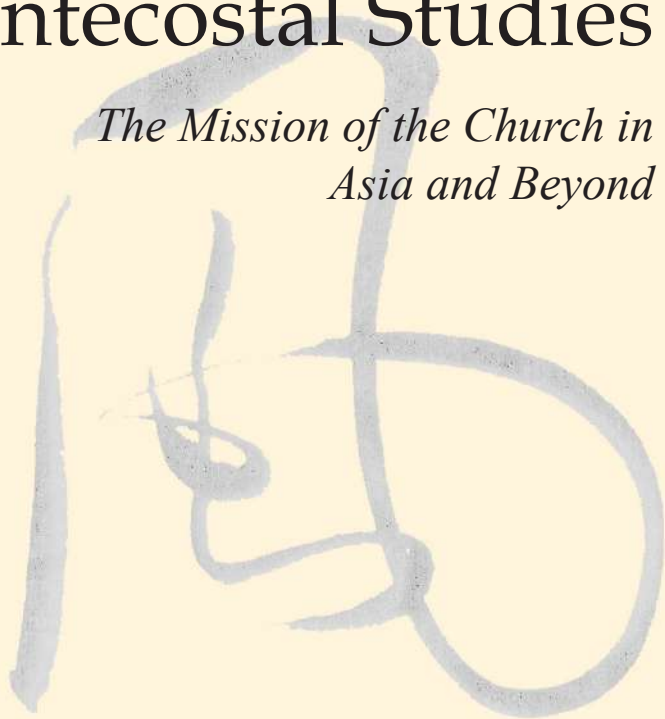


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Overcoming Persecution as a Barrier to Christian Witness to Muslims in Indonesia

By Lew Belcourt

Introduction

An Indonesian Christian businessman was relating his feelings towards the majority Muslim population in Indonesia. As the owner of a small factory, he had done his best to show the love of Jesus to his Muslim employees by granting sick leave, loaning money for emergencies, obeying labor laws, and genuinely caring for his workers. In return, they took advantage of him, stole from him, lied to him, and generally made the factory a battleground. “I know I am supposed to love them,” he said, “but honestly, I just can’t.”

Indonesia is home to 240 unreached people groups containing over 192 million people, almost all of whom are Muslim.¹ Many Christian organizations, both Indonesian and foreign, recruit evangelists and missionaries to evangelize these unreached people groups. The difficulties for these cross-cultural workers are well-documented. The cost to recruit, train, and support these workers is enormous. However, a minority Christian population exists in almost every village, town, or city where these unreached people groups live. These Christians migrated from other parts of Indonesia for various reasons. They experience persecution almost every day. Is it possible to mobilize these Christians who are already living among the unreached people groups to reach out to their neighbors? How can these persecuted believers overcome their trauma and begin to share the love of Jesus?

The Bible states that believers will be persecuted and offers spiritual support for those undergoing persecution. Is spiritual impact the only result of religious persecution? Or must the sociological, physical, psychological, and economic impacts of persecution on believers also be considered? Can spiritual support overcome all the effects of persecution which keep Christians from reaching out to their Muslim neighbors? It may be too simplistic to expect persecuted believers to share God’s love with their Muslim neighbors without first addressing the full impact of persecution in their life.

¹“Country: Indonesia,” *Joshua Project*, <https://joshua project.net/countries/id>, (accessed April 12, 2023).

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This paper will first explore the issue of persecution in the Bible and then look at how the early Church faced persecution. It will examine persecution experienced by present-day Indonesian believers and explore responses to this persecution by Indonesian theologians. The sociological, physical, psychological, and economic impacts of persecution will be considered. The final section of this paper will suggest ways that Indonesian Christians can overcome the barrier of persecution, enabling them to reach out to their Muslim neighbors with the love of Jesus.

Persecution in the Bible

The Bible refers to various forms of persecution. Some forms, like stoning, the sword, and crucifixion, are fatal while others, such as expulsion, imprisonment, and scourging, are not.² The term martyr (Greek, *marturion*) originally described those who witnessed to their faith. It then came to be used for those who suffered persecution, whether or not the suffering was fatal. The exclusive use of the term for those who died for their faith began in the post-apostolic writings of the early Church.

Regardless of the form of persecution, Pobee notes three elements common to biblical examples of persecution. The first element is suffering, whether resulting in death or not. The second, more important element, is the witness of the martyr to God. A third element is the view of the martyr “beyond the world to God and his heavenly kingdom.”³ A relationship between persecution and eschatology begins to appear in apocalyptic literature during the intertestamental period.⁴ We will explore these elements in the Old Testament, the intertestamental writings, and the New Testament.

