom that is both prominent and necessary in nearly every form of Christianity save the modern American Evangelicalism of today.

Keywords: persecution, suffering, American Christianity, Intersectionality, Critical Race Theory, socialism, falling away, apostasy, theology of persecution, philosophy of death, Enochian Worldview, martyrdom

Chapter 01 - Introduction to the Study

1.1 Is There Christian Persecution in the US?

To many if not most Christians in the United States, the last fifty years have seemed close to an eternity. Albeit recent in historical terms, the prosperity and freedoms American Christians have experienced are utterly unheard of anywhere else on planet earth or at any other time in the existence of humanity. In such a unique time as this, Western Christianity has become a striking spectacle with its rampancy toward denominationalism and its insistence on economic and cultural prosperity. Yet, American Christians are too oft to find the topic of religious persecution a rather foreign concept, despite its sheer magnitude and prevalence elsewhere in the world.¹

It is true, Christians have lived under all manner of governmental systems and cultural structures throughout history.² The Church herself has marked a dramatic and lasting impact on whatever culture she is found in,³ from China to Russia, from more western countries like Australia and European nations, the footprints of Christendom are countless. But the United States was unique in its very founding being moored not on a sacralist system or some form of theocracy, but on a secular or deist respect for all religious expression. This religious freedom was not only borne out of the experience of personal religious persecution but from 150 years of experimentation prior to the forming of the country itself.⁴

Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, Plymouth, and the Massachusetts Bay Colony all took a stab at some form of religious rule that swayed heavily on a spectrum between ecumenical and

¹ Philpott, *Caesar's Sword*, 9

² Various, *Bad Urach Statement*, 29

³ Various, *Bad Urach Statement*, 29

⁴ Kukah, "Persecutions in Africa"

intolerance.⁵ Since the very motivations to establish the colonies themselves derived heavily from the impulse to flee persecution from the Anglican Church,⁶ it is clear this concept of suffering was quite prevalent historically in the Church,⁷ from its very beginnings with the disciples to the horrors of Nazi Germany⁸ and beyond. In fact, most of the pilgrims were religious refugees including Protestants, Catholics and even to a lesser extent Jews⁹ attempting to find some sort of space in which they could worship freely. After the many years of experimentation and struggle, through the writing of the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights, those escaping religious persecution found a near perfect balance between autocracy and chaos in a representative democracy, where the freedoms of the individual were held in greater esteem than the wants and desires of the elites. For the first time in human history, the ability to worship freely and openly was granted to all religions within American borders, which in turn sparked not only religious revival but unprecedented economic expansion.

Unlike the transition in the fourth century from Christian persecution from the Roman state to Christian persecution from the Church, American Christianity experienced in its 250 year existence a truly Edenic kind of peace without systemic or persistent persecution.¹⁰ This allowed American Christians to develop distinctly from what journalist Eliza Griswold termed their “tenth parallel” counterparts.¹¹ This parallel includes countries like Nigeria, Libya, Egypt, the Middle East, Russia, Sri Lanka, China, Indonesia and North Korea, all representing the kind of

⁵ Horowitz, *Dark Agenda*, 37

⁶ Horowitz, *Dark Agenda*, 36

⁷ Reddy, “Knowledge,” 57

⁸ Penner, *Shadow of the Cross*, 86

⁹ Horowitz, *Dark Agenda*, 36

¹⁰ Kipfer, “Persecuted Christians”

¹¹ Philpott, *Caesar’s Sword*, 9

persecution against Christians that is simply unheard of so far in the United States.¹² Because of this, it is a fair question to ask, especially as Christianity in the last thirty years in the United States has experienced such great metamorphoses, from the cancerous infusion of Intersectionality, to the backlash of the restrictive fundamentalist movement. Why is American Christianity so unlike what most Christians experience around the world?¹³

In fact, according to Todd Johnson's research in his *Martyrology Demographics*, it is estimated that nearly 500 million Christians, nearly twenty percent of the earth's population live in countries where genuine persecution exists, and this figure is estimated to rise to 600 million by 2020.¹⁴ The question remains. Do American Christians experience persecution currently, and, if not, should they prepare to experience persecution in the future? To answer adequately, it is necessary to venture back far beyond just the founding of America as a nation. The seeds of the Christian Church in the United States were planted long before the Mayflower set sail, back to the shores of Galilee, where a lowly carpenter stood before his disciples and tried to explain to them how the Kingdom of God would be preached to all men before the coming end.¹⁵ It was this foundation within the gospel message that Jesus solidified persecution to come (Matt 24:9, 13–14; Luke 21:12–19; Mark 13:9–11). It was his Church that would rise from the suffering and the brutality that would be leveled against those who believed in him and followed his teachings.

In fact, he warned them of what would come, stating, "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore, be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils and scourge you in their synagogues. You will be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. But when

¹² Johnson, "Martyrology Demographics"

¹³ Rah, Prophetic Lament Justice, 41

¹⁴ Philpott, *Caesar's Sword*, 9

¹⁵ Taylor, *Sorrow and Blood*, 102

they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you. Now brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved" (Matt 10:16-33).

Christians today around the world likewise stand against hostile authorities and governments, declaring their sovereign faith before tribunals, persecuted, beaten, driven from one place to another, having no home and no food and no safety. But far cry is this picture from American Evangelicalism of today. There is no understanding of Paul's admonishment that we will reign with Christ if we endure (2 Ti 2:12). Rather, Christianity in the United States, and especially Protestantism, is a commodity, a product to be evaluated and purchased.¹⁶ Gone are the days of the Roman idea of suffering that was once spoken of by poets and philosophers and historians alike.¹⁷ Gone are the overbearing authority such as seen by the Roman magistrates considering the independent Christian spirit¹⁸ that saw itself as having been reborn into a knew Kingdom that was superior to any earthly one.

But suffering as a concept was well known in the Roman Empire of Jesus' day. Preoccupied by the spectacles of the arena which was utilized as an ataractic as a means of lulling the plebeian masses into a cathartic malaise, much of the lower class of society experienced widespread starvation, disease from food contamination or poor sanitation and hygiene, often with no recourse to disease but death.¹⁹ It was this stage upon which the Christian faith was set, as early Christians grew bold and unapologetically spread their teaching of Christ crucified to the

¹⁶ Rah, Prophetic Lament Justice, 41

¹⁷ Kilbourn, "Suffering in Early Christianity," 89

¹⁸ Philpott, Caesar's Sword, 8

¹⁹ Kilbourn, "Suffering in Early Christianity," 89

pagan cultures surrounding them, leaving behind the Judaism from which it sprang.²⁰ Despite modern interpretations that the early Christians did not suffer persecution as widespread as they claimed,²¹ the reality is well established that the early Church and especially the Church Fathers such as Tertullian, Cyprian, Clement of Alexandria, and Justin Martyr, all illustrated in their writings how persecution played a pivotal role in the formation of their theology and apologia among their defenders.²²

This theology of persecution has never truly left Christendom over the centuries. Replete are the examples of martyrs and suffering servants in the annals of Christian past.²³ In fact, the worldwide body of Christ can count tens of millions of persecutions occurring in the world even today, ranging from invasive rules restricting worship to violent death and excruciating physical and psychological torture.²⁴ Philpott, in his *Caesar's Sword* concluded, “Christians are the most persecuted religious group worldwide,”²⁵ a fact backed up by Schirrmacher in his 2008 essay describing Christians as the most persecuted religious group on the planet, victimized for a multitude of reasons, whether racial, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, economic, or any number of combinations.²⁶

When analyzed, it is clear persecution around the globe against Christianity is not simply a case of discrimination.²⁷ It is a concerted, systematic effort underway. Estimates place more than one-fifth of the world’s population of professing Christians as living in some form of highly restrictive context concerning religious expression.²⁸ Leaders are often targeted, threatened,

²⁰ Pesta, “Christianity Today: Surviving the Woke Church”

²¹ Williams, “Tradition Christian Persecution”

²² Kilbourn, “Suffering in Early Christianity,” 8

²³ Penner, *Shadow of the Cross*, 86

²⁴ Various, *Bad Urach Statement*, 4

²⁵ Philpott, *Caesar's Sword*, 130

²⁶ Allen, *Global War*, 45

²⁷ Crudup, “Religious Persecution,” 28

²⁸ Kipfer, “Persecuted Christians”

taunted, all to eradicate the faithful from the ranks of the masses. In a dissertation written on the topic, the author states, “one in nine Christians experience high levels of persecution worldwide,”²⁹ taking a wide variety of forms. It includes groups with no political authority, those who no religious organization such as house church communities, Pentecostal student groups, Orthodox and Catholic churches, all targets of extermination.”³⁰

Concerning the issue, Charles Caput, the Catholic archbishop of Denver, warned that persecution against Christians was “ugly and is growing and mass media seem to generally ignore or downplay its gravity.”³¹ If this be the case, if eleven Christians are killed every hour of every day over the past decade,³² how does the American Church fit into these kinds of statistics? In her book *The Not-Very-Persecuted Church*, Laura Hunt makes the case that Christians in the United States, when they are converted do not experience persecution as the rest of the world does. Rather, these individuals simply merge into the sub-culture and often experience joy or exuberance as a result of their Christian profession in no way separates them from the benefits of society.³³

But, if this be the case, what of Christ’s warning in Matthew 10:22-25 or Paul’s admonishing, “all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Ti 3:12)? In fact, it is a long-standing precedent for God to give his people over to death.³⁴ If so, how could the American Church survive for 250 years without persecution? How could most Christendom exist for 2000 plus years under varying degrees of threat and harm, while American Christians experience no trials or tribulations at all? The reality is, in the West, and especially the United

²⁹ Reddy, “Knowledge,” 4

³⁰ Philpott, Caesar’s Sword, 5

³¹ Gorder, Non-Muslims in Iran, 219

³² Allen, Global War, 14

³³ Crudup, “Religious Persecution,” 32

³⁴ Beale, NT Use of OT, 1657

States, most of the body of Christ has become the forgotten of the faith.³⁵

Believers in Western countries tend to benefit from legal religious protection, and have often grown complacent concerning those freedoms, misunderstanding them as inseparable and justified rights when, they are mere privileges bestowed by happenstance and serendipity.³⁶ An outgrowth from this misguided view is the idea that persecution not only is not present in the American Church, but that the American Church cannot experience persecution. This misalignment in the US has led to discrimination by many American Christians to be mislabeled as persecution.³⁷ The reality is, while large numbers of Christians are persecuted for their faith, and while Christian persecution stands as a large share of global religious persecution, most Christians in the world do not experience it.³⁸ In addition, what happens in the United States against Christians is different when compared to what happens in other countries.³⁹

Paul said to the Philippian Church that he strove to, “...know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death” (Phil 3:10). But this is not what is seen today in Western Christianity. Yes, there are instances of ridicule, of discriminations against the Christian religion in the US and against those who practice the faith, but more often is the cases that these issues stem from social and cultural violations and hyper judgmental mentalities rather than on an ardent profession of faith. What occurs in the US is by and large minor compared to the severity of persecution in other parts of the world.⁴⁰

Despite this lack, though, it is clear, what Pope Francis labeled “polite persecution”⁴¹ is slowly metastasizing into a much more malignant kind of enemy against Christians who live and

³⁵ Marshall, *Persecuted Global Assault*, 29

³⁶ Kipfer, “Persecuted Christians”

³⁷ Crudup, “Religious Persecution,” 36

³⁸ Philpott, *Caesar’s Sword*, 11

³⁹ Crudup, “Religious Persecution,” 36

⁴⁰ Kipfer, “Persecuted Christians”

⁴¹ Philpott, *Caesar’s Sword*, 6

worship in America. Because of this reality, it is the responsibility of every Christian to prepare for what is to come and to stand for Christ even if that means to the death.

1.2 Abandonment of a Persecution Theology

To better understand why Persecution Theology is important, especially for the American Church in the distant or even quite possibly a much nearer future, it is crucial to take some space to explore why exactly Christians in the United States are so unprepared in the first place. If propositioned, one would have a difficult time to find a message on persecution or the attacks against Christianity from a pulpit in the United States today.⁴² The reason for this, of course, dates to the very founding of the country itself and the transformations that were undertaken by the inhabitants of the colonies that had once been under Monarchical rule, but who chose willingly to “...cast off the restraints of tyranny...”⁴³ and strike out into the providence of God, into the unknown wilderness of the Western Expansion, into a land wild and terrifying and pristine. But along this journey and through its providential unfolding, the once oppressed pilgrims who sought to flee persecution in their own lands became themselves anew as settlers. Settlers by definition are distinct from the pilgrim and are defined by their tendency to sink roots deeply, having reached his final destination. Unlike the previous pilgrim who traveled light and was prepared for what may come, the new Settler could establish themselves, could take their eye off the journey, can relax from the tensions of travel.⁴⁴

Despite the Bible’s bitter cry for preparation,⁴⁵ American pioneers turned instead to their own events, to their own business of prosperity, rather than remain adrift in uncharted seas of

⁴² Allen, *Global War*, 27

⁴³ Maltby, *New Englander*, 272

⁴⁴ Hall, *Worshiping with the Fathers*, 145

religious uncertainty. Over several generations, the Settlers forgot the why of their predecessors - why they had risked the voyage to the New World, why they had risked the wilds of such foreign lands. Though often romanticized and simplified, the New World, especially amidst Westward Expansion, was anything but romantic. It was difficult and often brutally cruel. In today's numbers it cost each family roughly \$30,000 to make the trip on the Oregon Trail with death an ever-present threat.⁴⁶ But, as generations moved across the continent and churches sprung up in towns and Bibles were read among huddled kin close to dim fires, concerns over religious persecution faded and were replaced by more practical issues and threats, though starvation still weighed heavy on Settlers' minds as did attacks from the natives as did accidents and Settler on Settler violence.

This independent spirit, the drive toward material prosperity and the good life, blossomed among the people. As this spirit ushered in the Revolution, and then the Civil War, the turn of the twentieth century and the brutality and blight of WWI followed by WWII, the American spirit took flight, crafting along the way a preternatural way of life. By the late 1900's few Christians had ever experienced or could even fathom persecution for what had metamorphosed over the last 100 years into what is termed today: American Evangelicalism. As David Neff stated, "Christians in the United States don't experience normal Christian living...as a biblically sound Christian life is under a real threat of persecution...Christians in the United States find persecution as practiced in other countries to be baffling."⁴⁷ In fact, what is nominal and expected consequence of becoming a Christian in most parts of the world in modern times, and throughout the course of Christian history, is almost inconceivable in the western evangelical

⁴⁵ Reddy, "Knowledge," 33

⁴⁶ BLM, "History Westward," 1

⁴⁷ Crudup, "Religious Persecution," 21

mind,⁴⁸ despite clear biblical warnings of such (Phil 1:29).

Quickly in the American mindset, the view that persecution only occurred in certain places took root.⁴⁹ Often dismissing persecution as something that happened in the past or is tied inextricably to political or ethnic agenda, American Christianity has brought about a kind of amnestic effect. Growing alongside American material and technological prosperity, the Christian idealism over the last fifty years has skewed the definition of persecution as a bygone event, replacing it with a kind of super materialism where the gospel preached is not one of suffering alongside Christ but one of perpetual prosperity, good fortune, eternal happiness here and now, and the ushering in of the Kingdom of God on earth rather than in heaven. This has led consumerism Christianity to forget nearly entirely the greater body of Christ around the world that experiences Christianity as the apostles and first disciples did.⁵⁰

Anesthetized from her cultural context, the American Church cannot compute concepts like being forced to shutter their local church building or be at risk of members losing their pensions, or their children's future employment⁵¹ and will lead to an existence devoid of sound Christian discipleship.⁵² The entire concept of loss of asset or status or means because of religious expression is to American Christians anathema and this is due to the vast time and effort spent by American Christianity over the decades contemplating and formalizing their theologies on religious liberty and human rights not only for the evangelical community⁵³ but for all free individuals in the modern world. The natural result of such thinking was an atrophic view of persecution altogether and American Christianity soon grew anemic to the idea of suffering for Christ as a true measure of holy living or status among its members. Many Christians in the west

⁴⁸ Solomon, "Iron Curtain," 114

⁴⁹ Various, *Bad Urach Statement*, 30

⁵⁰ Penner, *Shadow of the Cross*, 18

⁵¹ Pesta, "Christianity Today: Surviving the Woke Church"

today do not view religious persecution as serving a legitimate purpose at all and gone is the ideology that when Christians are persecuted it is Christ they are attacking (Crudup, “Religious Persecution,” 5). Instead, American Protestantism has adopted a distracted view, focused on the latest fad, on materialism, swallowing the lie that he who dies with the most toys wins.⁵⁴ This is counter of course to the clear message of the Bible and the American Church has spent enormous resources and effort on questions other than persecution.⁵⁵ Unfathomable is the idea that religious persecution could be used as a kind of “cultural cleansing” to rid a region of any profession altogether, as is seen in Africa and other anti-Christian regions.⁵⁶

American Christians have been left unprepared for persecution because of these various developments. Rather than identifying with suffering Christians around the world as examples,⁵⁷ American Evangelicalism has looked inwardly, in a kind of perpetual haze, unable to see the handwriting on the wall (Dan 5:23-28). If left to the same trajectory, American Christians will be ill prepared for what is an increasing threat, and much more so than at any other time in history⁵⁸ and it is the call of every Christian to abandon this world and the attachments therein.⁵⁹

1.3 The Need for Persecution Training

As already discussed, the American Church has existed and developed over 250 years in near complete isolation from the world around it. It has exchanged the concept of suffering and death for the sake of Christ for a quasi-materialistic prosperity doctrine, where being a “good”

⁵² Reddy, “Knowledge,” 33

⁵³ Penner, *Shadow of the Cross*, 18

⁵⁴ Hall, *Worshiping with the Fathers*, 146

⁵⁵ Allen, *Global War*, 27

⁵⁶ Crudup, “Religious Persecution,” 21

⁵⁷ Solomon, “Iron Curtain,” 114

⁵⁸ Various, *Bad Urach Statement*, 30

⁵⁹ Reddy, “Knowledge,” 33

Christian is defined by success in both personal and corporate life. It more often equates the gospel for a commodity that should be packaged and peddled to parishioners, defining ministry in light of numbered aggregates, marketing, and numerical growth rather than in genuine discipleship and healthy, organic multiplicity. There is simply no room in many American congregations for talk of persecution of suffering when much of their focus is on promoting inner peace and tranquility.⁶⁰

But times are changing and have been changing over the last thirty plus years, and while a few missional organizations were able to see the transformations occurring and the need for increased persecution training for those individuals they sent,⁶¹ few if any domestic church or para-church organizations could even fathom a need for training that would equip American Christians within their own borders. Most often, the subject was relegated to eschatological events in the far distant future as end-time signposts,⁶² which left the American Church flailing in its own understanding of suffering and how one responds.

Americans simply had no objective context for references like 2 Corinthians 4:8-9 “We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed” and, without such, much of these references were viewed as irrelevant. The development and promotion of pre-tribulation ideologies only compounded the notion that American Christians (if no one else) would escape future persecution altogether.⁶³

Yet, this is in no way what Paul describes, “For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake” (Phil 1:29) or Peter, “For this

⁶⁰ Allen, *Global War*, 27

⁶¹ Taylor, *Sorrow and Blood*, 331

⁶² Various, *Bad Urach Statement*, 30

⁶³ Various, *Bad Urach Statement*, 30

is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully.

For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God (1 Pet 2:19-20).

Suffering and ultimately dying for Christ is not an achievement in which humans should boast.

But it is a victory and testament to the power of God in the resurrection of Jesus that such witness in action boasts.⁶⁴ For, if we are “...children, then heirs--heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together” (Ro 8:16-17).

For the better part of American history, the idea that the Church would need persecution training would be considered laughable. With no personal experience of persecution, they simply have no context from which to base any concept on.⁶⁵ But, as recent events have illustrated, the American culture - truly one of the last bulwarks against socialist and atheistic ideologies - has suffered a great stutter-step in its fight against fanaticism and insanity. Because of this, signs are now prevalent that persecution is coming for the United States. Though still insignificant compared with Christians who are currently suffering severely in places like China and the Middle East,⁶⁶ it is still a two-fold attack. As Christians are shaped by the societies in which they live in, but societies are made created entirely by the individuals who live in them as well. The view in the West is rather myopic and without much of clue as to what is happening even around them as American Christianity is geared toward the narrow expression of Evangelical Protestantism.⁶⁷ But, even as they attempt to operate business as usual, it is clear that the “churched” culture has decayed. Modern society in the West has experienced decline. Denominations have lost members in droves and while some sectors within American

⁶⁴ Various, Bad Urach Statement, 27

⁶⁵ Allen, *Global War*, 27

⁶⁶ Solomon, “Iron Curtain,” 14

⁶⁷ Allen, *Global War*, 28

Christianity have seen growth, there are clearly defined non-biblical reasons that are just as dangerous as the reasons driving many away.⁶⁸ Overall, we see in America (and across the western world) a secularization from within. Traditional religious beliefs are being hollowed out⁶⁹ by the radical secularism and liberalism that has infiltrated modern religious organizations.⁷⁰ This secularization of the society can be seen in and out of the culture. Quick estimates illustrate: 40% of children in the United States are born out of wedlock. Millions reside in the US illegally, and prisons are full while public schools across the board are effectively degraded to centers of indoctrination rather than institutions of education.⁷¹

American Christianity is desperate to cater to these carcinogenic influences if for no other reason than futile attempts at securing its own legitimacy and relevance in an increasingly polytheistic (or anti-theistic) culture. The reality is, in order to be prepared for future persecution in the US that is likely all but inevitable, it is crucial that American believers not only accept the biblical warnings about their own persecution, but that preparing for persecution will have a net benefit, and that God has a purpose in their own persecution.⁷² If Christians do not fully grasp how persecution will change them, change their means of worship and their fundamental theologies defining their faith, they will be unprepared when persecution arrives.⁷³

Post-Western religion is overtaking the planet⁷⁴ as the cultural ideology that is festering within the next several generations will only breakout in coming decades, as concepts of freedom, independence, and religious liberty are transformed, traded, and trampled in the name of security, equity, and Intersectionality. As tension increases and pressure against Christian

⁶⁸ Berger, *Rumor of Angels*, 14

⁶⁹ Berger, *Rumor of Angels*, 14

⁷⁰ Sanneh, “Persecuted Post Westerner”

⁷¹ Reno, “Woke Script”

⁷² Crudup, “Religious Persecution,” 95

⁷³ Solomon, “Iron Curtain,” 14

⁷⁴ Sanneh, “Persecuted Post Westerner”

ideology in the West grows, many believers will find themselves isolated and tempted to reject their faith for the sake of inclusion. As is often the case, when belief in God becomes difficult, there is a growing tendency to turn away from him⁷⁵ and this is no less true for Christian leaders. As persecution increases, those who persecute typically focus on the leader “Striking the Shepherd and the sheep will scatter” (Zech 13:7).⁷⁶ But, we can see from at least Paul’s perspective, disciples did not suffer for Christ but with Christ and willingness to suffer with Christ was preconditional to sharing in Christ’s glory.⁷⁷ It is clear, if there is no education for congregates on how to endure trials and resist temptations, they more often than not simply walk away.⁷⁸

As seen in the Church in China, waves of persecution fueled major advances in the faith. Crackdowns in the ancient world were often the most important ingredient to the church’s missionary successes and the same is true in the modern world.⁷⁹ As Schaff wrote in his *History of the Church*, “No great cause in church or state, in religion or science, has ever succeeded without sacrifice. Blood is the price of liberty. In quoting Tertullian, “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.”⁸⁰

Those in the modern era who suffer for the gospel and who lead others to pursue Christ amid persecution have much in common with the first generations of Christians.⁸¹ Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Matt 5:10).

⁷⁵ Crudup, “Religious Persecution,” v.

⁷⁶ Kipfer, “Persecuted Christians”

⁷⁷ Boyd, *Warrior God*, 267

⁷⁸ Reddy, “Knowledge,” 57

⁷⁹ Allen, *Global War*, 270

⁸⁰ 4687

⁸¹ Kipfer, “Persecuted Christians”

1.4 Personal Interest in Persecution Research

As a new believer I remember reading 2 Thessalonians 2:3 with awe and wonder, unable to comprehend a time where American civil liberties and religious freedoms would be so trampled that a great apostasy - a falling away - would take place. After all, Christian ideology is the bedrock on which the United states was founded, enshrined in the First Amendment, and affixed to every international agreement on civil and political rights.⁸²

But we are all products of our own individual cultures, all develop our viewpoints from the Word of God, yet still shaded by the understanding of our day.⁸³ For much longer than I've been alive, the US Constitution has secured those fortunate enough to live in America full liberty in religion, forbidding Congress or any other authority to establish a law against religion or faith.⁸⁴ Yet, sparked in 2016 (and seeded a half century before) and culminating in the corrupted 2020 Presidential elections, cultural and political transformation has occurred to such extent that I was shocked to find the world in which I lived now stood poised on a precipice, ready to be plunged into a new religious Dark Age.

Christian belief has, at least in modern times, garnered the possessor some level of ridicule by the secularists who carve for themselves a cold and stark Monist worldview from the ashes of what they call liberation. But, until recently, I had never seen random and orchestrated violence within the US borders rise to such a level⁸⁵ as political opposition seemed entrenched and stuck in impasse. No longer were the aggressive and challenging forms of evangelism (or any forms) accepted in the public or digital square, as the Christian ideology itself was increasingly and

⁸² Marshall, *Persecuted Global Assault*, 262

⁸³ Sproul, *Relationship Between Church and State*, 28

⁸⁴ Schaff, *History of the Church*, 5355

⁸⁵ Missler, *Alien Encounters*, 168

bizarrely viewed by radical leftist movements as agents of racism and colonial oppression.⁸⁶

Then a new front resurfaced from the failed attempts of the 1990's push for a unified American continent and talks of a one-world government, in what has now been termed, "The Great Reset." As Archbishop Carlo Maria Vigano stated the plans are set to cancel religions and replace individual faith with a religion of the state designed by a global ideology.⁸⁷ Slogans now can be seen around the world such as, "you will own nothing and be happy," "whatever you want you will rent," "US won't be the world's leading superpower," and "you will eat meat only as an occasional treat, not as a staple, for the good of the environment and our health."⁸⁸ So much clearer is the concerted and unified efforts by the world, by the enemy, the principalities, and the powers in the heavenly realms to bring to ruin the world and humanity.⁸⁹ More so now than ever before is it apparent that persecution will come for all. There is simply no guarantee of safety, whether it be by democracy or some other cultural aberration,⁹⁰ as is stated by Paul, "all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim 3:12).

Upon discovering the important need to prepare as many American Christians as possible for future persecution, I realized the providential nature of my own personal circumstances have equipped me for this kind of work. In the future I hope to develop this research into a comprehensive curriculum and make it available free of charge to all individuals, Churches, and organizations that desire to learn and prepare to suffer with Christ.

⁸⁶ Philpott, *Caesar's Sword*, 9

⁸⁷ Unknown, "The American," 8

⁸⁸ WEF, "8 Predictions"

⁸⁹ Torrey, *Fundamentals*, Ch 36

⁹⁰ Solomon, "Iron Curtain," 14

1.5 Preliminary Questions the Research Must Answer

The research into the historical and practical interactions the American Church has had with persecution immediately brings up a host of important questions that need to be explored in order to effectively develop a means by which individual believers are equipped to respond to potential persecution in the future. These questions here have been organized into three main sections: background, practical, and finally intersectional.

The first set of questions deal primarily with inquiring about “why” this phenomenon appears to exist. Why is it that American Christianity - specifically, Evangelical Protestantism - has developed in such a way as to forsake or abandon any kind of genuine or systematized Theology of Persecution? Despite, as already discussed, the very founding of the United States was sparked out of long-standing religious persecution, how is it that American Christians no longer even view persecution or suffering for the sake of Christ as something viable or purposeful? Was it an intentional decision? Was it more instinctual and practical, as explored with the Pilgrim vs Settler dichotomy described earlier in this Introduction? Could the lack of Persecution Theology have developed in similar fashion to cultural and political environment that drove the first believers into the Egyptian desert after the issuance of the Edict of Milan in 313 A.D.?⁹¹

After generations of religious freedom and individual liberty, was it impractical to devote time and energy to concepts such as suffering for Christ or the possibility of dying for one’s faith when, in the United States, there was literally no chance that such could even happen? Would not the lack of threat, the absence of governmental pressure to conform, to denounce faith in Christ naturally give theologians and ministers of the Word the breathing room necessary to focus on other, more pressing, and pastoral issues of the day?

Akin to these questions is the concept of suffering itself. Has the American Church, in her

near perpetual affluence and progress, considering American advancement in science and technology, in the substantive transformative nature of the US advancement in nearly every field imaginable in the last hundred years, what does the American Christian think of suffering as a concept? Is it something in which they strive to avoid? Is it a concept, like the first century Church, that is fundamental to their faith and their religious ethos?⁹² Would American Christianity in the modern and post-modern environment of today agree that persecution and suffering are normative ideas to the Christian life⁹³ or is it within their mindset that these ideas and their practicalities should be avoided at all costs, even to the point of compromising their Christian witness?⁹⁴

The second group of questions deal with practical aspects of the research, focusing on what persecution is and how it might manifest in the modern culture. Lurking always in the corner of the room is the question everyone is bound to ask: do American Christians really experience persecution today? Is that even possible? Considering the legal protections all Americans have access to, given the well seated and firmly established religious liberties and constitutional protections, is it right to even use the term “persecution” in the first place?

Are American Christians being persecuted when they are de-platformed for their stance on same-sex marriage or abortion or political issues of the day? Would these categories even be considered persecution for faith reasons or rather would they identify more with political and anti-government or counter-cultural categories? What of the verbal ridicule many Christians in the United States experience from family and friends, coworkers and in the public square? Bible-thumper is a derogatory term but being called names for their faith is a far cry from being

⁹¹ Small, *Lexham Dict: Diocletian*, “Persecution of Christians”

⁹² Kilbourn, “Suffering in Early Christianity,” 8

⁹³ Reddy, “Knowledge,” 57

⁹⁴ Various, *Bad Urach Statement*, 37

deprived necessities (such as water or food) or being enslaved or having property seized or brutally beaten, imprisoned, or even murdered.⁹⁵

If then, we do determine that Americans do not actually experience anything that can be construed as persecution in the modern age, what would have to change in Western law or culture for Christian persecution to be a possibility? The question begs: how far off is persecution from the American Christian? If not experiencing it now, what about a year from now? Ten years from now? Would the American political system require a massive shift to a one-party rule, allowing then the power majority to erode the constitutional protections enough so that Churches could be shut down and the freedom of speech of countless American citizens be curtailed? Would it simply require an excuse, such as a pandemic? What about the perceived threat of terrorism? How much of a cultural shift would need to take place before Christian conservative principles were considered hate speech, harmful to individuals and groups and determined to be violence in thought alone?

Akin to these kinds of questions is the consideration of what kind of persecution could American Christians be subjected to in the future? Would it be possible today that our purchasing power, our ability to move independently and autonomously be curtailed? Would status be rated on social quantification and quasi cultural “good will” instead of on merit or economic means? Today much of the social fabric of American society is built and sustained by and large by an assessment of behavior, which was in turn developed through a sense of belonging, nurtured by familial ties. How much of this fabric of American society would need to be rent for an unmooring to take place, where individuals were no longer tied to social communal systems (church, community, etc), but were instead dislocated, free-floating, and

⁹⁵ Chris, *Destination Jerusalem*, 84

unsocialized?⁹⁶ Would this provide the hotbed requisite for cultural and political disunity? Would it be possible for the modern American Christian to find themselves stuck in a culture, much like the Roman Christians of the first century, blamed for the many cultural woes they had nothing to do with?

Lastly, the third group of questions would pertain specifically to the development of a modern Persecution Theology geared for American Christians as well as how such a theology would be informed by both an Enochian Worldview and a Philosophy of Death.

If the questions above are answered in such a way as to determine a great need for a Persecution Theology to be developed for the American Church, how might that curriculum look in a post-modern society? How would it compare to the historical theologies used in the biblical context (by Jesus and the apostles) and by the Church Fathers in the first four centuries? Would there be changes needed to address specific issues that pertain to American society that were simply not relevant in the past? One example of this is how surveillance technology has possibly rendered a hidden church today as impossible to sustain. This has proved true in places like North Korea where pervasive state surveillance has rendered the entire country a prison without bars.⁹⁷

Likewise, it would be important to gauge how relevant the past and the modern experiences of persecution would help in developing a uniquely American Theology of Persecution. Would anything the Church fathers have written about be helpful for us? What about the writings of the Apostles? What about the Prophets of the Old Testament? What effort should be expended on collecting and analyzing the experiences of Christians elsewhere in the modern world? Would the accounts of Christians in the former Soviet Union be of any help? What about persecuted

⁹⁶ Stewart, “Identity Politics”

⁹⁷ Marshall, *Persecuted Global Assault*, 61

Christians in China, or in Iran? What about the current issues some would consider religious persecution in Canada? Are Christians in Eritrea so fundamentally different from those in the United States that their experiences of persecution would simply be of no benefit?

Also to be considered, how should training be conducted in America? At the time of this writing there are still personal religious freedoms in the US. There is still due process and there are still courts and the rule of law and the Constitution with all its provisions and protections. Neither revolution nor insurrection have occurred. Despite what the news media would be inclined to say, much of America is quiet and peaceful and all is as it should be. Regardless of the blathering of talking heads, the world is not on fire. At least not yet.

But, if it is determined that persecution training is, indeed, needed in the United States, how should that training be executed? Should it be done in secret? Should it be done strategically or organically? Should training materials be distributed on the open market, as a commodity like much of the training available in American Christianity today? Are persecution trainers to be paid? Should organizations be formed or should training be offered ad hoc, to only those who have an interest? Are pulpits and Church leadership in the US even ready for such training? Many Church ministries today have very little to do with biblical Christianity and teach a more social gospel mixed with positive psychology and a dash of new age. How receptive would the average Church or Church leader be if someone came to them preaching and teaching suffering and persecution was coming for their parishioners?

Along those same lines, what would a persecution theology even look like? How clear would it need to be? Would the message, if truly biblical, be too much for American ears to hear? Is it already too late and those who God will providentially protect will be protected and the rest will be tossed into the proverbial furnace? Will God do with America in similar fashion as he did

with Israel and only a remnant will be saved? For that matter, what does the Bible say about persecution in the first place? What does it predict about persecution in the future? Are there any instructions given from Scripture in how Christians are to respond to persecution when it comes?

Lastly, this research will tackle two additional questions in some depth. The first of those is: how does the Enochian Worldview inform Christian Persecution and second: how is Christian Persecution framed by a Philosophy of Death? These last two questions are naturally foundational to how one approaches not only persecution but also reality itself. The Enochian Worldview will be discussed at length in Chapter 02 The Rise of Godless Culture, and will detail how Paul is correct, that “we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph 6:12). But what does the Enochian Worldview have to do with persecution training for the American Church? How does it provide a solution that traditional Evangelical theology cannot? How can one be certain the Enochian Worldview is even correct?

Likewise, Persecution Theology hinges on a proper understanding of death itself. If a believer is tethered to this life, to things and people, to what they might count as loss if they were to die for their faith, there is a good chance faith will not sustain them through the fire. Therefore, a proper Philosophy of Death is crucial to an effective witness, that one be willing to not only suffer with Christ but to also die for him, this is the task some have been and will be called to when persecution comes to America.

1.6 Approaches, Technology, and Tools Used to Conduct the Research

This research project was approached utilizing several protocols, from linear reading to advanced data mining of both the biblical text as well as the resources selected as described below. This section outlines in general the steps taken:

1. Initial research was completed, and the Project Proposal was written and submitted on 1/11/2021 after formal acceptance into the ThD Program at Forge Theological Seminary was granted on 12/15/2020. The Proposal was submitted as a docx file along with a pdf copy, a Screencast presentation and links to all data files archived on the ThD Program ePortfolio. All documents pertaining to this research project can be found at the ePortfolio.⁹⁸
2. The Proposal provided enough background information to create a Comprehensive Outline on the dissertation itself and was further developed, edited, and expanded while resources were acquired.
3. Once all resources to be used in the Research Project were acquired (all digital formats), resources were sorted into three subgroups: Reading, Consulting, and Background.
4. All resources were then imported into LOGOS Bible Software as Personal Books so they could be indexed for future data mining.
5. Books, Articles, and Websites that were sorted into the Reading subgroup were then systematically read, with detailed notes taken and compiled into cards in the Scrivener Word processing program.
6. Keywords were generated from each section in the Dissertation Outline. These keywords were utilized in a series of meta context search inquiries using LOGOS Bible Software's

relational and proximity search features. It was possible to run a single search across all resources simultaneously, which greatly reduced the time needed for research. Results from these search inquiries were pulled and inputted into digital cards in the Scrivener Word processing program.

7. Once all keywords were searched and cards created, the cards were sorted and systematized, organized by concept, topic, and location (by keyword).
8. Writing was then completed over several weeks in April and May 2021 utilizing the cards as background and source material as well as following the outline.
9. The Dissertation underwent three complete edit passes before the final product was deemed ready for submission. The project was exported to docx for a final pass edit, as well as to include front and back matter.
10. A Dissertation Presentation was created in video format and submitted along with the Dissertation, as well as archived on the ThD ePortfolio.
11. A detailed review was conducted in preparation of the upcoming Dissertation Defense.
12. The Dissertation Defense, once completed, will be archived at the ThD ePortfolio.
13. Once the entire project is completed and pass/fail is determined, the total of the project content will be later reworked and developed into a comprehensive curriculum to be used by individuals and Church groups, to help equip American Christians for coming persecution. This will include an online, asynchronous course, delivery by download/flashdrive, and will also be supported by a weekly podcast and/or blog series.

During the Research Project a keyword search was conducted using the LOGOS Bible Software program on the biblical text of the Protestant Bible. The text exclusively used was the

⁹⁸ <https://stevenveach.wordpress.com/doctor-of-theology-program/>

New King James Version. This English translation was selected because of its loyalty to the Textus Receptus of the New Testament and willingness to consult the LXX in the Old Testament. While the NKJV Bible presents the Textus Receptus/Majority Text in-line for the New Testament and Masoretic Hebrew in-line for the Old Testament, the translation does reference textual variants in both testaments via the footnotes. This is the opposite of most modern English translations that provide the critical rendering in-line and the TR/Majority/LXX in the footnotes. The NKJV was also selected over the KJV due to the personal preference of the researcher, finding the NKJV more readable. All verses from the Bible quoted in this Dissertation were quoted using the NKJV.

In the process of researching the writings of the Church Fathers during this Dissertation, the *Early Church Father's Protestant Edition (37 Vol)* by James Schaff was consulted exclusively. This was the complete Ante-Nicene, Nicene, Post-Nicene Collection by the Christian Literature Company published specifically for the LOGOS Bible Software Program. It was the 1886 English edition.

As a comprehensive background for persecution within the Christian Church throughout history, two Church History surveys were consulted. James White's *Church History Lecture Series*, which is available on Sermon Audio and Credo House's *Church History Series*, which is available for free on the Credo House website were both utilized extensively if not quoted directly.

Technology and digital tools were leveraged greatly in the process of conducting this

research project. The two platforms used were a Windows 10 laptop and an Android phone. The LOGOS Bible Software program for both Windows and Android were used extensively for both detailed and exhaustive search (as already discussed) in imported resources as well as in the biblical text itself. The Word Bible Software was also utilized as a clipboard monitor for quickly displaying Scripture references while reading and writing.

For the writing process proper, the Scrivener Word Processor was used almost exclusively for writing the Proposal, the Dissertation Outline, and all but the last draft of the project manuscript. Final draft was exported to Microsoft Word for a final review and the addition of front and back matter and creation of the final docx documents.

Citations used in the project were initially generated automatically by LOGOS Bible Software and/or the Bib it Now! Citation Generator which is a Firefox Browser extension. Note citations in footnotes were manually formatted and inserted into the text. Information for the final bibliography was generated from LOGOS and the Bib it Now Generator and manually copied, sorted, and formatted. No other citation generator or application was used.

