



MentorNet #62

MOVING OUR CHURCHES 'UNDERGROUND'

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Jesus predicted, "They will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come." *Matthew 24:9-14*

Whence we have come

The messianic Jewish movement that would come to be called Christianity was born in a dusty back-water of the Roman Empire. While the faith spread to other provinces through synagogues, it shared Judaism's legal status. However, when it broke out into mostly Gentile populations, the movement became illegal and suffered three centuries of sporadic and regional opposition. Followers could be thrown to beasts for their refusal to worship the emperor as god. Unnumbered 1000s were imprisoned and butchered, and their hand-copied Bibles were burned in public. Nevertheless, messianic faith spread widely and prospered with neither a clergy class nor sacred sites. Only when legalized and made socially respectable did the movement begin its decline that would bring about a fossilized institution with a powerless "Christian" religion. Even so, the movement has always had within it a significant, faithful remnant of faithful believers who have resisted the apostasy.

It is certainly a pattern, if not a law, that the messianic movement grows fastest and farthest when persecuted. In England, "Bloody" Queen Mary had some 382 "dissenters" burned in public. In the mid-1940s and 50s, Communist regimes sought to exterminate Christianity by outlawing public and private worship, arresting and sometimes executing pastors and evangelists, banning publication and distribution of the Holy Bible. Thus, church planters in those countries had to break the law in order to obey their Lord Messiah, incurring the wrath of hostile and ignorant officials. Unnumbered 1000s were jailed and executed for daring to believe in Jesus. To this day, dominant religions and ideologies often suppress Jesus' followers.

Where we are at

At the present moment in world history, Christ-obedient, Bible-oriented Christianity remains the fastest growing faith movement on earth, if not the most powerful. Every geopolitical country now has a Christian movement, even if no chapels, Bible schools or vernacular Bible translation. However, this growth is happening at a cost. That cost is growing in the West, too, where public displays of Christian and biblical themes have become illegal and Christian organizations are systematically being excluded from participation in public, government and scientific forums.

Hate-filled atheists publicly ridicule the Bible, journalistic media have become almost entirely evolutionist, eastern mystical beliefs have become the majority belief propagated by cinematographers, homosexuals taut their disgusting practices in some public schools, infanticide of the unborn has surpassed 50 million abortions, and scholars hold public seminars with one objective: to reduce Jesus to the status of a dead, deluded, first-century rabbi. Portions of the Bible are banned in Canada, and in California high-achieving, home-schooled students who hold biblical beliefs have been refused admission to state universities.

Within a decade, some public officials predict, churches and religion-based schools will lose their tax-exempt status, and Christian clergy, already despised, will be subject to arrest for “corrupting” youth.

Whither we are going

In the near future, messianic Christian faith in the East and the West, the North and the South must prepare for legal, social, religious, governmental and financial opposition. Jesus ordered his followers, “Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.” “When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next.” We who love Jesus more than our lives and seek to obey his commandments above and before all else, may soon be plunged into indescribable confusion, if we are caught asleep.

Deprived of all privilege, respect and legal protections, followers who take seriously their Bible, their faith and their relationship with Christ, may soon have no chapel in which to sit comfortably, no cleric preaching monologues to which we listen passively, no admission to schools and jobs without signing away our convictions, and no loudly amplified worship music. Believers should not be surprised when denied jobs and education, their children seized by the state and recruited by antichristian religions, legally powerless to protect them and to defend themselves.

What to do?

Learn from our brothers and sisters in North Africa, the Middle East, across Asia and Eastern Europe. The lessons are simple enough for a small child to understand, and the financial price remains nil.

Commit to love and obey Jesus Christ. He is more than the object and centre of our faith. He is our very life, both our loving Saviour and our sovereign King. Too much so-called Christianity has replaced loving obedience with abstract ideas, popular psychology, frivolous emotionalism, institutional structures and rugged individualism.

Reaffirm biblical faith. Abstract theology, fascinating as it is, generally fails to inspire faith, motivate godly living, or provide spiritual power. Rationalistic beliefs about creation, God, baptism, communion, prayer and the life to come, must give way to trusting the Bible as literally true, spiritually powerful and entirely reliable in all that it teaches. We must become devoted to knowing the Bible and to obeying the New Testament, relying on the Holy Spirit to enable us.

Worship in spirit and truth. We must continually seek a balance between big worship “services” and little worship gatherings in which seekers and believers can practice community

by serving one another in love with their ministry gifts. Pray one for another to lay hold of Jesus' strength to overcome personal and social evil while undertaking endless ways to serve families and communities.

Learn, obey and teach the Word of God. Let the New Testament of the Holy Bible serve as believers' guidebook that they may freely follow in ways that they and their God-given leaders agree.

Accept persecution with joy. Jesus promised that our joy will always prove greater than the persecution, opposition and ridicule that unbelievers and other religions may heap upon us. Whilst we should never seek to be persecuted or abused, when it does happen, let the Spirit of Grace rest upon us. Many others will abandon their unbelief and hatred for Christ because of our godly reaction to injustice.

Plant and multiply little churches. Keep on making disciples of all who are willing, baptizing them, teaching them to obey Jesus' commandments in love, and forming them into little communities that worship Jesus, love one another, and serve their neighbours. Intentionally seek ways to help such little communities to start new ones, in turn.

Train leaders by mentoring them. The hugely-expensive Christian educational institutions cannot produce enough Christian workers. Unfortunately, many schools abandoned biblical faith for rationalism while majoring in abstract ideas. Gladly, the New Testament teaches a method of mentoring new leaders that can and must keep up with a rapid multiplication of new, little churches. See MentorNet articles 4, 6, 7, 17, 19, 23, 37, and 42.

Saturate society with believers. Do so by continually and quietly planting new little churches in every social group and inside every institution. Perhaps the clearest New Testament promise for effectiveness in evangelism is found in 1 Corinthians 14:24 & 25, which urges us to worship in gatherings that are small enough for all to participate actively, where visiting unbelievers will be convinced of their need for Messiah. The greatest ingathering of new believers in the history of the West is about to begin. It is already underway in the East and the South.

Resources

P. O'Connor, *Reproducible Pastoral Training*, www.MissionBooks.com

Free CP software "*Come, Let Us Disciple the Nations*" from www.Paul-Timothy.net/dn

Free mentoring tools and materials for new leaders from www.MentorAndMultiply.com

Train & Multiply® church planting and pastoral training course from www.trainandmultiply.com

Order *Church Multiplication Guide* from a bookshop or at www.WCLbooks.com

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