Old Testament

The Old Testament book of Daniel contains two of the best-known stories of religious persecution: Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah in the fiery furnace and Daniel in the den of lions.⁵ Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah refuse to bow down to the image of gold as commanded by King

²J. S. Pobee, “Persecution and Martyrdom in the Theology of Paul,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series*, vol. 6 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), 1-11. EBSCO.

³Ibid., 24-29.

⁴Pobee, 14.

⁵The three are more commonly known by their Babylonian names, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

Nebuchadnezzar. They are denounced and brought before the king. They are given the chance to obey the king's command or to be cast into a fiery furnace. Their defiant response to the king has inspired believers ever since (Daniel 3:16-18). After their miraculous deliverance, the king praises God and notes that the three Jews "trusted in [God], defied the king's command, and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God" (Daniel 3:28, All Scripture references are from the NIV).

Daniel faces a similar choice when political rivals ask King Darius to issue a royal decree forbidding praying to any god or human except the king (Daniel 6:7). Daniel chooses obedience to the God of Israel and continues his daily prayers to God. His obedience would have cost him his life had God not intervened (Daniel 6:26-27).

In these stories we see the three elements common to persecution: suffering, a witness to God, and a view beyond this world to God and his kingdom. The perseverance of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah become important examples to the Jews when they begin to suffer persecution during the intertestamental period.

Intertestamental Period

In 168 BC, the Seleucid King Antiochus Epiphanes issues edicts that forbid temple worship, the observation of the sabbath and other feasts, and circumcision. All this is an attempt to "replace Jewish national consciousness with Hellenism."⁶ Jews under the leadership of Judas Maccabee rebel against the king's edicts. Many are arrested and eventually tortured to death.

The Maccabean martyrs appear in intertestamental works as "examples to posterity of total and uncompromising dedication to God, the Torah, and ancestral tradition, even though it meant sufferings and/or death for themselves."⁷ References to the Maccabean martyrs frequently occur in apocalyptic literature, which reached its height between 200 BC and AD 135 and coincided with "the conflicts between the Jews and the Seleucids."⁸ This eschatological view declares that "God is the Lord of History. All history is pointing towards the Day of the Lord when the wicked will be judged and the righteous will be rewarded."⁹

During this period, the concept of prophet and martyr is also changing, "making a move from historical to a more theological base."¹⁰

⁶Pobee, 20.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid., 14.

⁹Ibid., 38.

¹⁰Ibid., 28.

“Martyrdom eventually became necessary for a prophet.”¹¹ Old Testament prophets are re-cast as martyrs. Elijah becomes “the prototype of zeal for the Lord” because he refuses to forsake the covenant (1 Kings 19:10).¹² A midrash from the period lists Abel, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Saul, David, and Israel as persecuted prophets.¹³ In a final development, not only is every prophet considered a martyr, but the utterance of a dying martyr takes on the form of prophecy.¹⁴

From the intertestamental period “grew a long tradition of martyr-theology.”¹⁵ The following section will explore persecution in the New Testament and follow the development of that tradition.

New Testament

In the New Testament, a martyr is one who is a disciple of Jesus, professing that Jesus is the Messiah and “being willing to suffer as he did.”¹⁶ This brief survey will examine the theme of persecution in the life and teachings of Jesus in the Gospels, the experience of the New Testament church in Acts, and the writing of the Apostles in the Epistles and Revelation.

Gospels

The Gospels are written “that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:31). The Gospels document the birth, ministry, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. The suffering of Jesus is documented in each gospel, as the Lamb of God becomes a sacrifice for the sins of the world. The gospels also record Jesus’ teaching to his followers about the suffering they would experience.

The Synoptic Gospels warn believers that persecution is the price of becoming a disciple of Jesus. Jesus warns that persecution would come from one’s family, authorities, and the world (Matthew. 10:17-8, 22; 24:13; Luke. 21:16-17, 19; John 12:25).

By their obedience, believers will accomplish three things: the Son will be glorified; their sacrificial death will result in eternal life; and the

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid., 26.

¹³Ibid., 28.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid., 46.

¹⁶James A. Kelhoffer, “Withstanding Persecution as a Corroboration of Legitimacy in the New Testament: Reflections on the Resulting Ethical and Hermeneutical Quandary,” *Dialog* 50, no. 2 (Summer 2011): 122, ATLA.