While reading and pulling page numbers for citations, a standard PDF Reader was used (Microsoft Edge PDF Reader). Epub and Mobi files were converted to Pdf to assign page numbers for citation. If no page number was available or a particular file could not be converted to PDF, then chapter and/or section was used in the citation process. Some resources in LOGOS Bible Software did not provide page numbers and, thus, alternative citation was utilized.

During the reading process, the Balabolka Text to Speech Reader was utilized, turning Pdf, Epub, and Mobi files into moving text that was read aloud by a computer-generated voice. This allowed for reading at much greater speed than normal and could be read during commute and while engaged in other activities.

For the research project, approximately 275 ebooks were consulted and/or cited of various formats. Of those titles, approximately 75 were from each subgroup: Enochian Worldview, Persecution, Philosophy of Death. Approximately 50 academic articles were consulted and/or cited during the research project. Some Internet sources were likewise consulted, such as popular non-academic articles and current events or new media articles and/or websites. Wikipedia was avoided in the research and not utilized as a source for quoting or as background use.

While conducting research for this project, several online libraries were utilized. The Liberty Library Online was used extensively to retrieve both digital books as well as gain access to academic journals and articles. Other online libraries included The Christian Classics Ethereal Library,⁹⁹ the Gutenberg Project¹⁰⁰ and Google Books.¹⁰¹

1.7 Dissertation Overview

This Dissertation is divided into seven Chapters with subsections within each chapter. Each Chapter is numbered, and subsequent Chapter subsections are dually numbered accordingly.

Chapter One includes an overall Introduction to the project, including sections questioning if American Christians experience persecution today, addressing why the American Church abandoned the concepts of persecution and suffering as theological topics, and why there is a need for persecution training today in America. Also reviewed are the preliminary questions that such research conjures, as well as an overview of the approaches, technologies, and tools used

⁹⁹ <https://www.ccel.org/>

¹⁰⁰ <https://www.gutenberg.org/>

¹⁰¹ <https://books.google.com/>

during the project. This last section in Chapter One provides an overview of the Dissertation itself.

Chapter Two discusses background materials and thinking in the Rise of Godless Culture, introducing, and analyzing the distinct worldviews in opposition to each other and how these worldviews originated at first in the Garden of Eden and foster by supernatural forces in the early days of humanity and further still when God divided the nations into desperate groups and place them in control of the Elohim (plural form).

A line of reasoning is traced through the descent of man from God's creation to his fall from grace, and through the mixing of ungodly thinking and actions, eventually culminating in the rejection of God's design for the earth, replacing Him and his creation with a non-thaumaturgic reality. Outlined is the radicalization of science and the mythification of the biblical text, the birth of a godless, socialist agenda and the historical and modern moves toward one world government and oppressive, anti-theistic rule by force, with analysis provided of how the American Church has fallen prey to the deceptive lure of capitalism, fascism, socialism, and a positive psychologicalism.

Chapter Three outlines and analyzes the Signs of Present and Increasing Discrimination in the United States most specifically against Christians. Discussed is the rise and radicalization of Intersectional ideology on the political and cultural left, and how their perpetration of random violence, organized riots have sparked a new cold war between the age-old, diametrically opposed worldviews discussed earlier.

These events have culminated in the success of the democratic socialist agenda in stealing the 2020 Presidential Election with fraud and illicit activism, leading to what will certainly end in a single party rule of the US and the ultimate eradication or at least evasion of the Constitutional

protections American Christians have exercised until now. This Chapter goes on to document the first steps of the new liberal regime, the calling for censorship of political and cultural adversaries and the bizarre challenge radical progressivism is insisting on in reframing conservative, biblical values as hate and the perversions of same-sex lifestyle, victimization, and Critical Race Theory as lofty and liberated love. The end of the Chapter explores how this mind virus of Intersectionality has corrupted at the very core the masses of humanity, in which there is no means by which to reason with or present a rational argument against, culminating and supporting the theory that these are those who have been given over to the lusts of their flesh, to a reprobate mind, unable to see God or the truth.

Chapter Four, Our Quite Possible Future Fates, outlines in detail several Case Studies in modern Christian persecution, namely: the former Yugoslavia, China, the countries of the Middle East, and lastly North Korea. These countries, while not a complete list where modern Christianity experiences persecution, they stand as some of the worst in human history. Yugoslavia specifically presents an example and warning to America in how socialist elites will utilize class warfare against the populous to achieve their goals, a blueprint being repeated near exactly as it was in the Yugoslavian Civil War. Additional examples are provided from different environmental and geographical contexts illustrating ideas for how the American Church will need to change in the future, how they might transform their function and assembly in both secret and in open considering the possibility that persecution might be coming to American shores. Special attention is given to the need for the American Church to abandon the current commercialized, corporate structure and the professionalization of the clergy for a function directed New Testament assembly format, that harbors no clergy/laity distinction and boast of a healthier plurality of servant leadership.

Chapter Five builds from the previous chapters, defining and describing the building of a Theology of Persecution specifically for the American Church. At the start, a definition for both suffering and persecution in the Christian context is explored, along with the necessity of establishing any theology for the Church on the apostles and prophets. Prophetic references are discussed at length pertaining to persecution in the future, and an in-depth analysis is proffered concerning the fundamental reality of existence and how that underlining reality provides the stage for proper theology along with a re-examination of the biblical worldview in light of suffering conscriptions in the biblical text. A detailed analysis of what American Christians can expect in the future is also provided, covering the forced closure of modern, organized Church organizations, the social disenfranchisement, loss of employment and employability, loss of familiar and social connections through radical ostracization, the seizure of homes and assets in the name of equitable good, long-term inability to buy or sell, inevitable physical violence perpetrated by both governmental entities and mob rule. Work camps are examined as well as the ultimate decision that will be required of American Christians: deny Christ or suffer or even die with him.

A how-to section is provided for all American Christians who desire to prepare for coming persecution, including psychological issues that arise from intense physical torture. Discussion is provided on how to properly suffer as a Christian (and what not to do and what not to be accused of before men), as well as ways in which to test your calling in Christ to be certain of your election. Information is also provided on how to surrender the will of the fallen human nation, to ready oneself for the spiritual battle to come, how and in what instances to avoid persecution if possible, and how the persecution of the individual Christian is a testimony to other believers as well as the persecutors themselves. Space is also provided at the end of the Chapter concerning

how to conduct evangelism while experiencing varying levels of persecution as well as providing practical tools and strategist for fulfilling the mission of God amidst hardship.

The sixth Chapter focuses on developing a Philosophy of Death to properly inform a well-balanced Theology of Persecution. Covered in this chapter is a philosophical introduction to death itself, outlining bodily, major system shutdown, and brain death, as well as emotional factors that often accompany the dying process. An examination of the anthropology of the human being is laid out, discussing the trichotomic being, the first death, the severing of the body from the soul, and how death is exemplified in Christ, the apostles, the Church Fathers, Christians throughout the Middle and Dark Ages, the believers during the Reformation and, lastly, those who have died for Christ during modern times. An exploration of sharing in Christ's death is provided, as well as the distinctive psychology of the Martyr, both historically and practically. The Intermediate State is defined and analyzed to inform the Christian who is in preparation or already experiencing increased persecution in their context. A review of the Resurrection, of Judgment, and, finally, the Second Death in the Lake of Fire is addressed. Lastly, the afterlife is discussed in depth, both biblically as well as speculatively in relation to the Enochian Worldview as described earlier in the dissertation.

The final Chapter provides conclusions to the overall discussion, tying up loose ends, and bringing into view specific frameworks from which further research might spring. Mortality is reviewed as well as the futile existential nature of human existence. This section of the research attempts to conclude that all that has been discussed has been so to garner a greater apocalyptic mindset in the American Christian, that individuals and the whole of the Church might take more seriously the mindset of Paul and of Christ, that we should be sober, watchful, and not distracted by the cares of this world, but focused on his Return. The certainty of future persecution is

reaffirmed as is the rewards awaiting those who are faithful until the end. As believers, Christians no longer live for this life or the tings on this earth but live as slaves of the one who has redeemed us from the power of death and sin. It is to him that we should live and move and have our breath. It is for him that we wait in somber and serious expectation.

Chapter 02 - The Rise of Godless Culture

2.1 What is Fundamental Reality?

Through the course of human history, the living being known as man has stepped out of the shadows of what is today consider the animal nature - that which is driven predominately by hardwired, generational instinct - and has emerged as a singular possessor of presence of mind, of arbitrator of knowledge and self-understanding.

There are a multitude of explanations for this transformation, many resorting to fanciful descriptions of many-headed gods or goddesses, of scientific marvel, of unknown processes that have yet to be witnessed in human history. Knowledge itself has been fractured in meaning and significance over the centuries, as reality itself has been questioned, pondered, explored. The ancient Stoics believed reality to be divided into two distinct realms, that of *ousia* or that which is eternal and *hypostasis*, that which becomes real by the individual.¹⁰² Though, of course, this idea is simplistic in such forms, as there are important distinctions between what is ordinarily viewed as reality (in individuality) and how it ultimately is (fundamental reality).¹⁰³

Thinking on reality continued to develop over time through Middle Platonism and into Neo-Platonism, striking a balance between the two ideas of reality, individualized vs fundamental. Eventually, the two would merge into a single constant, *hypostasis* becoming *ousia* as it is, while *hypostasis* retreating from reality as a separate construct, folding instead into the reality behind it. In the Neo-Platonic mind, the *hypostasis* became synonymous with the *ousia*, deriving ultimate being and would later filter into concepts of Trinity.¹⁰⁴ Such dichotomies arose between

¹⁰² Kittl, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 1238

¹⁰³ Bradley, *Philosophy of Death*, 124

¹⁰⁴ Kittl, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 1238

light and darkness, upon which the Scriptures drew important themes. Darkness ultimately became the lie and sin while the light the holiness of God and the hope of the condemned, as that light was sent to the whole world (John 8:12; 9:5; 12:35-36, 46).¹⁰⁵

The idea of absolute grew from this divergence of the two. Evil could not inhabit the reality of the holy, while absolute being existed not in symbolic form alone, but in spiritual, and non-terrestrial - existing independent of our own knowledge of God and that preexistent, non-dependent existence of God presupposed a fundamental reality of not only God but of his created universe and all that is found within it.¹⁰⁶

As the widening gap between opinions grew over time, the cosmological argument surfaced and re-surfaced several times, stating that every limited being has, by necessity, a cause for its existence and that a contingent being is impossible without its necessary Being which is God. As the argument purports, nonexistence cannot cause existence¹⁰⁷ and, thus, what is fundamentally real must objectively be real and likewise had an origin if causal in its own inherent nature. This reality of cause and creation was established in Genesis 1:1, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” It is from this reality that all of creation is dependent, all knowledge flows from this singular, absolute truth. This is the reason Genesis 1:1 is attacked most by nonbelievers, as it is the singular pillar upon which the biblical message rests: for to be rid of creation is to be rid of a Creator.¹⁰⁸

It is in this absolute reality that God brought forth the man and the woman, and it was in this space that there existed harmony between them and God in unbroken communion.¹⁰⁹ Of this pre-fall reality we know little. It is as foreign to mortal man as is the farthest, unknowable star. It

¹⁰⁵ MacArthur, *NT Commentary*, John 1:4-5

¹⁰⁶ Orr, *ISBE* “Anthropomorphism,” 153

¹⁰⁷ Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, 423

¹⁰⁸ MacArthur, *NT Commentary*, John 1:4-5

exists and its existence is independent of human involvement. Yet, to man its existence does not register. It is as similar as the adage of the tree falling in the forest, for there is no one to hear the tree falling, and thus, the tree does not make a sound. Removing all conscious beings from the equation does not negate the reality of existence of non-conscious existence.¹¹⁰

Quickly the exploration returns to the original and ancient question between fundamental reality and ordinary facts - does fundamental reality exist independent of the ordinary artifacts (tree vs sound)?¹¹¹ Further, does the will of God make human beings exist as independent entities, creating the personal identity?¹¹² If, upon death, an individual's identity is subsequently located with a piece of driftwood. Is that person a piece of driftwood or has the person embodied a piece of driftwood?

Do humans, as Plantinga argues, develop theistic beliefs,¹¹³ or are theistic beliefs (which already exist because the object of those beliefs - God - exists) simply recognized by the created thing? It is said, "The will of God holds the world together, makes of it a cosmos rather than a churning chaos or even nothingness."¹¹⁴ If this be so, what is then fundamentally real?

Is creation real? Is God real? Is creation real only in relation to and to the extent that God is real? If God were to at some point cease to exist would his Creation, likewise, cease to exist?

There are on earth today a myriad of beliefs about God, or more specifically, beliefs about the origins of the earth, the universe, living beings, and the nature of God or gods. But these myriads are often incompatible and at odds with each other or reject one but accept the rest. This was historically the case as well. The Gnostics serve as the perfect example of those who offered

¹⁰⁹ Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 923

¹¹⁰ Shermer, *Heavens on Earth*, 77

¹¹¹ Bradley, *Philosophy of Death*, 164

¹¹² Davis, *After We Die*, 67

¹¹³ Bartholomew, *Christian Philosophy*, 250

¹¹⁴ Davis, *After We Die*, 66

a more inclusive, accepting form of Christianity as compared to the Orthodox of their time.¹¹⁵

But it is impossible, logically, for there to be more than one reality. Whether it is Darwin's change over time, the Christian's insistence on Christ, or Mohammad's claim, or Joseph Smith's golden spectacles, there is but one valid worldview which best represents the fundamental reality that is actually accurate and true. Given such a claim, there must be knowledge beyond dependent experience, beyond the conscious awareness of the created.¹¹⁶ In fact, this reality is not at all dependent on the human observer and must then exist elsewhere than the terrestrial plane of existence. The war of worldviews in which humans battle is not the cause but the symptom of a much grander, much more dramatic, and severe offensive. Yet, despite humans' lack of involvement, it in no way is any less real. In fact, it might be so much more.

2.2 War Against the Theistic Worldview

Human ideology has expressed itself via a wide range of opinions and practices throughout human history.¹¹⁷ From what is perceived to be divine revelation to personal, willful empowerment and self-betterment, the human condition has seen a vast array of ideas and concepts concerning our existence, the purpose of our being. Much of that time has been devoted historically to what can only be called Christian theology, or more broadly, Christian Philosophy. Foundationally, the seeds of the Christian worldview were formed and joined together with Judaism's long history of Monotheism, which is distinct from that which the rest of the world sought as explanation for the reality humans see and feel and experience around them.

Theism in general is a doctrine of an extra-mundane, personal God - a creator and preserver,

¹¹⁵ Boa, Sense and Nonsense, Ch17 Note # 4.

¹¹⁶ Moreland, "Existence," Audio 1, 5 min.

¹¹⁷ Pope, Compendium of Christian Theology, 1220

governor, and sustainer of all things, of all matter and creation¹¹⁸ and it is impossible to begin a discussion of worldviews without attributing this ideology it's proper and significant place in the formation and historical development of society and humanity.

This fact can be illustrated thoroughly through a multitude of examples, from the Roman pagan spirituality which the people of that time sought to find explanation and justification for the physical, psychological, social, and spiritual suffering they endured¹¹⁹ to the mysteries of Isis and Osiris in ancient Egypt which syncretically spread throughout the ancient Greco-Roman world.¹²⁰ Or the Sun God, Ra, who was thought to embody the Pharaoh as an immortal ruler in the flesh, the incarnate god became a heavenly being in a cosmic order of perpetual continuity, as the *Egyptian Book of the Dead* captures, “My soul is the God, my soul is eternity.¹²¹”

For centuries the Romans celebrated and worshiped through ceremonies the pantheon, though cold and prosaic,¹²² it still held sway in theistic fashion as it had for their ancestors centuries before. But, beyond the pillars of the pagan Romans or the Greek Philosophers of old, or the Jewish kabbalists and rabbis of the Second Temple Period, Christianity found itself planted in the fertile ground of rational proposition.¹²³ The Christian community in the first century established for themselves the examples set for through the proposition of firsthand witness, then of secondhand teaching, then lastly through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Though Christianity did not invent Theism, its certainty went a long way in perfecting it with a God who required no perpetual sacrifice, no purgation through ritual or ceremony, only supernatural revelation and personal belief.¹²⁴ Christians are, in this sense, grateful to God for

¹¹⁸ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 241

¹¹⁹ Kilbourn, “Suffering in Early Christianity,” 94

¹²⁰ Elliott, *Eerdmans Dict: Mystery Cults*, 932

¹²¹ Moreman, *Beyond the Threshold*, 15

¹²² Kilbourn, “Suffering in Early Christianity,” 93

¹²³ Bartholomew, *Christian Philosophy*, 251

¹²⁴ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics Vol 1*, 483

both the Bible and the revealing of the gospel of Christ, what Irenaeus called the rule of faith or the tradition of the apostles.¹²⁵ To fathom an ideology that denied the existence of a God would be atheistic and incomprehensible to historical Christianity.¹²⁶ As it were, the Israelite God and subsequently the God of Christ and Jesus himself were no mere deity of the pantheon. God was not one of many gods from exilic times, the patron of the Israelite kingdoms. In the mind of the Jews, Yahweh was the God of both the Jew and the non-Jew alike. He ruled all nations¹²⁷ regardless of if any nation worshiped him.

The theistic concept, in the mind of the believer, demonstrates a rationality¹²⁸ founded in divine call (John 6:44; 1 Co 2:14). It is, at least in the theist' mind, a belief founded on divine revelation rather than on observable evidence which is why it is often viewed as faith without reason.¹²⁹ Yet, Deism took the first modern stab at theistic belief in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, from Bacon to Locke, in a quasi-kind of natural religion rendering supernatural revelation as impossible.¹³⁰

Even an argument can be made from Darwin, the father of evolution, that in his most extremes he never claimed to be an atheist to deny the existence of God.¹³¹ But, Theism, from nearly the beginning of its inception in Adam and Eve, found challenge in an incompatible alternative, what Darwin, despite his claims to the contrary, did hold to this alternative, rival religious presupposition.¹³² These two views solidified in modern times at the turn of the 20th century, founding the root of a war between the two worldviews - God vs No-God.¹³³ These

¹²⁵ Thiselton, *Systematic Theology*, Ch 4.5

¹²⁶ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 241

¹²⁷ Durken, *New Collegeville Commentary, Isaiah 40:12-31*

¹²⁸ Davis, *Christian Philosophical Theology*, 31

¹²⁹ Bartholomew, *Christian Philosophy*, 251

¹³⁰ Pope, *Compendium of Christian Theology*, 156

¹³¹ Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, 245

¹³² North, *Running Down*, 5

¹³³ North, *Running Down*, 5

views cannot be blended. In fact, the alternative view to theism is inherently a challenge to faith itself. One must choose, as it is impossible for an individual to believe in a personal God and simultaneously consider the concept of an infinite personal God to be a contraction and absurdity.¹³⁴

Some would categorize a multifaceted descriptive for the different alternatives to theism, though this is extravagant. The continual progression of anti-theistic sentimentality has continued on through liberal theology, neo-orthodox theology, radical theology,¹³⁵ and then finally Intersectional theology. All of these, rather than independent movements, illustrate a concerted spiritual effort to undermine the person and being of God.

All other religion is best viewed as soft atheism. Agnosticism, in its insistence on the impossibility of knowing if God is true or false, proves insanity in its paradox of skepticism, in that it is impossible to know that one cannot know, which leads to a rebellion, ultimately, against reason and logic.¹³⁶ The three greatest thinkers of suspicion were Nietzsche, Marx and Freud, all three sought great change under the auspices of critical analysis of theism. All three were atheists who described belief in God as man's weakness. They sought, instead, to align and define human motivation by sex, power, and material interest¹³⁷ rendering humans as no better or different from beast. This kind of apathy toward human nature led to the likes of Kierkegaard's doubt, that though one might work through doubt and find absolution, most would relish doubt, idolize it, and harken efforts to shipwreck others' faith as a calling itself.¹³⁸

Despite theism' claim that the world and existence is, in fact, real, and the juxtaposition

¹³⁴ Hodge, *Systematic Theology* Vol 1, 363

¹³⁵ Webster, *Handbook Systematic Theology*, Ch 33.1

¹³⁶ Thiselton, *Systematic Theology*, Ch 4.5

¹³⁷ Bartholomew, *Christian Philosophy*, 193

¹³⁸ Thiselton, *Systematic Theology*, Ch 4.5

between the spirit and the physical realities is actual,¹³⁹ atheism took it upon itself to argue for a monist or materialistic reality, where the spiritual reality is denied or excused away.¹⁴⁰

Atheism is a form of negativism and affirms nothing and works all its effort to deny theism.¹⁴¹ The New Age (which is a cloak for atheism as all religious are) challenges theism with its open fluidity of expression, diverse phenomena, practices, and ascriptions. This is eroded the concepts of theism ascribing instead anything that would take its place, such as self-help, tarot cards, crystals, yoga, goddess worship, Buddhism, meditation, neopaganism, the occult, witchcraft, astrology, Native American practices. Today, 20% of the American population believes it is spiritual yet cannot define its spirituality.¹⁴² The post-modern, pluralistic approach holds no objective value to evidence, and this is seen unfolding in peoples' lives in a multitude of negative ways. For the postmodern thinker, when absolute truth surfaces, it is replayed as "reason is dead."¹⁴³ Henry Spence-Jones outlined it best in his commentary on Ephesians, "There are several things that make our times evil (1) a ruling secularism. (2) Religious formalism; the living spirit is rare. The letter is killing the spirit. (3) Skeptical rationalism, or the world's philosophy - anti-theistic, anti-supernatural, anti-Christian."¹⁴⁴ This can be seen clearly in Matthew 11:12, "from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force."

¹³⁹ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics Vol 1*, 481

¹⁴⁰ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics Vol 1*, 481

¹⁴¹ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 241-242

¹⁴² Holder, *Blackwell Spirituality*, 543

¹⁴³ Kilbourn, "Suffering Early Christianity," 60

¹⁴⁴ Spence-Jones, *Pulpit: Ephesians*, 246

2.3 Garden of Eden

In modern American Evangelical Protestantism today, history is often blinded by tradition, by orthodoxy, or assumption, often at the expense of biblical accuracy. This is true about the original purpose and meaning behind the Garden of Eden event found in Genesis 3, when the Serpent tempted the woman with the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil and, upon eating it, the Man and Woman fell from grace.

Why or how the serpent was in the garden in the first place is open to speculation. What exactly was the fruit Eve and subsequently Adam ate is likewise unclear. It is clear, though, that the serpent was, at least by nature, Elohim. In the Book of Job 1:6ff an event takes place described as a presentation of the “Sons of God” (bene Elohim) and Satan (or the Adversary) was there among them and presented his activity to God¹⁴⁵ often translated as *aggelos* or angel in the LXX and New Testament.¹⁴⁶

After the fall, God drove Adam and Eve from the garden and sealed the entry to it by placing multiple “Cherubim” in its path possessing a “flaming sword which turns every way, to keep the way of the Tree of Life (Gen 3:24). These fantastical creatures play a prominent supportive role in the biblical text, showing up in figurine form on the lid of the Ark (Exod 25:18-20), appearing to Ezekiel (Ezek 1:5; 10:1) and Satan himself (also known as Lucifer) was considered at one time to be the chief cherub (Isa 14:12; Ezek 28:14). The Fall of Adam and Eve signified a distinct shift in the idea of “realm.”¹⁴⁷ This severed the direct and unbroken communication man had with God, incited God to drive the fallen creatures from the Garden entirely and produced an estrangement from God that humans have suffered from ever since.¹⁴⁸ Gone was the beauty of

¹⁴⁵ Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 297

¹⁴⁶ McGuire-Moushon, “Sub-Divine,” 5

¹⁴⁷ Heiser, *Supernatural*, Ch 8 “Heaven and Hell on Earth”

¹⁴⁸ Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 923

paradise,¹⁴⁹ the eternal benefit of immortality. Humans yearn to return to the state of grace from which they stumbled, seeking freedom, unrestricted practice of worship, propagation of faith (John 4:24),¹⁵⁰ yet always discovering the fleshly sickness that burdens the mortal soul (1 Pet 2:11).

In the Book of Enoch, which will be covered in much greater depth further into the project, the Garden of Eden is seen as the geospatial location for the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, yet Enoch, while still attributing the sin of Adam, considers this event as less significant as compared to the second event in Genesis 6:1-4.¹⁵¹ Certainly, the New Testament Writers such as Jude and Peter both cater to this apocryphal idea. Only later in Church history is an argument against the supernatural view of Genesis 6:1-4 proffered, and for ulterior means. For man, the beginning initiates at the Garden, as the human produced after the Fall is not the same as the one who existed before. Before the fall, Adam experienced an eternal and perpetual relationship with God, experientially tasting, proverbially and literally, the eternal being, the life source, God. After the Fall, man was separated ontologically from his creator, from the sustenance of the self-existent life, the I AM.¹⁵² As is captured in Acts 17:28, “In him we live and move and exist.” But now, because of the Fall at the Garden, because of the enmity aroused from the Serpent (for motivation there yet is none) who was bent to severe humanity from its creator. Likewise, because of this severing, at the Garden, the redemption begins to bring about the greatest testimony to God’s character, to his mercy, and long-suffering. But, for man, it began first in the Garden.

¹⁴⁹ Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology*, Vol 2, 613

¹⁵⁰ Penner, *Shadow of the Cross*, 15

¹⁵¹ Heiser, *Reversing Hermon*, 48

¹⁵² MacArthur, *NT Commentary*, 4710

2.4 Fall of the Watchers

The second rebellion on the earth was not human but celestial.¹⁵³ In a passage John MacArthur claims is one of the most mysterious, elusive texts in the Bible,¹⁵⁴ Genesis 6:1-4 states, “Now it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born to them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves of all whom they chose....There were giants on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men and they bore children to them. Those were the mighty men who were of old, men of renown.”

The very concept of angels “falling from their own heavenly abode” is sometimes rather shocking for modern believers. In fact, in the postmodern world of today, this account would simply be passed over as fanciful myth¹⁵⁵ from an ignorant people two thousand years ago, and, unfortunately for modern Christians, this tendency to do so became widespread around the fourth Century A.D.¹⁵⁶ when Augustine tried to defend Christianity against Celsus, Julian the Apostate, and Julius Africanus, who mocked the orthodox for believing in the angelic view of Genesis 6:1-4¹⁵⁷. Developed out of this apologetic defense and later reinforced by the secularism sweeping the Church in the modern era, the Sethite view proposed the “Sons of God” of Genesis 6:2 were not angelic beings but human kings, nobles, or other aristocrats. There are primarily three views that have solidified over the centuries, though all the earliest and many later church fathers accepted the angelic view alone.¹⁵⁸

Among scholars today, the most conservative tend to take the angelic view, while more

¹⁵³ Heiser, “Tower Divorce,” 2:10

¹⁵⁴ MacArthur, *Biblical Doctrine*, 1001

¹⁵⁵ MacArthur, *Biblical Doctrine*, 1001

¹⁵⁶ Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 92

¹⁵⁷ Missler, “24 Hours” 38

¹⁵⁸ Beale, *NT Use of OT*, 2647

liberal thinkers side with the Sethite view.¹⁵⁹ When looking for support from the text, it's easy to find the LXX tends to simply assume the angelic view while examples like the Book of Daniel show bar 'elahim in Aramaic is the equivalent a bene 'elohim or "Sons of God" in the Hebrew. The Aramaic phrase is used on inscriptions at Karatepe and Ugarit to designate the members of the divine court.¹⁶⁰ We can also see evidence of Sethite View supporters in times past manipulating the text to help their claim, such as the original reading of "sons of God" in Deut 32:8-9 was changed in the later Masoretic text, as confirmed by the Dead Sea Scrolls.¹⁶¹ For those who argue for the Sethite View, they have taken a position that is not supported in Scripture at all. To state the bene 'elohim of Genesis 6:2 is referencing human actors flies in the face of all other instances where this phrase is found. The angelic view, on the other hand, has a longstanding track record from both the Hebrew Masoretic as well as the Greek Septuagint.¹⁶²

A modern interpretation of the angelic view is at the time Genesis 6:1-4 took place, not only was humanity inconsolably corrupt and evil (Gen 6:5), but they were also being corrupted genetically by the fallen angels to create a race of ungodly hybrid giants.¹⁶³ Unlike the Sethite View, the angelic view as a concept was not invented as a knee-jerk response to some anti-supernaturalist attack. It was not only the interpretation of Genesis 6 by the early Church Fathers, but it was also the interpretation of the New Testament writers as well. In fact, the supernaturalist idea was prevalent in what is known as the Second Temple Period, the time of Philo and Josephus,¹⁶⁴ the time when the LXX was the predominate translation of the Old Testament used throughout the diaspora. The writers of the apocalyptic religious texts in between the close of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New, such as the Book of Enoch and Jubilees, point

¹⁵⁹ Missler, *Alien Encounters*, 202

¹⁶⁰ Chaffey, *Fallen*, "Ch 8 - Book of Daniel"

¹⁶¹ Heiser, "Divine Plurality"

¹⁶² Beale, *NT Use of OT*, 2648

often in excruciating detail the supernaturalist idea as foundation for the fundamental reality of Creation. In their view, the world, the physical dimension humans know and exist within, is but a subset of a much greater reality, one that subsumes all that can be known by living beings.

Yet, this is not the fantastical part. What is even more interesting than there being a genre in Jewish history where this supernaturalist view was held and written about, but that the New Testament authors were convinced these accounts were true! Jude and Peter are both handy examples where they not only directly quote apocryphal writings from there period, but they did so on numerous occasions and also frequently made off-handed inferences, as if their readers would be well versed in the same content.¹⁶⁵ This alternate view was also reaffirmed during the Reformation, despite the insistent calls to return to a plain reading of the biblical text, for reformers like Luther found the idea of angels degrading themselves in copulation with mortal woman to be repugnant and, instead of insisting on a review of the evidence, simply capitulated to the Sethite alternative.¹⁶⁶ Calvin later rejected the angelic view of Genesis 6 because it interfered with his salvific themes he hoped to encourage, wanting to illustrate the pitting of God's chosen against those he had rejected.¹⁶⁷

The reality is, the Sethite View is a historical fabrication that, as Michael Heiser states in his book *Reversing Hermon*, “The Sethite hypothesis collapses under the weight of its own incoherence.”¹⁶⁸ The Angelical view of Genesis 6:1-4 and the subsequent references in Jude 6 and 2 Pet 2-4 illustrate a much larger battle than one merely pitting human against human in the cosmic tug-of-war for the deed of the earth. Instead, the Bible, often cryptically, insinuates a

¹⁶³ Boyd, *Warrior God*, 1322

¹⁶⁴ Beale, *NT Use of OT*, 2650

¹⁶⁵ Olson, *Eerdmans Commentary: 1 Enoch*, 908-911

¹⁶⁶ Chaffey, *Fallen*, “Ch 16 - Summary”

¹⁶⁷ Chaffey, *Fallen*, Notes # 52

¹⁶⁸ “Ch 1 - Sons of God”

much larger battlefield, one in which principalities and powers¹⁶⁹ hold sway in the greatest Civil War to ever fought throughout Creations long history.

But now the question must be asked and will be answered in the next section of this chapter, how did all this begin and what does it have to do with human beings?

2.5 Division of Humanity Among the Elohim

The third rebellion for humanity is found recorded in Genesis 11:1-9, the Tower of Babel, where the people of the earth set about the work, devising a system of construction to build for themselves a tower that would reach to the heavens, that they might “make a name for themselves.” This is the plight of man, as God so declared, “Truly the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil; madness is in their hearts...” (Eccl 9:3). It is here that humans illustrate best the seeds of all destructive worldviews, in the account where fear drives the motives of men, where God must endure much misery being witness to so great a travesty of the being he created turning away, seeking his own mind, leaning on his own understanding (Prov 3:5). It is back here where the state of individuality is first manifest, conceived, where man conspires together amongst themselves a collective hubris¹⁷⁰ against which God must certainly respond.

It is likened to those of the earth in Psalm 2 who, “rage...and plot...” and are “the kings of the earth who set themselves and the rulers who take council together against the anointed, saying ‘let us break their bonds to pieces and cast away their cords from us’.” What was God’s response? He, in his mercy, in his own righteous entrusted all nations of the earth under the rule

¹⁶⁹ Missler, “Commentary on Jude”

¹⁷⁰ Pesta, “Christianity Today: Surviving the Woke Church”

of angelic beings as is depicted in Deut 32 and Psalm 82.¹⁷¹ These beings, utterly extraterrestrial in both biology and ontology, exist within an oft neglected account recorded in the Old Testament. These are similar to the “Sons of God” already discussed who fell from their appointed place in the “spiritual realms,” who copulated with human women and sired hybrid offspring known as Nephilim.¹⁷² Those who did not fall from their proper domain, who were known as “gods” (‘elohim) or “mighty ones” (bene ‘elim) and “sons of the Most High” (bene ‘elyon) are those who hold stake in God’s Divine Council.¹⁷³ This council is depicted clearly in 1 Kings 22:19-25 and Job 1:6-2:10.

This distribution is cited in Deuteronomy 32:8, “When the Most High divided their inheritance to the nations, when He separated the sons of Adam, he set the boundaries of the peoples according to the number of the children of Israel. For the Lord’s portion is His people; Jacob is the place of His inheritance.” Here again we see early witnesses pointing to an alteration of the text. In the Masoretic it states, “children of Israel” but in the LXX and Dead Sea Scrolls we see “angels of God.” For it is at this momentous event, at the Tower of Babel, when the triune God went down and confused the language of the people on earth, divided and distributed them up among the “angels,” that the world was set on a collision course between two very distinct and diametrically opposed worldviews - a showdown between God and the myths of the nations.¹⁷⁴

The few centuries before Christ saw an increased interest in the supernatural world among the Jews, in the invisible realm, angels, demons, and the lot of gods in the Greco-Roman

¹⁷¹ Chaffey, *Fallen*, “Ch 17 - Section Two: The Nephilim”

¹⁷² Missler, “Commentary on Jude”

¹⁷³ Chaffey, *Fallen*, “Ch 17 - Section Two: The Nephilim”

¹⁷⁴ Heiser, “Tower Divorce,” min 8:11

religions, which demanded propitiation through the mysteries and magical arts.¹⁷⁵ Glimpses of this can be seen in biblical accounts of dreams, those suprasensory impressions. Egyptians thought dreams allowed the dreamer to enter the world of the sun god, while the Greeks saw a connection between the world of the living and that of the dead.¹⁷⁶ In Daniel we see the same kind of interest. “Princes” doing battle on behalf of Daniel, empowered by his prayers. This world is opened to the reader and place a significant role.¹⁷⁷ Why would it not? Has there ever been anything about God that is anything but utterly extraterrestrial? The space in which he dwells is completely foreign and inaccessible to fallen man.¹⁷⁸ The biblical account is the revelation, the great unveiling of the supernatural world around us and the order of things as they really are.¹⁷⁹ Not only did the New Testament writers write about and refer to this bizarre world of other-earthly creatures, but they and their readers appear to have been convinced this place and these creatures were just as real as the physical dimension. This is not the case today, where evangelical scholars would rather explain away the supernatural altogether than admit it exists.¹⁸⁰

Paul, likewise, was familiar with the supernatural realities before him. Throughout Galatians his view of the battle and the war was seen within a cosmic conflict perspective rather than one on an earthly plane.¹⁸¹ He viewed himself and all workers of Christ as “sheep ready for the slaughter.” His recommendation was that people share in the suffering of Christ, embody the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53.¹⁸² Paul saw the cosmic conflict before Christians as being between God and the non-personified “this present evil age.” In his mind it manifested in three ways: within the believer and the community, between Jew and Gentile, and between persecutor

¹⁷⁵ Freedman, *Anchor Bible Dict: Vol 5*, “Power, NT”

¹⁷⁶ Kittel, *Theological Dict NT*, 691

¹⁷⁷ Spence, *Pulpit: Daniel*, 301

¹⁷⁸ Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 163

¹⁷⁹ Pope, *Compendium of Christian Theology*, 156

¹⁸⁰ Heiser, *Unfiltered*, 18

¹⁸¹ Hutchens, “Cosmic Conflict,” 225

and persecuted.¹⁸³ It was a different war than what is conventionally thought of. The enemy was not flesh and blood but were the “spiritual hosts” who indwelt the “heavenly places” (Eph 6:12).

Amidst this battle that raged on all around them, Paul saw an additional linkage between the spiritual warfare and suffering and persecution. It was his contention that Christians were on the front lines of the war, that there were skirmishes through persecution and the war was being fought against Satan and his legions.¹⁸⁴ It is clear. There is something occurring behind the scenes that humans are, at best, ignorant of, and at worst willfully in denial. The Divine Council, the Supernatural Realms, the Powers, the Principalities, the Spirits, the Conflict that takes place in another place, possibly another dimension that subsumes our own. But now that the why has been answered, it is important to turn to what the enemy’s tactics are in the actual field.

2.6 Repudiation of a Thaumaturgic Reality

The worldview underpinning reality - actual reality - not what one simply believes to be true, or wishes on, but that which is fundamentally, irreversibly accurate, effectual, and genuinely real, if indeed it does exist, is the spiritual realm known by God, by the host of heaven, by Satan, by the demons. This can be clearly seen when the demons respond to Jesus’ presence “What have we to do with You, Jesus, You Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?” (Matt 8:29). In the Mark 5 account, the demon possessed man not only ran up to Jesus and worshiped him but invoked God in hopes that the “Son of the Most High God” would not torment him.

What reality is this, that demons knew Jesus by name, and expected to be tortured by the

¹⁸² Beale, *NT Use of OT*, 1657

¹⁸³ Hutchens, “Cosmic Conflict,” 34

¹⁸⁴ Byrley, *Eschatology, Suffering*, 163

Christ? How is it that this worldview has been abandoned or forgotten by the modern Church? The fact is, the global populous in general (the American specifically) is under the sway of what was termed in the 1980's and 1990s as “the New Age.” It is this new spirituality that scholars insist serve to fulfill the psychological and spiritual needs of people who are dissatisfied with religious institutions.¹⁸⁵ Fast forward to today and the 2000's have seen the New Age metastasize into whatever itching ears desire to hear (2 Tim 4:3), from consumer Protestantism to social justice evangelicalism.¹⁸⁶ One element the liberal culture within the Church has been insistent on discarding is the miraculous.¹⁸⁷ Denying that God can or does perform miracles puts a heavy strain on theistic belief since it is defined by that which is beyond the materialist worldview. To be extraordinary and beyond human capability, this is the litmus test for a miracle, from the healing of the man at the Pool of Siloam or the raising of the young girl who was “just sleeping.”¹⁸⁸ In fact, one of the prominent ways those principalities are waging war on humans is through religious thinking that is other than biblical. Modern Christians are shifting away from orthodoxy or traditional forms of evangelicalism or Protestantism or Catholicism or the Orthodox faith and are instead bringing in foreign voices that were before marked as heretical.¹⁸⁹

Paul considered the influence of these other than terrestrial forces as is clearly illustrated in 1 Tim 4:1-3. He calls them “deceiving spirits” much like the serpent in Genesis 3. He likewise compared the Corinthians to the serpent who “deceived Eve by craftiness” (2 Co 11:3) and states they are “so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords)” (1 Co 8:5). But, as Dr. Heiser points out in *Angels*, “Job 15:15 teaches us that God ‘puts no trust in his holy ones.’” As Job learned, there is not always advocacy from heaven on human

¹⁸⁵ Holder, *Blackwell Spirituality*, 544

¹⁸⁶ Rah, *Prophetic Lament Justice*, 152

¹⁸⁷ Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, 32

¹⁸⁸ Freedman, *Anchor Bible Dictionary Vol 4*, “Form and Rationale of Miracle Accounts”

behalf.¹⁹⁰ Angels - supernatural beings - are not creatures with two-dimensional personalities, that simply obey every single command of God. They are beings with a past, a present, and a future, just like humans and some of them are even destined for the Lake of Fire (1 Co 6:3; Matt 25:41).

