

Hated without a Reason: The Remarkable Story of Christian Persecution over the Centuries by P Sookdheo

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This is a new book about an age-old topic; the persecution of Christianity. However, it does present some differences from its predecessors. First, it begins with a discussion of the persecution of Jesus of Nazareth. This is followed by a section on the persecution of Jesus' immediate followers before getting to the historic persecutions as we know them. Finally, it deals with ongoing persecution down through the centuries to the present day. An appendix is included which contains the substantial text of *The Silk Letter* penned by Korean Christian, Hwang Sayeong, in 1801 on a piece of silk which described the persecution of Christians in Korea and led to their severe persecution.

The author emphasises the situation which arose at the close of Christian persecution with the passing of the Edict of Milan in 313CE by the emperor Constantine. Sadly, this led to the beginning of persecution by Christians up to and following the Reformations! Persecutions by no means only referred to the attack on Christians by pagans. The rise of Islam heralded a new wave of persecution from another faith perspective. This led to the demise or virtual demise of Christianity in some areas. One issue the book does not draw out clearly, regards the persecution of Christians by Christians in the process of Roman Christianity wiping out the faithful Celtic Christianity, which had produced the bright light of learning and mission to Europe during the Dark Ages. This was the fateful result of the Synod of Whitby in 664CE. Wherever Christianity was birthed persecution followed throughout Europe, Scandinavia, the Far East (China, Japan and Korea) and South East Asia. An interesting theme to remember is the persecution that occurred within families and communities when people, especially women or young people, turned from their traditional faith to Christianity.



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The longest chapter in this book is devoted to “The long twentieth century” which is described as “a century of global persecution of Christians” (p. 139) which has yet to come to an end. This was for the author evidenced in the positive correlation between persecution and totalitarian ideologies such as Communism, Nazism, Fascism and Maoism. He also adds Islamism as an ideology, but why not Christianity and Judaism, since all three have aggressive fundamentalistic tendencies which have led to the persecution of Christians and others with whom they disagree? The final chapter of the book is devoted to Christian responses to persecution and includes a discussion of religious liberty which concludes that “the Bible teaches that freedom of religion must be for all in society” (p.198).

The text is extremely lucid and coherent and is enhanced by the inclusion of sidebars throughout as well as helpful illustrations and maps. This book will be of enormous use by students of the history of Christianity, relating to an issue many had thought had passed centuries ago but which is still an enduring problem. It reflects a global historical and contemporary phenomenon which has virtually become a mark of the Church: “... we must share his sufferings if we are also to share his glory” (Romans 8:17).