Father will be glorified.¹⁷ John 16:1-4a notes different forms of persecution, the motives of the persecutors, and the purpose of Jesus' warning. Jesus tells the disciples they will be put out of the synagogue and some will be killed. The persecutors believe they are serving God by persecuting Jesus' followers, although Jesus says that they do not know God. The warning is given so the disciples will not fall away when they are persecuted.¹⁸ In John 17, Jesus specifically prays for his disciples in light of the persecution they will face. Jesus asks for their divine protection and sanctification. He asks that they receive a full measure of joy. Lee notes that "in Johannine theology, it is not so much what the disciples do when they face persecution so as not to fall away, but divine providence that keeps them from falling away."¹⁹ Jesus' victory over death, hell, and the grave will give the disciples courage, peace, and joy during times of persecution.²⁰

In the Gospels, the elements of persecution are clearly seen. Jesus suffers and warns his disciples that they will suffer also. Jesus gives a clear witness to the Father and points the Jews to the kingdom of God. Jesus also links persecution to the end times. As Scaer notes, in the four Gospels "we have the words of the Lord that will help to guide us along the way through persecution, and in the age to come, eternal life."²¹ Let us now follow the theme of persecution in the rest of the New Testament.

Acts

Acts 6 describes how Stephen, filled with the Holy Spirit and power, is falsely accused by the Jews of blasphemy and brought before the Sanhedrin. Acts 6:15 records that "his face was like the face of an angel." In Acts 7, Stephen makes his defense and accuses the Jews of killing Jesus, the Messiah. As the Sanhedrin reacts in anger, Stephen has a vision: "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God" (v.56). As the Jews stone him, he prays, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" (v.59). Before he died, he cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them" (v.60).

The three elements of persecution are clearly seen. Stephen suffers, he testifies that Jesus is the Messiah, and he looks past the world to God and his kingdom. Scaer observes that Luke uses the depiction of Jesus'

¹⁷Chee-Chiew Lee, "A Theology of Facing Persecution in the Gospel of John," *Tyndale Bulletin* 70, no. 2 (2019): 192, ATLA.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 200.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 202.

²⁰*Ibid.*

²¹Peter J. Scaer, "Passion and Persecution in the Gospels," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 83, no. 3-4 (July 2019): 261. ATLA, 265.

death as “a model for Christians to follow,”²² noting the similarities between Stephen’s prayers and the words of Jesus, who also forgives his murderers (Luke 23:34). In his depiction of Stephen’s persecution, Luke portrays the ideal Christian martyr: falsely accused; faithful in confession; otherworldly in appearance; holding to a vision of God and his kingdom; and whose dying words inspire others. Pobee says, “Stephen in Acts gave the vision of the dying martyr the form of prophesy.”²³

After Stephen’s death, the early Church experiences a great persecution (Acts 8:1). Luke relates Peter’s miraculous deliverance from prison and describes in detail the persecution experienced by Paul on his missionary journeys. In Luke’s accounts we again find the three elements of persecution: physical suffering; witness of Jesus as Lord; and a vision of God and his kingdom.

Epistles

Another effect of persecution is found in the Epistles. Kelhoffer writes that “assertions of standing, authority and power claimed on the basis of withstanding persecution” are evident in New Testament literature.²⁴ Paul uses his persecution to validate his apostleship. Defending his authority to the believers at Corinth, Paul says he has “worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again” (2 Corinthians 11:23). To the Colossians, Paul writes that his sufferings “fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ’s afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church” (Colossians 1:24). Paul clearly sees his suffering as a sign of his authority.

Persecution also validates the faith of the believers. Kelhoffer highlights the common theme of suffering (persecution) as a “corroboration of the believers’ standing.”²⁵ Paul writes in Romans 8:17 that believers are “heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.” The author of Hebrews also expects that believers would suffer for their faith. Some believers have been mistreated and imprisoned (13:3). Noting that Jesus has endured suffering “outside the city gate,” the author exhorts believers to “go to Jesus outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore” (Hebrews 13:13). Kelhoffer concludes that believers must accept some

²²Scaer, 259.

²³Pobee, 28.

²⁴Kelhoffer, 120.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 123.

suffering “as part of identifying with Jesus. If they do, they will be confirmed in their faith.”²⁶

Revelation

The theme of persecution runs throughout the book of Revelation. The beginning of Revelation refers to the suffering of John. The letters to the seven churches reference opposition to the Christian faith. The remainder of the book portrays the suffering of believers during the apocalypse. Each will be addressed in turn.