The concerted effort has been made and is currently being furthered to distract humanity from the clear and present danger that exists for each and every person on the planet. Some would like to dismiss the action of “the heavenly realm” to myth altogether,¹⁹¹ but, the Bible does not view angels as such. They are portrayed as mediators and interpreters between God and man,¹⁹² waging war on behalf of God,¹⁹³ and bringing about calamitous judgment such as the events of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18-19) and Daniel in the Lions’ Den (Dan 6).

Distraction, though, comes in the form of discounting the biblical message. Full apostasy begins with the first steps of doubt¹⁹⁴ as can be seen in Eve’s interaction with the Serpent. As Pannenberg points out, “the older orthodox theologians affirmed the infallible truth of all scripture statements, yet the insights of later theologians led to a recognition of the historical conditioning and relativity of the views of biblical authors.”¹⁹⁵ More modern (and subsequently more progressive and liberal) thinking typically tends to move away from the universality and absoluteness of biblical truth despite the reality that some truths cannot be denied without doing violence to the laws of nature themselves.¹⁹⁶ But the objection remains levied by the Adversary (Job 1:6-12; 2:1-10) simply, if for no other reason than he knows how little time he has left. He

¹⁸⁹ Holder, *Christian Spirituality*, 154

¹⁹⁰ 54

¹⁹¹ Dunn, *Eerdmans Commentary: Hebrews*, 1466

¹⁹² Heiser, *Angels*, 55

¹⁹³ Boyd, *Warrior God*, 1356

¹⁹⁴ Missler, “Commentary on Jude”

¹⁹⁵ Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology Vol 1*, 321

¹⁹⁶ Hodge, *Systematic Theology Vol 1*, 198-199

is desperate and he will do anything to quench the plan of God.¹⁹⁷ If this means the most effective way to carry out his attack is through the belief systems of human beings who, in their own ways and their own thinking, willfully choose to trade the truth of God for lies, worshiping the body or the mind, participate in activities such as yoga or martial arts or new age medicine, merging traditions with modern ideas.¹⁹⁸

Combine these propensities to embrace anything and everything other than God, and the consumerist nature of American evangelicalism¹⁹⁹ makes for a perfect storm for the rejection of the miraculous, of the relative nature of the Christian faith, undermining its very foundational moorings in divine revelation. Abandoning revelation of the Old and New Testaments creates a vacuum that others are more than happy to fill. The Gnostics did this in the early centuries of Christianity, professing belief in Christ yet simultaneously rejecting the validity of the New Testament. They sought a more “inclusive, accepting” form of religion, much like liberal society today has done.²⁰⁰

Tearing down the thaumaturgic nature of the Christian worldview resolves several issues. First it rendered both the salvation and judgment of God void. Second, it no longer affirms the creation of the universe by supernatural event.²⁰¹ By discrediting God’s salvific ability, and more importantly his future judgment of sinner and saint alike, the wicked can be as wicked as he chooses with a clear albeit self-deluded conscience. Jude described this in excruciating detail, “ungodly men...turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ (Jud 4) and corrupt themselves as brute beasts and walk after their own

¹⁹⁷ MacArthur, *NT Commentary*, 4713

¹⁹⁸ Holder, *Blackwell Spirituality*, 544

¹⁹⁹ Rah, *Prophetic Lament Justice*, 152

²⁰⁰ Boa, *Sense and Nonsense*, Ch17 Note # 4

²⁰¹ Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, 32

lusts.²⁰² This is the goal of the powers in the supernatural realms, to lead humans astray - to corrupt and condemn. Why this is the case remains unclear. But, despite unknown motives, the war still rages on.

2.7 Radicalization of Science and the Conscription of Public Education

The purpose of science as it was originally pursued in the 18th century was the increase of knowledge and discovery of the laws that govern all of God's Creation.²⁰³ The majority of these "scientists" were ardent believers who were convinced that God not only spoke revelation through the Scriptures but also through the natural world, through the order and the function of the physical processes.²⁰⁴ In fact, Paul leveled God's judgment on all people for disregarding the clear evidence found in the natural world of God's principle traits and works of wonder, "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened" (Ro 1:20–21).

It is from this position that most Creationists present their apologetic arguments against skeptics, pointing to natural theology as a vehicle for convincing, for converting, if those in opposition are open minded enough.²⁰⁵ But, as liberalism continued to infect not only the world but also the Church, the move from logic to subjectivism and relativism began to take hold. The difficulty was there is an element of truth in the materialistic worldview of the external world

²⁰² Missler, "Commentary on Jude"

²⁰³ Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 156

²⁰⁴ Dick, *Many Worlds*, 187

²⁰⁵ Davis, *Christian Philosophical Theology*, 21

and this kernel of truth went a long way in convincing those who were desperate to relieve themselves of the burden of God's judgment and authority over their lives, that they errored in accepting that the external world was original or had an independent existence.²⁰⁶

Like Dick's assertion in *Many Worlds*, that humans cannot rely just on Scripture for God's revelation,²⁰⁷ these blind men and women concluded wrongly that they could deduce the origins of the physical world without the input of divine revelation. Attempts to do so do violence to the laws of nature, even to the point where the religious objectionist comes to deny the obligation of moral law or even the very existence of the external world altogether.²⁰⁸ These are those Paul spoke of when writing to the Roman Christians, warning them that people had "changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. Therefore, God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator (Ro 1:23–26).

This is what man has done in the modern era in hijacking Science and perverting it, changing it into a radical, quasi-scientific religion that has abandoned God to worship that which was created. In the early 1900's and into the 2000's Western Science has been stretched further through quantum physics and neuroscience, arguing that consciousness is a delusion, opting for an Eastern tradition explanation that the "I" in the individual existed in a universal, non-material, non-locality quantum field.²⁰⁹ The reality is, liberality does not care how the universe or this dimension in which humans exist came to be, as long as it discredits God's hand in the work, and this agenda was not only in the minds behind those who created public education in the United

²⁰⁶ Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 312

²⁰⁷ 187

²⁰⁸ Hodge, *Systematic Theology Vol 1*, 198-199

²⁰⁹ Shermer, *Heavens on Earth*, 78

States but is today in full swing as the American Institutions of learning have been transformed into centers of indoctrination.

The foundation of this shift can be traced back to Dewey as America entered the 20th century. He was a staunch secularist, humanist, and advocate for overturning God.²¹⁰ But it was Ladson-Billings and Tate who are credited with introducing Critical Race Theory into education, which has subsequently metastasized into a nightmarish theoretical and analytical framework within education research itself.²¹¹

A supernatural conspiracy holds together generations of individuals who work toward ultimate domination of the Church, as C.S. Lewis described in his *Screwtape Letters*, the Church herself being the greatest ally to those who wish to undo her altogether.²¹² The first step was to make education free for all children. The next was to then enforce their public education through conscription where it would be illegal for any parent to withhold their child from such education, regardless the reason. Third, their goal was to slowly change the content of the curriculum, on a multi-generational level, until education as an institution was instead transformed into centers of indoctrination²¹³ as is assumed a right and lofty aim by proponents of Intersectionality, concluding that the primary purpose of higher education is the political and cultural indoctrination of youth, priming them for future political activism if needed.²¹⁴ The final nail in the coffin was to divide students into groups and then pit them against each other, which has been accomplished through the introduction of Critical Race Theory and its interrogation of Whiteness²¹⁵ as a means of unwinding the last hundred years of Western progress.

Emerging from the ashes of such progressivism is a kind of new secular religion, an ideology

²¹⁰ Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, 253

²¹¹ DeCuir, “Aren’t Surprised”

²¹² Pesta, “Christianity Today: Surviving the Woke Church,”

²¹³ Orr, *ISBE*, 900, 905

in which the masses are convinced to agitate for their own incarceration,²¹⁶ where words are redefined as violence and as already discussed, all manner of perversion is rebranded as love and acceptance and safety. The last step will be to outlaw through political and cultural fiat the remains of individual freedom and religious liberty that has been an American benchmark for the last 250 years. In its place will rise the Modern Maoist Machine, and this will spawn a new era of Christian persecution in the United States.

2.8 The Historical & Modern Maoist Machine

Karl Marx saw religion as a means of keeping the masses docile, a threat he described as the opium of the people, where the elites used fantasized narratives to pacify the proletariat who remained manipulated in their poverty, while those who were of higher class and economic status continued to increase their wealth and power unabated.²¹⁷ Grounded in the English Deist movements before them, along with those in France and Germany,²¹⁸ Marx also believed reason and secularism, combined with natural philosophy and a materialist worldview were necessary to free the oppressed group effectively.

Marx was a materialist. He struck not to just interpret the world around him, he wanted to change it dramatically. He wanted to outlaw private ownership and bring about a humanist revolution.²¹⁹ In fact, it was this same humanism in which Dostoevsky linked to disbelief, the atheism of Marx in direct opposition to fundamental and essential biblical truth, “socialism is no mere labor question, it is before all things an atheistic question...the question of the tower of

²¹⁴ Corey, “First Church”

²¹⁵ DeCuir, “Aren’t Surprised”

²¹⁶ Hedges, *American Fascists*, 147

²¹⁷ Thiselton, *Systematic Theology*, Ch 4.4

²¹⁸ Pope, *Compendium of Christian Theology*, 156

²¹⁹ Thiselton, *Systematic Theology*, Ch 4.3

Babel built without God, not to mount to Heaven from Earth, but to set up Heaven on Earth.”²²⁰

It was the foundation that would later culminate in what became Cultural Marxism in the early 1900’s, where class struggle became the focus. Those who advocated for socialism early on went into education as teachers and professors, or elsewhere in group think organizations, successfully laying the foundation for training the next generation of radicals.²²¹ This new generation has picked up Marx’ *Communist Manifesto* as a manual for just society, as a means of responding to the perceived woes of capitalism,²²² albeit most in the “modern” revolution are ill informed and ignorant of the origins of their own movement - satisfied alone in simply railing against the machine - and any machine will do. Campuses today have seen replays of the 1960’s, yet with one glaring difference - then there were purposed local governments and an independent media. Today the very radical sentiments that spark mass rioting and violence exists also in the same local officials tasked to stop them. This has led to local support of radical ideology and the order for law enforcement to stand down.²²³

Rooted in what Dostoevsky saw in Russia during the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, this socialist agenda first infected the cultural sphere, then the political, then persecuted the Russian Orthodox Church, ultimately driving Christianity in that country underground.²²⁴ The same took place in China, where Marxism was transformed by Mao Tse-tung, and infected places like Germany and France as well.²²⁵

The world wanted by such radical groups harkens back to Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov* which chronicled a world in which atheistic socialism both undermined the Church and ultimately corrupted the youth. But, despite his criticism of the atheistic socialist, the writer

²²⁰ Pesta, “Christianity Today: Surviving the Woke Church”

²²¹ Eidsmoe, “Critical Analysis of CRT”

²²² Thiselton, *Systematic Theology*, Ch 4.3

²²³ Eidsmoe, “Critical Analysis of CRT”

concluded there was a creature much worse than any atheistic radical, and that was the Christian socialist.²²⁶ This is the postmodernist thinking in the Western world today. It weakens the moral and objective truth of the biblical message²²⁷ and analysis has shown more than just a haphazard cultural malaise in the US. Rather there seems to be a tangle of roots that feeds a psychological toxicity that seems to produce only the worst possible outcomes for people under its spell.²²⁸

At its core is a belief that human enhancement, the improvement of human nature can be altered and improved by human effort alone.²²⁹ This kind of thinking gives rise, authority, and raw manipulative power to groups like the United Nations who see their purpose as “an obligatory reference point of justice and a channel of peace” with the ultimate agenda of “the global common good” and “universal fraternity”²³⁰ of all humans on earth.

The socialist would argue against definitions of inequalities as a combination of circumstance, individual talents, and choice. They would reject concepts of free will, of individual responsibility, and instead attributes inequality to oppressor groups defined by race, gender, sexual orientation - all characteristics and traits that cannot be changed. Because these elements cannot be changed on the individual level, the government must step in and engineer “social justice” through force.²³¹ These changes are often viewed by the radical left as powers of liberation, but some have challenged that idea, claiming these fabricated divisions only feed negative feedback loops that continue to rip society apart, as Mary Eberstadt describes in her research as “the Great Scattering.”²³² But the socialist is adamant. The material world is our one

²²⁴ Pesta, “Christianity Today: Surviving the Woke Church”

²²⁵ Thiselton, *Systematic Theology*, Ch 4.3

²²⁶ Pesta, “Christianity Today: Surviving the Woke Church,”

²²⁷ Penner, *Shadow of the Cross*, 18

²²⁸ Stewart, “Identity Politics”

²²⁹ Hefner, “Animal Aspires to be Angels”

²³⁰ Pesta, “Christianity Today: Surviving the Woke Church”

²³¹ Horowitz, *Dark Agenda*, 107

²³² Stewart, “Identity Politics”

and only home, the originator of our creation through accidental, unguided process. It is in the responsibility of the human to continue with the evolutionary process that has already begun, to one day, through human effort alone, bring about terrestrial utopia,²³³ to ultimately overthrow the opiate of religion and build our tower of Babel once and for all. The socialist agenda is in direct opposition and competition with Christianity, despite their repeated failures after the Cultural Revolution in both China and in Russia.²³⁴ Germany also serves as ample illustration of how these anti-Christian worldviews end in utter disaster. Hitler relied heavily on Darwin to support his Aryan nation and master race,²³⁵ yet his claims ultimately failed.

In the end, it can easily be surmised that whatever name or title one tacks onto it - socialism, Darwinism, Intersectionality, critical race theory - it is all an attack from the supernatural realms. Just one generation from the crusades of Billy Graham, the Church in America finds herself overwhelmed by a new cultural ideology that seems unrelenting in its pursuit to overthrow everything that stood for absolute truth. It may, in the end, already be too late for the modern evangelical expression of Christianity so often seen in America today, but there still is an opportunity for the Body of Christ, for individual believers, to prepare for what is certain to come next.

2.9 Entrenchment of the Modernist Christian Agenda

Throughout much of human history the concept that all men were created equal was rather an anathema. Only in modern times - the last 250 years - has this idea percolated through a population, where the masses believed their Creator has granted them certain inalienable rights,

²³³ Pesta, "Christianity Today: Surviving the Woke Church,"

²³⁴ Philpott, *Caesar's Sword*, 357

²³⁵ Eidsmoe, "Critical Analysis of CRT"

that those rights could not be infringed by government.²³⁶ As Americans founded their states and then the coalition that united them as one people there were many cultural and political issues that would subsequently require difficult choices. Many mistakes were made along the way. Tensions grew. During that time, a shift took place in American spirituality beginning in the 1950's, where sacred space was given up for sacred seeking.²³⁷ Communities changed. After WWII, the suburb formed, allowing millions of white Americans to move out beyond the city limits, resulting in the white flight,²³⁸ leaving urban inner cities devoid of diversity or financial investment. This overall transformation of a geographical landscape likewise transformed the spiritual boundaries that had previously been drawn by ethnic and national origins. No longer were people grouped as Irish Catholics, Vietnamese Buddhists, or Indian Hindus. Instead, people opened as individual spiritual seekers, sojourners bringing their sacred space along with them.²³⁹ Developing alongside this change was the master story of the American people, the American Dream, that afforded the idea of opportunity, of freedom. People could live out their dream of "making it" of economic prosperity.²⁴⁰ This freedom, of course, was founded on the idea of religious liberty, of the unalienable rights protected by the US Constitution.²⁴¹ Envisioned was an American virtue that would spread throughout the world, culminating in the ushering in of Christ's return. A millennial vision, though sanitized by a heavy dose of secularism and separation between Church and State, this initial ideal was transformed from the gospel of Christ into a Social Gospel that spelled out the removal of anxiety through good works and American ingenuity and prosperity.²⁴²

²³⁶ Eidsmoe, "Critical Analysis of CRT"

²³⁷ Holder, *Blackwell Spirituality*, 543

²³⁸ Rah, *Prophetic Lament Justice*, 87

²³⁹ Holder, *Blackwell Spirituality*, 543

²⁴⁰ McClendon, *Systematic Theology Vol 3*, 383

²⁴¹ Horowitz, *Dark Agenda*, 106

²⁴² McClendon, *Systematic Theology Vol 3*, 86

This is spelled out in John Winthrop's words, first governor of Massachusetts, "America was to be a city set on a hill." These new cities were to be the new Jerusalem and new Zions.²⁴³ But this had an unpredictable side effect. In the United States, especially during and in the aftermath of the two World Wars, the issue of allegiance arose, pitting Christians between faith and citizenship in heaven verses loyalty and allegiance to their country. Pressure grew rapidly, political, economic, social, all demanding informal oath overall.²⁴⁴ Soon, Christians living in America were expected to be American first and Christians second. This American nationalism sparked by the inquiring religious individual made a fertile bed for New Age as a world view to infect the Church itself. Despite the warnings of fundamentalist and some evangelical groups, the Church in America has spent several generations attempting to understand how the New Age and Christianity can learn from each other.²⁴⁵ The growing disparity during the twentieth century for Christians in the city verses the non-city or suburb regions only incited additional hostility and resentment. As the suburbs became the New Jerusalem, the inner cities became the New Babylon.²⁴⁶

Out of this rural formation arose a conservative Christian Right as a political wing, convinced there was a historically correct view of the United States that sought to identify America as a Christian nation. Their ideology sought political, economic, and demographic²⁴⁷ adherence to a kind of prosperity doctrine for the country, where God blessed America simply because America was great. As American evangelicalism rode the fumes of the previous generations' triumphs, a distinct theology was produced that celebrated American excellence and

²⁴³ Rah, *Prophetic Lament Justice*, 86

²⁴⁴ Hall, *Living Wisely*, 57

²⁴⁵ Holder, *Blackwell Spirituality*, 544

²⁴⁶ Rah, *Prophetic Lament Justice*, 88

²⁴⁷ Kehoe, *Militant Christianity*, 164

success.²⁴⁸ Baptists comprise the largest group within this movement, as well as the largest denomination in the US to date.²⁴⁹ These groups formed what is known today as Big Eva, comprising the structure and organization of a massive Christian Protestant movement that alters the gospel message for its own means, recreating it's culture in its own image, a contemporary Christian spirituality²⁵⁰ having more to do with economic progress and capitalism than it does with Christ or the Bible.

This materialism has become the norm for most Church organizations in the United States today, validating their own excessive materialism in the claim that it is a blessing from God.²⁵¹ Despite the value of wealth and material acquisition is seen either neutrally or even negatively in the Bible, American Christianity by and large has gone all in on the acquisition nonetheless.²⁵² All this greed and corporatism and focus on amassing wealth and assets, in the manufacturing into Christ-like products that which should be solemn, sacred and freely given, the American Church has left the door wide open due to her reliance on expediency and in the name of self-preservation and protectionism. Evangelical institutions have by and large capitulated to the contemporary social justice movement, with mainline denominations as well as their seminaries bending the knee as long as it means the revenue streams remain unmolested.²⁵³ Their argument, though, as it always has been, is out of relevance. The culture has changed after the last fifty years of indoctrination in American Educational Institutions. The American Church then argues, out of necessity, they must cater to Millennials and Gen Z to have an influence on them. If they reject alternative lifestyles and categorizations by race or orientation or gender, then they risk the

²⁴⁸ Rah, *Prophetic Lament Justice*, 24

²⁴⁹ Bregman, *Religion, Death, and Dying*, 6

²⁵⁰ Holder, *Christian Spirituality*, 154

²⁵¹ Rah, *Prophetic Lament Justice*, 153

²⁵² Rah, *Prophetic Lament Justice*, 155

²⁵³ DeVine, “Fight Wokedom”

charge of racism.²⁵⁴

In this insistence, modern Christianity is just as susceptible to the trappings of consumerism as the rest of the public. In fact, it has been asserted that consumerism is so pervasive in the US that religion has been completely co-opted by it, that, in fact, material culture shapes religion and the Christian worldview rather than the other way around.²⁵⁵ This ideological shift is not uniform throughout the country as there are still Churches in the US that outright reject woke ideology. There are even still public schools where administrators and teachers still pray together about their children and the work they are tasked with. Unfortunately, for the most part, this is simply not the case.²⁵⁶ The last fifty years of atheistic socialism has been devastating to the Church in the United States. Whether it goes by the label of liberation theology, democratic socialism, social justice, Black Lives Matter, Antifa, the result is always the same, the erosion of values and biblical truth in exchange for a lie of equality and justice.²⁵⁷ Exchanging the truth for a lie (Rom 1:25), the Christian Church in the US has sought after other gods, has exchanged the truth of Jesus Christ for a self-centered ideology where universe or the creative power is recognized as the source of all being.²⁵⁸

Most pastors have no idea what they are teaching their flocks. They are either ignorant of what woke ideology actually is or they buy into it and promote it as a means of maintaining a tether to their empires.²⁵⁹ In reality, such ideology is a cancerous blight on humanity and its singular objective is the destruction of all that it views as the enemy. Make no mistake. The American Church is the enemy of CRT and Intersectionality. All religion is. Woke ideology is, but its very nature, a group think, a mind virus, and it will, unabated, bring down the entirety of

²⁵⁴ DeVine, “Fight Wokedom”

²⁵⁵ Rah, *Prophetic Lament Justice*, 149

²⁵⁶ Unknown, “TS&TT: Christian Ed...”

²⁵⁷ Pesta, “Christianity Today: Surviving the Woke Church”

Western Civilization and it is most likely too late to stem the coming tsunami it will bring in its wake.

²⁵⁸ Craig, *Blackwell Companion Natural Theology*, 501

²⁵⁹ Eidsmoe, “Critical Analysis of CRT”

Chapter 03 - Signs of Present and Increasing Discrimination

3.1 The Rise of the Intersectional Army

Intersectionality stands hand in hand with some of the other ideas the progressive academy has come up with over the years, from critical race studies to queer studies, women's studies to ethnic studies and beyond.²⁶⁰ It is a kind of ideology that aligns individuals into groups, then pits them against each other to isolate the differences between them, highlighting how there are those who have and those who have not and this in turn represents generational suffering that must be corrected.²⁶¹

It unapologetically speaks the language of victimhood and represents the greatest threat to those who fear a takeover of liberalism by a radical insurgency,²⁶² and these radicals lie in wait behind the scenes, typically in their ivory towers,²⁶³ preaching that the status quo must be challenged through redistribution of wealth,²⁶⁴ the recasting of the historical record, and the suppression of any dissent through force. Of course, critical race theory ignores the reality that the civil rights movement originated from the Black Church, and that over eighty percent of African Americans today self-identify as Christian.²⁶⁵ Regardless of this fact, the radical left has no use for the Church other than to dismantle it.

Unfortunately, the term itself - intersectionality - is little known outside of the halls of academia. Originated in 1989 in an anti-discrimination paper, the word itself has grown into a cancerous amalgam and is typically used as a catch-all to mean subjectively whatever the radical

²⁶⁰ Corey, "First Church"

²⁶¹ Rah, *Prophetic Lament Justice*, 22

²⁶² Stewart, "Identity Politics"

²⁶³ Corey, "First Church"

²⁶⁴ Rah, *Prophetic Lament Justice*, 23

²⁶⁵ Paradise, "Marginalizes"

desires.²⁶⁶ This can be seen in statements such as “white privilege” when referring to black on black crime. Its sole purpose is the dismantling of perceived privilege, the abjuration of any pretense of exceptionalism.²⁶⁷ Adherents claim they are committed to anchoring itself in academia so that the perspectives of people of color are included,²⁶⁸ yet too often the perspective presented is slanted or skewed disproportionately with a victim mentality and an ideology that demands justice for individuals who have experienced nothing by individuals who have committed no crime. This is the case since intersectionality really does not deal with individuals but insists on prejudice oppressing at the social and institutional level. Those who are targets can do nothing to defend themselves and those who are perpetrators do so regardless of their own views or behavior.²⁶⁹ Even further, Critical Race Theory adapts and borrows from other disciplines as it sees fit - liberalism, law, feminism, Marxism, poststructuralism, pragmatism, nationalism - whatever makes its case,²⁷⁰ and can ultimately justify its blind rage.

In 1968, political philosopher Eric Voegelin stated that modern ideology, such as intersectionality or critical race theory, had much in common with Gnosticism of the first few centuries after Christ. Fundamentally, he asserted, the gnostic and the modern radical both were dissatisfied with his personal situation and believed that the world was inherently evil and salvation from this world came from radial human effort alone.²⁷¹ Because of this, intersectionality primarily focuses on social inequalities and how those inequalities are discerned through various categories²⁷² with a strong emphasis on activism, the end goal being the

²⁶⁶ Corey, “First Church”

²⁶⁷ Rah, *Prophetic Lament Justice*, 72

²⁶⁸ Paradise, “Marginalizes”

²⁶⁹ Corey, “First Church”

²⁷⁰ Paradise, “Marginalizes”

²⁷¹ Corey, “First Church”

²⁷² Riswold, “Lutheran Feminist”

dismantling of the system through actual participation.²⁷³ As one can see in recent events that have taken place in the last year, what is termed as “cancel culture” is brutal and merciless, enforcing partisan censorship on anyone who speaks out against the cause.²⁷⁴ These phenomena operates on two main axis: subjectivity, in that nothing is objective in the world and truth can only be ascertained through emotion and interpersonal identification rather than through logic and evidence and critical theory, which states that all ideas, all forms, all systems must be critically examined for fault and then subsequently dismantled.²⁷⁵

Much of this ideology was brought to the forefront in American politics during the early 2000’s and Obama’s election. In his opening speech when accepting the nomination, he promised a great deal of lofty ideals, but instead of “providing care for the sick and good jobs to the jobless” or seeing “the rise of the oceans slow” or the “planet being to heal,” what instead he ushered in was an agenda to fundamentally transform America.²⁷⁶ Obama’s agenda built on decades of a systematic de-Christianization of American society. This provided a means for scapegoating in condemning white privilege which allowed especially religious Americans to offload their guilt by claiming others were racist (and making themselves superior) or by a quasi-confession which allowed them to temporarily escape social judgment from woke mobs.²⁷⁷ But the question must be asked: how can a religion like Christianity adapt or embrace an ideology that holds at its base a Marxist ideal that leads eventually to the demise of all religions?²⁷⁸ This new ideology is found, instead, not to be new but old, hidden for several generations within academia, but now springing forth at the nexus between social media and the under-informed

²⁷³ DeCuir, “Aren’t Surprised”

²⁷⁴ Reno, “Woke Script”

²⁷⁵ Eidsmoe, “Critical Analysis of CRT”

²⁷⁶ Horowitz, *Dark Agenda*, 98

²⁷⁷ Reno, “Woke Script”

²⁷⁸ Sun, “Post Communist China,” 193

youth.²⁷⁹ It claims to be a movement of diversity, yet, it is only the tip of the iceberg of radical socialism,²⁸⁰ hell bent on destroying the very fabric of Western society.

While the civil rights movement was predominately a religious one,²⁸¹ this new ideology is secular with religious, cultish calls to overthrow everything. The aim is to, “smash the neoliberal, the corporate, the hetero-patriarchal academy and then to reinvent it in a way that rejects traditional notions.”²⁸² It is not in any way neutral or seeking compromise or diversity as it has traditionally been known. Rather, intersectionality seeks for social transformation and change.²⁸³ If asked to bring together intersectionality and the conservative, the answer would be ‘No, you cannot bring these two worlds together. You must be oppositional. You must fight. It is a line in the sand.’²⁸⁴ There is, for these individuals, no objective list of demands. There is no rationale by which they will accept or concede. Words and behaviors are both viewed as insulting, regardless of underlining motive. The ideology views “whiteness as property,”²⁸⁵ in which it is impossible for the individual to escape guilt or find absolution. If one is white, one is guilty simply for being white.

This was seen most poignantly in the responds from “Black Lives Matter” protesters when “Blue Lives Matter” counter-protests occurred. While there was no racist element to the conservative counterpart, they were branded as racist. Political progressives celebrated the label of open discourse while simultaneously refusing to dialog. They simply argued that white conservatives claimed racism would go away if people stopped talking about it.²⁸⁶

This ideology has also metastasized into an industry of victimhood. Through publications

²⁷⁹ Stewart, “Identity Politics”

²⁸⁰ Corey, “First Church”

²⁸¹ Paradise, “Marginalizes”

²⁸² Corey, “First Church”

²⁸³ Riswold, “Lutheran Feminist”

²⁸⁴ Corey, “First Church”

²⁸⁵ DeCuir, “Aren’t Surprised”

and protests, such as Madalyn Murray in her column for *The Realist* publication where she stated, “I am against religion. I am against schools. I am against apple pies. I am against Americanism,” believing and portraying herself as an atheist, as an underdog, a victim of bigoted and hateful Christians. She concluded that playing the victim was the surest way to win the sympathies of liberal America.²⁸⁷ It is an argument against joy, against celebration, and against sustainability. As described in the book *Prophetic Lament*, “the well-off do not expect their faith to begin in a cry, but rather, in a song. They do not expect or need intrusion, but they rejoice in stability and the durability of a world and social order that have been beneficial to them.”²⁸⁸ But, as can easily been seen by Murray’s personal life²⁸⁹ as well as many intersectional scholars, these victim mentality individuals are, by definition, unhappy and dissatisfied with their situations in life²⁹⁰ and rail against this personal plight rather than any systemic disadvantage.

These groups argue that whiteness is a hegemonic ideology, that it works through societal measures, establishing and perpetuating unquestioned dominance, believing it is a power classification, subordinating bodies of color to white superiority.²⁹¹ But this is not the case. The subjectivism within which these individuals operate and derive their worldview casts racism or discrimination on groups that are subordinated not because of racial identity but because of economic and behavioral factors. Critical Race Theory, Intersectionality, Victimhood mentality all serve at the behest of the elite (regardless of their skin color) to enslave the masses and perpetuate their own prosperity. Greed infects universally as can be illustrated by the founders of Black Lives Matters organization recently going on a real-estate shopping spree, purchasing

²⁸⁶ Guitar, “White Spaces”

²⁸⁷ Horowitz, *Dark Agenda*, 55

²⁸⁸ Rah, 23

²⁸⁹ Horowitz, *Dark Agenda*, 55

²⁹⁰ Corey, “First Church”

²⁹¹ Guitar, “White Spaces”

mansions in Malibu.²⁹²

In the aftermath of the 2020 Presidential Election results and the grinding economic shutdowns because of COVID, it is clear this radical ideology is not going to simply disappear. Whether out of arrogance, ignorance, and simply the result of God sending “deceiving spirits” (1 Tim 4:1; 1 Ki 22:22), whether a punishment for America for its generational wickedness or simply the signs of the times humanity currently finds itself in, it would be a mistake to ignore the cries coming from the radical left in our society. As was witnessed in 2020, destruction is their aim, and they will use insanity to bring about that ruin.

3.2 Random Violence, Ritual Riots, and a New Cold War

The tilting at windmills is an English idiom from Miguel de Cervantes’ novel *Don Quixote* in which the main character goes about the countryside battling imaginary enemies. The phrase has come to mean battling enemies ill-perceived or actions that are considered idealistic, romantic, and even heroic, despite the effort being in vain.²⁹³ Until 2020, this was a term most often used for the occasionally insane or misguided. But, after the 2016 election of Donald Trump, the civilized world was turned on its proverbial head. When the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis was used as a premeditated trigger event, on May 25, 2020, the left took to the streets. Initially presumed to be peaceful protests, the demonstrations around the country quickly deteriorated into rioting, looting, vandalism, and violence with the goal of massive change in American society.²⁹⁴ Over the course of the next few months, these violent and senseless outbursts grew. It was believed that the injustice illustrated by the Ferguson shooting was as

²⁹² Vincent, “Real Estate Binge”

²⁹³ Ammer, “Tilt at Windmills”

²⁹⁴ Eidsmoe, “Critical Analysis of CRT”

epidemic. There was a perceived view that there was a lack of concern for black lives, which prompted an investigation by the Department of Justice, which concluded there was a pattern of unconstitutional policing shaped by a focus on revenue rather than public safety, claiming the Ferguson Police Department was using African Americans as a source of revenue.²⁹⁵

Such fictional narratives, primarily directed at the youth in America, has done a severe disservice to them. This can be seen glaringly in the insanity in colleges and universities across the country. One example is the underclassmen at Oberlin College who demanded all grades below a C should be erased from student transcripts so they can feel supported for absences generated from activist work.²⁹⁶ Fundamentally, these students and the radical activists that stand behind them have declared the past is more important than the present. They claim that America is incapable of rising above race, that there remains a reckoning still to come for the injustices of the past, that modern white people, despite never owning a slave, nor any African American alive today ever having been enslaved, must separate and white people must repent of their privilege and exceptionalism.²⁹⁷

Underlining these events and behavior is the key to its motivation. Jesus said, “a tree is known by its fruit” (Matt 12:33) and this is encapsulated in the behavior and challenges of the radical left in American society. The shift being witnessed today in the United States and around the world is not due to issues of race but is twofold. The first issue is the prevalent rejection of Christian values as a societal foundation. The second is the erosion of Constitutional protections by wealthy elites.²⁹⁸ Over the course of one week in July 2020, Churches across the country were burned and vandalized during Black Lives Matter and Antifa protests. This included the

²⁹⁵ Rah, *Prophetic Lament Justice*, 206.

²⁹⁶ Corey, “First Church”

²⁹⁷ Rah, *Prophetic Lament Justice*, 207

²⁹⁸ Various, *Bad Urach Statement*, 4

desecration and or toppling of statues of Jesus or statue beheadings.²⁹⁹ This was joined by the silencing of opposition through cancel culture and the militant control of the new public square in social media. The only conversations allowed were the ones which accommodated the liberal outrage.³⁰⁰ Everyone else was expunged or de-platformed or targeted for all out violence.

Despite the reality that there are just as many poor and disenfranchised whites as there are non-whites in the US, the wealthy elites have pitted peoples against each other based on factors that cannot be changed.³⁰¹ But this cultural shift is not occurring just in the US. In Italy, Satanists disfigured and toppled a statue of Jesus; in Sweden vandals desecrated a Church; in Northern Ireland there have been a multitude of attacks on places of worship; in Scotland, a hate-crime bill has been proposed targeting Christians for spreading hatred.³⁰²

Likewise, it is not simply a cultural slide for atheists or non-religious. As the culture in America shifts away from theistic ideals to atheistic ones, so too the Church has voiced a new concern for justice. Yet, despite many denominations and seminaries caving to critical race theory and social justice ideologies, non-religious activists question the authenticity of woke Christianity. Is it possible for Christians to remain believers and contribute to revolution? Or is the newfound concern simply a mast for further consumerism and materialism? Is it simply the repackaging of justice into commercialization, rebranding Church as to rope in the moderate voice into a quasi-religious perspective? Many argue this is impossible since, while there is a rhetoric of the Church against an unjust culture, the lifestyle and behavior of the Church in injustice continues unabated in the context of consumerism.³⁰³

The reality is, the radical left will never be satisfied as it is a strategic choice driven by an

²⁹⁹ Pesta, “Christianity Today: Surviving the Woke Church”

³⁰⁰ Stewart, “Identity Politics”

³⁰¹ DeCuir, “Aren’t Surprised”

³⁰² Pesta, “Christianity Today: Surviving the Woke Church”

ideology that hopes to gain political advantage.³⁰⁴ The groups in which they claim to protect, the individuals they claim to be fighting for, have nothing to do with their actual agenda. This is the pattern. As seen in the 2008 series of riots in India that left five hundred Christians dead at the hands of Hindu radicals, or the destruction of hundreds of churches and schools,³⁰⁵ it is not a war or a revolution about racism or equality or transgenderism. It is, rather, a war of worldviews, the pitting of a God centered worldview against an ideology that seeks only to tear down and destroy that which is all around it. It is likened to the John's account of the devil, "Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows his time is short" (Re 12:12). It is clear to see, the radical left, the violence, the insane logic, it is all derivative of the one who is really pulling the strings.

3.3 The Turning Point with Fraudulent Elections

The turning point and culmination for the radical left was the 2020 Presidential elections. Crouched in perpetual decries of racism and hatred for anyone who dared speak against the progressive agenda, the country was bombarded with 24/7 chastisement from the slanted media, from academia, from political operatives, and even from family and friends. It seemed almost as if, somehow, people were being infected with a mind virus as Church denominations failed, educators and administrators reacted to everyday activity with insanity, and leadership and professors in seminaries were kicked to the curb in some quasi-purity pledge.

Speaking out against the political left meant the loss of the individual's ability or opportunity to speak. After the election, many Christians and conservatives alike were scratching their heads,

³⁰³ Rah, *Prophetic Lament Justice*, 152

³⁰⁴ Stewart, "Identity Politics"

asking, “How could we possibly lose to [Biden]?” But even more baffling for liberals was the reality that 74 million Americans voted for Trump!³⁰⁶ Despite the numbers in 2016, though, the political left was not going to let history repeat itself. A concerted effort was immediately launched, a campaign of disinformation and censorship to silence both Donald Trump and those who supported him.³⁰⁷ But reality is subjective and perceived. As the election results began to pour in at the end of 2020, anyone who dared claim there was a stolen election was ostracized as racist and politically motivated. But, along with the poll results, claims of impropriety began to surface, too. Close numbers came out of several states early on, but with Trump leading, until late night dumps that favored almost unanimously the democratic party swayed results. There was direct evidence of illegal counting. There was evidence of unlawful process, and there were anomalous results that could only be explained by fraud.³⁰⁸

But, now, several months afterward, with the swearing in of Biden and Trump slipping off into near obscurity, as well as the activities of the new administration clearly indicating that radical leftist agenda is surely on its way, it is clear there is something wrong in American politics.³⁰⁹ In fact, a letter sent to GOP legislators immediately after the election results by attorney Andy Schlafly urged the conservative leaders to do their duty and save America from voter fraud, “The voting in this presidential election has been tainted beyond repair.”³¹⁰ In the aftermath it was determined that late-night vote dumps in Wisconsin, Michigan, and Pennsylvania from mail-in ballots resulted in the swing Democrats needed. These votes were most often counted late,³¹¹ despite laws preventing such. This resulted in these late dumps

³⁰⁵ Allen, *Global War*, 15

³⁰⁶ McLaughlin, “Must Have Been Stolen”

³⁰⁷ Newman, “Stopping the Steal”

³⁰⁸ McLaughlin, “Must Have Been Stolen”

³⁰⁹ Hyde, “Restoring Election Integrity”

³¹⁰ Newman, “Stopping the Steal”

³¹¹ McLaughlin, “Must Have Been Stolen”

mysteriously being all for Biden and little to none for Trump.³¹² Of course, liberals would argue against claims of fraud, stating there is no way elections decided by 10,000 plus votes could be tampered with. Yet, it is clear from the evidence, in the age of computerized records and recordings across multiple jurisdictions, fraud does happen.³¹³ In fact, it is not a new claim. Democrats in 1982 were caught red handed with nearly 100,000 fraudulent votes in Chicago. A single city with a one-party machine at its disposal, harkens back to the 2020 Presidential election with great similarity.³¹⁴

Because of the pandemic, thousands of individuals cast ballots after moving from their original state,³¹⁵ early voting allowed many repeaters to vote multiple times, for election insiders to scan results multiple times, casting votes in the names of people known to have already left the state and allowed for time to alter ballots. Surveillance videos also captured election workers processing ballots from boxes under their tables, adding to the sudden spike in vote totals in Biden's favor.³¹⁶ Yet, most of this falls on deaf ears as these issues with the election are out of reach of the general populous. There is simply nothing we can do. Biden was sworn in, Trump left office abandoning all who marched on Capitol Hill, and conservatives lost their much-needed seats in the Senate as well as found their newly appointed supreme court justices impotent (terrified) to render fair court decisions.³¹⁷

Unquestionably, the rules were bypassed by Democrats³¹⁸ in what appears to be an attempt to usher in a one-party rule going forward. One thing is for certain, if the 2020 elections were as fraudulent as they appear, 2022 will be likewise, and so will all elections in the United States

³¹² Newman, "Stopping the Steal"

³¹³ McLaughlin, "Must Have Been Stolen"

³¹⁴ McLaughlin, "Must Have Been Stolen"

³¹⁵ Newman, "Stopping the Steal"

³¹⁶ Hyde, "Restoring Election Integrity"

³¹⁷ Newman, "Stopping the Steal"

³¹⁸ McLaughlin, "Must Have Been Stolen"

going forward. The reality is, globalism has grown over the last hundred years to include heads of state, the ruling elites of the United States, as well as those within the Church. The Pope has voiced opposition to populist movements, such as the election of Trump, the passage of Brexit which rejected globalism for the British people.³¹⁹ This globalism has been masked in recent events, under COVID provisions, such as offsetting airline emissions, providing retirement plans for media, calls for instituting a \$15 minimum wage. Most of these conditions have nothing to do with the pandemic or economic recovery. They are, in actuality, the agenda of the globalist elites who choose to hold the country hostage unless they can grant their radical wish list.³²⁰

It is clear, the traditional American elections are gone. Gone are the open election processes. Gone are the election observers.³²¹ Gone are the days when elections in the United States could be depended upon as fair and accurate. The liberty America had enjoyed hangs in the balance,³²² and will soon falter entirely if corrective action is not taken swiftly.

