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Rejected by the World

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In my Bible study I have increasingly realized that from its inception Christianity was rejected by the world. Long before the birth of Jesus, the prince of the world was attacking God's people. All one has to do is look at the historical events that document the fact that God's people have been constantly assailed by some enemy. They began their existence as the nation of Israel with the Egyptians in hot pursuit. Their goal was to destroy them. After that, if it was not the Moabites, it was the Amorites, Jebusites, Philistines, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, Romans, Turks, or British attacking, conquering or ruling over them. Outside of Israel they have been persecuted in almost all of those countries where they dispersed. Notable among these were Spain, Russia and Germany.

Christianity, an offshoot of Judaism, has had its troubles too. The Romans did their best to stamp it out. Islam tried to destroy it. Christians were put to the sword by the hundreds of thousands by Islam. Today the Muslim Sudanese are killing the Christians in their country by the thousands. More recently the communists did all they could to wipe out the church in Russia and that part of Eastern Europe under their control. The communist government in China continues to this day in its persecution of Christians.

The established church did its best to wipe out the reformation before and after Luther. They burned many potential reformers at the stake. One large group of Protestants that was persecuted was the French Huguenots. They were a charismatic protestant sect. Because they were different, they were put to the sword by the government of France at the instigation of the Roman Catholic Church.

The persecution has not stopped. A saying I heard early in my Christian life went like this. "No one ever aspires to rise up to the level of a righteous man. He only wants to drag him down to his own level." This fact is apparent in the observation that the church in our day is under attack by the forces of humanism. Leading the attack is the ACLU. It is using every "legal" means possible to destroy the influence of Christianity in our society. In the same way gay activists, radical feminists, socialists and abortion advocates are doing all they can to destroy the "Christian Right." Then there are the militant atheists who are still at it, although we do not hear much of their leader Madeline Murray O'Hair these days. We must remember too that the peddlers of smut and pornography like Larry Flynt are doing their best to pollute society and destroy its moral fiber.

I have to say that I am bothered when I find that very few people are concerned about the rapid decay of morals. This lack of concern may be the result of our belief that our government, founded on Christian principles, will protect us. Theoretically it should, but that is not the case. One of the greatest threats to our society is the Supreme Court that slowly and continuously erodes the Christian foundations of our society. These Jurists have believed the humanist line taught in their law schools. Their decisions reveal their philosophical bias. Since most of them lack metaphysical education, they do not understand what they are doing to the moral fiber of our society with some of their decisions.

The July 1997 issue of *First Things: A journal of Religion and Public Life* published a symposium on the rulings of this not so august body. They pulled together essays by Hadley Arkes a Professor of Law at Amherst college, William Bentley Ball, a practicing lawyer from Harrisburg PA; Robert Bork, a law professor and former judge; Jean Bethke Eltaint, professor in the theology school at the University of Chicago; Robert P. George, professor of Law at Princeton University; Mary Ann Glendon, law professor at Harvard; Russell Hittinger, professor of Law at Tulsa University; Michael Stern from the American Jewish Congress and Michael Uhlman a professor of public policy at Claremont College. I have taken the time to list all the contributors to show you that these are learned men and women who are scholars with great knowledge of the Constitution and its application to public life.

Although they were picked because they do have an understanding of metaphysics, they were unanimous in their evaluation of the direction the Supreme court has taken in the last forty years. Mary Ann Glendon summed up the state of the Court so well. She Said, "The nine men and women on today's Court are wandering around in a museum of error created in the 1940's when their predecessors in a series of shoddy opinions, made the establishment (of religion) ban binding upon the states. Justices Hugo Black and Felix Frankfurter led a majority of their colleagues in setting the establishment and free exercise clauses in opposition to one another by interpreting the establishment ban broadly, and the free exercise narrowly — in a sort of pincer attack on what the Founders considered the first of freedoms. Several opinions from this era, such as *Everson and McCollum*, rank among the Supreme Court's worst — *With their skimpy reasoning, ill disguised hostility to religion (especially to religious organizations), and their contempt for political solutions reached through interfaith cooperation. The underlying thrust of these decisions was to privatize religion and eradicate it from public life* (italics mine)."

The legal philosophy of the Supreme Court has profoundly influenced the lower courts too. All federal courts have gotten into the business of governing without the consent of the governed. They too have demonstrated a hostility to religion. Both the lower courts and Supreme Court interpret the Constitution in the same way the humanists and liberal theologians interpret scripture. They interpret it as saying what they want it to say. Not what the author(s) intended it to say.

It is because of the hostility of the Supreme Court to religion, and the militant anti-Christian stand of organizations like the ACLU and the others named above, that Christianity is being persecuted by the courts.

Individually, many of us have been persecuted because of our faith. When I began my Christian program at Duke University, the chairman of my department was encouraging. He gave me excellent advice, and defended me against the attacks of some other members of the department who objected to my praying with patients. I had the support of others in the Medical School administration who also chose to give me freedom to promote Christian medicine. Then my chairman was promoted to Chancellor, and we had to get a new one. During the interviews I made a comment to one of the primary candidates. He responded in a patronizing manner. I had not had anyone patronize me like that in my life. My first reaction was to respond in a way that made it plain that I did not appreciate his attitude. I let it go, thinking that he would not be the man chosen for the job. He was given the job, and almost immediately he let me know that he wanted to minimize my influence in the department.