Of course, the opposition would argue that the 2020 Election was a fair response to the 2016 Election that is referred to by the radical left as a historically white institution being reclaimed from its first person of color, Barack Obama.³²³ This justifies any action to “correct” what the radical left perceives as injustice as they would argue, Americans (white Americans) have a difficult time addressing the issue of race. They tend to hide their stories of guilt and shame and elevate success sorties of exceptionalism and triumphalism.³²⁴ Yet, as much as the radical left might consider their views justified, it still negates the 74 million people who voted in 2020 for Donald Trump. Likewise, the allegations of fraud will never be proven as lawsuits were disregarded by the courts based on standing rather than on merit, with the final buffer, the

³¹⁹ Pesta, “Christianity Today: Surviving the Woke Church”

³²⁰ Eidsmoe, “Critical Analysis of CRT”

³²¹ Hyde, “Restoring Election Integrity”

³²² Newman, “Stopping the Steal”

Supreme Court, standing aside as the constitution was obliterated.³²⁵

But, more important than how America found herself in this compromised position, though, will be what it will mean for Christians going forward at the dawn of a new age of a one-party rule that is an enemy of the Church.

3.4 Calling for Censorship and the Stripping of Legitimacy

The fallout from the 2020 Presidential Election was typical if not slightly prophetic. After court cases were heard and rejected by lower courts and, ultimately, the Supreme Court, Biden was sworn into office and the transition between both administrations occurred without issue. Immediately, LGTBQ groups went to work attempting to leverage their newfound ally in power, demanding that Biden strip Christian schools, colleges, and seminaries of their accreditation status³²⁶ if those institutions would not capitulate to woke demands. Among those groups wanting to exercise their newfound political capital was none other than the Human Rights Campaign.³²⁷ With such attacks now occurring in earnest, Biden has attempted to placate his new constituents by signing an executive order that requires all colleges and universities to allow male students to use female only dorms, showers and restrooms. On May 19, 2021, a request for injunction against the executive order by College of the Ozarks, a Christian liberal arts school, was denied by an Obama appointed judge.³²⁸ As such efforts against Christians have been virtually ignored, similar attacks on non-Christians are condemned as bigotry.

Attempts to strip the Christian's validity and freedoms in the economic, social, and political

³²³ Guitar, “White Spaces”

³²⁴ Rah, *Prophetic Lament Justice*, 58

³²⁵ Hyde, “Restoring Election Integrity”

³²⁶ Various, “Pull Accreditation”

world is viewed by the radical left as a means of balancing the scales, since Christians are considering an oppressor group, despite its martyr-history in the past.³²⁹ The same is true from the Pope, who demands host countries support immigrants as children of God, yet hypocritically says nothing about the responsibilities of the immigrants seeking asylum. There is no discussion of the instances of rape by immigrants in Sweden and no calls for refugees to peaceably assimilate.³³⁰ Conservative workers for former President Trump likewise have felt similar ostracization because of their association with the target of the Left's hostility. Many, since the election, have had difficulty finding employment³³¹ with active discrimination of them across the economic and political world. Yet, while many of these people simply held positions in the Trump administration because they were conservative and desired to work, they are deplatformed from making a living now in the foreseeable future, punished for their political views or at least what their political views are perceived to be. At the same time, those who identify with victimhood and oppression (rightly or wrongly) commit violence in the streets, loot, burn down businesses and when arrested they are set free either by the left leaning politicians who support them or the leftist populous bail them out, given the adage, "as long as you are oppressed you are given a pass for negative behavior."³³²

These calls for censorship and active political and social discrimination only further exacerbate the memories of exclusion that one political identity group feels over the other. But, contrary to the popular belief that those in government are benevolent and genuinely desire to look out for the masses they govern, the government operates on a game of personal enrichment. Yet, each side is playing a different game with different end goals. The Conservatives seek to

³²⁷ Mohler, "Direct Threat"

³²⁸ Foust, "Force Colleges LGBT"

³²⁹ Eidsmoe, "Critical Analysis of CRT"

³³⁰ Pesta, "Christianity Today: Surviving the Woke Church"

unite the country under a deluded banner of exceptionalism and excellence, while the Democratic party seeks political incentive in emphasizing racism and bigotry. They need discrimination to hold their coalition together, the details of that plan for them matter little, as long as they can portray the opposition as a Handmaids Tail style fundamentalist takeover³³³ while disguising their own insidious agenda, harkening back to the days of the Obama era when lack of transparency had huge political advantage and the administration believed the American voter was above all else stupid.³³⁴

This kind of culling of the heard has been occurring for many years now yet has found a renewed fervor in the last few. As universities shift away from liberal arts education and toward a curriculum obsessed with social justice, the long term the goal of the radical left will be and already has been achieved. Society will drift and is drifting and has already drifted away from its representative form of government, away from personal, individual inalienable rights. If the masses accept the ideology that locked into the American society, at its core, is a power structure build on the immutable traits of oppression, this will infuse much more than a tangential shift in group think. It will utterly transform life as is currently known in the West and throughout the world.³³⁵ But, this dichotomy is typical of the conservative/liberal split running through the country. Conservatives typically pounce on every outrage while the Liberals celebrate martyrs in Latin America but willfully ignore anti-Christian hatred in the Gaza Strip or even at home.³³⁶

Censorship in the American political system takes many forms, but none were more draconian than the 2013 lawsuit Obama waged against the Little Sisters of the Poor over the issue of the contraceptive mandate, taking seven years of rejection until their case was taken to

³³¹ Graziosi, “Staffers Struggle”

³³² Eidsmoe, “Critical Analysis of CRT”

³³³ Reno, “Woke Script”

³³⁴ Horowitz, *Dark Agenda*, 109

the US Supreme Court. A unanimous decision was levied against the Obama administration only for the nuns to then have to defend themselves against State governments on the war path. This agenda was done in the name of “social justice, as the radicals in the Obama administration were determined to force their mandate onto everyone.³³⁷

The overall shift is a move backward in time, as culture and structure both contracts, back to the time of the medieval society when institutional and group think reigned. Unlike the last fifty years in America, where contemporary spirituality had much less dependence on institutional approval, to the point of individuals even resenting ecclesiastical interference or suggested oversight,³³⁸ the new structure will demand compliance by force, spirituality will be godless, and actual redemption unknown.

3.5 The Re-Framing of Truth as Hate and Perversion as Love

There was a time, twenty, even thirty years ago when the idea that a great delusion could fall on the people of America was impossible to imagine. Yet, Paul predicted as much, saying “Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first...” (2 Th 2:3) and “they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason, God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth...” (2 Th 2:10–12). But, despite this once being unimaginable in the past, this is the state of America today. With the cultural malaise required to bring about such apostasy, within just a few short decades, the shift is all but complete.

As early as 2008, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, blamed Christianity as

³³⁵ Horowitz, *Dark Agenda*, 106

³³⁶ Allen, *Global War*, 26

³³⁷ Horowitz, *Dark Agenda*, 111

offensive to Muslims, that certain doctrines in the Church should be excised from the faith in the name of multiculturalism.³³⁹ This is what has occurred, the trading away of sound doctrine.

American Christians now live in a world in which “right” is called out as wrong, “good” is now evil, rioters are now peaceful protesters, and crime is now social justice. In this world neutrality is considered racism and actual racism (depending on who it is waged against) is considered politically correct. This is a world in which terminology has changed, and tolerance and respect are demanded for all religions save the one that declares why Christ died for the world.³⁴⁰

It is a world where children are brought up in hostility and broken homes, where they are taught to hate Christians and Jews and are told to denounce any belief in God,³⁴¹ where the gospel of Christ is exchanged for a “good Christian” social gospel, where individuals openly flaunt their sinful lifestyles and make excuses for how they are justified before God.³⁴²

Over the last several decades, the progressive agenda has not been attempting to seek inclusion for different groups into existing American culture, but has, in reality, sought to destroy and deconstruct that very culture in a “fire sale” brand of annihilation.³⁴³ This was evident in the Church of Iceland’s advertising campaign that represented Christ with breasts to intimate the idea that Christ’s divinity can be projected onto the individual and to align with a social understanding of human nature rather than a divine one. Despite being pressured to remove the advertisement, the Church warned that it had just begun experimenting with the concept of de-Christifying Christ in the name of social inclusion.³⁴⁴ This movement has had as its goal to lay a foundational challenge to what they viewed as repressive, sex-negative cultures.

³³⁸ Holder, *Blackwell Spirituality*, 108

³³⁹ Pesta, “Christianity Today: Surviving the Woke Church”

³⁴⁰ Eidsmoe, “Critical Analysis of CRT”

³⁴¹ Horowitz, *Dark Agenda*, 55

³⁴² McQueeney, “God’s Children”

³⁴³ Horowitz, *Dark Agenda*, 85

³⁴⁴ Pesta, “Christianity Today: Surviving the Woke Church”

In other words, they did not want monogamous gay marriages or be included in the nuclear family arrangement, but, instead, wanted to not only practice habitual and defiant promiscuity but also to force American society to deem it acceptable.³⁴⁵

This is the drive behind much if not all the intersectionality and critical race theory, the sexual revolution,³⁴⁶ which promoted gay “liberated zones” and sexual gymnasiums and public sex exhibitions.³⁴⁷ It is a means of twisting society away from its moorings in the biblical text, away from individual autonomy, all in the name of habitual sin.

But do not mistake this progressive agenda as viewed by its proponents as something other than religion, as NYU professor Michael Warner points out, “The phenomenology of a sex club encounter is an experience of world making. It’s an experience of being connected not just to this person but to potentially limitless numbers of people, and that is why it’s important that it be with a stranger,”³⁴⁸ which sounds surprisingly metaphysical if not outrightly a religious experience. Of course, proponents never desire to highlight or admit the negative fallout of such behavior. This ideology puts at risk the most vulnerable strata in society, which the negatives hit disproportionately the hardest. Absent fathers, mixed households, jealousy, volatile relationships, serial, and short-term partners replacing stable marriages are all negative results of the so-called sexual revolution.³⁴⁹ All the sinful behavior metastasized into epidemics of opportunistic but treatable infections that spread like wildfire in the liberated culture. Gay radicals continued in their perverse lifestyles despite warnings from the medical community.³⁵⁰ It is the heart of every living being to be justified in their own behavior and to be, above all else, be considered normal

³⁴⁵ Horowitz, *Dark Agenda*, 85

³⁴⁶ Stewart, “Identity Politics”

³⁴⁷ Horowitz, *Dark Agenda*, 86

³⁴⁸ Horowitz, *Dark Agenda*, 86

³⁴⁹ Stewart, “Identity Politics”

³⁵⁰ Horowitz, *Dark Agenda*, 86

despite their sexual behavior.³⁵¹ Yet, God says, “my thoughts are not your thoughts, your ways are not my ways” (Isa 55:8).

But, as Randy Shilts, a gay reporter, wrote in his authoritative history of the AIDS epidemic, “gay men were being washed by tide after tide of increasingly serious infections. First syphilis, then gonorrhea. Gay men were 80% of the annual 70,000 patients visiting VD clinics....so cavalier was their attitude toward venereal disease, they saved their waiting line numbers like tokens of desirability and the clinic became an easy place to pick up both a shot and a date.”³⁵²

The most recent mutation of this progressive agenda is the redefinition of the family by abolishing the binary nature of man and woman.³⁵³ This effort in turn allows lesbians and gay men to create more inclusive Christian churches in which they then develop echo chambers where they can resist any notion of homosexuality as a sin and produced among themselves a kind of quasi respectability among their peer groups.³⁵⁴ But, in reality, all this has done is cast a shadow over continued divorce, cohabitation, serial short-term live-in relationships, mixed families, smaller families, broken families, all in an attempt to deprive both men and women opportunities to learn and experience healthy sexual conduct.³⁵⁵ Likewise, ignoring the biblical truth of these behaviors is like sweeping sin under a carpet or into the corner of a room and denying the pile of dirt and debris is still there. People who are gay, lesbian, or transgendered, who have had sexual relations outside of marriage, will inevitably regret their actions later in life³⁵⁶ or will so sear their hearts from the truth that they will be handed over to an unrepentant and willfully disobedient mind, and be given over to a parasitic theology - a strong delusion indeed.

³⁵¹ McQueeney, “God’s Children”

³⁵² Horowitz, *Dark Agenda*, 86

³⁵³ Corey, “First Church”

³⁵⁴ McQueeney, “God’s Children”

3.6 A Parasitic Theology

The progressive claim is often made of the Church that the Western mind generally and the Evangelical Christian mind in particular not only has a difficulty with the guilt of him who commits sin but cannot seem to address the group sin of a culture nor the shame that emerges from it.³⁵⁷ Of course, this could be said of anyone or any group throughout history, stretching accountability way beyond any genuine or reasonable culpability. This is because the woke mind is off in its thinking, conjuring futile explanations to support its assertions such as the only group that can be racist is the oppressor group and that oppressed groups cannot.³⁵⁸ Not only does this comical diatribe tilt scales always in favor of a specifically identified group as currently identified, but it likewise condemns certain groups forever into the future. The white individual will always be racist, and the African American can never be racist, even if they commit crimes or discriminate against white individuals based on the whiteness of the individual they choose to oppress.

As can be seen specifically in the modern Church, intersectionality and critical race theory serve the same function, as a wood horse outside the proverbial gate. From initial appearances, the horse is pleasant, varnished, fighting the good fight of freedom and against oppression. Yet, what no one within the walls of the Church seem to be able to tell, within that same horse, once it is allowed in and opened, inside is a white-hot mess. It is a parasitic and divisive ideology masquerading as a theology of political awareness and social truth. But whatever the pretty package might claim, it is actually a hijack designed to destroy from within.³⁵⁹ The ideology innocently seeks to subsume Cartesian theological categories typically understood as Biblical

³⁵⁵ Stewart, “Identity Politics”

³⁵⁶ Bregman, *Religion, Death, Dying*, 10

³⁵⁷ Rah, *Prophetic Lament Justice*, 56

³⁵⁸ Eidsmoe, “Critical Analysis of CRT”

Theology and replace them with a liberationist hermeneutic that defines the biblical text and especially the historical interpretation of that text as a tool of oppression. A woke theologian would contend, then, that Scripture can only be interpreted through the lens of the reader, through their presuppositions, through the worldviews formed by the traits they have that are unchangeable. This re-interpreted hermeneutic not only encourages the intersectionalist to reject previously derived interpretations, but it also encourages them to interpret the Bible from an entirely different perspective.³⁶⁰ It is opposite the Berean hermeneutic.³⁶¹

The intersectionalist is obsessed with suffering, even when there is no measurable or legitimate suffering present in the life of the victim. They reject the models that draw from success stories, as stories of triumphs limit the stories of struggle.³⁶² In the mind of the African American who is convinced he suffers because of the history of American slavery seems to overlook the reality that he was never a slave nor were his white neighbors ever slave owners. The idea there is unresolved resentment against injustice suffered multi-generationally is absurd.³⁶³ But, protests the radical activist, “The language of sin as used by Western Christianity does not provide the necessary nuance to understand how a victim of sin experiences sin. Traditional theology has emphasized one-sided the sin of all people, while ignoring the pain of the victim.”³⁶⁴ Yet, what pastors and teachers are so often reticent to voice is the reality that there is a reason to limit claims of suffering or claims of victimhood by sin when those claims are so broad as to render them utterly incoherent and illogical. This kind of thinking was destroyed at the Cross, as Paul put it, “no Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Ga 3:28).

³⁵⁹ Sovereign Nations, “Grievance Scholars”

³⁶⁰ Dunn, *Eerdmans Commentary: Hereneutical Approaches*, 983-985

³⁶¹ Sovereign Nations, “Grievance Scholars” 60:00 min

³⁶² Rah, *Prophetic Lament Justice*, 58

The fact is, the woke Church is not Christianity as described in the Bible. It is a wholly separate and distinct religion that is infecting and hijacking biblical Christianity as the church moves away from sound doctrine to human psychological tools to explain and teach.³⁶⁵ Critical Race Theory, taken at face value and objectively, is nothing more than racism disguised as justice. In asking for evidence, it provides none other than evidential knowledge is nothing more than the white mans' tool to sustain and hold power.³⁶⁶ The Christian Church in the United States has failed as it strives desperately to remain relevant to new generations. In trying to capture the attention and interest of the millennial and Gen Z's, the Evangelical Church has embraced the talk of social justice yet does not really seem to comprehend there will be no turning back (or maybe doesn't care). But, in the end, all this kind of thinking does is erode objective truth found in the Word of God. If there is no objective interpretation, if presuppositions, biases, and needs of the reader all hold sway over the reader's interpretation, then there is no starting point for any kind of objective hermeneutic. To swallow this camel is to also strain out the gnat (Matt 23:24). Those who even bother with approaching the Bible would do so with suspicion and doubt which is the intersectionalist aim.³⁶⁷

Of course, the American Church was never a healthy and functioning organization to begin with. Never had it mirrored its first century counterpart described in the Bible, nor had it addressed proper doctrine or worship in the biblical context (rather than a uniquely American one). But despite its shortcomings, it at least operated with clear goals and logical moorings from the biblical text. Intersectionality has none of the positives and as already discussed, a whole host of negatives that puts at risk any ability of pastor or elder or minister to encourage and bring

³⁶³ Rah, *Prophetic Lament Justice*, 57

³⁶⁴ Rah, *Prophetic Lament Justice*, 57

³⁶⁵ Sovereign Nations, "Grievance Scholars"

³⁶⁶ Sovereign Nations, "Grievance Scholars" min 59:00

about genuine transformation and change in the lives of Americans seeking God's grace.

3.7 Futility in Reasoning with the Reprobate Mind

What has been discussed thus far in this research project points to the blinding reality that there is a fundamental shift occurring in American culture that is not only curtailing the influence of Christianity on the populous, but that there is also an alternative ideology that has somehow gained an almost tsunami-like momentum that has not only infected society at large but has contaminated the thinking also of the Church. It is, at the base level, as already discussed, a theory that assumes that power structure or those from within the power hierarchy have invented both logic and reason as a means of perpetuating and maintaining their own power.³⁶⁸ How an individual or a group would come to this conclusion is simply unknown, as it flies in the face of what humanity knows or assumes to know about ontology and the very base structures of society and existence.

Likewise unshared is the alternative the radical left has in mind (if they have bothered to think about it at all) if they were to succeed in tearing down Western Civilization. Would they desire socialism as humans have already seen in China, in the USSR, in Cuba, Vietnam? Or would they rather have a dictatorship like in Korea or the Sudan, Algeria, or a King like in Saudi Arabia? It is a confusing idea to understand why an individual, most typically well educated, and often born to wealthy families, would be so angry and disillusioned by American society. This is predominately why countering woke ideology is so difficult. It simply makes no sense. It is, in the end, difficult to reason with people who believe truth is subjective and logic is a construct of

³⁶⁷ Dunn, *Eerdmans Commentary: Hereneutical Approaches*, 983-985

³⁶⁸ Sovereign Nations, "Grievance Scholars"

the oppressor.³⁶⁹ So bizarre is their thinking that radicals in this war do not see rational reflection as a gift from God. They discard the Church Fathers as biased, and discredit the very concept that God is guarantor of his truth, of his promises, casting aside all faith in a higher power, especially anything that carries the label of Christ.³⁷⁰

Further, there is no variance at which they use to classify guilt. If one is white, male, they are identified as the oppressor group. In fact, every interaction between white and black individuals is categorized and painted as white oppression.³⁷¹ As already discussed, interactions between two non-white individuals are somehow likewise painted as white oppression. But the lack of logic and reason lead these radical groups to conclusions such as: the white individual is racist while it is impossible for the black individual to be racist. The male is the sexual predator and the female, regardless of her actual actions, cannot in any instance be the sexual predator. If, hypothetically, the white individual grew up in a economically poor region of the country, had no money, little education, and grew up in a diverse group of peers where race was not view as identity, but the black individual was born into a wealthy family, lived in a sprawling city of privilege, attended the finest boarding schools, receiving an excellent education, got their degree at an Ivy League school and this black individual looked down on the white individual because the white individual has nothing, was poor, was poorly dressed, could not speak eloquently, and was not of pristine breeding - the intersectional ideology would insist that the white individual was not only inherently racist but enjoyed a better quality of life than the black individual simply because American society leaned in his favor. This kind of hypothetical example is utterly incomprehensible and no one, if in their right mind, would conclude such a fallacy. Yet, the insanity goes even further still. The Intersectional advocate not only views the provided

³⁶⁹ Eidsmoe, “Critical Analysis of CRT”

³⁷⁰ Thiselton, *Systematic Theology*, Ch 4.5

hypothetical as correct - the white individual is still racist despite all the elements of life working against them, but they also view disinterest as a kind of irresponsibility, fostered by those already in power.³⁷²

This is, of course, the crux of the issue. Those who accept woke ideology are exchanging the truth for a lie. As Paul clearly states, “the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them, for God has shown it to them” (Ro 1:18-19). There is some truth to the relativistic nature of reality and our perceptions. But the error is in abandoning that which is already “evident within them.” Paul goes on, “since the creation of the world his invisible attributes, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse” (Rom 1:20). These individuals, both in and out of the Church, willfully ignore what has “been clearly seen.” God, his nature, his superiority to his Creation can be witnessed even now through the creation itself. Yet, there are those who willfully reject him, “for even though they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks” (Rom 1:21).

But, as much as Christians might desire for these individuals to return to the light of the Word, to be overtaken by the truth, it is apparent both by Scripture and by their actions that can be seen, “they became futile in their speculations and their foolish heart was darkened” (Rom 1:21). God concluded it was just and right, “just as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, he gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not fitting” (Rom 1:28).

The reality is this ideology is nothing new. It might be couched in fresh sounding

³⁷¹ Eidsmoe, “Critical Analysis of CRT”

³⁷² Corey, “First Church”

terminology or might use a slightly different perspective, but the origin is the same. It is the same ideology the Soviet Union attempted to push onto religious students³⁷³ and it is the same ideology that Churches have who preach prosperity and no need for persecution. It is a cosmic war that rages on between the flesh and the spirit, between true saints and false teachers, between the body of Christ and the unbelieving world. It is not the Christian's responsibility to reason with the individual who has blotted out from their mind the truth about God. We are simply to be prepared. We are to do our best with what we have been given. We are to "be diligent...rightly dividing the word of truth," (2 Ti 2:5) that we might be able to take a stand for Christ in the future. The only question remains is what might that future look like and what should that preparation look like for the American Christian?

³⁷³ Solomon, "Iron Curtain," 70

Chapter 04 - Our Quite Possible Future Fates

4.1 The American Fate Ciphered in Historical Past

History is bound up in perspective and America's fate is intertwined irreversibly with her often complex and confusing past. It is unclear what exactly it is that builds up civilizations and then tears them down again. But it is certain, as it was for the Roman Empire, that stability depended on adherence to the traditions that brought the society to prominence, that is, adoration to the Roman state gods.³⁷⁴ So, too, is the fate of American society and prosperity as the United States repeats those tendencies that might just bring about its own ruin.

Will American society, by and large, over the next twenty, thirty, or forty years move away from its Christian roots? Will they like the Roman government, take the stance that Christianity is a perversion³⁷⁵ of an earlier but just as faulty faith? Is it possible that American Christians will not heed the lessons from the past, such as Chrysostom's premonition of future persecution, which came true in the last years of his own life?³⁷⁶ Is the societal opinion already shifting the window enough that American Christians in the future will be perceived to be zealots,³⁷⁷ intolerant of the sensibilities of new, more enlightened generations?

Gone are the days when Christians of the first few centuries rushed into persecution in hopes of sharing in Christ's death.³⁷⁸ As was indicated in those early times, those who confessed Christ likewise could expect a similar fate to his. Christians were once upon a time at odds with the world that opposed God.³⁷⁹ Certainly, there have been different responses to persecution and to

³⁷⁴ Small, *Lexham Dict.*: "Diocletian"

³⁷⁵ Wiebe, "Early Struggle," 41

³⁷⁶ Hall, *Learning with the Fathers*, 202

³⁷⁷ Borchert, *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 86

³⁷⁸ Hall, *Learning with the Fathers*, 203

³⁷⁹ Various, *Bad Urach Statement*, 15

hostility toward the Christian Church historically. So diverse they were it is difficult to form any kind of consensus on a single strategy. Should the Christian cooperate with their persecutors? Should they resist?³⁸⁰ There is no one right answer and Christians, in fact, throughout history, have opted for all and more at different times. Many Christian leaders during Roman days confronted persecution head on. Apologists such as Justin Martyr, Athenagoras of Athens, Tertullian, and Lactantius, all lived during times of varying degrees of persecution from the sporadic to widespread oppression.³⁸¹ Much like those in Acts, where unbelieving Jews went about stirring up trouble against Paul,³⁸² so it is easy to see radical and hostile gay and lesbian and transgendered activists doing the same to Christians in modernity.

But unlike what is the typical response to the term Christian Persecution, that of a pitifully triumphant Christian being eaten alive by lions in the Coliseum,³⁸³ religious persecution is often brutal, yet also intermittent and sporadic. The lines between friend and foe are not so easily drawn in a world where profession can bring social condemnation one day and being burned at the stake the next. The Roman government was anything but consistent and rarely did it always enforce all the rules. The high priest was deposed after the killing of James, but none were held accountable after Stephen's death.³⁸⁴ The reality was, as it is today, there were a multitude of reasons for hatred against Christians in the Roman Empire. But, overall, it was a class of worldviews that forced a persistent incomparability between believers and the society in which they found themselves.³⁸⁵ Is the same context beginning to take shape in the post-modern era in America? There are no signs that the decline of the social fabric in the United States is anything but inevitable. If single party rule takes control, if liberal ideology reaches critical mass among

³⁸⁰ Philpott, *Caesar's Sword*, 355

³⁸¹ Philpott, *Caesar's Sword*, 18

³⁸² Spence-Jones, *Pulpit: 1 Thessalonians*, 3

³⁸³ Wiebe, "Early Struggle," 12

common people as it already has in the academic and media institutions, then Christians will be one of several groups to be targeted as undesirable. Religion as seen by the culture as a backward belief can fair only severe hostility, yet refusal to compromise religious conviction on spurs on the violence and oppression.³⁸⁶

If persecution does come to America only history will be able to predict its severity. As it is estimated, the victims of the Spanish Inquisition outnumbered those of the Roman one. This fact is akin to the stark reality that more Protestants were executed during the Reformation than all the Christians during the first three centuries of the church combined³⁸⁷. If trajectory holds, the American Church might very well face unimaginable persecution in the future. The reality is stark, though, as never before in the history of the church have so many Christians experienced persecution as they do in today's contemporary world.³⁸⁸ Most of the apostles met untimely fates at the hand of the persecutor.³⁸⁹ Is it so hard to imagine American Christians, who have thus far in a 250-year history, been spared? Similarly, how comfortable should the American Christian be within their own church group when history has proven, an established church must persecute dissenters one way or another.³⁹⁰ This was seen, as already discussed, during the Reformation and likewise throughout the Church's modern trajectory as well. If American Christianity takes the time to look at its own history, they will find a rich and varied source of information on how persecution has come both in the past and even in the modern era. Just as during the time of the Church Fathers or even the apostles, there is no way to determine if or even when persecution might arise. It can be predicted but might be utterly and grossly in error. It can be estimated but

³⁸⁴ Craig, *Blackwell Natural Theology*,” 613

³⁸⁵ McDowell, *Apostles as Martyrs*, 82

³⁸⁶ Solomon, “Iron Curtain,” 69

³⁸⁷ Borchert, *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 86

³⁸⁸ Various, *Bad Urach Statement*, 4.

³⁸⁹ Taylor, *Sorrow and Blood*, 67

³⁹⁰ Schaff, *History of the Church*, 5355

might be overblown.

But, despite not being able to see all aspects and all perspectives and knowing the beginning from the end, the American Christian can look to history as a roadmap that describes to the best of its ability the terrain Christians might encounter in the future. It is coming, this is near a certainty. How it might look once it does come, is simply a matter of sitting up straight enough to look.

4.2 Case Study #1: Yugoslavia - A Reminder of Familiar Progression

The world remembers the terror of Nazi Germany and the death camps and the gas chambers, how countless lives were destroyed and how God seemed to be silent and powerless to turn away such brutality and injustice toward his people. The holocaust was a tremendous illustration on what kind of evil there is in the world, but it was certainly not the only one. The Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, the atrocities perpetrated by the Sudanese government, they all serve as examples of what is wrong with humanity, what is defective, fallen, within us. As the first Case Study there is no better example of this than the former Yugoslavia.³⁹¹ Fueled by apocalyptic visions, armed groups in what was then Yugoslavia rose to hold on to the power they had received during the Cold War.³⁹² Since most Yugoslavians at the time were Caucasian in ethnicity it was impossible to divide the people by race. Rather, those behind the scenes used religion instead, dividing the people into distinct camps and pitting them against each other.³⁹³

This is the exact same play book being used in the United States today with intersectionality, although religion is not the direct subject. Because of America's dark history with slavery and because of US Christians' staunch stand against alternative lifestyles, this allows radical

³⁹¹ Penner, *Shadow of the Cross*, 85

³⁹² Hedges, *American Fascists*, 9

activities to wage war on various fronts in the culture - fighting those who are against LGBTQ special rights, who are for the biblical gospel, and all whites as a distinct group because of slavery. Furthering the radical left's agenda is a kind of Christianity in America that seems to be a hybrid of patriotism and evangelicalism. Often termed dominionistic, these groups see it as a Christian duty to fight political opposition aggressively and very similarly to how such ethnic nationalist parties operated in the former Yugoslavia.³⁹⁴ But the brutal genocide in such countries only illustrates the point, that violence does not solve the problem of violence. It can be shown again and again through even modern history, such as WWI and WWII, and the Cold War. Desert Storm led to Operation Iraqi Freedom,³⁹⁵ and that led to Afghanistan and endless fighting and death.

The Yugoslavian Civil War was caused in addition to several other reasons, by a deep-seated conflict in politics - old, festering grudges that were inflamed by past wars - as well as economic issues inflamed by the old oligarchies and the spread of Communism. Yet, this region was also once a meeting ground for the East and West and rivalries between Orthodox and Catholic, Muslim, etc.³⁹⁶ By the end of the civil war 350,000 Serbian Orthodox were murdered by soldiers from Croatia including three bishops and 220 priests.³⁹⁷ These actions have consequences. Because of the brutality of the fighting, countless children suffered, families broke up, and as is always the case, the suffering fell predominately on the poor.³⁹⁸ A country and homeland to millions was lost forever in the aftermath of the Yugoslavian Civil War.

Many other countries suffered under the fall out of the Cold War, such as Russia, Poland, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Albania and much of what was then the

³⁹³ MAAH, "Yugoslavian Warning"

³⁹⁴ Hedges, *American Fascists*, 23

³⁹⁵ Sprinkle, *Fight*, 334

³⁹⁶ McClendon, *Systematic Theology Vol 2*, 220

Soviet Union.³⁹⁹ But, the United States was by and large spared any calamity or culpability during these years. Yet, how strange it is that now America seems to be following in the footsteps of those countries that went before, eroding the fabric of society, giving inroads to the socialist hordes at the gates, allowing the systematic dismantling of their entire way of life.

It is foolish to think that America somehow has a monopoly or saint-status with God. The United States has not been chosen by God above all other nations or people groups. Despite the values that were once embodied in American culture and in the pillars of the Church, the foundation of American Democracy is the people are self-governed and the health of the country is determined by the steadfastness when striving to attain those values.⁴⁰⁰ If a tipping point comes (which we are now approaching) where more in society are disinterested or less invested in the America ideal, in the American Dream, then the system itself will begin to (has already begun) degrade and collapse. Moving from religion to science and to science as religion, where the god invoked is no longer the Creator but the created,⁴⁰¹ where the individual determines what he will think and what he will do, the country is left on the precipice.

As America moves into a post-Christian era, a vacuum will be created in the absence of faith and reason and logic and absolute truth. In its place will follow individuals who place subjectivism and relativism above everything else, and once again the assessment will be true of the American people as it once was of the entire earth “the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen 6:5). In the absence of faith there is nothing binding people together. Pain, dislocation, alienation, suffering and despair - it all surfaces and they strike back at a culture they blame for their misery

³⁹⁷ Johnson, “Martyrology Demographics”

³⁹⁸ Harries, *After the Evil*, 118

³⁹⁹ Solomon, “Iron Curtain,” 20

⁴⁰⁰ Hedges, *American Fascists*, 73

in their lives. There is, indeed, a numbness among the masses, a kind of emptiness, a loss of control, an inability to marshal the energy or volition to fight against what the radicals claim science and law and riots can build as a utopia.⁴⁰² But, as the past illustrates, such ideations never materialize. As was seen during the Yugoslavian Civil War, in just one decade, over 22,000 evangelicals were sent to prison camps in Siberia, many never returning.⁴⁰³ Their grand designs never produced the utopia they promised and, as socialism and atheism continue to spread throughout the world, a much more concerted effort will be needed to keep them at bay. It is difficult to conclude that America of today has the will to do so.

4.3 Case Study # 2: China - Christians at the Mercy of Governmental Oppression

The second Case Study is the country of China or the Chinese Communist Party or the Peoples Republic of China, established in 1949 as a party-state ruling system that operates a socialistic government in control over secular as well as the religious beliefs of its people. It does have a Constitution, but falls grossly short in application, despite the words, “the freedom of religious belief.”⁴⁰⁴

The reality is, China allows limited freedom when it comes to religious belief, and severely curtails the actual gathering for worship beyond the government sponsored religions. Further, those who are part of the government or government sponsored groups such as the Communist League, the Young Pioneers, or military personnel cannot accept religious affiliation at all.⁴⁰⁵

Officially, China holds a Marxist-Leninist-Maoist ideology, with specific characteristics

⁴⁰¹ Thiselton, *Systematic Theology*, Ch 4.3

⁴⁰² Hedges, *American Fascists*, 91

⁴⁰³ Solomon, “Iron Curtain,” 9

⁴⁰⁴ Philpott, *Caesar’s Sword*, 336

⁴⁰⁵ Sun, “Freedom Post Communist China,” 206

including atheism as the main theme. This is viewed as foundational to Marxist philosophy and desires to eliminate religion from society. This was viewed most prominent during the Cultural Revolution in the mid 1960's which not a single church, temple or mosque was open for service.⁴⁰⁶ As Christianity spread into China, it became clear there was a Christianization happening. By 1920, due to efforts by foreign missionaries, the Church in China was almost completely western in its approach, theology, and appearance. Within twenty years, independent Christian groups would begin breaking off and form their own identities. This was due in part to the belief by the people that China is the center of the world, and the move toward distinct identity harkens back to the Boxer Rebellion where 186 missionaries were killed.⁴⁰⁷

Despite attempts to reign in the government in China with such maneuvers as the Jakarta Declaration, demanding Chinese authorities adhere to international human rights standards for all peoples with or without a religion,⁴⁰⁸ there has been little progress. There are no outright murders, as there was during the Boxer Rebellion. The perfect example of this is the fifteen-year-old girl who begged the authorities not to expel her and her missionary family from China. She argued that they had done good, brought medicine for the people, provided aid and the gospel. In mid-sentence, the young girl was beheaded.⁴⁰⁹ In modern history, though, China appears to have softened on its eradication policy with limited toleration.⁴¹⁰ Though some would argue this is progress, it is more likely the Chinese government is lightening the persecution against religious groups as a means of bringing secret groups out in the open, so individuals can be identified, tracked, as was the case for the Christian Church in the 1990's under the repressive regime.⁴¹¹

China does regulate religion within its borders to motivate religious adherents to following

⁴⁰⁶ Philpott, *Caesar's Sword*, 336

⁴⁰⁷ Johnston, "China House Church"

⁴⁰⁸ Sun, "Freedom Post Communist China," 232

⁴⁰⁹ Johnston, "China House Church"

their rules. They define what changes needed to be made to a particular religion, whether it be teaching or practices. Chen Yun called this “religious infiltration” in his letter to the former PRC President Jiang Zemin.⁴¹² China also attempts to control religious belief through patriotic associations, which are monitored, supervised, dictated to by government oversight.⁴¹³ But, despite this continual effort by the Chinese government to eradicate religion and especially Christianity, in the 1950 it was estimated there were 100,000 Christians in the country. By 2020, there are said to be a hundred million.⁴¹⁴ There is no guarantee for religious belief and in fact, the government and their regulative institutions attempt to restrict citizens’ rights frequently.⁴¹⁵

There are mass media organizations specifically for the purpose of transmitting atheist propaganda to the people. According to their Document Number 19, atheist propaganda must be spread relentlessly.⁴¹⁶ With the shift away from culture and toward economic development in 1979,⁴¹⁷ the atheist propaganda was ignored by most authorities, but in the 2000’s the Chinese government have doubled their efforts through public education, radio, and television, as well as in the sciences.⁴¹⁸ Today there are basically two types of Christian groups in China. There is the government run Church and then the underground Church. Government run Churches are not allowed to preach on the resurrection of Christ, on the spirit, or on the return of Christ. They are not allowed to print or distribute Bibles and their theology is typically reduced to a social gospel that aligns with the government’s opinions.⁴¹⁹

Those who resist the regime’s oppression, on the other hand, are often devout and

⁴¹⁰ Philpott, *Caesar’s Sword*, 337

⁴¹¹ Marshall, *Persecuted Global Assault*, 20

⁴¹² Sun, “Post Communist China,” 193

⁴¹³ Philpott, *Caesar’s Sword*, 338

⁴¹⁴ Johnston, “China House Church”

⁴¹⁵ Sun, “Freedom Post Communist China,” 233

⁴¹⁶ Philpott, *Caesar’s Sword*, 341

⁴¹⁷ Philpott, *Caesar’s Sword*, 336

⁴¹⁸ Philpott, *Caesar’s Sword*, 341

conservative and do not mix politics with theology. They have a robust view of suffering and persecution and often view suffering as a Christian duty. Yet, recently, politics and religion have collided, and individuals have engaged with the Communist party on the issues, sometimes calling for civil disobedience or nonviolent resistance. Others try to sway the government through legal measures and the use of the courts.⁴²⁰

Missionaries within the country are trained for such perilous activity and obstacles. They are taught how to prepare in advance so they can flee, if necessary, as well as go to prison if the Lord calls them to do so. They learn how to free themselves from handcuffs, how to jump from second-story windows, as well as organizations devising evacuation plans in case of danger.⁴²¹

Typically, there are three types of responses Christians can give to persecution in environments such as China. First is cooperation. Second is accommodation. And the last is resistance.⁴²² Every situation has a number of variables, but largely Christians who are a part of the government run church typically have no need for resistance, while members of the underground house church do, since they are considered enemies of the state.⁴²³ Often in these kinds of cases, when an individual is identified, the Chinese government will fabricate charges such as divulging State secrets to provide cover when they arrests or detain a Christian.⁴²⁴ Since the 1980s many house church leaders have been detained or imprisoned in labor camps. If families were willing to pay the fines they could be bailed out, which quickly became a money-making strategy for some local officials.⁴²⁵

This is most likely how persecution will come to America. It will require the Church to

⁴¹⁹ Johnston, “China House Church”

⁴²⁰ Philpott, *Caesar’s Sword*, 354

⁴²¹ Taylor, *Sorrow and Blood*, 347

⁴²² Philpott, *Caesar’s Sword*, 346

⁴²³ Johnston, “China House Church”

⁴²⁴ Sun, “Freedom Post Communist China,” 4

⁴²⁵ Philpott, *Caesar’s Sword*, 344

retreat underground, as Christians in China do, grouping together on disparate schedules, sometimes for 8-10 hours at a time. Memorization of large sections of Scripture is imperative, since printing, obtaining, or possessing a Bible is a crime. Often different members will be assigned a Scripture portion to memorize, and each would take turns reciting their section during their gatherings. With no titles, no clergy, no denominational divisions, the positions of the church are defined by their function. All members are of the same priesthood and prefer to simply be called followers of Christ.⁴²⁶ Within the Chinese context, accommodation appears to be the best option, as it allows them to remain within the populous, overseeing the expansion of both the church membership and the ministries. On the other hand, the resisters, despite their varied prison terms in labor camps, having to endure physical and psychological torture, have become role models and inspire Christians and new converts with their testimony. Because of these tactics, the house church has grown substantially.⁴²⁷

This is, ultimately, the picture from which the American Church can analyze to acquire helpful information about possible future persecution to come. There can be in the house church leaders in China a treasure trove of wisdom that Americans can glean⁴²⁸ while the opportunity is available. In the future, such information may be much harder to obtain. It is a provocative mirror in China where we can see believers being persecuted despite their Constitution providing protections for religious freedom.⁴²⁹ Similar will be the case for the third case study, the Middle East.

⁴²⁶ Johnston, “China House Church”

⁴²⁷ Philpott, *Caesar’s Sword*, 355

⁴²⁸ Kipfer, “Persecuted Christians”

⁴²⁹ Philpott, *Caesar’s Sword*, 340

4.4 Case Study #3: The Country of Iran

Unlike the civil war in Yugoslavia which was driven predominately by generational religious prejudice and personal views of revenge, or China's atheistic governmental oppression based entirely upon Marxist ideals, persecution of Christians in the Middle East is founded almost entirely on theological grounds.

Whether it is in Iran, Iraq, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, other African or Asian countries or India, the motivations, as will be discussed, are strikingly similar. Islam is the number one threat to Christians in the modern world and persecution in Islamic countries is rampant.⁴³⁰ For Iran, this came during the transformations in the mid-1960s as the country's government became increasingly totalitarian⁴³¹ and by the end of the 1970's Iran saw the expulsion of foreign missionaries and contact with foreign organizations became a crime in the country⁴³² despite a long history of protestant missionary groups operating within Iran's borders.⁴³³

Similar to China's war against house churches, the early 2000's saw such tactics from Iran's government, arresting several individuals, who endured beatings to the point of requiring hospitalization before two died from their ordeal. Another individual in Iran, a Christian Kurd, was arrested and hung by his feet from the ceiling, both his arms and legs broken to get him to give up the other converts in his group.⁴³⁴ These atrocities arise because of Iran's distinct stance against religious liberties. Christians in the country have little hope that any political change will take place and, thus, they must respond to persecution in a much different theological understanding than Americans currently do. In their view, the Iranian Christians sees persecution

⁴³⁰ Reddy, "Knowledge," 34

⁴³¹ van Gorder, *Christianity in Persia*, 76

⁴³² Philpott, *Caesar's Sword*, 138

⁴³³ van Gorder, *Christianity in Persia*, 206

as inevitable and view suffering as a calling by Christ.⁴³⁵ Despite the active work by the Iranian government to stamp out Christianity, most every evangelical denomination is represented.⁴³⁶ Yet, these Christians often have no resting place in sight and live in a constant state of fear, either from the current government oppression or the fear that jihadists will take the majority and make Christian persecution even worse.⁴³⁷

Another risk to Christians in Iran is family hostility. One such woman, a convert to the faith, found herself permanently disabled from spinal cord injury after being severely beaten by her family members.⁴³⁸ Over the course of the years since the move toward single rule, the Iranian government has seen fit to subject Christians to severe pressures, resulting in the numbers of believers falling precipitously. Leaders in the Church are taught how to recognize grenades or bombs and how to respond if such weapons explode.⁴³⁹ But, despite this kind of training, they work under great risk, since any Muslim found converting to the Christian faith are at risk of being executed.⁴⁴⁰

Some Churches within the country attempt to maintain formal structures and roles while others, such as the Armenian Evangelical Spiritual Brotherhood operates as a lay leadership group, with appointed elders and no ordained clergy.⁴⁴¹ More recently, the Iranian government has focused their efforts on cyber-censorship efforts, which has had an impact on radio broadcasts and satellite television, as well as correspondence courses.⁴⁴² There are even Seventh Day Adventists in Iran, who subscribe to a strict daily life and rigid diet, though it is unclear how

⁴³⁴ Marshall, *Persecuted Global Assault*, 145

⁴³⁵ Philpott, *Caesar's Sword*, 161

⁴³⁶ van Gorder, *Christianity in Persia*, 207

⁴³⁷ Philpott, *Caesar's Sword*, 35

⁴³⁸ Marshall, *Persecuted Global Assault*, 145

⁴³⁹ Philpott, *Caesar's Sword*, 90.

⁴⁴⁰ Marshall, *Persecuted Global Assault*, 145

⁴⁴¹ van Gorder, *Christianity in Persia*, 208

⁴⁴² Philpott, *Caesar's Sword*, 138

many are practicing.⁴⁴³

Persecution in Iran is not uniform among groups. Some receive little discrimination while others, such as Malayeri, an Assemblies of God pastor, not only served five years in prison, but received an additional two-year sentence and, at his appeal, even his lawyer was sentenced to prison. During his prison term, Malayeri was incarcerated at a mid-level prison, but was subsequently transferred to the Rajai Shahr prison, where he had to serve the rest of his term with extremely violent prisoners. Malayeri's wife and children were forced to flee to Canada.⁴⁴⁴ This is not the case for all Christians in Iran, though. Some, like the Armenian and Chaldean Christians, can openly practice their faith without issue with the government. Others, such as the protestant and evangelical groups have faced extensive persecution since the revolution. The focus seems to be on the evangelization of the Muslim that sparks the ire of the Iranian authorities.⁴⁴⁵

Despite the Middle East being the birthplace of Christianity, those who practice the faith today, such as in Iran, are facing systemic and pervasive persecution that seems to only be increasing in its intensity. A hundred years ago, Christianity had 20% of the population of the Middle East, yet today its only about 4%.⁴⁴⁶ Those who hold on in such a shifting environment find the prospect extremely dangerous and deadly.⁴⁴⁷ In fact, Nina Shea, the director of the Center for Religious Freedom states, the rise of ISIS has elevated Christian persecution to a religious cleansing, “it is the eradication of the entire Christian presence in this part of the world where there has been Christians for two thousand years.”⁴⁴⁸ Saeed Abedini was arrested while

⁴⁴³ van Gorder, *Christianity in Persia*, 208

⁴⁴⁴ Philpott, *Caesar's Sword*, 160

⁴⁴⁵ van Gorder, *Christianity in Persia*, 219

⁴⁴⁶ Chris, *Destination Jerusalem*, 84

⁴⁴⁷ Marshall, *Persecuted Global Assault*, 118

⁴⁴⁸ Chris, *Destination Jerusalem*, 84

trying to build an orphanage and was sentenced to eight-years in 2012.⁴⁴⁹ In 2010, Behnam Irani was arrested and beaten for leading a house church. He was charged with apostasy, which is considered a crime against the Islamic order. He received a one-year prison term.⁴⁵⁰

The tragedy of Christians in Iran is nothing less than forced conversion. Muslims desire to eradicate Christians from the face of the earth, driving them out to the desert, depriving them of water, enslaving their women and girls, killing anyone who resists, stripping them of property, identity, legality. They are being left with nothing and have no future. It is summed up in the graffiti that is found throughout the Middle East: First comes Saturday, then comes Sunday,⁴⁵¹ meaning - first the Jew, then the Christian.

4.5 Case Study #4: The Greater Middle East

The greater portion of the Middle East is quite similar in many respects to the country of Iran, especially in their fervent adherence to some form of radical Islamic ideology and intolerance of a Christian presence. In Syria, Christians have experienced a dramatic increase in violence and persecution over the last several decades. This has predominately occurred due to the rise of Islamic caliphate ideology. Since the beginning of their civil war, nearly 470,000 people have died.⁴⁵²

Despite the intense and extended intervention from the West, Iraq also has experienced a rise in anti-Christian violence. In 2010, Al-Qaeda attacked a Catholic church in Baghdad while members were attending a Sunday mass. Nearly half the parishioners were killed, both priests,

⁴⁴⁹ Philpott, *Caesar's Sword*, 140

⁴⁵⁰ Marshall, *Persecuted Global Assault*, 163

⁴⁵¹ Chris, *Destination Jerusalem*, 84

⁴⁵² Philpott, *Caesar's Sword*, 34

with a third shot in the head but somehow survived.⁴⁵³ In 2011, a priest in the Assyrian Church told aid workers that Christians in Iraq were being systematically attacked in coordinated efforts to drive them out of the country.⁴⁵⁴ This kind of non-governmental initiated violence typically occurs from a lack of enforcement by the local government itself. As despotic rulers are removed, a vacuum is created allowing non-state actors to move in and exert their own agendas. As traditional structures fail, the populous is forced to accept religiously infected nationalism, which in turn provides a hostile environment for the native Christians in the area.⁴⁵⁵ When the initial Gulf War sparked in 1991, Christianity was flourishing in Iraq. Today, total numbers have decreased exponentially. Many have fled in fear but many have died because of their faith.⁴⁵⁶ With flight has been the primary response for Christians in these countries, most leaving the Middle East altogether. In 2001, nearly 30% of all Iraqis emigrating elsewhere were Christian, and this number has only increased after the US invasion.⁴⁵⁷

There are many stories recounting the horrors of persecution in this region. Pascale, a Christian woman had been stopped with friends at a checkpoint, having to show their IDs to masked guards. They dragged her from the car, put a gun to her head, and demanded she convert to Islam or be killed.⁴⁵⁸ In 2006, after a Catholic mass, a young priest was kidnapped by an al-Qaeda militia group and held for ransom. He spent 28 days in captivity, being tortured for his religion, with his captors demanding he abandon his faith.⁴⁵⁹ After Saddam was removed from power, Jihadists bombed forty Iraqi Churches between 2004 and 2011. Saddam while in power,

⁴⁵³ Marshall, *Persecuted Global Assault*, 207

⁴⁵⁴ Allen, *Global War*, 146

⁴⁵⁵ Philpott, *Caesar's Sword*, 35

⁴⁵⁶ Allen, *Global War*, 14

⁴⁵⁷ Philpott, *Caesar's Sword*, 46

⁴⁵⁸ Marshall, *Persecuted Global Assault*, 263

⁴⁵⁹ Philpott, *Caesar's Sword*, 37

did not enforce Islamic law mandating the subjugation of Christians.⁴⁶⁰

Afghanistan is slightly different, as Christians there have responded to their situation in a somewhat different manner. While some have fled to other countries, many Afghan Christians have decided to remain in their home country and continue to practice their faith and remain faithful despite the immense political and social pressure to convert. Some have concealed their identities and try to work within the oppressive system they find themselves, remaining resilient, resisting, and confronting oppressive structures and try to enact lasting change.⁴⁶¹ There is only about 1% of the Afghan population that is other than Muslim (such as Sikhs, Hindus, Christians, etc). As of 2011, there was only one Jew remaining in the entire country. In a country of 30 million, the Christian population is an overwhelming minority. In 2010 the only church in the country was torn down, and the Taliban has officially declared they would execute apostates, imprison bookstore owners who sold books that criticized Islam, and have closed numerous foreign aid organizations.⁴⁶²

Saudi Arabia Christians view persecution and suffering for their faith as a prophetic promise for a future heavenly reward. Though they do not seek persecution out, it is neither unexpected nor avoided when it comes.⁴⁶³ In 2008, a Saudi sharia court sentenced a Filipino man to death who had been arrested a year before, accused of blasphemy and mocking the name of the Prophet. His sentence was later commuted to five years and five hundred lashes. He eventually was pardoned and deported back to Manila in 2011.⁴⁶⁴ Many Christians in Saudi Arabia are convinced that God is in control of everything and, whether in peace or being persecuted, good will eventually come out of evil. They focus their theology on the cross as an overriding example

⁴⁶⁰ Spencer, *Muslim Persecution of Christians*, 8

⁴⁶¹ Philpott, *Caesar's Sword*, 258

⁴⁶² Marshall, *Persecuted Global Assault*, 192

⁴⁶³ Philpott, *Caesar's Sword*, 161

of their own eventual victorious resurrection in the next world. They take consolation in the words of Christ, “I will build my church and not even the gates of hell shall prevail against it.”⁴⁶⁵

Many in these countries, especially Evangelicals, grow their congregations through proselytism. This allows the gathering of people from across the class spectrum and from a diverse ethnic background. Some converted were nominal Muslims, but others were from strict Islamic homes. Many were converted by having dreams and visions, even some report miraculous healings. Others were witness to the personal lives of Christian friends who were persecuted for their faith and served as a living testimony of Christ.⁴⁶⁶

Christians in Pakistan are, likewise, quite diverse in their makeup. The experiences had varied greatly between the educated middle-class and those of lower income. Urbanized middle-class Christians experience less discrimination and persecution and more often have better relationships with their Muslim neighbors. Poor Christians in Pakistan, on the other hand, often live in rural areas and are frequent victims of aggression, persecution and violence.⁴⁶⁷

Shifting to African countries, the intensity of persecution against Christians is out of control as rapes, beatings, forced marriages, arrests, abductions, and murder occur frequently.⁴⁶⁸ In Eritrea, the Me’eter prison was created specifically for certain Christians within the country. Built off the coast of the Red Sea, the number of Christians killed there could not be assessed. They are tortured with a well-documented list of horrors, such as beatings, exposure, and non-mortal hangings.⁴⁶⁹ There is little dialog between these countries and the rest of the world, with respective governments unwilling to ease religious restrictions, though some have proved

⁴⁶⁴ Marshall, *Persecuted Global Assault*, 144

⁴⁶⁵ Philpott, *Caesar’s Sword*, 161

⁴⁶⁶ van Gorder, *Christianity in Persia*, 209

⁴⁶⁷ Philpott, *Caesar’s Sword*, 246

⁴⁶⁸ Crudup, “Religious Persecution,” 19

⁴⁶⁹ Crudup, “Religious Persecution,” 18

sensitive to international pressure as a result of high-profile cases of abuse.⁴⁷⁰

In Nigeria, Islamic Boko Haram have killed nearly 3000 people since 2009, specializing in Christian persecution, targeting churches and in some cases driving Christianity completely out of different parts of the country. One example of this is the 2011 edict from a Boko Haram spokesperson, stating that all Christians in Nigeria's Yobe and Borno states had three days to escape, a threat that was followed by region wide church bombings and shooting sprees.⁴⁷¹ Many other countries in the region have similar experiences. Sri Lanka Christian groups, especially evangelical and Pentecostal congregations in rural areas serve as prime targets.⁴⁷² Burma is another example, with its Chin and Karen ethnic groups experiencing routine imprisonment, torture, forced labor, and murder from the government. 2010 saw Burmese military helicopter strikes in Christian dominated regions. One source stated soldiers are authorized to kill Christians on sight and thousands have lost their lives in that country as a result.⁴⁷³

India is the last country to be discussed - a country with a long history of anti-Christian sentiments in both its culture as well as its government. The source of Christian oppression and persecution in India stems primarily from their anti-conversion laws which, instead of promoting religious freedom, they do the opposite. Originally enacted to preserve Hindu identity against Christian proselytization, the laws actually incite hostility toward religious minorities and empowers extremists.⁴⁷⁴ As a result, India has seen some of the worst riots and organized resistance in the twenty-first century. In 2008, five hundred Christians were killed, hacked to death by machete armed Hindu radicals. Five thousand homes have been destroyed along with 350 churches and schools. In one instance, a Catholic nun was raped, stripped, and marched

⁴⁷⁰ Philpott, *Caesar's Sword*, 72

⁴⁷¹ Allen, *Global War*, 15

⁴⁷² Philpott, *Caesar's Sword*, 24

⁴⁷³ Allen, *Global War*, 15

through the streets. Because the police were sympathetic to the radical groups, they discouraged the nun from filing a report and refused to arrest her attackers.⁴⁷⁵

Overall, Christian persecution is a grim reality, taking place across the globe and increasing exponentially, stretching from Libya to Nigeria, Egypt to Russia, Sri Lanka to China, Indonesia to North Korea. It dominates not only a large portion of the globe but an even larger portion of those persecuted for religious reasons.⁴⁷⁶ As already discussed, American culture and government structure are shifting to mimic the very places where Christian persecution has occurred. If the progression continues it will be inevitable that Christian persecution will come to the American Church as well. The question that must be asked is not only should the American Christian prepare for what is certainly persecution to come, but how does one actually prepare for it?

4.6 Case Study #5: North Korea - Under the Sway of a False Demon God

There is a single country with a worse record than China or Russia combined when it comes to persecuting religious freedom, especially when it comes to Christians.⁴⁷⁷ In fact, for the last fifty years, Christians have suffered horrifying acts of violence and oppression at the hands of the North Korean regime and it is considered by some to be the most dangerous place in the world.⁴⁷⁸ Combined with the country-wide famine in the 1990's,⁴⁷⁹ Christians in the kingdom had to resort to hiding their faith from all but their most trusted inner circles.⁴⁸⁰

The reality is, North Korean list of crimes against the state are endless with the government

⁴⁷⁴ Saiya, "Violent Persecution India"

⁴⁷⁵ Allen, *Global War*, 15

⁴⁷⁶ Philpott, *Caesar's Sword*, 10

⁴⁷⁷ Marshall, *Persecuted Global Assault*, 59

⁴⁷⁸ Allen, *Global War*, 16

⁴⁷⁹ Park, *In Order to Live*, 54

obsessed with rooting out any corrupting idea from within its borders. They forbid foreign media, family-owned televisions, radios, or video players and are only allowed to watch state-sponsored propaganda.⁴⁸¹

North Korea is the most militant of atheistic countries in the world. The government is run by absolute dictatorship formed after the 1948 division of the Korean peninsula. Kim Il-Sung, the original leader established a government that mixed a personality cult with an isolationist ideology⁴⁸² that has mired the country in darkness ever since. This cultic like culture has created within the people a kind of schizophrenic parallelism within their own minds as they outwardly project the propaganda of the government while simultaneously seeing reality all around them - holding the two together often in conflict with one another.⁴⁸³ This ideology began with Kim Il-Sung's systematic campaign of indoctrination. He considered religion to be superstition and hindered the socialist evolution. In the 1960s secret police began an intense eradication of all religion from the country. Churches, temples, shrines were all closed. Bibles were burned. Religious leaders were executed or sent to camps to die.⁴⁸⁴ Public executions were common, lessons in loyalty against examples of disobedience.⁴⁸⁵

In the place of the traditional religions, Kim imposed a personality cult structured around himself and his son. The people are taught to look at Kim Il-Sung and his son Kim Jong-Il as infallible, as godlike, being progenitors of the Korean race. They promote this cult ideology while disparaging other religions. In the North Korean constitution, he is referred to as the "eternal President."⁴⁸⁶ The people are required to hang pictures of their leaders in their homes so

⁴⁸⁰ Marshall, *Persecuted Global Assault*, 60

⁴⁸¹ Park, *In Order to Live*, 50

⁴⁸² Marshall, *Persecuted Global Assault*, 58

⁴⁸³ Park, *In Order to Live*, 52

⁴⁸⁴ Marshall, *Persecuted Global Assault*, 59

⁴⁸⁵ Park, *In Order to Live*, 49

⁴⁸⁶ Marshall, *Persecuted Global Assault*, 59

that they can worship them.⁴⁸⁷ In fact, war has never ceased on the Korean peninsula. The two countries, still technically at war, are held in a kind of stalemate with South Korea on constant guard against infiltration and spies from both North Korea and China.⁴⁸⁸ Because of the stark differences between in both culture and economics, many of the North Korean defectors that managed to successfully flee the country and seek asylum in the south find difficulty resettling. Despite their shared language, history, culture, these refugees they have higher jobless rates, their children are more likely to drop out of school, they suffer from psychological problems, they frequently turn to drugs and alcohol or crime - some even return to North Korea altogether.⁴⁸⁹

One tactic used by the government would be for officials to hold Christian services in order to trap members who attend, but this has some counter effects, with some of these spies becoming Christians themselves. Like in China, the house church movement in North Korea is extensive. Some of these new converts remained in their government positions and continued to trap unsuspecting Christians so they could influence the punishments. They knew it would be worse for Christians in the future if they did not remain in that position.⁴⁹⁰

Nearly a quarter of the Christians in North Korea are believed to already be in forced-labor camps because they refused to join the national cult. Often people whose grandparents are Christian are still frozen out of the best jobs. In fact, it is estimated that over 300,000 Christians in North Korea have simply disappeared since 1953.⁴⁹¹ For the Christian in North Korea, life is one of death. People are surrounded by death constantly. Suicide, starvation, disappearances,

⁴⁸⁷ Marshall, *Persecuted Global Assault*, 60

⁴⁸⁸ Kim, *Miles to Freedom*, 128

⁴⁸⁹ Kirkpatrick, *Escape from North Korea*, 240

⁴⁹⁰ Marshall, *Persecuted Global Assault*, 62

⁴⁹¹ Allen, *Global War*, 16

imprisonment,⁴⁹² no medicine, no modernization,⁴⁹³ all take a massive toil on a culture and a psyche of a people who realize there is a whole other world outside of their own existence but have no hope of reaching it.

It can play tricks on the mind, adjusting reality to make it fit what one sees around them. To see frozen babies discarded in alley ways, bodies in trash heaps or floating in the rivers was normal, common place.⁴⁹⁴ Combine such horrible existence with a pervasive state surveillance and this environment makes religious community nearly impossible to maintain. North Korea still exists only because of its surveillance system pitting families against each other.⁴⁹⁵ Soldiers are corrupt, wanting a cut in the black-market trade, despite the items being on the forbidden list, all the while, breaking the rules carry a severe penalty, even possibly a fatal one or worse.⁴⁹⁶

In the end it is difficult to assess how many Christians there actually are in the Hermit Kingdom. Some media outlets report the number at 30,000, while some aid organizations claim the number is several hundred thousand.⁴⁹⁷ With it being illegal to hold religious services or to meet for prayer or to own a Bible, or to express anything that would be perceived as a threat to the countrywide religious cult, the outside world may never truly have an accurate number of Christians living inside a country such as North Korea. But, despite this, there is still a great deal American Christians can learn from them.

⁴⁹² Park, *In Order to Live*, 54

⁴⁹³ Kim, *Miles to Freedom*, 129

⁴⁹⁴ Park, *In Order to Live*, 52

⁴⁹⁵ Marshall, *Persecuted Global Assault*, 61

⁴⁹⁶ Park, *In Order to Live*, 49

⁴⁹⁷ Marshall, *Persecuted Global Assault*, 60

4.7 Discarding the Church to Build the Body

It is clear from the Case Studies covered in this chapter that Christianity in other places around the world look and function very differently than in the United States. In fact, as already stated, what is experienced and expected as a Christian in America is not normally what one experiences when becoming a Christian in the rest of the world⁴⁹⁸ and this has been the case for most of Church history. By and large, a peculiar pattern is formed through the Case Studies presented. Naturally, as persecution increases in a particular area, the formal organization, and external trappings of the Christian faith decrease. This seems to be the case today in China, in Iran, other countries in the Middle East, as well as in North Korea. The structure of the persecuted church appears to be spiritual in nature rather than organized around assets and external structure acquired. The idea of a church oriented around the needs of its members is predominate in the New Testament,⁴⁹⁹ yet nearly absent from the modern evangelical expression found in America that is predominately organized around eliciting a passive, emotive experience that is packaged as a consumer product, co-opting what could otherwise be genuine or functional purpose.⁵⁰⁰ To organize a Church or program and then expect or demand (or worse simply assume) the Holy Spirit will get involved is rather presumptuous. Those who operate in the American Church model risk forcing the Spirit into their own human-made mold.⁵⁰¹ In fact, Paul makes it clear in his writings that the Christian life is not a profession like ordinary professions. Rather it is a calling and a spiritual vocation that may very well require risking their lives for him or others.⁵⁰²

Typically, the American Church is a nonprofit organization which funnels its limited

⁴⁹⁸ Solomon, “Iron Curtain,” 114

⁴⁹⁹ MacArthur, *NT Commentary*, Acts 6:1-7

⁵⁰⁰ Rah, *Prophetic Lament Justice*, 150

⁵⁰¹ MacArthur, *NT Commentary*, Acts 6:1-7

resources toward maintaining external expenses such as utilities, real estate repairs and upkeep, professional clergy salaries, which often overwhelms and shuts out much else.⁵⁰³ The difficulty with this system is the Church Jesus Christ is building is not a Fortune 500 corporation. It does not necessitate organizational charts, job descriptions, boards, committees. Rather these gatherings need only one thing that is oft missing - the Holy Spirit.⁵⁰⁴

This can be seen throughout the Church under persecution, that unites beyond denominational barriers.⁵⁰⁵ The real cost in such situations require a basic testimony of Christ crucified and little else as many find they need to face the common threat together.⁵⁰⁶ The example of the early Church illustrates this organic nature of compatibility, cohabitation in the sacred space of persecution. The power and authority they received during those early years in Jerusalem allowed them to standfast in the faith, when no amount of persecution or suppression waged by the Roman authority could assuage their work. The believers loved one another, shared their material goods, and saw unbelievers come to saving faith.⁵⁰⁷ The New Testament Church did not seek to establish for themselves a political power nor did they insist on any kind of independence to be recognized by the State. In fact, it was automatically assumed, as if the State's opinion held no bearing at all on that reality.⁵⁰⁸ This was seen then and through much of Church history, the power of persecution and the testimony of the martyrs on building up the church. Keeping one's faith in times of trial bolstered the faith of others, and Christians in turn gain confidence in telling others about Christ and those following his example. For the Church to

⁵⁰² Various, *Bad Urach Statement*, 20

⁵⁰³ Allen, *Global War*, 28

⁵⁰⁴ MacArthur, *NT Commentary*, Acts 6:1-7

⁵⁰⁵ Reddy, "Knowledge," 34

⁵⁰⁶ Various, *Bad Urach Statement*, 20

⁵⁰⁷ MacArthur, *NT Commentary*, Acts 6:1-7

⁵⁰⁸ Marshall, *Persecuted Global Assault*, 234

truly remain the Church of Jesus Christ, it requires the suffering Christ promised.⁵⁰⁹

The example provided by the New Testament was established firmly on a plurality of elders. The office is not professional. It is not a means of power or ruling over others (1 Pet. 5:2) nor is it a means of making money or garnering political influence.⁵¹⁰ Likewise, the realities of Christian persecution, both historical and modern, should not be ignored or swept under the proverbial rug.⁵¹¹ Cassian wrote, concerned, that the eldership would be ignored by even older, experienced monks and would thus be deceived. Nor was he lax in the qualification of church leaders, “we need to be discerning when subjecting ourselves to the judgment of others. Not any old men will do.”⁵¹²

The plurality of elders was clearly established in the New Testament (Acts 14:23) and they rightly recognized that it was God who ultimately granted gifts, who called and who sent servants of the Church.⁵¹³ But, there is great objection to abandoning the way in which American Christians “do” church today, despite the reality that first century, medieval, even early 19th Century Christian expression would view modern American evangelicalism as a kind of amorphousism.⁵¹⁴ Naturally, this would be the case for those who see such attempts as a threat to their livelihood. But it is important to consider Christ’s job description rather than man’s, “If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all” (Mk 9:35).

There is a great deal to be learned from the persecuted Church. The Chinese Case Study serves as the best example: the underground church there has no titles, no specialized or professionalized clergy, no denominations. They simply are followers of Christ, a single

⁵⁰⁹ Various, *Bad Urach Statement*, 21

⁵¹⁰ MacArthur, *Biblical Doctrine*, 1118

⁵¹¹ Solomon, “Iron Curtain,” 14

⁵¹² Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 265

⁵¹³ MacArthur, *Biblical Doctrine*, 1050

⁵¹⁴ Holder, *Blackwell Spirituality*, 108

priesthood⁵¹⁵ being led by the spirit of the one true God. Just as their church buildings were confiscated or demolished in China,⁵¹⁶ so too American Christians can see this on the horizon in the Western World. Canadian Christians are currently under attack by their progressive government, recently having police seized and fenced off a Church and imprison the pastor for 35 days.⁵¹⁷ During the ordeal, without thinking about the ramifications, one of the elders sent out a tweet that included the twitter handles of all the elders of the Church⁵¹⁸ putting the elders at great risk without even a consideration.

The uncomfortable truth is external buildings and “churches” and organizations structured after secular corporate entities are neither a necessity nor exemplified in the New Testament. There will come a time, possibly soon, where American Christians will have to recognize how exposed such operations make their leaders as well as the individual members who attend. It is time to return to the biblical model of the house church, which is the same model used by the modern persecuted Church today. Oppression for professing faith in Christ is most likely inevitable. The choice American believers have before them is not whether persecution will come, but if they will actually prepare for the challenges and trials ahead.

⁵¹⁵ Johnston, “China House Church”

⁵¹⁶ Taylor, *Sorrow and Blood*, 346

⁵¹⁷ Beck, “Just like China”

⁵¹⁸ Shellnutt, “Police Block”

Chapter 05 - Building a Theology of Persecution for the American Church

5.1 A Biblical Definition of Suffering & Persecution

In 2020, some of the worst places to be a Christian on earth were places like Iran, Yemen, Sudan, Somalia, Eritrea, Pakistan, Libya, Afghanistan, China, and worst of all, North Korea⁵¹⁹ as these places saw violence and systematic oppression like nowhere else. Increased hostility toward Christians can take a multitude of forms, but typically it is identified as any violence or oppression connected with one's identity in Christ.⁵²⁰

Suffering for God and persecution in general is not foreign to God's people. It is found in the Old Testament as God's people were oppressed by a foreign power like Rome, when Israel suffered at the hands of the Egyptians, and likewise the Assyrians and Babylonians.⁵²¹ The first Christians suffered at the hands of Nero and his wife, Poppaea Sabina, who was a convert to Judaism⁵²² and it was a common warning of Jesus to his disciples, "Beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils and scourge you in their synagogues. You will be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles" (Matt 10:17-18), making it clear, suffering for his sake was an integral and defining characteristic of being a Christian.⁵²³

Suffering in general is a malaise on account of the curse. It is discomfort, an ill-ease caused by the sickness of sin, which ultimately culminates in the death of the individual. It can take many forms, whether physical, psychological, emotional, or even spiritual, but is ubiquitous to

⁵¹⁹ Casper, "Top 50," Para. 18

⁵²⁰ Reddy, "Knowledge," 4

⁵²¹ Dunn, *Lexham Dict: Persecution Early Church*

⁵²² Orr, *ISBE*, 2137

the human experience and is that which is “common to man” (1 Co 10:13). These are universal sufferings, such as the loss of loved ones, loss due to some misfortune, suffering caused by illness or accident.⁵²⁴ But there is specific suffering that is undertaken by an individual, not by sheer hard luck, but specifically because of their personal belief in the Christian message. This can take different forms and vary in its severity, whether systematic, haphazard, by the hand of a government agency or agent or by an enraged populous. It can go by many different terms, such as persecution, religious cleansing, or genocide. It is, by definition, a violation of human rights, as described in the US International Religious Freedom Act, “arbitrary prohibitions on, restrictions of, or punishment for assembling for peaceful religious activities, speaking freely about one’s religious beliefs, changing one’s religious beliefs and affiliation, possession and distribution of religious literature including Bibles, raising one’s children in the religious teachings of their choice, requiring registration, detention, interrogation, imposition of financial penalty, forced labor, forced resettlement, imprisonment, forced conversion, beating, torture, mutilation, rape, enslavement, murder and/or execution.”⁵²⁵

This kind of suffering is expressly for the purpose of proclaiming Christ and his sufferings on the Cross, which many Christians view as a privilege to share with their Lord.⁵²⁶ Not only was persecution and suffering a core concept to the New Testament believers, but the apostles themselves rejoiced when they were considered worthy to suffer for the name of Jesus.⁵²⁷ The New Testament put major emphasis on suffering as a distinct calling of believers. As Christ died for all, so too Christians should be willing to suffer for the good of others, for the spreading of

⁵²³ Taylor, *Sorrow and Blood*, 346

⁵²⁴ Various, *Bad Urach Statement*, 7, 31

⁵²⁵ Marshall, *Persecuted Global Assault*, 19

⁵²⁶ Crudup, “Religious Persecution,” 25

⁵²⁷ Various, *Bad Urach Statement*, 26

the gospel.⁵²⁸ Peter saw the work of evangelism being strengthened by persecution,⁵²⁹ as did Paul who warned the Church to expect it in the future.⁵³⁰

Jesus defined suffering and persecution for his disciples when he sent them out “lambs among wolves” (Luke 10:3), though persecution was often varied in degree and expression.⁵³¹ Paul did not go out and seek suffering, but his only occupation was the cause of Christ, the spreading of the gospel. Suffering and persecution are natural results of this work and is illustrative of the hostility the world has for God and the good news. It served as a reminder, a witness, and a condemnation.⁵³²

Paul captures it best in 2 Tim 3:12, “All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” As such, Christians were called to model the pattern of Christ in their lives and were expected to endure suffering with hope of a heavenly reward.⁵³³ Despite this, suffering is, by definition, negative in nature.⁵³⁴ Though the individual does receive some benefit in certain circumstances, it is most often associated with loss, with pain. It is considering this negative that the Christian response should remain positive - a testimony to the spirit of God in the individual’s life. In many instances, suffering and persecution experienced by one individual has little to nothing to do with them specifically but has more to do with presenting them as a witness or as a testimony before others. Passing judgment on a stubborn spouse or Church, to illustrate God’s mercy, these are tools in which God has used and does use when persecution comes.⁵³⁵ Of course, by its very nature, suffering is contrary to the will of God. The Human being was not

⁵²⁸ Freedman, *Anchor Bible Dictionary, Vol 6*, "The New Testament"

⁵²⁹ Kittel, *Theological Dict*, 604

⁵³⁰ Willmington, *Outline*, 1 Th 3:4

⁵³¹ Penner, *Shadow of the Cross*, 146

⁵³² Penner, *Shadow of the Cross*, 193

⁵³³ Dunn, *Lexham Dict: “Persecution Early Church”*

⁵³⁴ Freedman, *Anchor Bible Dictionary, Vol 6*, “The New Testament”.

⁵³⁵ Tabbernee, “Theology of Persecution”

originally intended to experience suffering, pain, discomfort, sorrow, or despair.⁵³⁶ Though, despite this, God allows all that was just listed as a means of rectifying the wrongness of the current human condition. Natural disasters, sickness, deformities, limitations, these are all logical fallout from the transgression in the Garden. Even more so is the Christian who suffers when they have done nothing wrong, but simply because they were a faithful and obedient believer.⁵³⁷ Certainly, intellectual understanding or theoretical knowledge of suffering and persecution mean nothing when experiencing it firsthand.⁵³⁸ Knowledge in the presence of pain are useless and definitions alone meaningless. There must be more to the believer's development than just understanding. Preparation for potential persecution is as much a spiritual preparation as it is an intellectual one.

5.2 Upon the Apostles and Prophets

There are multiple perspectives for developing a theology of persecution yet underlining all of them is a fundamental necessity that informs each perspective so the individual believer can be successful in not only withstanding persecution when it comes, but ultimately fulfill the purpose for which God has called them to suffer. Beyond having the correct theological and doctrinal understandings about persecution and suffering, beyond being physically prepared with tactics and strategies to maneuver under oppressive cultural and governmental systems, the individual needs to be fully and genuinely committed to the worldview for which they are experiencing persecution.⁵³⁹

This assurance has been best expressed in Ephesians 2:20, as any theology of persecution

⁵³⁶ Various, *Bad Urach Statement*, 7

⁵³⁷ Various, *Bad Urach Statement*, 7

⁵³⁸ Zacharias, *Suffering, Meaning, Comfort*, 28

must be “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone.” Building such a solid foundation is often the motivation for hostile governments to remove or outlaw the Scriptures themselves, as it is a useful bridge between modern believers and the Early Church Fathers and those of the apostolic age.⁵⁴⁰ Not only is the biblical narrative illustrative of how Jesus came and fulfilled the ancient promises of the Old Testament, but through both his prophets and apostles, God has revealed the gospel fully to the human condition, with no additional revelation needed until the history of humanity is fully spent.⁵⁴¹ For, it is clear from the testimony of faithful men, “If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead” (Lk 16:31), for this is the method in which God has established for all men to come to salvation, through the testimony of one god-man. Not only does the message of the Bible illustrate the examples of those who have gone before, as a lesson from which future believers can learn, but it also issues the warning, those who proclaim the name of the Lord should expect persecution.⁵⁴²

Throughout the Old and New Testaments, the suffering servant is alluded to. The very concept of suffering in pagan circles in apostolic times would have been quite strange, as household codes for pagans mentioned nothing about suffering that would be considered appropriate or good. Yet, it is seen throughout the biblical text,⁵⁴³ most certainly in Isaiah 53.