Through a series of maneuvers during the next three years, he did all he could to eradicate Christian psychiatry from his department. I had only three responses to his persecution. (1) I could take it, and wait until I was ready to retire three years later. (2) I could fight him. I had been a fighter in my childhood and had learned how to infight while I was on the faculty at the University of Texas. My chairman, Titus Harris, was a master infighter, and really taught me how to do it. My friends in the Christian Legal Society wanted to take him to court, but I could not bring myself to do it. (3) I could retire early, and let the Lord give me a new career. I chose the last alternative. He did give me a new one that has been very satisfying.

Retrospectively the Lord was guiding me in those years. He first of all told me that I would be moving to join the New Directions. I laughed at him because I did not believe I could be of use to them. Even so, I told J. L. Williams the director of the New Directions about what was going on, and he invited me to open a counseling center in his building. Since I was on his board of directors, I felt it might be the thing to do. When the funds became available to make the move I knew it was the Lord's will.

One of the greatest lessons I learned during that time was that I had to remain steadfast in prayer, and not let the hurt of being rejected by an institution I had been loyal to get me down. I must have forgiven him ten times each day. I did not want bitterness to ruin me. After I left the University many of my colleagues remarked that I had handled those events remarkably well.

Persecution comes in many forms if we practice our faith. The reason for this is found in Jesus' discourse in the 15th chapter of John:

This is my command: Love each other. "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do

not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One who sent me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin. Now, however, they have no excuse for their sin. He who hates me hates my Father as well. If I had not done among them what no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. But now they have seen these miracles, and yet they have hated both me and my Father. But this is to fulfill what is written in their Law: 'They hated me without reason (John 15:17-25).'"

Then again he said, "All this I have told you so that you will not go astray. They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God. They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me. I have told you this, so that when the time comes you will remember that I warned you. I did not tell you this at first because I was with you (John 16:1-4)."

In these words the Lord told us why we are going to be persecuted. We are going to be persecuted because He chose us out of the world. Let us look at his statement closely.

To be sanctified means to be set apart. Having been chosen out of the world we have been set apart to be a special people. We have been made right before the Lord and have the guarantee of eternal life. We have been raised and seated with Christ in heaven. This makes us very special people. We have been forgiven and given the power to overcome sin.

People of the world are lost, sinful and ridden with guilt. They cannot control their biological drives. They are morally paralyzed. They know they are doing wrong, but they cannot stop doing it. They are aware of their wretchedness, but they cannot do anything about it. They do not want to surrender their lives to a God they perceive as stern, harsh and wrathful. They look at all the natural catastrophes, and such things as the Holocaust or Rwanda, Bosnia and Northern Ireland and cannot believe that our God is love. It is no wonder that they want to maintain their autonomy.

They consider real Christians a threat. They know that we have found something special, because we love one another. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control are not characteristics (Gal. 5:22,23) they possess. They think that God will take away from them the things that they treasure. They do not want to give up their alcohol, drugs, sexual immorality, idolatry and witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, envy, and orgies (Gal. 5:20,21). It is no wonder that they want to remove us from their midst, or force us to keep our beliefs to ourselves. We remind them of their depravity.

Prayer bothers them too. It bothers them because they suspect that it may be effective. That it is quite possible that there is a God, and that he might answer the prayers of his

people worries them. Since many of those who have these fears are highly educated and productive people, Satan exhorts them to attack and try to remove the threats that Christians pose. They possess great zeal. I have met many of them during the years. They are far more zealous than many Christian leaders I know. They are eloquent, persuasive, well informed and passionate in their argumentation. They can be mean as well. I have had my life threatened by homosexual activists after I publically declared that homosexuals can be healed.

Realizing that we are under attack we should ask as the hearers of Peter's sermon in Acts (2:37), "Brothers what shall we do?" The answer for us is that we too should repent, but we do not need to be baptized. What we desperately need to do is to pray. We must enlist ourselves in the growing number of Christians who are fasting and praying for Gods intervention in the polluted society in which we live. Bill Bright and others are holding a meeting in Houston where thousands of Christians will fast and pray for our country and for the church. They will be linked with thousands of others in other parts of the country by satellite. We need to join them. and enlist as many other Christians in the effort as possible.

Every time there has been a national prayer effort of this kind revival follows. Prayer will change the hearts of the people of this country, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against the true church (Matt. 16:18).

Some years ago a young helicopter pilot who works in the mission field transporting missionaries to out of the way places told me a story that illustrates how the enemy uses prayer too. He said that before a major evangelical thrust in the Cameroons, the witch doctors in the area held an all night prayer meeting with the purpose of thwarting the efforts of the missionaries. When he and his copilot went out the next day to deliver his missionaries to their destinations, his compass was in error. He did not make his destination. He actually flew over it without seeing it. He soon realized he had missed it and returned by dead reckoning to the site and landed. The people there said, "Why did you fly over us? Did you not see us waving to you?"

The minions of Satan are praying to the god of this world. We need to be praying to the Most High God of the universe. We are fighting an invisible War. We cannot afford to be fainthearted. We must use our powerful weapons.

"For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ (2 Cor. 10:3-5)."