Additionally, the last days are predicted to be fraught with danger, full of error in the professing Church.⁵⁴⁴ As Paul warns Timothy, “in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons...” (1 Tim 4:1), so too do we today find a myriad of heresies in and out of the Church being propagated by hucksters in their many

⁵³⁹ Taylor, *Sorrow and Blood*, 346

⁵⁴⁰ Kilbourn, “Suffering in Early Christianity,” 203

⁵⁴¹ Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology Vol 1*, 79

⁵⁴² McDowell, *Apostles as Death*, 66

attempts to captivate the “itching ears” of those who “will not endure sound doctrine” (2 Tim 4:3). The one who intends to be a faithful witness of Christ crucified will need to be grounded and solidified in the unfiltered, uncompromisable message of God’s Word, even while its popularity diminishes.⁵⁴⁵ In fact, so great and important is this foundation, it was to this group alone that God revealed that which before had remained unknown (Eph 3:5), and is the foundation upon which Paul built, as a master builder, establishing the gospel on the foundation that “no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Co 3:9-11). James recalls the lessons of the prophets in their patient suffering in James 5:10-11, as well as did Peter arguing that Christians are called to suffering (1 Pe 2:21-25). Likewise, Paul, speaking with the authority of the Psalmist, shares in the sufferings of the same which enables him to witness boldly, despite the Corinthians originating from Gentile stock.⁵⁴⁶

The Church Fathers also shared in the common allegiance to the same foundation in the text, as Justin, Irenaeus, and Cyprian all referred to the gospel of salvation found in Jesus Christ as consisting in entirety the whole of Scripture. The doctrine of the Gospel to Justin included the Old Testament prophets, and the gospel to Irenaeus included both the law and the prophets which heralded the Messiah.⁵⁴⁷ To say there is any other foundation on which one can build a theology of persecution is to ignore Paul’s admonition, “let each one take heed in how he builds” (1 Co 3:10). As Christ leveled, “he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber” (Jn 10:1). Any other mechanism by which we formulate the principles or teachings of the faith, of the theology of persecution, will transform the theology accordingly. As stated, the foundation matters greatly for it is from the foundation

⁵⁴³ Beale, *NT Use of OT*, 2611

⁵⁴⁴ Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology Vol 1*, 79

⁵⁴⁵ Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology Vol 1*, 79

⁵⁴⁶ Beale, *NT Use of OT*, 1973

and cornerstone that the entire building is built. If the foundation is skewed or set incorrectly, if our fundamental tenets are misaligned to earthly concerns or eroded by human knowledge or philosophical ideologies that only mimics wisdom, then our theology which is subsequently built upon it will likewise be skewed and faulty.⁵⁴⁸

5.3 Discrimination of Biblical Christians Will Increase

There are few certainties in the world in which we live, especially given the turbulent times we find ourselves subjected to. This is especially true for Christians in the United States, as cultural moorings are loosed and the society itself that has fostered security and individual freedoms for the length of its history is being systematically dismantled. But the question must be asked: is persecution for the American Christian inevitable? According to the biblical message, the answer is a resounding yes. This is affirmed by not only the signs present in this current age and in the godless culture sweeping across the country, but it is also confirmed by the Jewish worldview presented in the apostolic age, when Peter was putting pen to paper, writing how the coming of the Messiah would usher in a period of suffering before the Parousia (Second Coming) could take place.⁵⁴⁹

As is reminiscent of Jesus in fulfillment of Isaiah 53, we see his arrest, his exchange for Barabbas, his crucifixion between two criminals all point to fulfillment of Scripture in the life of a savior.⁵⁵⁰ So, too, today there is increased tension and conflict between Christians around the world and the countries in which they live.⁵⁵¹ Just as in Roman culture, pagan spirituality was in

⁵⁴⁷ Kilbourn, “Suffering in Early Christianity,” 177

⁵⁴⁸ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 42-61

⁵⁴⁹ Byrley, “Eschatology, Conflict, Suffering,” 201

⁵⁵⁰ Beale, *NT Use of OT*, 1015

⁵⁵¹ Philpott, *Caesar’s Sword*, 26

decline at the same time the early church was beginning to spread, and with it mechanism for coping with suffering that filled the void.⁵⁵² Culturally, today can be witnessed the roots of apostasy in the European Union, in its denial of its Christian roots.⁵⁵³ This same ideology has infected American culture (and the rest of the Western World), which rings a hollow warning. For years Eastern Europe was the hot spot for ideological warfare against Christians. Soviet believers saw waves of persecution, with millions dying for their faith, with the church there relegating itself to the “church of silence.”⁵⁵⁴ As it is, most Christian persecution today comes from either socialist governments and movements, and religious zealots.⁵⁵⁵ As has been addressed already in an earlier chapter, the United States, with the last election, has found herself under the sway of a kind of soft totalitarianism, an oligarchical extremism at both the national and state level that reeks of corruption and dystopian socialist policies. Once entrenched, this socialist authority will begin enforcement of its atheistic agenda as it has in other parts of the world in the past.

It is not an exaggeration to say the world, by and large, hates the Christian. In fact, in 1998, it was estimated that 82% of those who were killed worldwide because of their faith were Christians⁵⁵⁶ and this trend is growing. Such hatred will take the form of societal discrimination to institutional discrimination; from employment discrimination to legal discrimination; from the suppression of missionary activity to the suppression of Christian conversion; afterward, will come forced conversion away from Christianity to the outlawing of public and corporate worship; violence against individuals will be incited, communities as a whole will be

⁵⁵² Kilbourn, “Suffering in Early Christianity,” 96

⁵⁵³ Kukah, “Persecutions in Africa”

⁵⁵⁴ Allen, *Global War*, 166

⁵⁵⁵ Marshall, *Persecuted Global Assault*, 255

⁵⁵⁶ Penner, *Shadow of the Cross*, 17

oppressed.⁵⁵⁷ There was once a time when such lists would be considered fanciful ideations of conspiracy nuts, but today many if not all of these have occurred within the US borders.

One may ask, though, why is there such a rejection of God among Americans today, especially the young? Why must persecution come? The answer is, in alignment with the chapter on worldviews, a battle rages on multiple fronts in a cosmic war that subsumes all human endeavor. There is warfare against God by Satan and the demonic creatures that have struck allegiance with him (though for what reasons remains unclear), God and those angels who remain faithful work behind the scenes to bring about God's ultimate will, while the humanity is fractured into loyalty groups, often driven by rage and deception as extra-terrestrial (angelic rather than alien) forces utilize the human capital as both pawn and prize.⁵⁵⁸ It is a misconception that the only threat to American Christianity is Islam,⁵⁵⁹ as there are more insidious opponents at work from within than any external force could bring to bear. As opposition grows inside the Church and inside the American culture, divisions will begin to emerge that is mirrored in the first few centuries of the Christian faith. Some during that time, when faced with persecution by the governors, sacrificed to save themselves, and others did not. Some went out of their way to find persecution, while others did everything they could to avoid trials.⁵⁶⁰

Some would argue that it is the responsibility of the American Church to learn the lessons provided by Christians who suffered for their faith at the hands of brutal dictators, or atheistic government oligarchies. They are those who are comfortable in their faith need to recover a proper antagonism to the world⁵⁶¹ rather than living so well within it. Whether by losing out in popular opinion or being subjected to persecution from state-sponsored groups, or martyred by

⁵⁵⁷ Allen, *Global War*, 37

⁵⁵⁸ Byrley, "Eschatology, Conflict, Suffering," 202

⁵⁵⁹ Allen, *Global War*, 209

⁵⁶⁰ Hill, *First 400 Years*, 130

maddened mobs, a theology of persecution is needed for American Christians to be prepared when persecution does come to its shores.⁵⁶² The inevitability of persecution in America is no longer a question, but only when and in what severity will persecution come. Given the time of this research project, there are only increasing signs of what to expect. Whether by government fiat or by a breakdown of civil society (which occurred long ago in some places in the US), the erosion of individual rights or the suppression of what once was a constitutionally protected freedom of speech, the United States is shifting into a pluralistic society and away from its Christian roots. It is time for the American Church to take up its cross that it previously laid down.

5.4 Forcing Shut the Church Doors

One of the very first targets of a socialist overtake of a culture or specific country has been the visible Church. Whether it be by unorganized street mobs burning and looting or orchestrated, systematic dismantling, the organized, visible Church is typically the first target to go. This pattern is typically focused on small towns and rural areas, which often serve as strong holds of individualism, independence, and deep religious conviction. Often, it is evangelical Christians targeted, as they tend to be the most outspoken of all Christian denominations and most prone to active proselytization.⁵⁶³ This kind of targeting can be seen in various states in America with the restrictions placed on religious organizations against corporate gathering in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Unfortunately, the same political entities that forbid by executive decree the gathering of Churches simultaneously allowed and even openly supported

⁵⁶¹ Allen, *Global War*, 277

⁵⁶² Wiebe, “Early Struggle,” 43

⁵⁶³ Philpott, *Caesar’s Sword*, 24

mass organized protesting, rioting, and looting in the same cities and regions.⁵⁶⁴

In neighboring Canada, which is further along in the erosion of individual liberties and religious freedoms, has not only arrested a pastor for disobeying the COVID restrictions, but also seized the Church building, putting up fencing and disbanding Church function entirely, despite the campus being owned as private property by a private corporation.⁵⁶⁵ This kind of activity, which is growing on the North American continent in the last decade, is reminiscent of the persecution in Saudi Arabia, where its historical Christian community has long since been cleansed from existence.⁵⁶⁶

American Christianity is at a crossroads, as it begins to shift away from its long history of peace and prosperity to reclaiming its historical record of persecution in trials and tribulation. As the society around it weakens and slips under the weight of increasing immorality and godlessness,⁵⁶⁷ it will be the responsibility of American Christians to stand up, not for the consumer Christianity they will be forced to abandon, but for the historical, New Testament Christianity that Christ died for.

5.5 Utter Disenfranchisement and Social Ostracization

As American Christianity ceases to be culturally identifiable and re-emerges as a cultural revolution that wages war spiritually against the powers of darkness, those remaining within her ranks will begin to probe for new ideas, ask new questions about what it means to be Christian.

The experience of becoming Christian will be utterly transformed within a very short period. No longer will Christianity be synonymous with prosperity, goodness, beneficence, or perpetual

⁵⁶⁴ Shrier, “Shutter Churches”

⁵⁶⁵ Shellnutt, “Police Block”

⁵⁶⁶ Marshall, *Persecuted Global Assault*, 148

happiness. No longer will Churches be filled with individuals who seek radical yet superficial signs such as speaking in tongues or rolling around “uncontrollably” on the ground in a vain attempt at feeling some sense of God in their lives. Rather, this narrow expression of American Christianity will be supplanted with a robust theology of suffering, where new converts will be taught what it means to be called to a saving grace in Christ Jesus, who the heroes of the faith truly were, not because of their ability to gather large crowds or amass wealth and power, but because they were servant to all, and gave their very life for those around them. This will grow into a holistic training or discipling approach, as opposed to the current, superficial, corporate, professional one in place with the modern American Church.⁵⁶⁸

American believers will come to recognize disenfranchisement as a personal requirement for a believing faith in the future. No longer will the new convert be introduced openly to a celebration experience likened to a party or a theatrical show or music concert. Instead, new believers will be ushered into secret places, darkened rooms, where secrets will be revealed, oaths taken, the reality of compromising meaning they and those around them would certainly be socially ostracized from the popular cultural beliefs of the day. They will discover a severe and growing cost to their faith, no longer free and without sacrifice. They will learn there is a risk in sharing their faith with their friends, their family, and their neighbors, and the stranger walking along the roadway.⁵⁶⁹ Gone will be the cultural Christians who, like the seeds who fell on the rocks, quickly grew and received the Word with joy, but when temptation came, they quickly departed (Luke 8:13). Those individuals, who now fill modern American Churches in droves, will cease to call upon the Lord in the days of persecution and will instead follow the winds of every kind of doctrine (Eph 4:14).

⁵⁶⁷ Penner, *Shadow of the Cross*, 18

⁵⁶⁸ Taylor, *Sorrow and Blood*, 336

5.6 Loss of Family, Friends, and Betrayal of Both

Found in Acts 13:50 is a statement recriminate of modern American culture in its intersectional ideology and digitally canceling lynch mobs, “the Jews stirred up the devout and prominent women and the chief men of the city, raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region.” This is what occurred for Paul in his day, in the center square, at the Temple, and in the synagogue, to the point that they drove Paul and his associates out of the city and out of the region. What will it be like for American Christians when they are forced by social pressure, by graffiti on their doors and property, by mob violence, by extra taxation, investigations by Child Services because of trumped up accusations, fines and penalties - what will it take before they are forced to flee their homes, their assets, their jobs, their family and friends, their communities and have to move to other places just to feel safe at night?

Even when Christians accommodate the repressive tactics and scale back their religious activities, the oppression will continue. But it will be up to them, and is often the case, that such Christians choose to remain in their homes and businesses, in their culture and find ways to persevere, to continue declaring Christ through their lives.⁵⁷⁰ Justin Martyr wrote about such a situation, pondering how Christians overcame such suffering, enduring the day to day economic and social ostracization. There was, as Justin mentions, physical abuse, but it was the living in among the wickedness of the people that brought oppression on the Christian in his time. Being hated but not hating in return. Fearing nothing, not even death since they were certain they would at some point die for their testimony.⁵⁷¹ This is the issue for the Christian who stands on faith and principle and resists the cultural and sociological pressures around them. How far do they

⁵⁶⁹ Philpott, *Caesar's Sword*, 24

⁵⁷⁰ Philpott, *Caesar's Sword*, 15

go? How lenient should they be before they cross the line from proactive resistance to proactive support?⁵⁷² Part of the cost for the American Christian will be the loss of family members, who will turn them in to the authorities for speaking out against the cultural war (Matt 10:21). It will be the loss of friends who had been lock step in both belief and deed until the cost became too great. It will be the willingness to lose a job, to be cast out of the marketplace, to be unemployable, unable to draw employment benefits, unable to draw pensions rightfully owed to you - these will be the costs for the American Christian in the future.

5.7 Seizure of Home & Assets (Equitable Redistribution)

One of the major tenets of intersectionality is the idea of reparations⁵⁷³ or the financial or socio-economic advantage toward a particular group based on a perceived wrong committed against said group at some point in the past. Of course, on the outset, logic would dictate the problem with such proposals is it represents the payment of a past “perceived” wrong by an offending party that never committed the wrong and pays that payment to an offended party that never actually had the wrong committed against them. The reality of such misguided proposals is an attempt not toward any kind of genuine justice but toward division of a nation based on elusive generational wrongs that could never be adjudicated no matter how much money was shoveled toward it.⁵⁷⁴ But, regardless of the consequences of such ideas, they are proposed again and again, harkening back to times when such travesties happened in the Roman world, when one’s homestead could be seized, and such actions increasingly became more about greed than

⁵⁷¹ Kilbourn, “Suffering in Early Christianity,” 126

⁵⁷² Philpott, *Caesar’s Sword*, 15

⁵⁷³ Paradise, “CRT Marginalizes”

⁵⁷⁴ Horowitz, *Dark Agenda*, 151

about fairness.⁵⁷⁵

One modern example of this kind of persecution is extrapolated in a fictional scenario where a Christian homeowner is presented with an eviction notice by the Sheriff's Office. The particular owner has been harassed multiple times in the past by Sheriff deputies because of the cross the owner has in his front yard.⁵⁷⁶ The issue in this example is not that the homeowner will potentially lose his home. Rather, it is the Christ-like attitude and behavior the Christian now has opportunity to present as a response. Will the owner lose his home and be forced to relocate? Possibly. Will it be a hardship, and will he experience feelings of betrayal and bitterness? Quite possibly. But what is left out of the fictional account is whether or not the deputies come to Christ because of the testimony the homeowner provides.

Such tactics are currently in use in Mexico as the Catholic Church participates in the festivals where alcohol is provided, yet protestant Christians refuse to pay their tax in protest to host the festivities. Many of these Christians have been driven from their villages, their homes burned.⁵⁷⁷ But, of course, the question is raised, especially in America, why can't the Christian fight back? Indeed, there is an argument for such a response from the Bible, as Paul expressed about slavery, "Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called. Were you called while a slave? Do not be concerned about it; but if you can be made free, rather use it" (1 Co 7:20–21). Notice, though, what Paul does not say here. He does not endorse uprising or revolution. He does in no way condone the overthrow of the slave owner and the "equitable" re-distribution of all his wealth. He simply states that if one is called (to be a Christian) while a slave, you should remain a slave. But, if "you can be made free" do so. Meaning, if there is a legal avenue by which one can become a freedman then it would be better a Christian be a freedman (and a slave to Christ)

⁵⁷⁵ Kilbourn, "Suffering in Early Christianity," 88

⁵⁷⁶ Crudup, "Religious Persecution," 60

than a slave to man and Christ both. The book of Philemon is a letter where Paul is asking a slave owner to take back a runaway slave, Onesimus - all three are Christians.⁵⁷⁸ Then, it stands to reason, if the New Testament writer asked for peace and the working within the present laws, it would seem logical that such would be the case for today as well. As he entreats, “as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men” (Ro 12:18).

In some places in the world, Christians retreat underground, where they worship and educate in secret and seek to expand their ranks at great cost and risk. Other places they comply and restrict their outward efforts.⁵⁷⁹ Even some denominations, such as the Amish, Mennonites, and Brethren, because of their unwillingness to conform to perceived orthodoxy of the region, have been severely persecuted in the past, even by other Christian groups.⁵⁸⁰

Regardless of denomination, affiliation, or particular history, Christians will be targeted in the future and are already being used to fund intersectional agendas, as has been witnessed in the assaults and overthrow of many evangelical seminaries in the United States over the last several decades.⁵⁸¹ Their leadership have been infiltrated, their conservative faculty fired, such as the firing of Russell Fuller from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary,⁵⁸² and the attempted takeover of Liberty University,⁵⁸³ all pointing to a concerted effort to strip the Christian community of any assets and redistribute those assets in the name of Equity. It is only a matter of time before Christians in America find their personal assets a target of the new culture that views them as the enemy of the state.

⁵⁷⁷ Marshall, *Persecuted Global Assault*, 233

⁵⁷⁸ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 144

⁵⁷⁹ Philpott, *Caesar's Sword*, 15

⁵⁸⁰ Keane, “Persecution American Revolution”

⁵⁸¹ West, “Liberal Baptist”

⁵⁸² Poff, “Conservative Fired”

⁵⁸³ Various, “Liberty Woke”

5.8 Systemic Torture (by Government, non-Christians, and the False Christian)

Governments that prove hostile to Christians typically will enact laws against them specifically or will use existing laws, such as declaring Christians as enemies of the state, or “hostile actions against the order” as Iran used when arresting a pastor in 2014.⁵⁸⁴ Often once a Christian is tried and found guilty (if there is even a trial at all), additional charges will be leveled against them, especially once they are soon to be released.⁵⁸⁵ Most often such tactics are used to present the prisoner as an example for the public, sending them a message that religious persecution is serious. Prisoners convicted of such crimes are often incarcerated with regular criminals and are subjected to additional beatings and torture at their hands.⁵⁸⁶

Threat of prison or prosecution or even death are used regularly, though most governments anticipate individuals to cease their undesired behavior. If they had to house and feed the entire population of believers, such oppression would be expensive and time consuming. One act above all others that is typically not tolerated is evangelism, especially in Muslim countries. This kind of activity will bring swift punishment,⁵⁸⁷ either beatings, detainment, arrest, prosecution, imprisonment, or sometimes execution. By some accounts, jailers would use electric shockers and whips to torture their captives, as well as spread broken glass in their prison cells, hang weights off their limbs. They would also be sexually and psychologically abused.⁵⁸⁸

Governments of the world have a long running record of falsely persecuting, torturing, and executing Christians for the same kind of crimes the general non-believing populous commit on a regular basis⁵⁸⁹ and often, these prisoners are forbidden to have Bibles or any form of Christian

⁵⁸⁴ Philpott, *Caesar's Sword*, 139

⁵⁸⁵ Marshall, *Persecuted Global Assault*, 163

⁵⁸⁶ Marshall, *Persecuted Global Assault*, 163

⁵⁸⁷ Philpott, *Caesar's Sword*, 139

⁵⁸⁸ van Gorder, *Christianity in Persia*, 97

⁵⁸⁹ Kilbourn, “Suffering in Early Christianity,” 128

literature.⁵⁹⁰ Imprisonment is more often exercised by heavily militarized states with rulers who desire to put an end to their opposition and use the Christian narrative for political ends.⁵⁹¹

According to a report put out by Open Doors International, more than 7,100 Christians were killed globally in 2015 and this was double from the year before. Religious persecution, including beheadings, being burned alive, and slavery were all used in conjunction with imprisonment to motivate people away from religious belief.⁵⁹² It is not a hard stretch, given that America is the number one country in the world in terms of the highest prison rate,⁵⁹³ that imprisonment could quickly be used as a deterrent to dissuade open Christian belief and behavior in the future. This is especially true as the US' political system continues to unravel and those in power are destabilized. The growing hatred felt toward Christians by several identity groups could easily be manipulated through high-profile arrests and imprisonments.

Torture by government or by non-believers is a risk around the world,⁵⁹⁴ but for American believers there is an even greater risk of persecution from within. The American Church for the last 30 years has had an open-door policy for admittance. Anyone could join, anyone could participate. The meetings were not only open to the public but were simultaneously broadcast live on the Internet. This kind of openness has sparked and flamed great diversity among self-professing Christians, many today who no longer identify with fundamental doctrines of the faith while adhering to illogical doctrines such as Liberation Theology, Black Theology, and Liberal Lesbian Theology. These counterfeit teachings do damage progressively, long-term, eroding from within the truth and sound doctrine that has been established biblically. In the future, it will be from within the Church herself in America that biblical Christians will receive the worst

⁵⁹⁰ Crudup, “Religious Persecution,” 30

⁵⁹¹ Marshall, *Persecuted Global Assault*, 234

⁵⁹² Crudup, “Religious Persecution,” 30

⁵⁹³ Various, “Prison Rate”

forms of persecution. As Jesus predicted, “They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service” (Jn 16:2).

5.9 Work & Re-Education Camps (Economics of Division)

As persecution ramps up in a particular country, especially when a government entity is involved, the typical progression is sporadic at first and then graduates to systematic suppression and may even occasionally descend into ethnic or socio-economic cleansing. But one tactic often utilized is the re-education of the offending populous through propaganda and camps. Such was attempted in the Soviet Union as well as China to varying degrees over the last several decades. Typically, it is marketed to the populous as both punitive and simultaneously beneficial. Religious affiliation and behavior are viewed as skewed or malignant in some way, especially to the welfare of the general populous. Most often children are the target, especially children from Christian homes.⁵⁹⁵

This, of course, is not always exact in every case, as political and social as well as economic variables play a part in determining not only how a particular government will respond to Christian activity, but how Christians will respond to persecution from their own government.⁵⁹⁶ Many individuals, though, when sent to work camps either because of their own actions or the actions of their family members or parents, find they are subject to ridicule, intimidation, interrogation by teachers, administrators, etc.⁵⁹⁷ This is a technique already being employed in the American public school system, which has degraded in the last several decades into a system for indoctrination rather than providing underage students with a proper liberal education. In

⁵⁹⁴ Reddy, “Knowledge,” 4

⁵⁹⁵ Solomon, “Iron Curtain,” 67

⁵⁹⁶ Philpott, *Caesar’s Sword*, 23

oppressed countries, Christian children are often removed from the home entirely and forced to abandon their Christian faith. While unthinkable in the United States just a few years ago,⁵⁹⁸ it is not entirely impossible given the recent political shifts and criminal acts that have occurred in the last few years.

Such camps have been hinted at online and in communities all across the country as FEMA and other governmental organizations move equipment around, and as the issues on the southern border continue to grow. It is not a conspiracy theory to wager the need for housing for amnesty granted refugees and placing non-compliant Christians and conservative operatives in FEMA camps would solve both housing as well as political problems for the radical left.⁵⁹⁹ It is not an unprecedented concept in socialist spheres.

During the Cold War, nearly 22,000 evangelicals in the Soviet Union were sent to prison camps in Siberia, many never seen again. This has occurred in Poland, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Romania, Bulgaria, and Albania as well.⁶⁰⁰ Such tactics are typically done without any court trials and often violate existing laws meant to protect individual freedom. But governments often have creative solutions to get around existing hurdles as China illustrates in their crackdown against Christians by identifying them as “feudalistic sects and cults” as they stripped religious leaders of any political influence, imprisoned them, sent them to labor camps, or just simply execute them.⁶⁰¹

Such re-framing of reality can already be seen in the United States as Biden underhandedly threatens American citizens who choose not to comply with COVID vaccinations.⁶⁰² It will not be long before American schools, prisons, and FEMA camps could become the left’s own

⁵⁹⁷ Solomon, “Iron Curtain,” 67

⁵⁹⁸ Crudup, “Religious Persecution,” 21

⁵⁹⁹ Trilling, “Destroy You”

⁶⁰⁰ Solomon, “Iron Curtain”

modern-day version of Auschwitz for Americans.⁶⁰³

5.10 How Biblical Christians Can Prepare Themselves and Others

In Peter's first letter he writes, "Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing has happened to you" (1 Pe 4:12), encouraging those believers of his day that persecution for their faith was a certainty. More so, American Christians find themselves in similar shoes, standing on a precipice, about to slip off the edge into a black abyss below and often unclear as to what they are supposed to do or even how to do it. As already discussed in an earlier chapter, there is little training being done today in missionary circles that focuses specifically on American Christians, simply because context has clouded sound judgment. Though individuals can see the need for such training, organizations strapped with limited resources are unable, unaware, or unwilling to provide what is not perceived as an immediate threat.⁶⁰⁴

Because of this reality, it is important that individual Christians take on the responsibility to self-train and find the needed resources available and adapt them to their own particular circumstances. The alternative, of course, is remaining unprepared. Even theoretical knowledge about suffering and pain is limited in its effectiveness if not augmented with real world experience. Many who have experienced persecution and torture firsthand have come away stating that immediate experience of persecution was unwavering against intellectual answers alone. One man stated, "the emotional and psychological pain was unrelenting, and the physical

⁶⁰¹ Philpott, *Caesar's Sword*, 342

⁶⁰² Steinhauser, "Biden Threat"

⁶⁰³ Pesta, "Christianity Today: Surviving the Woke Church"

⁶⁰⁴ Taylor, *Sorrow and Blood*, 331

results from the stress and mental pain were devastating.”⁶⁰⁵ Too often, American Christians, despite knowing or believing persecution is on the horizon, wish and hope that persecution will pass them by, that some political or economic or cultural solution will be reached, and their unusual protections will be secured. This, unfortunately, is not a solution in the day and age in which we live. There is an urgency that Americans Christians who lived in previous generations did not have to content, as the government protections erode before our eyes, it is crucial that Churches and individuals prepare themselves for what is to come. The first step is to ask the important questions about what kind of training is needed and how such training could take place. This was asked in a survey done by a prominent missionary organization and the responses were: training on how to handle suffering and persecution and Martyrdom. In fact, one respondent asked for these topics to be addressed in a theological framework by covering missionary experiences that touched in-depth on the subject matter. Also suggested were courses in crisis management, case study review, as well as spiritual formation and sanctification training.⁶⁰⁶

It is important to remember that Christians experiencing some form of persecution are in unique situations often requiring impromptu and immediate responses to the environment around them. They need to learn what their options are, what to do, what not to do - whether they should flee, resist, endure, or hide in plain sight.⁶⁰⁷ Many options are on the table for a believer who finds themselves under persecution, and it is up to them and the conviction they have pertaining to God’s calling in their lives just what their response should be in any given situation. Being exposed to the realities of persecution, to the emotional trauma that often accompanies it is key to preparing individuals for the monumental task of standing for Christ against a government or a

⁶⁰⁵ Zacharias, *Suffering, Meaning, Comfort*, 28

⁶⁰⁶ Taylor, *Sorrow and Blood*, 332

mob of their own countrymen.⁶⁰⁸ The best way to develop such a curriculum is by drawing on the lessons already learned from those Christians who suffered firsthand under oppressive situations. Much of this has been achieved by the *Bad Urach Statement* created in 2010 by eighteen scholars who created a document that 1. Increased awareness of oppression against the church, 2. Learned from churches already being oppressed, 3. Prepared churches to face possible persecution in the future.⁶⁰⁹

During the process of training or self-training, it is important to recognize the necessity and eventuality of transformation. Such training will indeed change the individual through spiritual development and growth,⁶¹⁰ through acknowledgment of and expansion of their sphere into a larger, more complex understanding of not only their local but the meta reality that informs the entirety of their worldview. Long-term, it is important for the health of the Church in the United States if such training on suffering and persecution were incorporated into already established theological training, both at the local Church level as well as in seminary contexts. Not only is such training necessary for those who might face severe persecution in the future, but it also contains the spiritual insights by part of the body of Christ that is needed by the rest of the body to facilitate long-term growth and maturity overall.⁶¹¹

As one begins, it is important to frame the training within the reality that life, by nature, is fleeting, and acceptance of this realization provides a unique perspective on the individual, the family, the vocation, how we address the sin in life, how God is to be approached, and in what hope we have in Christ. American Christianity has suffered for so long from such a deep-seated

⁶⁰⁷ Various, *Bad Urach Statement*, 48

⁶⁰⁸ Taylor, *Sorrow and Blood*, 333

⁶⁰⁹ Kipfer, “Persecuted Christians”

⁶¹⁰ Beach, “Man of Sorrows,” 17

⁶¹¹ Kipfer, “Persecuted Christians”

self-deception and shallowness that many believe their life on earth will last forever.⁶¹²

Experiencing persecution in and of itself is not the mark intended by the Christian faith.

Adherents to other religions suffer persecution as well, such as the Uyghurs in China. But how the Christian responds to persecution is ultimately the sign of spiritual maturity. Through persecution, the Christian Church gains credibility with those outside of it, as well as such successful stands bolster the ranks within the Church.⁶¹³ Success, of course, is not clearly defined in such instances. There is no immediate feedback in most cases, sometimes there is no feedback at all. It is unclear who is reached through a particular response to suffering or persecution.⁶¹⁴ It is quite possible the testimony provided by a Christian suffering is beyond the earthly scope of conception. Will our persecution be used as an example of faithfulness at the Judgment? Will our fall from grace serve in comparison to those who willingly walk to their own death in the name of Christ their Lord? Or will my witness convince my jailer or my executioner or my interrogator about the truthfulness of Christ as the risen savior?

The idea that suffering or persecution is without purpose is unheard of in the New Testament. Despite the ramifications remaining unclear, even the modern persecuted Church desires in many instances for persecution to continue. Only in America do we pray for the persecution to cease, believing that only if persecution stopped in China would the Church be better off, when they would argue the opposite; it is by persecution that the Church grows still.⁶¹⁵ Likewise, to consider, the person living a biblical Christian life is under increasing threat of being persecuted, by social pressure, by imprisonment, by torture, by even death, for simply exercising their faith.

⁶¹² Hall, *Worshiping with the Fathers*, 145

⁶¹³ Various, *Bad Urach Statement*, 38

⁶¹⁴ Philpot, *Caesar's Sword*, 27

⁶¹⁵ Piper, *Suffering and Sovereignty*, 224

It is an idea Christians in the United States often find quite baffling⁶¹⁶ as they simply have no first-hand comparison to make. Amidst such training, it is important to recognize that the Christian life is not merely a race but a battle, a conflict between oneself and the spiritual forces, and also a battle within for self-mastery, a lifelong struggle for control over the flesh.⁶¹⁷ It is not a battle, though, of physical war, such as the Jews in Jerusalem undertook against Rome in their uprising⁶¹⁸ or in modern civil wars. Rather, it is a spiritual battle, in which the heroic quality of the human spirit is forged in patience and endurance on the anvil of suffering,⁶¹⁹ as the body becomes the physical sacrifice and the willingness to die for Christ becomes the pleasant aroma.

The response is key, as it is the gist of the call itself, not the physical act of torture or the systematic oppression of an individual's constitutional rights. How long has it been since you have heard a sermon extolling the vagaries of your approaching death? Nowhere in the biblical text or in the historical Church record is happiness a state guaranteed as a Christian. In fact, quite the opposite. Yet, this is the very difference between the American Church today and the Church Fathers of the first and second centuries.⁶²⁰ Death, suffering, persecution, these are not failures. Rather, suffering for Jesus, following his pattern and the pattern set by the generations of faithful is a victory.⁶²¹ Preparation for persecution is the responsibility of each Christian, for there is no way to know with any kind of certainty whether we have been called to suffer and die for our faith. But, if such evil were to be done to us, it is our responsibility to not only stoically accept it, but to rejoice in our suffering, to be glad for God's call to share in the sufferings he endured.⁶²² We must always remember Paul's words, "We must through many tribulations enter the

⁶¹⁶ Crudup, "Religious Persecution," 82

⁶¹⁷ Spence-Jones, *Pulpit: 1 Corinthians*, 321

⁶¹⁸ McClendon, *Systematic Theology Vol 1*, 323

⁶¹⁹ Schaff, *History of the Church*, 4687

⁶²⁰ Hall, *Worshiping with the Fathers*, 144

⁶²¹ McDowell, *Apostles as Death*, 65

⁶²² Penner, *Shadow of the Cross*, 119

kingdom of God” (Ac 14:22).

5.11 Standing Firm in Christ and No Other

There was, during the first few centuries of the Christian faith, an issue that arose within the Church pertaining to those who failed to suffer for the faith. It was not as if believers were called to seek out persecution for its own sake, though there were some who did so, but there were others who were unwilling to endure persecution for the sake of Christ or for the sake of other believers, even some who abandoned the faith altogether and returned to their old religions and their old gods. For some of these individuals it was considered an irreversible apostasy, as described in Hebrews,⁶²³ while others were forgiven and allowed back into the Church once the danger had passed.

But, as Jesus stood before Pilate and refused to answer, refused to accommodate the whims of the non-believer, it is clear Christ upheld his duty to the voice of God, in which he laid down the example for both the apostles and for the later disciples of the first three centuries who sought to model Christ in his sufferings and in his death.⁶²⁴ In fact, Jesus expressly established the Church as a perpetual critic of the State, certainly knowing the future of these beasts of burden that human governments have always been, how they would condemn and persecute his disciples, both in the immediate aftermath of his crucifixion and throughout the next 2000 years of human history.⁶²⁵

But, interestingly enough, Jesus did not induce in the first century, quite possibly to the dismay of his own acolytes, a political revolution or human judicial system by which his Church

⁶²³ Penner, *Shadow of the Cross*, 228

⁶²⁴ Spence-Jones, *Pulpit: Jeremiah*, 130

could take over power and privilege and influence. The reality is, the battle Jesus waged while on earth was not one of man against man, but of God putting down the enemy, ending the power of death, in the cosmic battle between him and the damage done in the garden by the serpent.⁶²⁶

Above all else, though, Jesus' purposes were clear for his disciples, "Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you" (Jn 15:20). As Peter elaborates, "let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter" (1 Pe 4:15-16) and elsewhere (1 Pe 2:20; Matt 5:11). Because of this, it is important for the Christian today to limit their response to persecution with persistence and dedication as a marathon runner would.⁶²⁷ It is not about undermining the social cohesion of the non-believer or to spark revolution or bring about a Christian utopia. Jesus at no time approved war to be waged in his name nor did he agree to bringing down fire on the heads of his enemies as his disciples were so quick to desire (Luke 9:54-55).

Likewise, when Christians are caught committing crimes, they are punished like everyone else. In these instances, the believer finds himself fighting against the very God in which he claims to serve (Acts 5:39), and tarnishes not only his own testimony but the name of his King (Ro 2:24) as well. The State has an inherent duty to punish criminals and rightly so. It is crucial that the Christian has a clear conscience with God, that their testimony will remain untarnished before men.⁶²⁸ A perfect example of this was a pastor at a conference who was arrested. Initially it was believed the man was being persecuted by his government, but later it was revealed the

⁶²⁵ Sproul, *Relationship Between Church and State*, 28

⁶²⁶ Byrley, "Eschatology, Conflict, Suffering," 189

⁶²⁷ Philpott, *Caesar's Sword*, 141

⁶²⁸ Various, *Bad Urach Statement*, 28

man was being charged with sexual assault and the State had a legitimate reason for their investigation.⁶²⁹ Additionally, though in the past this has not typically been the case, the Christian is not to persecute other believers or non-believers, regardless of their position or authority. The Protestant Reformation saw persecution by Catholics against Lutherans, Lutherans against Anabaptists, Anglicans against Quakers.⁶³⁰ This is contrary to what Christ established and was subsequently carried out by his Church - Christians are called to live quiet lives and to be at peace with everyone (1 Tim 2:1-2). Whenever those in power forced the people of God to go against his decree, they were convicted to follow God rather than obey men (Acts 5:29).

Testimony, in the end, is the call of Christ into a fallen world. It is not pageantry or rigid formulation or flashy marketing or commercial products to sell. It is the witness of God to those who do not believe in hopes that some might be saved, even in the face of suffering and discomfort and persecution and death. We are ensured, though, at those critical moments, the Holy Spirit will instruct us in what we are to say and to do (Matt 10:19).

5.12 Surrendering the Rebellious and Willful Impulse for Revenge

The will of God has been made clear to all who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit and can spiritually discern both the Scriptures and likewise the signs of this age, as this war will rage on, as Christians are called to resist evil yet respond in humility and peace. Not only does Christ call us to accept persecution but also to love our persecutors as well.⁶³¹ Yet, in the last few decades, the heresy previously discussed (Dominion theology) has infiltrated the American Church, which transforms the gospel of Christ into a kind of quasi-political entity much like the Jewish Zealots

⁶²⁹ Sun, "Post Communist China," xi

⁶³⁰ Philpott, *Caesar's Sword*, 469

⁶³¹ Taylor, *Sorrow and Blood*, 102

of the first century.⁶³² This movement espouses, among other things, not only the political involvement of the Church in worldly affairs, but that the Church is destined to rule the world on earth. It also goes by the names of Kingdom Now Theology, and is often closeted, with ministers and pastors not admitting to being proponents. Today this secretive group includes many major leaders of the Evangelical and Fundamental and Charismatic movements, declaring the modern state of Israel as an impostor, claiming they have no right to the land, and ultimately will lay the roots for a second holocaust.⁶³³

But, even more insidious, woven into this ideology is the concept that American Christians have a duty to their country first before Christ, and are encouraged to take up arms against the left, even against other Christians. It is possible the Corinthians were likewise tempted to retaliate against those who persecuted them. Paul, of course, cautioned against such actions (Matt 5:39–40; Ro 12:19), and instead they were to others that which God extended to them.⁶³⁴ We are not to seek vengeance or revolt against authorities (Luke 6:28; 23:34; Acts 7:60; Ro 12:14-17), but are to forgive them, do good for them and repay their evil with good (Matt 5:44). It was a non-violent ethic that drove the disciples after Jesus' death,⁶³⁵ praising with joy the opportunity to suffer for his name, and at no time calling for revolution or retaliation.

It is a reality that each believer has the choice in how they respond to persecution, no matter its intensity or pervasiveness.⁶³⁶ The Church has had a long history stretching back to the first centuries of responding to persecution, not with violence, but with rebuttal, with arguments designed to not only directly argue against false claims, but to demonstrate the government's

⁶³² Melvin, “Direct Roman Rule”

⁶³³ Missler, “Jude” 62-68 min

⁶³⁴ Barry, *FSB*: 1 Thessalonians 5:15

⁶³⁵ Dunn, *Lexham Dict: War*, 2016

⁶³⁶ Kilbourn, “Suffering in Early Christianity,” 84

injustice and inhumanity.⁶³⁷ In fact, nowhere in the New Testament is there a positive model for employing violence in defense of justice. It is argument instead is consistently against violence and calls all Christians to accept suffering rather than inflicting it.⁶³⁸

Such requires self-mastery of both the body and the mind, that one repays abuse with kindness,⁶³⁹ while too often, especially in an American context, persecution is viewed not as God's will but as an evil to be opposed and defeated by any means necessary.⁶⁴⁰ As Paul borrows the imagery from war and military strategy, at no time does he encourage others to take up arms or fight physically.⁶⁴¹ In fact, the long history just in modern warfare illustrates clearly how there is no net benefit to human war.⁶⁴²

Flight is an option in some situations, though not in every case. If there is no option to flee to safety, the Christian is called to stand firm and remain faithful until the end, whether that means rescue or release or even death.⁶⁴³ But, taking up arms against another, regardless of their ideology, makes little sense to the individual who is a citizen of the Kingdom of God. Suffering is the weapon of choice by God for with it the heart of the torturer can be reached or condemned. As a believer it is impossible to lose. Whether a believer is kicked, whipped, or killed, what is done to the believer is being done to the Lord and the Lamb of God cannot be defeated for he has already won.⁶⁴⁴

⁶³⁷ Philpott, *Caesar's Sword*, 18

⁶³⁸ Boyd, *Warrior God*, 288

⁶³⁹ Various, *Bad Urach Statement*, 36

⁶⁴⁰ Philpott, *Caesar's Sword*, 22

⁶⁴¹ Dunn, *Lexham Dict: War*, 2016

⁶⁴² Sprinkle, *Fight*, 334

⁶⁴³ Various, *Bad Urach Statement*, 38

⁶⁴⁴ Sprinkle, *Fight*, 263

5.13 Surrendering the Desire for the Things of This World and for Life

As will be discussed in much greater detail in the next chapter, the Christian is called by God to love him more than even his own life. Suffering not only prepares the individual to share in God's glory (Ro 8:17), but we through suffering identify and find union with him once in death and again in resurrection.⁶⁴⁵ Unfortunately, most people, including many within the modern church, are too caught up in the material things of this world, chained to the temporal life, possessed by it.⁶⁴⁶ But, in the end, the call to becoming a disciple of Christ is a call to martyrdom. Denying oneself, taking up his cross, these are synonymous with the abandonment of the cares of this life (Matt 10:37,38; Luke 14:26,27).⁶⁴⁷ As Paul elaborates in 1 Corinthians 7, he desires that we all be without the cares and distractions of this world, to be focused on the things of the Lord.⁶⁴⁸ In fact, Paul describes the state of mind of a Christian as one who does not grieve like one without hope. It is not that the believer does not grieve or does not experience pain or suffering, but that their death is no longer regarded as a loss but as a gain.⁶⁴⁹ Ambrose thought differently, expressing death as a totality loss.⁶⁵⁰ Yet, Cyprian, in contrast, considered death to be a happy ending, not only for the one who suffered or was persecuted or who had loved ones martyred, but for all who remained faithful and endured as Christ did.⁶⁵¹

Forming militias is a means of revenge and a kind of holding onto a life that was lost the moment the Christian first came to believe. The insistence on defense and meeting violence with violence tends to cross the line of becoming that which one is fighting, such as the case of the Nigerian Christians who massacred civilians. It is a similar threat to the results of the Kingdom

⁶⁴⁵ Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology* Vol 2, 1488.

⁶⁴⁶ Various, *Philokalia*, 350

⁶⁴⁷ Penner, *Shadow of the Cross*, 311

⁶⁴⁸ Spence-Jones, *Pulpit: 1 Corinthians*, 252

⁶⁴⁹ Jones, *Approaching the End*, 194

⁶⁵⁰ Jones, *Approaching the End*, 194

⁶⁵¹ Kilbourn, "Suffering in Early Christianity," 6

Now theology where Christians are firsts Americans before citizens of heaven. As Pere Jacques remarked before the Nazis arrested him and carted him off to a concentration camp for hiding three Jewish boys in his school, “Since Christ chose suffering for himself, suffering is not a curse or a plague to be avoided at every price. Christ welcomed the cross and even said he who wishes to come after me must take up his cross and follow me. Through his suffering Christ has redeemed the world, each of us by our suffering can personally share in the work of redemption as well.”⁶⁵²

American Christianity avoids suffering and lament and loss. It has forgotten the lament of the historical Church from which it sprung, and likewise has forgotten suffering and pain as a reality to be experienced.⁶⁵³ To be a disciple of Christ is to reject the world and the things of the world, its false ideologies, its other religions, its godless lifestyles, its vain pursuits, and to seek instead the love of God which the natural and depraved mind cannot conceive.⁶⁵⁴ Such was the case of Saturus, the individual who voluntarily surrendered to the magistrate, refusing to hide, refusing to flee. His decision to turn himself in illustrated the importance for him to remain steadfast until the end.⁶⁵⁵ As Augustine explained to Proba, life is fleeting and is over in the blink of an eye. This world and everything in it that represents its true nature is but a way station along the journey home. At the end, we are not concerned about our homes or about how many servants we had or what kind of wealth we have acquired. The pressing question will be “did I serve Christ well during the years he gave me?”⁶⁵⁶

The writer to the Hebrews captured it best, “choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater

⁶⁵² Culligan, “Darkest Night”

⁶⁵³ Rah, *Prophetic Lament Justice*, 22

⁶⁵⁴ MacArthur, *Biblical Doctrine*, 880

⁶⁵⁵ Heffernan, *Passion of Perpetua*, 177

riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward” (He 11:25-6).

5.14 Avoiding Persecution

There is a question pertinent to developing a theology of persecution that must be addressed. It stretches all the way back to the time when Jesus sent out his disciples to the countryside, instructing them to preach the gospel, but if it was not accepted, they should retreat from that area and go elsewhere (Matt 10:23). Couched in the circumstance of persecution, Jesus set in motion a pattern in which the Church in Acts (Acts 8:1) would later model as did Paul in his ministry work (Acts 8:1, 9:25, 11:19, 14:5-6). But rather than running from persecution specifically, this directive was given more so that the gospel could continue to be preached throughout the known world. This is because, despite how powerful message of the gospel is through martyrdom, sometimes it is more important for the messenger to remain living so that the work can continue (Phil 1:19-24).⁶⁵⁷

The reality that one should leave a region, or their home is often a direct result of instability, where members of a community are unpredictably and frequently assaulted with violence. Faced with certain peril, it can naturally be more attractive to flee the area and seek common safety with others of the same ilk. This eventually results in a cleansing of a specific area of religious groups and a religiously segregated society.⁶⁵⁸ But, fleeing poses another issue: what to do with those who do not stay in protest after persecution is gone? The Early Church had to wrestle with the same question, as they wondered if elders could abandon their flocks and flee to safety, or should they willingly lay down their lives for their sheep? It was finally determined that an elder

⁶⁵⁶ Hall, *Worshiping with the Fathers*, 145

⁶⁵⁷ Various, *Bad Urach Statement*, 37

⁶⁵⁸ Philpott, *Caesar’s Sword*, 80

could flee if it were beneficial for the Church, but not out of fear or unwillingness to die.⁶⁵⁹

Of course, fleeing to another region is not the only tactic used in avoiding persecution. In fact, there are some instances, such as in China, where there really is nowhere to flee to, and Christians must decide an alternative. The underground Church is an alternative to other options and may serve as a more practical option since it allows the continuation of evangelical work in the region and does not bring up questionable issues of loyalty. Churches that operate underground typically do so in secret and utilize varied creative tactics to continue their work in anonymity.⁶⁶⁰ This tactic borders between strategies of survival and confrontation. With it there is no open admittance of religious belief or practice, but there are also practices being persevered in secrecy as the Church exercises its authority over the government in rebellion to the rule of law.⁶⁶¹ It is a fine line to split, between flight, and outright opposition, and subterfuge. All three have their proper place given the right circumstances as they allow. But the individual Christian must weigh the contents of his heart and determine what actions he or she takes based on their faith. For, as Paul stated, “whatever is not from faith is sin” (Ro 14:23).

5.15 Witnessing to Persecutors and Non-Believers (That They May Be Saved)

Another important issue to address is the underlining purpose of the persecution to begin with. Has God called an individual or group of Christians to persecution solely for the purpose of bringing about salvation in others? One imprisoned Christian woman, when asked stated that she could not be indifferent to her jailer since she wanted her jailer to experience the same joy of salvation that she had. She insisted that she could not keep silent about her faith even if she

⁶⁵⁹ Various, *Bad Urach Statement*, 38

⁶⁶⁰ Marshall, *Persecuted Global Assault*, 60

⁶⁶¹ Philpott, *Caesar’s Sword*, 14

wanted to, since it was her faith that compelled her.⁶⁶² This, of course, is the main thrust of the argument against any response but forward and persistent declaration of faith in Christ as Lord. If one were to flee, how would those who were persecuting find salvation if there was no one present to preach it? The same would be true of those who hide and conduct ministry work in secret. If under guise and secrecy, how would anyone know or learn the truth?

One answer to this objection, of course, is the work of the Holy Spirit through prayer, as the New Testament exhorts believers to pray for God's grace for persecutors, for guidance in reaching the lost, and as Jesus told his disciples, "Pray for those who persecute you, pray for those who hurt you" as well as Paul, "Bless those who curse you."⁶⁶³ Further, in the book *The Insanity of Obedience*, it is encouraged that potential victims of persecution consider first the intent of their persecutors, trying to understand their motivations. Not every persecutor has the same motives or mindset and considering such motives in advance could prepare the Christian for what is to come and might save a soul as well.⁶⁶⁴

5.16 Perfection by Fire (Called to Share in the Sufferings of Christ)

It is by divine predisposition that Christians are called out of the darkness and into the light, thus, subsequently, they are pulled into the sway of the supernatural battle that wages on through human history, the final effects of the devil and his forces as they lose an already lost war. Persecution and suffering of God's chosen simply offers testimony and an incorruptible record attesting to the goodness and perfectness of God and his will for Creation. Jesus suffered at the hands of Satan on the cross, yet, in that death so too believers experienced salvation and Jesus'

⁶⁶² Philpott, *Caesar's Sword*, 139

⁶⁶³ Various, *Bad Urach Statement*, 41

⁶⁶⁴ Crudup, "Religious Persecution," 26

final victory over the devil and his plans to thwart redemption.⁶⁶⁵ Persecution, in this sense, are simply growing pains echoing the ultimate, trans-dimensional reality of final supremacy as Christ put down death and sin and corruption once for all.

But no other testimony carries with it as much weight in light of eternity as does the perfection by fire on the human plane, for “scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Ro 5:7–8). As it is, in the face of increasing persecution, many become more resolute in conviction and steadfastness, as exemplified in the 2012 arrest of over 300 Christians in Iran, who in turn sought aggressively for the conversion of their captors rather than their own safety.⁶⁶⁶ What is it within the human condition that provokes such commitment to the task that is, by its very nature, unnatural? It is, truly, a testament to the interacting within them of the Spirit of God, who gives amply in times of trial and testing,⁶⁶⁷ for there is no greater test than to willingly give up the only life given. It is more precious than gold,⁶⁶⁸ which is reminiscent of the fiery furnace and the fourth person recognized by the king as the “Son of God.”⁶⁶⁹

Like Polycarp, who looked up to heaven and prayed and was not consumed by the flames of death, but instead forced the human rulers to run him through with a sword, his last words were, “For eighty-six years I have been Christ’ servant and he did me no wrong. How am I able to deny my king who saved me?”⁶⁷⁰ This is truly the faith of the saints, those who dance freely and perfectly in the fire of persecution and in life and faith and hope and love.

⁶⁶⁵ Byrley, “Eschatology, Conflict, Suffering,” 202

⁶⁶⁶ Philpott, *Caesar’s Sword*, 140

⁶⁶⁷ Boyd, *Warrior God*, 267

⁶⁶⁸ Byrley, “Eschatology, Conflict, Suffering,” 201

⁶⁶⁹ Chaffey, *Fallen*, “Ch 8 - Book of Daniel”

⁶⁷⁰ Jennings, *Portrait of Death*, 241

5.17 Old Wineskins, New Wine (Evangelism through Subterfuge)

As persecution descends on the American Church one thing will be clear: how ministry was done in the past will be done no longer. Evangelism, discipleship, shepherding, these concepts will retreat from their current professional definitions and will resynchronize with a predominately hidden Church that operates not in the open but in the shadows, in the basements of rural communities, on back roads and where underground and midnight baptisms will be standard fare. As Jesus said in the parable, “Nor do they put new wine into old wineskins, or else the wineskins break, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But they put new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved” (Mt 9:17). So, it will be with the work of the Church. The outward confrontational approach of evangelism will no longer apply. Rather, open preaching will be replaced by intimate discipleship, one on one and small group meetings will replace the mega church, the external building will cease its relevance as homes and outbuildings will become the new norm.⁶⁷¹

This as the case for the first century Christian as the treasure of the gospel was carried about in earthen vessels, which were required to endure hardship and persecutions and shipwrecks and bitter rejection and betrayals.⁶⁷² But, despite the failures of socialism in Russia and other former Soviet Union countries,⁶⁷³ the supernatural agenda rages on waging war against the gospel and against the Kingdom of God (Mt 11:12). Active evangelism in China despite persecution has inspired tremendous growth over the last few decades, mostly due to the indigenous underground house church movement.⁶⁷⁴ But, there is one major difference between the last fifty years and the next fifty going forward in terms of how the Church will operate and function under persecution

⁶⁷¹ Philpott, *Caesar's Sword*, 9

⁶⁷² Beale, *NT Use of OT*, 1970

⁶⁷³ Solzhenitsyn, *Warning to the West*, 32

⁶⁷⁴ Philpott, *Caesar's Sword*, 356

in America - surveillance. In a time now on the brink of a digital and technological revolution, humans are more connected than ever, but at a high cost. No longer is there a physical public square, as the digital square has taken its place and those in control of it are bent on complete surveillance and utter oppression. It often reduces entire regions to a prison without bars⁶⁷⁵ with ATM and traffic cameras on every corner, doorbell cameras on every front porch and a live streaming camera in every individual pocket, there is no expectation of privacy in any space, even in the home with devices that can be turned on and used remotely by hackers or even the very companies that service them.

Printing is likewise a thing of the past, with nearly all reading material being disseminated from the Internet, via email, social media, which can all be tracked. This has incited God to increasingly reach out directly to individuals through prophetic means, with a myriad of accounts in the Middle East of individuals who have subsequently developed a relationship with God by way of a dream or a vision that sparked their conversion.⁶⁷⁶ The future of the Church in America will require a new effort in spy craft, with members becoming adept in code work, whether by embedding messages in digital newsletters or other innocuous documents and by gatherings in plain sight under the moniker of some innocuous purpose, such as a support group or chess club or business meeting. The use of air-gapped phones will become useful to disseminate training and ministerial materials, with technological advancement not only reducing the price of such devices but increasing the standard storage capacities to the extent that whole video and print curricula can be stored and easily accessed as well as disposed of if needed. The same is true of portable flash drives and encrypted, anonymous websites and storage lockers, though accessing such online services carries inherent risks that physical storage devices do not have.

⁶⁷⁵ Marshall, *Persecuted Global Assault*, 61

⁶⁷⁶ Hitchcock, *The End*, 23

As for the Bible itself, no longer will there be printed copies on every shelf in the house. As was the case in China's Cultural Revolution, the first to be targeted were the pastors and ministers of the open Church, and second were printed Bibles as soldiers went from house to house to confiscate them.⁶⁷⁷ Such will be the case when the cultural slide in America has reached its tipping point and the liberal left feels confident in their ability to sway public opinion. They will not only burn the printed Bibles in the pews, but they will outlaw all digital programs that contain the Bible and implement prison terms for anyone caught with such devices or software. This will require creative solutions to both possessing the Bible and disseminating it. The truest means has always been memorization, for they can take our phones and they can take our Bibles, but they cannot yet take what is in our own minds and what has been hidden in our hearts (Ps 119:11).

Additional steps will be needed for the local Church, no longer located on the street corner but now found in homes and in abandoned buildings, in the back of businesses, where two or more are gathered (Mt 18:20). These Churches will be much smaller, and will require a network between them, not only to share resources and training and members but to provide for the harboring and passage of fugitives who have been targeted by the authorities, whether it be because they were revealed as Christians or because they were caught with illegal materials or because one of their family members was arrested.

An example of such gatherings was described in a lecture series by Chuck Missler entitled, "The Once and Future Church." He describes a Korean fellowship organized not by geography but by professional interest. A gentleman had been invited to this fellowship and, upon arrival, discovered it was a group that was closed to membership, and all members were required to be

⁶⁷⁷ Philpott, *Caesar's Sword*, 357

doctors.⁶⁷⁸ It was explained to him that if someone wanted to invite a new member, the group would spend six months in prayer first before the invitation was extended, and then another six months would be required to pray about who would approach the new individual.⁶⁷⁹ Interestingly enough, the mission of the group was not evangelism, as is typically focused on in American Christianity, but on discipleship and mutual growth and edification - on making disciples.⁶⁸⁰ This is the typical approach of the Church in persecuted regions of the world, focusing on discipleship and less on outward evangelism. With such structures, the church splits organically since growing too large in any one area is problematic. This is biblical duplicability, with leadership based on function rather than arbitrary qualification or a clergy/laity division.⁶⁸¹

⁶⁷⁸ 44:35 min

⁶⁷⁹ Missler, “Future Church,” 45:00 min

⁶⁸⁰ Missler, “Future Church,” 46:10 min

⁶⁸¹ Johnston, “China House Church”

Chapter 06 - The Gift of Martyrdom

6.1 All Philosophy is But Preparation for Death

Death is a fact of life. It has always been for humans the great enemy, with Science all but surrendering to it as being “natural” and “necessary,” stating it is the logical consequence of existence.⁶⁸² Yet as far back as Plato’s *Phaedo* we find philosophers contending and wrestling with the very concept of death, so much so that the claim is made that all of philosophy, by its very nature, is but preparation for death.⁶⁸³ This significance cannot be ignored, though in much of the United States it is. But questions arise from life generally that beg for answers: what is death? How does one actually die? What does death have to do with persecution? Why must living things die?⁶⁸⁴ For some insight, it is prudent to turn once again to Plato in his description of Socrates’ death.

The question of what death is is sharply distinguished from what is dying, though they are similar they are still quite distinct. When Socrates drank the hemlock poison, the potion paralyzed his bodily systems, yet he was not necessarily dying moments after he drank the poison and he certainly was not already dead.⁶⁸⁵ So, if not immediately dead, when did Socrates actually die and, at what point did he cross over the threshold from life to death, from dying to dead? These questions will be addressed further into this chapter, but suffice it to say, life is by definition the absence of the definition of death. For we awake every day of life to a familiar world, we talk to the same people, see familiar faces, find continuity in activities from day to

⁶⁸² Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* Vol 3, 247

⁶⁸³ Hartle, *Disinterested Spectator*, 9, 219

⁶⁸⁴ Sumegi, *Understanding Death*, 11

⁶⁸⁵ Luper, *Philosophy of Death*, 73

day,⁶⁸⁶ who would stand to disrupt such pleasantries with talk of death?

Much like American culture, the Mesopotamians had no interest in the topic either. They avoided it like the plague while the Egyptians on the other hand became obsessed with the concept.⁶⁸⁷ Americans spend small fortunes separating themselves from the specifics of death, from paying for nursing homes for elderly family members, for hefty hospital bills in hopes of staving off complications, to quick, out of sight out of mind cremations so the dead body is reduced to harmless ash. Most Americans have no interest in understanding their own mortality or the mortality of others. Fending off the thought of death is often a full time job of consumerism and trinkets and hobbies until landing on the proverbial age of 50 when one reluctantly acknowledges that the universal sentence of death applies to oneself.⁶⁸⁸ Obviously, such an important topic, yet so little is really known about its cause or how or why God chooses death in the first place.⁶⁸⁹ It is the topic many simply ignore until the end and then respond with shock and dismay that time has actually run its course.

The Greeks understood the body to be a vehicle useful for the education of the soul but ultimately dispensable, while the Jews could not conceive of a thing like the body, being a creation of God, could be discarded so easily. It was in their mind that both the soul and the body together formed seed which would be resurrected on the Day, yet over the course of time there was much discussion and disagreement between the various Jewish factions - Josephus, the Sadducees, the Essenes, the Pharisees, all had their own opinions on death and what the reality of death really means.⁶⁹⁰ Buddhism, on the other hand, sought to end the connection between life and death by removing the attachment to life, to want, and to desire. But this, of course, changed

⁶⁸⁶ Kastenbaum, *Death, Society, Experience*, 2

⁶⁸⁷ Moreman, *Beyond the Threshold*, 15

⁶⁸⁸ Overall, *Aging, Death, Longevity*, 3

⁶⁸⁹ Jennings, "Portrait of Death," xiv

over time, as Buddhism mixed with other faiths in different regions.⁶⁹¹ Likewise, Gilgamesh, in the ancient story, finds his quest for immortality fruitless, and settles to home, accepting his approaching death with as much contentment as he could muster.⁶⁹²

Yet, it is impossible to open a discussion of death, especially one focused on the relation between death and religious persecution without identifying death as it is - a quantifiable property that is opposite life. In fact, it is the breath of life that brings life from God to man,⁶⁹³ yet it is the theft of this life that quantifies death, the penalty for sin, the consequence of the curse. Yet, the Eastern Fathers did not view death as the end of life. They saw death more distinctly as a deliverance from life, separation from corruption, liberation from the slavery to the flesh.⁶⁹⁴ At the same time, Ambrose saw the concept of “dying to sin” to be a kind of spiritual death, in which one participated voluntarily in the death of Christ. Virtue itself was a form of dying, an anticipation of the temporal, terrestrial death of the body. He too saw death as a release, a separation of the soul from the body that brings the soul home to Christ.⁶⁹⁵

As it were, the Christian’s joy and hope ran in direct contrast to the reality of death as a totality loss and rightly so since the Bible clearly claims death to be the consequence of sin and unnatural in both its origination and execution and its power over those who have died. Yet, as the Christian breathes his last breath, he is yet conflicted by his faith which sees that which cannot yet be seen, the hope of the resurrected Lord and, subsequently, the resurrection of the dead, as Christ defeats death on the cross.⁶⁹⁶

As already discussed previously, much of one’s opinion on theological matters rests in one’s

⁶⁹⁰ Sumegi, *Understanding Death*, 93

⁶⁹¹ Bregman, *Religion, Death, Dying*, 151

⁶⁹² Jennings, *Portrait of Death*, 113

⁶⁹³ Sumegi, *Understanding Death*, 80

⁶⁹⁴ Various, *Philokalia*, 278

⁶⁹⁵ Jones, *Approaching the End*, 35

⁶⁹⁶ Jennings, *Portrait of Death*, xiii

worldview. If an individual maintains a Christian worldview, one where God is highly personified, interacting with his creation in intimate ways, their view of death will be starkly different from the Hindu who sees God as an ineffable being without form and encompassing all things.⁶⁹⁷

Yet, regardless of the worldview, everyone must prepare for death, prepare to experience the dying process. More so, the Christians who are convinced they will experience persecution or even martyrdom in the future, must wrestle with the concepts of death and dying all the more. The American Church is not the martyr church, which is prepared to suffer and die for her testimony of Christ.⁶⁹⁸ At some point, though, she will need to deal with death and the potential for harm,⁶⁹⁹ especially as the culture around her shifts and is transformed from within.

With a groundswell of resentment from the popular paganizing culture that seems to be sweeping through the world, American Christians can only be certain that persecution will come for them in the future. To what degree and in what severity is unknown. Often accompanying such persecution is the gravity of death, yet too often those who face it are unprepared. It is resemblant of the *Fundamentals* when Torrey wrote, “but when the thunders of God’s power break in upon the soul, when despair at the loss of all one has loved takes possession of the mind, when remembrance of a miserable lost life or of past misdeeds is felt and realized, when one is on a sick-bed and death approaches, and the soul, appreciating that it is now on the brink of eternity, calls for a Savior, just at this time when its help is most needed, modern religion utterly fails.”⁷⁰⁰

There is, ultimately, a chain of survival, as if the human life was designed to not die but to

⁶⁹⁷ Weaver, *Theology of Suffering and Death*, 87

⁶⁹⁸ Kilbourn, “Suffering in Early Christianity,” 118

⁶⁹⁹ Kastenbaum, *Death, Society, Experience*, 4

⁷⁰⁰ Ch 4

live⁷⁰¹ and, yet, consistently since before recorded history, death has held sway. As the philosopher does prepare for death, so do the rest of the living - just without a net.

6.2 Bodily Death

Death has multiple meanings, but none as prevalent today, in the modern era, as bodily death. According to Science (or its religious hijacker) matter and energy are what is immortal, not a god, and the human body is naturally subjected to decay and destruction, to reordering at the atomic level. It is old age, the decline of one's faculties, albeit all these remain still a mystery.⁷⁰² Despite this, one can wager with certainty that death is distinct from sleep, ignoring our euphemisms to the contrary.⁷⁰³ Though different from sleep, death has no means of compensation, as does sleep, when one is awakened after a night's rest, refreshed and ready, the body having undergone repair and refreshment. But, to bodily death, clinical observation reveals much. Rarely do organisms simply run out of steam and cease to continue because of some expiration date. Rather, humans tend to die from illness or disaster or accident - something that steals away the life that remains.⁷⁰⁴

In the 1800's the concept of the good death grew in popularity, casting inspection on how a person died,⁷⁰⁵ but even before this, the Egyptians sought to explore death and immortality through mummification and ritual dismemberment.⁷⁰⁶ Despite all the discussion and consideration, though, death remains still the end of at least the body up to this point. Those of a materialist persuasion, spend little to no time describing the nature or reality of a next life, fully

⁷⁰¹ Parnia, *Erasing Death*, Ch 1

⁷⁰² Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics Vol 3*, 247

⁷⁰³ Moody, *Life After Life*, 13

⁷⁰⁴ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics Vol 3*, 248

⁷⁰⁵ Kastenbaum, *Death, Society, Experience*, 514

⁷⁰⁶ Moreman, *Beyond the Threshold*, 16

engaged are they in proving this life is all there is.⁷⁰⁷ Regardless of one's belief about the afterlife, though, it stands to reason that death is at least the end of the animation and sustainability of the body. If there is to be a resurrection, we have received no data save a 2000-year-old promise by one who the world is convinced doesn't even exist.

Of the characteristics that define the ideas of life, such as the experience of pain, the awareness of present surroundings and an interior perpetuity of memories and emotions, the defining characteristic of bodily life is the function of the systems that sustain it.⁷⁰⁸ It is Major Systems Death that leads to bodily death and possibly the death of the consciousness that is represented by the "I." Then again, through most of human history, people died typically before what is now considered midlife. Countless numbers of people, individuals, did not survive childhood or even a successful birth. This could be the impetus for legends of immortality on earth, since death was an ever-present adversary that needed to be dealt with.⁷⁰⁹

The Puritans of New England sought to all but ignore death, dressing the dead in simple clothes, and outlawing the wearing of black at the grave site, or the outpouring of excessive emotion. Many during this time were buried in unmaintained cemeteries that bolstered no headstones and no markers.⁷¹⁰ Much, though, has changed in the years since. Dealing with death has become a business with sprawling cemeteries, with mini cathedral gravestones marking and differentiating among the rich, while simultaneously suppressing the dying process, sequestering it behind closed doors, in hospitals, hospice homes, and nursing facilities. Even bigger business has grown around the concept of saving lives, of curing illness and disease, of sustaining life

⁷⁰⁷ Davis, *After We Die*, 6

⁷⁰⁸ Cattoi, *Death, Dying, Mysticism*, 41

⁷⁰⁹ Kastenbaum, *Death, Society, Experience*, 3

⁷¹⁰ Bregman, *Religion, Death, Dying*, 5

longer and longer.⁷¹¹

It is a mistake, though, to assume living is a process of death and that death is actually the end of the dying process as some would conclude.⁷¹² The 18-year-old cheer leader is not in any way dying as she spends her days on stage, doing flips and cartwheels. She is certainly alive, and certainly maintaining her life through metabolic and life sustaining processes (breathing, circulation, etc). Even illness does not necessitate a shift into the dying process, at least not until death is imminent and the body's major systems begin to fail. Likewise, physical death is not to be misunderstood with the separation or dissolution of the mental or conscious unity of identity but is simply the cessation of means by which the body continues to function. Bodily death cannot be understood on a dualistic framework but must be isolated monistically. Concerning bodily death there is only one substance and that is material matter, the building blocks that form the constituent components of the bodily form.⁷¹³ The liver, the spleen, the heart, the lungs, the brain, the skin, the bones - all make up the body and it is one or more of the bodily systems that fail to maintain viability in death.

In all practicality, though, it is true that even the best of minds cannot agree on when life begins and when it ends. Confusion abounds and so does contradiction, as one is saddened by the loss of a loved one, yet at the same time whole heartedly believes their loved one is now in heaven.⁷¹⁴ It still stands to reason, though, at least physical death remains in the realm of medicine and science, while other definitions of death pertain to philosophy or religion.⁷¹⁵ It is impossible to really differentiate the two. Faith acknowledges the body and the death of the

⁷¹¹ Lock, *Twice Dead*, 206

⁷¹² Jones, *Approaching the End*, 162

⁷¹³ Williamson, *Death and the Afterlife*, 62

⁷¹⁴ Akhtar, *Wound of Mortality*, 23

⁷¹⁵ Lock, *Twice Dead*, 205

body, not as natural but as necessary.⁷¹⁶ It is hope embroidered into the fabric of loss, that the loss of bodily death is only temporary, that the body that has died and decayed and has returned to the earth has been sown in hope and anticipation of a future resurrection dependent on the resurrection of Christ Jesus.

There is in bodily death the loss of the body. But there is no loss of the “you” that is represented without physical body⁷¹⁷ existing after death in Hades or in the Sea or in Death itself (Rev 20:13). So, bodily death is the cessation of the physical form, yet does not necessarily extend to the metaphysical individual, the conscious “I” of the personal being. As Christ has made clear, this individual and conscious in relation to the world around it, can only be destroyed in Gehenna (Matt 10:28).

6.3 Body, Soul, Mind (Consciousness as Experiential Existence)

Plato was convinced there was a separate soul and body that made up the human being as experienced in the world of the living. He likewise saw death as the release and separation of body from soul so much so that he stated, “is it not the philosopher’s aim, the separation of the body from the soul?”⁷¹⁸ He, too, believed in the idea of the preexistence of the soul, that the origin of the soul existed in the perfect idea, what Aristotle called forms, and, though the degree to which Aristo-Platonic philosophy really had on Christian Theology is open to debate, one finds several doctrines of soul origin in the Church: preexistence, traducian, and Creation.⁷¹⁹

These theories argued for the improvable, since no one has ever crossed over into death and

⁷¹⁶ Berger, *Rumors of Angels*, 101

⁷¹⁷ Bradley, *Philosophy of Death*, 72

⁷¹⁸ Plato, *Plato Vol 1*, para 67-68

⁷¹⁹ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 65-76

returned to describe what they have seen, nor has there been anyone with recollection of what came before their birth. For the Christian all there is the biblical assumptions presented in the text, to the non-believer there is even less. Whether the soul has always existed, was created during the pro-creative active of mother and father or was specifically and divinely created by God at conception, what is important is the existence of autonomous individuals we call souls, or people.⁷²⁰ The body is the tether by which the individual is bound to the physical plane. If it were not for the “sōma” (body) there would be no means of locating or identifying the “psuchē” (soul), as it appears both intangible and nonspatial. Controversially, the “pneúma” (spirit) is that which God breathed into man, and he became a living being. It is what Genesis 2:7 describes as “the breath of life” and animates the clay and the soul to life.⁷²¹

It is this combination, speculative at best, that represents the image in which God created the living being (Ge 1:27), the same image in which he modeled of those present at Genesis 1:26, “Let us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness.” It is in a trichotomic view that the human soul contains all that identifies the individual as unique: the intellect, the emotions, the will, the consciousness, the reason, the experience, and the memories.⁷²² It is with this soul that the body interacts with the physical, external reality or dimensionality, utilizing the brain as an interface between the physical world and the spiritual one. The soul is not material but incorporeal, having no terrestrial form or dimensionality. It is through the combination of the body, soul, and spirit that the individual becomes a living being and can have and make and move within the dimensionality of the physical realm. The soul tethers the two between, the body to the soul and the soul to the spirit, with all three destined for redemption on Christ’s return (1 Thess. 5:23). The spirit is not the complete living being just as the body alone is in

⁷²⁰ Macarthur, *Biblical Doctrine*, 574

⁷²¹ Orr, *ISBE*, 2496-2499

similar deficit. The soul, on the other hand, can and does exist separately and independently without either, though it is not what was originally intended for man to experience.⁷²³

The entirety of human experience, human history - everything - has originated from the conscious perception of the living being, as filtered through the senses of the body and likewise projected outward the same. As J.P. Moreland describes, “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.”⁷²⁴ 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. Though such a declaration should not be misconstrued with the new age ideologies that present consciousness as a form of unified intelligence, with individuality being a delusion,⁷²⁵ the Bible does not describe the architecture of man directly, but rather assumes the constellation of human activities that would collectively be titled mental. In fact, everything that makes up the individual personality indeed resides within the soul, and, thus, the soul can and does exist separately from the body.⁷²⁶ It is this capacity to interact with the external world around us that defines us uniquely as human. But this in no way equals the definition of living, since other creatures are truly alive even though they do not interact with the external, physical world the same way humans do. The same is true for the human who is in a deep coma. They do not interact with the world, yet they are still fully human and fully alive.⁷²⁷

Science would argue against the trichotomic concept for several reasons. First, there is no means by which the empirical method can formulate data on non-terrestrial components such as

⁷²² Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 421

⁷²³ Spence, *Pulpit:Mark*, 368

⁷²⁴ “Existence,” 1:00, 5:00 min

⁷²⁵ Shermer, *Heavens on Earth*, 85

the soul; it cannot even deduce if a soul exists to begin with! Yet, scientists make the unnecessary and anxious leap to mind-brain equality even though conjecture is all they can produce simply out of a deep-seated desire to desperately disprove God's very exist. After lab experiments, brain tumors, strokes, accidents and other injuries, science has concluded (because it aligns with and supports their own worldview) that neurochemical processes produce subjective experiences.⁷²⁸ The same data could just as easily suggest, and the biblical record bears out, that neurochemical processes in the brain do not create subjective experiences but simply transmits the signals necessary between the physical dimension and the supernatural one.

It is accurate to say, though, that the only evidence available for the trichotomic or dichotomic anthropology of the living being is the Scriptures themselves. If not for the Bible's claim of distinction between body and soul, there would be no argument with the monistic materialist who insists there is only the material world that exists.⁷²⁹ Yet, though easier for some than others, the biblical record cannot be discarded simply because it is inconsistent with secular reasoning or makes one uncomfortable or nervous. Science and the natural world do not inform the Bible on what is real or correct. It is the opposite. It is up to science to amend its experiments to find narratives that align with Scripture. The trichotomic connection becomes important as one explores the process of death in detail and how the living being that was once formed by God is subsequently dismantled by a curse that has reigned over all living beings for at least six thousand years.

⁷²⁶ Davis, *After We Die*, 61-62

⁷²⁷ Sumegi, *Understanding Death*, 12

⁷²⁸ Shermer, *Heavens on Earth*, 86

⁷²⁹ Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology Vol 2*, 453

6.4 Decoupling the Trichotomic Being (the First Death)

Jesus was rather clear, while discussing several different topics he shifted to the subject of the body and soul - believers should not fear the one who can only kill the body, but instead we should fear him who can kill both body and soul in Gehenna (Matt 10:28). Of course, the main topic of his teaching was not about the distinctiveness between bodies and souls, but that humans have more to fear being cast into the Lake of Fire at the end of the age than they do losing their life on this earth.

But death, it is more than just the destruction of life. It is a shadow, an infection that takes captive the living being and relegates them to something not quite living but still existing on a different plane. It is certainly, on one hand, a release from the misery of life that humans must now endure, but it was not always this way.⁷³⁰ Life was, apparently, not burdensome, not so easily given over to sin and wickedness. In the pre-fall Garden, the man and the woman were able to eat freely from a variety of fruits, were able to enjoy eternity as immortals (whether by DNA or by consumption from the Tree of Life it is unclear). But this was stripped away from man after the fall, and the world itself was transformed into a destructive and beguiling place. What there was to the immortality of the living being was removed and the human became fallen and destitute.

So, there appears, at least at first glance more components to the original man than three: for there was originally body, soul, spirit, and immortality,⁷³¹ which Paul describes like clothing, something that we will put on at the Redemption (1 Co 15:53). Concerning this topic, N.T. Wright quips, “We have been buying our mental furniture for so long in Plato’s factory that we have come to take for granted a basic ontological contrast between “spirit” in the sense of

⁷³⁰ Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of New Testament*, 312

⁷³¹ Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 228

something immaterial and “matter” in the sense of something material, physical.”⁷³² Despite this scholarly assessment, it is unclear just where the biblical definitions arose,⁷³³ either from Greek philosophy or from first principles, what Paul calls “the oracles of God” (Ro 3:2).

Uncontested, man is a soul, a being, either of composite or singular in substance, and his life is appointed to him for a period and then the judgment (Luke 12:20; Heb 9:27). It is important to note, if something of man survives after death, where does it go, when will it exist, and to what degree will it be cognizant?⁷³⁴ The answers to these questions are derived by another instance of happenstance from Scripture, as Jesus teaches a parable to his disciples of a rich man and a beggar named Lazarus. In Luke 16:19ff Jesus begins teaching about a rich man who lived in abundant prosperity and had great wealth, yet there was also a beggar named Lazarus who begged from the rich man’s table. Through the story it is discovered that both die, and the rich man finds himself in Hades being tormented while Lazarus is carried off by the angels to Paradise. A subsequent conversation ensues, and it becomes evident that there is only one means by which people are saved in this life, through the Word of God. But this account also contains within it the answers to the questions just posed. In just thirteen verses we find not only are the destinations of the dead revealed, but so is the time determined as well as how conscious the dead will be. Verse 23 provides two specific locations in which the dead reside: 1. Hades, being in torments, and 2. In the presence of Abraham. Likewise, verses 27-29 pinpoint roughly the time in which the departed exit - the present. The rich man entreats Abraham to send Lazarus back to the living, to his family, to warn them of his precarious fate so that they might repent and avoid the same when they die. While it is possible the dead do not experience time the same way as the living, it remains most likely the dead co-exist within time itself, awaiting judgment day to

⁷³² Moreland, *Substance Dualism*, 429

⁷³³ Williamson, *Death and the Afterlife*, 34

come. Lastly, the rich man and Abraham (we hear nothing from Lazarus directly) provide important clues into the mental functionality of the dead. Verse 23 states the rich man had eyes and could see Abraham and Lazarus both. Additionally, he cries out to Abraham from his imprisonment. In verse 24, he states he is not only being tormented by flames, but water would cool his tongue.

Not only did the rich man possess the ability of sight, but he could also taste (water), could feel pain or some similar sensation (of fire), and could also speak and was conscious of his surroundings (though not necessarily aware of what was occurring in real time among the living). It is clear, the view of Scripture is there is consciousness beyond death, more so even than a naturalistic worldview could comfortably explain.⁷³⁵ This reduces death to the decoupling of the soul from the body rather than the annihilation of either. Of course, this is not the death as defined by bodily death or the spiritual death described in the future event when the lost will be thrown into the Lake of Fire. It is the temporary, unnatural, decoupling of the trichotomic being, the consequence of sin, the result of the curse on both man and all of Creation.⁷³⁶

This reality is clearly seen in the death-refusing hope at the very core of the human genus. Whether engorged by an overwhelming fear of his own annihilation, or the moral outrage of the death of a loved one, or even the hesitancy of one who attempts suicide, humans appear hard-wired to resist death.⁷³⁷ It is, by and large, a separation of violence, as death cuts short not only the mortal life remaining but also the original immortal existence the individual was originally created for. Because of this, it is more than appropriate for a Christian to feel sorrow and loss concerning their impending death. It is, after all, something with which every human must

⁷³⁴ Jennings, *Portrait of Death*, 14

⁷³⁵ Craig, *God and Cosmology*, 245

⁷³⁶ Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, 1595

⁷³⁷ Berger, *Rumors of Angels*, 100

contend, despite the joyful end we have been promised.⁷³⁸

6.5 Psychological Preparation for the Severing of Body from Soul

Despite death being an inevitable reality for everyone (save Enoch and Elijah) the fear of death and the anxiety that often accompanies it can be overcome. In fact, the history of the Church has multiple faithful individuals who have stood against persecution and ultimately accepted martyrdom with joy,⁷³⁹ serving not only as a faithful servant of Christ but also as a powerful witness to their persecutors, executioners, as well as the rest of the body of Christ. Despite the philosophical argument that death is inherently bad for both the individual as well as the individual's loved ones,⁷⁴⁰ the Christian finds solace in the terminology Christ used, "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you" (John 15:18) and recognize death as great gain.⁷⁴¹

But, in preparation, the implications must be examined critically including one's feelings about death, about one's anxieties and denials. Different is this age with many desiring a long life of prosperity, whereas previous generations often feared old age because of possible infirmity, suffering and abandonment.⁷⁴² Life, or the quality of that life, shapes, ultimately, one's approach toward death. Every human, because of the events of the Garden are now on a trajectory toward death. It is imposed upon every living, breathing soul, unwelcomed, oft denied. But it is still the greatest reality for the human, who alone on the planet is conscious of his own mortality.⁷⁴³ Likewise, it is not an escape from time, as some assert that the dead exist

⁷³⁸ Jones, *Approaching the End*, 195

⁷³⁹ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics Vol 3*, 247

⁷⁴⁰ Luper, *Philosophy of Death*, 74

⁷⁴¹ Moody, *Life After Life*, 13

⁷⁴² Kastenbaum, *Death, Society, Experience*, 518

⁷⁴³ Jones, *Approaching the End*, 162

atemporally,⁷⁴⁴ as has already been addressed, the dead appear under the same constraints of time as are the living. Yet, to prepare for one's own death could require a post-ambivalent, time neutral view of the world, leaving behind the needs and wants of others and even the self, that, as one approaches death any aggression or envy toward youth can be worked through.⁷⁴⁵

Resentment is, as is often the case, in direct opposition of removing the fear of death or anxiety of the unknown. This resentment traps the individual in a self-limiting loop, which keeps them from tapping into a greater view or perspective before them. Often, death can be viewed, especially in folk theology, as punishment for their own, personal sins, which is short-sighted. As believers are justified, there is no longer obligation to render penalty, and thus, the question arises, why must they die?⁷⁴⁶ If the record is correct, Enoch did not taste death, nor did Elijah. Why their exception? This is often a problematic conclusion with an improper view of death.

The Curse, as it were, fell upon not only the humans of that day, but also upon all living creatures that moved or had the breath of life within them. They, for the first time, transformed as they were from immortal to mortal, suffered aging and death and passed this genetic malformation onto their seed.⁷⁴⁷ This is the inheritance that we have received from the first Adam, which the last Adam will remove at the Great Day where the dead will rise and stand for Judgment (1 Co 15:22, 45). But, once the proper understanding of what death is and why it occurs has been established, and how it will be and has already been remedied in Christ Jesus, the individual can then make a move from the everydayness of the living to a more stoic mindset. It is this state of thinking, often only accessible via a sudden shock (such as a death, or near death, or terminal diagnosis, or severe persecution), that lends itself to a more ontological

⁷⁴⁴ Bradley, *Philosophy of Death*, 158

⁷⁴⁵ Akhtar, *Wound of Mortality*, 8

⁷⁴⁶ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, I/C

⁷⁴⁷ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, I/C

ideology, an awakening state where the details of the world fall into proper perspective against the backdrop of a supernatural one.⁷⁴⁸

In one example, a man was given a terminal diagnosis and, upon meeting with the hospital chaplain, the man says with some anguish, “I never thought this would happen to me.”⁷⁴⁹ Too often people do not operate from a sound, biblical worldview, but rather interact with the world from a secular one, or worse, a high-bred belief structure that makes allowance for the spiritual but only when it coincidences with the secular, medical, and rational world around them,⁷⁵⁰ or live in a fantasy state where perpetual immortality is assumed given their current health or economic strata. Just as with the terminal patient who discovers that God has, indeed, called them to death by an incurable disease, so too does the one called to suffer persecution at the hands of a hostile government or a violent mob - God does and will call people to die by his will and for his purposes.

If death is not a concept for which an individual has given some length to consider, the negative anticipation might overwhelm them.⁷⁵¹ The best preparation is the realization that a “good death” may not be the picture-perfect goodbye, but, as the martyrs of the past have modeled, it could be the voluntary acceptance of death itself, despite the injustice that brings it about. Martyrdom is the loss of control as pictured in Jo 21:18-19.⁷⁵² Death, as it is considered, can often produce depression or melancholy. It is important to recognize, this is a natural response and in no way indicates that one is venturing down a wrong path.⁷⁵³ Death is quite possible the most significant topic one will consider in their life, and thus deserves a great deal of consideration.

⁷⁴⁸ Yalom, *Staring at the Sun*, 36

⁷⁴⁹ Bregman, *Religion, Death, Dying*, 4

⁷⁵⁰ Bregman, *Religion, Death, Dying*, 4

⁷⁵¹ Bradley, *Philosophy of Death*, 233

In the end, death radically alters the constitution of an individual and at most isolates him from the world of the living but may actually neutralize interaction or conscious awareness altogether.⁷⁵⁴ As Paul concludes, “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable (1 Co 15:19). Death does come for us all. It is our responsibility to prepare well for it.

6.6 Examples of the Christian Death

When Jesus sent out the twelve to preach in Israel, he made sure to teach them about persecution (Matt 10:16-42), about how closely mission work and the spreading of the good news of Christ would be linked to persecution from the hands of those who did not believe.⁷⁵⁵ But, it was not until after Jesus’ crucifixion and ascension and the formation of the Church in Acts that formal martyrdom began. Initially, Christians were dragged into the public arena to be tortured and killed for sport.⁷⁵⁶ It was most likely not from any official imperial decree, but out of local discrimination that rose to the level of legal accusation.⁷⁵⁷ This persecution, though predicted by Christ, weighed heavy on the believers in the first few centuries. Many were drawn away, back to their old religions, after witnessing their fellow believers being tortured and killed by the Roman authorities.⁷⁵⁸

It is an interesting human characteristic, how often people forget the reality of their own death and cling to the things of this world as if they were to live forever. Augustine correctly understood, the contemplation of one’s own death leads to a profound appreciation for what is

⁷⁵² Jones, *Approaching the End*, 220

⁷⁵³ Overall, *Aging, Death, Longevity*, 3

⁷⁵⁴ Jennings, *Portrait of Death*, 13

⁷⁵⁵ Taylor, *Sorrow and Blood*, 67

⁷⁵⁶ McDowell, *Apostles as Death*, 57

⁷⁵⁷ Dunn, *Lexham Dict: “Persecution Early Church”*

important in life.⁷⁵⁹ Clement, in his letter to the Corinthians in 70 AD, encouraged them to imitate Christ as an example of humility, as they responded to the persecution of their day, even linking his readers' calamities with those of Peter and Paul.⁷⁶⁰ Suffering was to be interpreted through a Christian lens, and believers were to respond much differently to it than did their Roman neighbors.⁷⁶¹ But, as stated, during those first hundred years, there was no imperial policy against Christianity. But that which was first initiated by Nero⁷⁶² seemed to establish an unofficial policy of response by Roman leaders. The brutality of Nero could not be ignored by subsequent leaders, nor could the spread of the Church throughout the region.⁷⁶³

During the time of persecution in the first four hundred years of the Church, many believers were convinced that it was Satan behind the violence leveled at them. The author of the *Martyrs of Lyons* wrote, "The Adversary swooped down with full force...he went to all lengths to train and prepare his minions against God's servants." As did Polycarp, "He might...compel them to deny their faith for the devil tried many things against them."⁷⁶⁴ By the end of the third century, Christian persecution was in full swing. Diocletian, one of the greatest emperors of Rome⁷⁶⁵ saw to the persecution of the Church personally. So frequent were the deaths of Christians during this time, that in later centuries, memorials were written of their exploits, with a view that their reading and re-reading on the day they were martyred would edify the Church as a whole.⁷⁶⁶ How accurate such accounts are remains unclear. But persecution did serve its purpose in spreading the gospel far and wide. As Tertullian is often roughly quoted, "The blood of the

⁷⁵⁸ Jamieson, *JFB*, 439

⁷⁵⁹ Hall, *Worshiping with the Fathers*, 144

⁷⁶⁰ Dunn, *Lexham Dict: "Persecution Early Church"*

⁷⁶¹ Kilbourn, "Suffering in Early Christianity," 103

⁷⁶² Dunn, *Lexham Dict: "Persecution Early Church"*

⁷⁶³ Orr, *ISBE*, 2607

⁷⁶⁴ Byrley, "Eschatology, Conflict, Suffering," 164

⁷⁶⁵ Hill, *First 400 Years*, 128

⁷⁶⁶ Williams, "Tradition Christian Persecution"

martyrs is the seed of the Church.”⁷⁶⁷

Polycarp was, in 155 AD, the bishop of the Smyrna Church, and was killed by Marcus Aurelius at the age of 86. At the time of his confrontation with authorities, he prepared them a meal, prayed for them, and was then taken into the city where he was executed.⁷⁶⁸ His account, though powerful for future generations of believers, seems to contain a great deal of ideation and elaboration. First, he was to be burned to death, but when the flames could not touch him, the Romans ran him through with a sword.⁷⁶⁹

Pliny, a Roman lawyer, wrote many letters that have provided a great deal of information concerning ancient Christianity and documented his encounters with Christians under his authority. In his correspondence with the emperor Trajan, he inquires if the Christian title itself was enough to convince or if there were other names to be considered. At the time, Christians were being accused of such grotesque behaviors as atheism for refusing to acknowledge other gods, for being cannibals because of the Lord’s Supper, and for being incestuous because they greeted one another with a holy kiss.⁷⁷⁰ Though Trajan made it clear to Pliny that the Christians should not be sought out, most often, Christians suffered hostility because of their unwillingness to assimilate to Roman culture, which they considered to be idolatrous.⁷⁷¹ Christians would not worship the Roman gods, and thus, in the Roman mind, this caused the gods to be angered and such behavior was seen as a cancer undermining the entire empire.⁷⁷²

Ignatius, the bishop of Antioch around 100 AD, saw life to be a kind of death, in that it separated the believer from Christ. Dying for Jesus was considered the ultimate prize, the

⁷⁶⁷ Jennings, *Portrait of Death*, 235

⁷⁶⁸ Jennings, *Portrait of Death*, 240

⁷⁶⁹ Jennings, *Portrait of Death*, 241

⁷⁷⁰ Dunn, *Lexham Dict: “Pliny”*

⁷⁷¹ Dunn, *Lexham Dict: “Persecution Early Church”*

⁷⁷² Dunn, *Lexham Dict: “Stoics”*

greatest spiritual step one could take.⁷⁷³ Ignatius believed in laborious training of the body and the mind in anticipation of the suffering to come,⁷⁷⁴ and, after his capture, he warned the other believers not to attempt to save him. He longed to die a martyr's death, believing it was a call from God on his life. He did not care if his death was by fire or crucifixion or by wild beast or mutilations or grinding on the wheel. All he was concerned with as he waited his death was that he remained faithful to Jesus Christ.⁷⁷⁵

Another example is the death of Perpetua, who was a young, newly converted Christian woman in the early third century who willingly chose to die for her faith at the military games rather than denounce Christ. For her victory was a faithful death, and even received a vision of her execution beforehand where she stated, "I realized it was not with a wild animal that I would fight but with the devil."⁷⁷⁶ The Edict of Toleration in 311 AD brought Church persecution by the Romans to an end,⁷⁷⁷ but it would not be the end of Christian persecution throughout the history of the Church. In fact, violence against Christians continued throughout much of human history following the first few centuries and spread through most of the world,⁷⁷⁸ often in later centuries at the hands of the Catholic Church.

The Waldensians, loosely considered a proto-protestant group, were persecuted in the 1100's because they desired to make the Scripture known in the common language.⁷⁷⁹ Their doctrine and theology rejected the authority of the Pope,⁷⁸⁰ and desired a freedom to preach as a means of returning to the teachings of Augustine and Paul.⁷⁸¹ In 1211, over 80 Waldensians were burned

⁷⁷³ Hill, *First 400 Years*, 132

⁷⁷⁴ Spence-Jones, *Pulpit: Revelation*, 57

⁷⁷⁵ Jennings, *Portrait of Death*, 237

⁷⁷⁶ Byrley, "Eschatology, Conflict, Suffering," 164

⁷⁷⁷ Dunn, *Lexham Dict: "Persecution Early Church"*

⁷⁷⁸ Dunn, *Lexham Dict: "Persecution"*

⁷⁷⁹ Schaff, *History of the Church*, 3261

⁷⁸⁰ Audisio, "Waldensian," 14, 16, 22

⁷⁸¹ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics Vol 1*, 198

at the stake in France, considered heretics by the Church. Later, starting in 1655, over 2000 Waldensians were killed as part of the 300-year persecution in Italy.⁷⁸² Their belief that they were the true authentic Christian body did not sit well with the leadership in Rome.⁷⁸³ They did not believe the criteria for the true Church was found in ministry of the Word and in the sacrament, but in holy living,⁷⁸⁴ which ran counter to the liberality and extravagance of Rome. Little is known of their founder,⁷⁸⁵ yet, of all these groups that were persecuted during this time, the Waldensians are the only ones still in existence today.⁷⁸⁶

Even in modern times, Christians are persecuted more than any other religious group. Approximately 69 million have been murdered for their faith in the course of the history of the Church.⁷⁸⁷ By 2016, it was determined that ISIS had destroyed over 100 religious sites under their control including the Monastery of St. Elijah.⁷⁸⁸ Latin America has also seen its share of Christian persecution. With the rabid conversion to Protestantism from members of the Catholic Church, persecution has steadily grown over the last several decades.⁷⁸⁹ Such is not rare. During the Reformation, Christian on Christian persecution was commonplace. Some were killed for their views and practices concerning the communion, or because they were Lutheran, or sold Lutheran books. In Germany many died by burning or by the sword, were mutilated, or beheaded.⁷⁹⁰

Through all the examples, it is difficult to not take away the brutality and malignancy of religion on earth. Yet, with the violence we also see a great “cloud of witnesses” surrounding the

⁷⁸² Johnson, “Martyrology Demographics”

⁷⁸³ Holder, *Christian Spirituality*, 117

⁷⁸⁴ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics Vol 4*, 390

⁷⁸⁵ Schaff, *History of the Church*, 3283

⁷⁸⁶ Schaff, *History of the Church*, 3265

⁷⁸⁷ Johnson, “Martyrology Demographics”

⁷⁸⁸ Philpott, *Caesar’s Sword*, 39

⁷⁸⁹ Philpott, *Caesar’s Sword*, 392

⁷⁹⁰ Schaff, *History of the Church*, 4688

body of Christ, as countless believers have willingly and victoriously suffered and died in defense and proclamation of their faith in Christ Jesus.⁷⁹¹ It appears as if the American Church is now running a similar race, as circumstances of culture and politics and world affairs move us toward our own arena. The question remains if we will be found worthy to share in the sufferings of the Lord as did those of the past.

6.7 The Literality of the Intermediate State

Much has been written and discussed concerning the fate of the living after they die. Most all Christians believe in some form of heaven and hell, but Roman Catholics argue for a third destination for the dead, purgatory,⁷⁹² where those who have died pass into a place where they remain in a state of suffering for an indeterminate period for their own benefit, in hopes that they might alleviate their sin and eventually purchase entrance into heaven.⁷⁹³ Unfortunately, there is little to no evidence to support a state in which the dead work off their sins, but it is also just as short sighted to conclude an individual is slated for only one of two fates immediately after death. Catholics often utilize both the Bible and Church Tradition to defend the dogma of purgatory,⁷⁹⁴ but as a clear reading of the text show, it is a concept incongruent with either the apostles or Jesus himself. In the Old Testament, the place of the dead is called “*sheol*” and is often associated with darkness and gloom, a fading existence. This word is translated in the Greek New Testament as “*hades*” and occurs multiple times in the 27 books (Matt 11:23; 16:18; Luke 10:15; 16:23; Acts 2:27, 31; Rev 1:18; 6:8; 20:13 – 14) yet is most often rendered as “hell”

⁷⁹¹ Various, *Bad Urach Statement*, 19

⁷⁹² Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, 1678

⁷⁹³ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 687

⁷⁹⁴ Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, 1680

in English translations.⁷⁹⁵

Jewish writers during the second temple period were rather consistent with the purpose of Hades, defining it as a place of the departed dead (2 Macc 6:23; 1 En 102.5; 103.7; 2 Bar. 23.4).⁷⁹⁶ It also contains within it some form of distinction between the righteous and the wicked even before the final Judgment of the world. This is illustrated both in 1 Enoch 22:1–14, where the righteous and wicked are separated in Hades, as well as Luke 16:19ff where Lazarus and the rich man are separated by a “great gulf fixed” between the two. It can also be seen rather clearly that Jesus, after his death, did not immediately ascend into heaven, but went to this waiting place of the dead with a peculiar mission (Acts 2:27, 31; 1 Pet 3:19 – 21). While purgatory declares a system of repentance and remittance, but overtly a kind of processed universalism that smacks against the decision made on earth by each human.⁷⁹⁷ In the book of Revelation, it is an interesting display of both death and Hades as well as the ocean as the realm of the dead (Re 20:13), even personifying death and Hades as they ride upon the pale horse (Re 6:8). In certain instances, Hades appears to be the singular repository of all souls during the intermediate state (Acts 2:27-31), yet at other times there appears to be a distinction between the wicked and the saved.⁷⁹⁸ Often, the concept of an intermediate state or a repository for the dead is discounted by atheist and theologian alike claiming it interjects a platonic anthropology into the biblical text. While it is true Plato proposed a dualist nature of the human between body and soul and affirmed an underworld where disembodied spirits went for a time only to be recycled back into a new body in the future, in no way links such reincarnate views to the worldview Jesus and the New

⁷⁹⁵ Moreland, *Body & Soul*, 24

⁷⁹⁶ Beet, *Immortality*, 19

⁷⁹⁷ Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, 1678

⁷⁹⁸ Mounce, *NIC: Revelation*, 20:11-15

Testament writers proffered.⁷⁹⁹

In fact, foreign to Plato's conceptualization of the underworld, the Bible clearly diverges from a single receptacle where all congregate after death to one in which there is distinctions between souls themselves. Those who have departed in unbelief are imprisoned while those who have died in faith exist in what Jesus called Paradise (Lu 23:43).⁸⁰⁰ Likewise, Plato's description provides a natural state for the departed, where everyone is providentially designed to experience, while the Bible insinuates an abnormality to the death of the living being, with a clear distinction between the disembodied soul and the immortal soul. Plato would have disembodiment be the true destiny of the soul while the Bible claims embodiment is how humans were initially created to exist.⁸⁰¹ These kinds of ideas raise important questions, not just for the religious. What indeed is the purpose of such a place and why must humans go there?⁸⁰² Such a journey from embodied living being to disembodied can only be considered a traumatic event, regardless of how temporary it might be. Without a body, the human is incomplete,⁸⁰³ and as such the curse works its power over the living reducing them to the dead.

The greatest biblical witnesses to the intermediate state are found in Luke 16:19ff, 1 Pet 3:19-20, Jude 6, and 2 Pet 2:4, all describing in varying detail an insular region of existence beyond the death experience and without contact to the realm of the living, where individuals are tallied to be either in Hades or in Paradise, where fallen angels are imprisoned under heavy darkness with chains in Tartarus, where there is no escape and no redemption remaining for the lost. Many have claimed near death experiences as evidence for existence beyond death, though

⁷⁹⁹ Williamson, *Death and the Afterlife*, 24

⁸⁰⁰ Pope, *Christian Theology*, 1216

⁸⁰¹ Davis, *After We Die*, 61

⁸⁰² Sumegi, *Understanding Death*, 94

⁸⁰³ Williamson, *Death and the Afterlife*, 62

such is rather flimsy at best.⁸⁰⁴ It is only when one abandons a theistic worldview and adopts the idea that the human mind is conceived of as processes of the brain, and that there is nothing beyond brain function that sparks consciousness, that individuals begin to struggle for truth concerning existence after death.⁸⁰⁵

The biblical record, albeit not entirely clear, is predominately undeniable. There is something to its testimony, that both the apostles and Jesus simply assumed to be true. For the modern and post-modern living today, such ideas are fanciful fiction, as their monist and physicalist mentality must demand only the physical matter to reign supreme. Yet, in Jesus' mind, there was a genuine and real place of the dead, and according to the apostolic record, he visited those caught under death's sway and preached to the spirits previously condemned. The adage holds still, "May God be true and every man a liar" (Ro 3:4).

6.8 The Resurrection and the Great Why Throne of Judgment

It is one of the doctrines Jesus quarreled over with the Sadducees and Pharisees and Scribes during his short ministry on earth (Mk 12:18–27; Mk 13:27; Mt 24:31; Mt 22:23–33; Lk 20:27–38), describing not only the bringing back to life the dead from all points and places, but that he, himself, was the mechanism by which the dead would rise, and the bones would mend.⁸⁰⁶ Of course, details of the resurrection itself are sparse and often cryptic. Of what is known, there are not one but two resurrections of the dead. The first is found in Revelation 20:5, where John writes, "Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for

⁸⁰⁴ Shermer, *Heavens on Earth*, 86

⁸⁰⁵ Williamson, *Death and the Afterlife*, 24

⁸⁰⁶ Orr, *ISBE*, 2804

the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ and shall reign with Him a thousand years" (Re 20:4–6).

This initial resurrection is limited to those who had been martyred for their faith in Christ⁸⁰⁷ and whether its roster includes all martyrs throughout all time, or only a subset, or any other believer (Abraham, Enoch) is unclear. Throughout history, many Christians have suffered and died believing they would be part of this initial repeat.⁸⁰⁸ In fact, more Christians have died in the modern era than in the first nineteen centuries combined.⁸⁰⁹ What is known of this first episode, is they will reign with Christ for 1000 years before the main Resurrection will come. Through John's words in Revelation, it is clear he was writing to Christians who were suffering under persecution. To encourage them to stand firm, he provides promises that would aid not only them but all Christians going forward.⁸¹⁰

It is accurate to state that Christianity has been, from its very inception, a movement based on resurrection. No sooner had Christ died than he was raised to life again, and it is that resurrection which the apostles and the later disciples oriented their entire corpus of teaching.⁸¹¹ It is in the second Resurrection that the earth sees its first glimpse of real peace. It is the outcome of the final cataclysmic confrontation between those cryptic beings in the supernatural realms,⁸¹² as Satan, the Beast, the demons are put down, and the angels of God are triumphant in squelching

⁸⁰⁷ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 841

⁸⁰⁸ McDowell, *Apostles as Martyrs*, 467

⁸⁰⁹ Hall, *Living Wisely*, 55

⁸¹⁰ Reddy, "Knowledge," 32

the uprising (Re 12:7ff).⁸¹³ As Jesus describes it, the Second Resurrection is the moment in which “the angels will come forth, separate the wicked from the just, and cast them into the furnace of fire, and there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth” (Matt 13:49-50) and also “When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world...and Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels’” (Mt 25:31-46).

The day of Judgment is described as a means to an end, where the laws of physics no longer seem to apply (Re 20:11), where reality itself appears to unravel and contort (Re 6:14; Is 34:4). It is here where all who have ever lived will be present and will stand before what John describes as, “a great white throne” (Re 20:11), where God sits with Christ to judge all the works and deeds and thoughts of men (Re 20:11-12). Those who survive the last days will not taste death as the rest of the world has, but will be transformed, given new bodies⁸¹⁴ in which they will then march to their inevitable fates. At the end of the world, the end of reality as humanity has always known it, the physical world and all of creation will pass away and everything will be renewed to its former self. God will judge between the living and the dead (Acts 10:42; Ro 14:9; 2 Tim 4:1; 1 Pe 4:5) and those whose names are not written in the Book of Life, they, like the Devil and his angels, will be cast into the Lake of Fire for all eternity.

⁸¹¹ McDowell, *Apostles as Martyrs*, 467

⁸¹² Heiser, *Angels*, 105

⁸¹³ Dunn, *Lexham Dict: War*, 2016

⁸¹⁴ Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, 1896

6.9 Gehenna - the Lake of Fire (and the Second Death)

Of course, there is a purpose to the Great White Throne scene at the end of the millennium that casts a shadow on everything else in cosmic history, that which is referred to in the Bible as the “second death”⁸¹⁵ or the Lake of Fire. It was, for Maimonides, a kind of two act play. First the resurrection of the dead and then the judgment of those souls was uniquely and indubitably linked to the immortality that each was raised with.⁸¹⁶ Augustine considered these events to be in alignment with what he termed the multiple deaths: death of the body, death of both soul and body in hellfire. Of course, Augustine’s view of death was in stark contrast to Ambrose, who saw a more Platonic view. To him, death was a positive, while to Augustine it was seen as always negative.⁸¹⁷ But, beyond the good or bad of death, which is temporary in its authority and sway over the human condition, judgment stands at the end of Revelation as a final and brutal end that does not end for the wicked of the earth as well as the wicked of the supernatural plane.

Thomas Aquinas wrestled with the reality of the Lake of Fire, in the perpetual existence of those condemned, rather than God’s ability to annihilate those who were destined for eternal punishment. Why would it be, Thomas asks, those who have no hope in the resurrection or in Christ could not simply cease to exist rather than be tormented. Was it possible that, even though condemned, damned souls would rather exist in torment than not exist at all?⁸¹⁸ Not only are non-believers destined for such a fate, but so, too, are the very holding places of the dead: Death and Hades find themselves being thrown into the Lake of Fire in the end.⁸¹⁹ Here, during the closing of creation, the lost find themselves set hopelessly adrift in a state that is so much more than non-existence or even mere punishment. As the first death is analogous with bodily death,

⁸¹⁵ Luper, *Philosophy of Death*, 43

⁸¹⁶ Sumegi, *Understanding Death*, 94

⁸¹⁷ Jones, *Approaching the End*, 4

⁸¹⁸ Jones, *Approaching the End*, 123

the second death describes an external state of paradoxical negation and contradiction. On one hand, the sinner is marked for a fiery torment, and yet, simultaneously, they are utterly cut off from the source that brings all efficacy to their individual existence. How is it, then that one can exist in a perpetual state of existence and non-existence at the same time? It is a state unlike any other that humans are even capable of imagining. The Lake of Fire is the truest and most accurate description of a living nightmare able to be conjured in the mind of man. For those destined for its shores, a living nightmare it will truly be.

6.10 Venturing into the Unknown (Revelation 22:22)

Utopia is touted in modern society as the ultimate elixir to the woes of humanity⁸²⁰ with radicals claiming they will bring about a world that is better than the Garden of Eden through force and capitulation. But those of the past who attempted such feats only crashed and burned on the rocks of reality. Despite these ill-fated agendas, even the American Church has its own version of a Utopian world on earth, with capitalism as its flagship and prosperity as its mantra.

The reality is, the Bible speaks very little about the aftermath of Revelation 22:15, where the reader is left with those who do the commandments of God and find themselves with the right to the Tree of Life and to the city and with the dogs and sorcerers and immoral and murderers and idolaters and liars forever outside of the gates. One may venture to ask: what comes next in the grand narrative? But, like any good storybook, as the last page is turned, do the characters simply stand still in the last scene, forever frozen in time or until another reader picks up the title and begins to read from the beginning again? Jesus assured us there would be a Paradise to come,

⁸¹⁹ Jennings, *Portrait of Death*, 15

⁸²⁰ Kastenbaum, *Death, Society, Experience*, 525

one in which already existed at the time of his crucifixion, and certainly must still exist today. Do we inhabit what once was the Garden of Eden, the Cherubim, after six-thousand years, finally putting down their flaming swords? Will there be, in the distant future, a time when the mystery of God should be finished - when time is no longer?⁸²¹

The assurance of a heaven is claimed in Scripture, of a heavenly treasure that is merited by good works and a faithful testimony,⁸²² for it if were not the case, what would there be as justification for the depraved and despicable world in which we now live? So powerful and deep seated is the notion of an afterlife that a third of agnostics and atheists state they believe in such.⁸²³

The gospel was a mystery by which God held secret from the foundation of the world, to be revealed in latter times through the apostles, though the prophets did hint at what they did not know. Still, the *mysterion* of God is not over⁸²⁴ and resides in the words of the seven thunders and on the lips of Enoch, the man who walked with God and was not, for God took him. What then remains for the saved after the city has been cleansed and the gates thrown open, and the twelve trees give over their fruit?

During the second temple period, the apocalyptic literature ran rife with the worldview of supernatural beings and demons and a grander reality at war.⁸²⁵ Will the earth and all her inhabitants simply cease to be considered with the plight of those lost? Will there be, instead, a new agenda, a new mission, a new gospel spelled out by God in the secret and hidden places of his own heart, only to be revealed to us new initiates among the hosts of heaven as was our gospel once revealed? Will we, once merely human, ascend to the designation, “Sons of God”

⁸²¹ Pope, *Christian Theology*, 1224

⁸²² Kilbourn, “Suffering in Early Christianity,” 175

⁸²³ Shermer, *Heavens on Earth*, 11

⁸²⁴ Freedman, *Anchor Bible Dictionary Vol 4*, “Mystery and the Mysteries”

and join the supernatural hosts of heaven on the divine council and rule from an intergalactic stronghold, to serve in the capacity of angels, indeed becoming like them ourselves? Will we be mystical messengers, bringing the good news from afar to a yet unknown race of sentient beings in need of a new kind of redemption? Will our desire and tradition for sacred space on earth then shift in heaven toward a new spirituality of seeking,⁸²⁶ a kind of pilgrimage, a mobile tabernacle where there is no temple made of hands, but each of us serving as living stones in the temple of our God?

It is simply unclear, as the message remains hidden just beyond the horizon of fate, out of reach of the minds that are alive and flaming with a fire for the Lord and for peace and for victory. Is earth the only realm in a kingdom of saints? In a universe that is boundless and without perceivable limit or size, can it be we are alone with the God who created all things? As Paul quoted from the prophets, “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him” (1 Co 2:9). With this alone we must be content until the day dawns and the morning star rises in our hearts (2 Pe 1:19).

⁸²⁵ Dunn, *Lexham Bible Dict*: “Messianic Woes”

⁸²⁶ Holder, *Blackwell Spirituality*, 543

Chapter 07 - Conclusions

7.1 In Mortal Shadow Do We Yet Wait

In the shadow of death, we all wait for the culmination of all things; for the return of the King of all Creation, for the judgment of the Saints and the Condemned, for the “revealing of the Sons of God” as Paul describes in Romans 8:19, the adoption as sons into the family and order of God. It is a time of waiting while on this earth, while subjected to the forces of evil, to the selfish volition of mere men, of demons, of dark forces that writhe and twist and seethe with great rage and enmity against any who call upon the name of the Lord, who dare to side with the Alpha and Omega. But those who do call on his name have been, as the Scriptures says, “drawn by the Father” (John 6:44) and those who have not have been turned over to the futility of their own minds, theirs hearts darkened (Ro 1:21) by the perpetual stain of sin in their lives.

A time is coming, though, when the heavens will roll back like a scroll and then mountains will move from their place, and this dimension in which humans exist will open to a greater revelation that now simply cannot be comprehended. Afforded to us in this life is but a moment, a simply wisp of wind, as we each wrestle with the words and deeds of our God, and the testimony of the saints, and the example given by the faithful throughout the history of the Church. Are we called to stand firm against the coming onslaught of a secularizing ideology that is hostile to the Christian faith? Are we to be willing to, joyfully, give up our material things, our comfort, our safety, our amenities, our freedoms and rights and absence of pain and loss, all for Christ? Would he truly call us to such a great cost?

As Luke recounted for the entire world to hear, “which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish?” May we each,

likewise, before another sun sets, consider soberly the cost we may be asked to pay for a clear conscience before God and King.

7.2 But for a Season is this Lamentable and Venal Existence

In Ecclesiastes, the teacher tells of this life, all is “vanity, vanity, a chasing after the wind” (Ecc 1:2, 14; 6:9; 2:17). “Nothing,” he says, “is new under the sun. That which has been is what will be, and that which is done is what will be done” (Ecc 1:9). This life is superfluous, temporary, futile in our human pursuits of wealth and fame and significance, when we are nothing but a breath and then we are gone. The very thing we know of as existence, as real - the earth and the universe, the stars and the sun and moon, the physical reality - it is a figment of our imagination, having come to us from the mind of God as a means of testing us, of preparing us, of bringing us to the point where we can answer the question by faith, “who is the Christ?” For there is no other name in heaven or on earth by which men are saved (Acts 4:12). Salvation is not found in Buddha or in evolution, or in the efforts of men, nor in New Age, or in American culture. The pain and suffering existent in the world is for our benefit, for our edification. As Paul attests, “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose” (Ro 8:28).

If nothing else, in this life we should count it all joy to suffer for Christ and to share in his death if indeed we have been called by God to do so. A good life has never once been promised by God to the inhabitants of this earth. Rather, from the foundations of the world, God has hidden in his heart the object of his mercy. In that, if in nothing else, may the Christian truly find lasting hope.

7.3 Knowing Neither the Day nor the Hour (Be Watchful until the End)

Christians are warned in the end of Luke that they should avoid carousing and drunkenness and the cares of this life, for the Day will come unexpectedly, as a snare for all who dwell on the earth. But the Christian should instead watch, pray to be counted worthy to escape everything that will occur at the end (Luke 21:34-36). Again, in Matthew 25:13 Christians are warned to, “watch, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.” And Mark 13:32, “of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, But only the father.”

Because of this admonition, the Christian life should be a stark and grave contradiction from the picture painted above of the non-believer. Christians are to forsake carousing (overindulgence), drunkenness, and the physical, psychological, social, and economic cares of this world. Rather, he is to be watchful, alert, sober, considering the things of God and the Kingdom of Heaven rather than the futile pursuits of this abysmal life. What will be the fate of this world, of the universe? What will be the total of my worth in life? Will I strike it rich? Will a make a mark after I am gone? What will my favorite sports team score in the playoffs?⁸²⁷ None of these things matter when compared with the mission of God and the purpose he has given to each of us. There is no way to determine what the future holds, save what the Bible has predicted for us beforehand. All we can do is ready ourselves physically, spiritually, psychologically for what is next.

For the American Christian, persecution is an unknown quantity, without firsthand exposure. There is no way to determine what kind of persecution will come to these shores, or to what severity it will come, if at all. Could anyone in the first 1700 years of the Church have predicted there would be a new country formed in the Americas that would secure and preserve religious

freedoms for all, guaranteeing in the founding documents freedom of speech and religious liberty? Rather, we must take Jesus at his word. No one knows the day nor the hour of his return. While the world is occupied with the cares of this world, of the trivial and the immoral, the believer should take a sober and serious assessment of their life and their efforts before them, be watchful until the end.

If persecution comes, the Christian is to be content in all things. As was previously discussed, we should not avoid persecution if it comes, nor should persecution be sought out for its own sake. Rather, as Paul puts it, “If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men” (Ro 12:18) “being anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Php 4:6–7).

7.4 The Research Reviewed

At the outset of this research a series of questions were put forward concerning persecution and the American Church today. The aim was to discover, after analysis of three distinct areas of inquiry - a historical and modern Theology of Persecution, the Enochian Worldview of the Second Temple Period, and a Philosophy of Death as it informs the martyr - just how off the mark the American Church had slipped through its 250 year development, and what would likewise be required to bring back a proper persecution theology that would adequately prepare American Christians for potentially severe persecution in the future.

The first question posed was: is there persecution currently in the US? As was discovered in Chapters 1-4 of this dissertation, with a detailed and extensive review of both historical and

⁸²⁷ Vidal, *Beginning and the End*, 6

modern persecution, the answer to this first question is a resounding no. US Christians not only do not experience systemic or severe persecution natively, but actually have no theological concept or framework from which to gauge persecution if they, at any moment, were to experience persecution firsthand. But, as discussed at length in Chapters 2 and 3, the signs of the times are changing. The American Church is now teetering upon the edge of a precipice, with diverging agendas amidst a cultural war armed to the teeth by radical socialists that is poised to dismantle and destroy anything it views as the establishment or patriarchal, which includes the American version of Evangelicalism. With even a cursory skim through Church history, it is accurate to say American Christianity is a distinct and unique brand of the Christian faith, which dovetails from historical theology quite significantly. With its infusion of nationalism and intrinsic religious and individual freedoms, along with its reliance and formation in Western capitalism and consumerism, the American Church often operates as a business rather than an organic organism as the Bible describes.

Another preliminary question asked was: has the American Church abandoned a theology of persecution and suffering? Again, the answer from the research returned a stark and sobering yes. Much of Christianity has been imbued with suffering as a central doctrine. Christians in the past sought and prayed to emulate Christ, from the first apostles to the Church Fathers, to the believers who stood against the abuses of the Catholic Church, to even modern day Christians throughout much of the world who live and breathe under near constant threat that they will be arrested or beaten or murdered simply because of their faith. The American Church, though, does not possess this same kind of identity. Suffering is more often viewed as a failure in faith or a result of unconfessed sin, instead of a call from the God who saved them. Rather than question why the theologies against persecution and for religious freedom that founded their country have

vanished from the pulpit, most Christians in the United States opt for a nationalist and popularist narrative that speaks to the fallen human nature toward consumption and greed and the consumption of product and the aim of material prosperity.

A third question asked of the research was: is there a need for persecution training today in America? This question was answered by in-depth inquiry in Chapters 2-4, as the data illustrates clearly the shift from a predominately Christian nation to a post-Christian or post-modern, poly-atheistic one. All but gone are fair and open political elections, checks and balances between the three branches of government, or even the concept of government locally over federal government - the rule by the people and for the people. These concepts along with the protections afforded by the Constitution are being exponentially eroded at a rate few if any could have predicted just a few decades ago. There is no better time than today for the American Christian, individually and the Church as a whole, to band together and begin the task of reclaiming her long abandoned heritage and do the necessary work to prepare for the battle that will surely come.

Lastly, the question of: 'what would persecution training look like?' was asked at the outset of this research, and this was covered extensively in Chapter 5 and 6. From the biblical definitions of suffering and persecution, to the requirements that any kind of curriculum or theology must be founded firmly on the Apostles and the Prophets, the aforementioned analysis concluded that a renewed Theology of Persecution would be most effective if interconnected with already existing theological training, both in the local Church as well as externally through para-church organizations. Great care was given to provide ample examples of what persecution could look like in the United States if and when it arrives, whether the forcing of modern Church organizations (which can already be seen in neighboring countries), to social pressure as was

seen in the first few centuries after Christ's resurrection, the potential loss of family, friends, and the predicted betrayal by both. In a country and a culture that has had a longstanding development of independent volition and healthy skepticism of government interference, it will be extremely difficult for many American Christians when they realize their homes and other assets are being seized, or that they must pay a greater tax to the government because of their faith, or that at any time they might be arrested for preaching or teaching about biblical values or even possessing a Bible to begin with. Such concepts are simply an anathema to the American mind, yet how quickly we see the rumblings of emergency camps and talk of stripping Christians of credentials or degrees, barring individuals from working if they do not comply with the insanity of intersectionality or accept the assumptions of White Guilt in the name of secular cultures new god, Equity.

Additionally, Chapter 6 explored the concepts of death and looked at what would need to be included to form a proper philosophy of death that would effectively inform the Christian martyr if they were ever to be called to stand and die for their faith and testimony of Christ our King. In this examination was discussed the basic philosophical and historical understandings of death, as well as a detailed analysis of biblical anthropology, in how the individual living being of the Bible is formed to constitute a whole, and how death as the great enemy mechanism of the curse that rips apart that union of body, soul, and spirit, sending the individual "I" careening into an unknown and unforgiving void, devoid of physical form, of purpose, of awareness of the living world from which they had come. This discussion of the Intermediate State gave way to the aftermath of death, the end of all things, the culmination and fulfillment of biblical prophecy and the promises of God and Christ at the Resurrection of the dead, to stand before God, the creator of the earth and the heavens and the entire reality in which we call home. To stand before the

judgment seat of Christ, the great white throne, where God will judge both the living and the dead, and any who are not written in the Lamb's Book of Life will be cast into utter fiery darkness for all eternity shut out from the presence and perpetuity of God.

Discussed as well in Chapter 2 is the fundamental reality of not only our own fallen world, but of the greater realm of the supernatural beings that exist as little more than enigmas. Shrouded in mystery, these creatures of unknown origin share with humans a fate sealed in unknown glory. Whether they be called angels or demons or fallen ones or earth born, these beings serve at God's good pleasure, with unparalleled powers and capabilities, yet seemingly enthralled by the endeavors of mere men. This worldview provides a proper and robust framework from which a Theology of Persecution can be oriented. Rather than glossing over or dismissing the spiritual realm entirely, as does the secularist or materialist, such inquiry addresses head on the whys and hows of the mysterious destiny of humans who are saved by the blood of the Lamb - the revealing of the Sons of God. To what will we be likened once we are like the angels? To what task will we be assigned? For what purpose will we serve the King once he has subdued his enemies and thwarted the usurpers?

The American experiment does at least appear to be coming to an end. Whether the lofty ideas birthed at the founding of the United States continue into the future or they are unwittingly and irretrievably lost to the grind of time, the American Church must ready herself for the task ahead. It is time, once and for all, to surrender the dominionistic ideology that has replaced persecution theology or the charismatic fantasies that claim perpetual prosperity and the Christian rule of earth is within its grasp. It is time to learn from the past, to learn from other Christians who have suffered and been beaten and demoralized, even brutally and savagely killed because of their faith in a God in which Americans also claim to serve. It may be too late to save

the America you and I grew up in. The political and culture tipping point may very well have already been reached. If so, now begins the work and the struggle for the faith, for the word of God, for American Christians to stand as a testimony in a darkened world, to be the light on the hill, and, if called, to be perfected in the flames of persecution and martyrdom yet still. It is up to us to, as Paul championed two thousand years ago, “redeem the time, walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, for the days, they are evil” (Eph 5:15-16).

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