John pens Revelation from the island of Patmos. He writes to the seven churches that he is their “companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus” (Revelation 1:9a). His reason for being on Patmos is “because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus” (Revelation 1:9b). He is exiled due to opposition to the gospel message. Bandy suggests that John is officially banished to Patmos after a legal proceeding instituted by the local Roman authority, most likely the proconsul of Ephesus.²⁷

John is also aware of persecution suffered by Christians in the seven churches. His message encourages them to hold fast to their faith. Although most of Revelation looks to the future, DeSilva remarks, “we should not dismiss the evidence of conflict and crisis in the seven oracles as generic topics having no bearing on the realities faced by their audiences.”²⁸ The Christians in Ephesus are commended for “enduring hardships” for the name of Jesus (Revelation 2:3). The Christians in Smyrna are warned of suffering, imprisonment, and even death (Revelation 2:10). The church in Pergamum has suffered persecution and one of the congregation, Antipas, has been executed for his faith (Revelation 2:13). The church in Thyatira is commended for its perseverance and encouraged by Jesus “to hold on to what you have until I come” (Revelation 2:25). The church in Sardis has only a few faithful members, but it is implied that they have acknowledged Jesus before the authorities, as Jesus says he will acknowledge them before the Father and the angels (Revelation 3:5). The church in Philadelphia is commended for keeping God’s word and not denying Jesus (Revelation 3:8). Only the church in Laodicea has not faced persecution but is condemned for gathering worldly rather than spiritual wealth (Revelation 3:17-18). Although scholars have not been able to place the

²⁶Ibid., 122.

²⁷Alan Bandy, “Persecution and the Purpose of Revelation with Reference to Roman Jurisprudence,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 23, no. 3 (2013): 382, ATLA.

²⁸David A. DeSilva, *Seeing Things John’s Way: The Rhetoric of the Book of Revelation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 52.

writing of Revelation with a period of intense persecution by a Roman emperor, it is clear that local churches each face opposition, either from Jews or other local sources. Notes Bandy, “Their uncompromising monotheistic devotion to the exclusive worship of Jesus repeatedly placed them at odds with the social, religious, and political conventions of the day.”²⁹

In Revelation chapters 4-22, John looks to a future persecution of the church. Scholars see the original source of persecution as the imperial cult, noting allusions to it in Revelation 13:4,15-16; 14:9-11; 15:2; 16:2. Bandy says, “John envisions a time when the imperial cult escalates to a point of mandatory participation by all inhabitants of earth.”³⁰ The term προσκυνέω ("worship"), commonly used in the imperial cult, is used by John in direct connection with the beast (Revelation 13:4, 8, 12, 15).³¹ Christians who refuse to worship the beast are summarily executed (Revelation 13:15). Justice is served when the beast is cast into the lake of fire by Jesus after his second coming (Revelation 19:20). Those who are martyred by the beast will rule with Christ during his millennial reign (Revelation 20).

In the book of Revelation, we again see the three elements of persecution: suffering, the witness of Jesus as the Son of God and a vision of God and his kingdom. We also see the eschatological conclusion of persecution, as the saints receive justice when Jesus comes again and defeats the beast. The persecution of the saints serves as a “corroboration of the believers’ standing,” as “they overcame by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony” (Revelation 12:11).³² Although the final fulfilment of Revelation has yet to come, it offers guidance, strength and comfort to believers who stand for Jesus in times of severe persecution. The persecution of the early Church under the Roman Empire is one of those times.

Persecution and the Early Church

Through the mid-first century, the Church mostly suffers at the hands of Jews. Roman authorities intervene only when public order is threatened. The Roman legal system protects Christians from false accusations and extra-judicial killing. Gallio, proconsul of Achaia, refuses to listen to complaints against Paul and drives the Jews away (Acts 18:14-16). The Roman officials conducting the trial of the Apostle

²⁹Bandy, 381.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 394.

³¹*Ibid.*

³²Pobee, 123.

Paul remark on his innocence and says he could have been freed except for his appeal to Caesar (Acts 26:32).

The eventual conflict between the early Church and Rome is perhaps inevitable. The Roman empire contains a multitude of different religions and cults. As the emperor consolidates power, religion becomes a tool of politics. The rise of the emperor cult requires the worship of Roman gods and elevates the emperor to the level of a deity. Worship of the emperor and sacrifice to the gods of Rome becomes a test of fidelity. Christianity, however, is exclusively monotheistic, and therefore “incompatible with any other religious system.”³³ A convert is required to abandon all other gods and religious practices. Christians leave “a community that shared one religious identity in order to enter in another with a new identity and boundaries. This was not just ‘another’ religion in the varied religious panorama of the Roman Empire, but an alternative to the traditional cults.”³⁴ Roman officials begin to view Christians as a threat and to look for ways that “a self-avowed Christian might be executed.”³⁵

The second and third centuries witness a conflict between the Roman Empire and the growing Christian church. Lovin says, “The opposing powers were rather closely balanced, despite the overwhelming physical force in the empire’s hands.”³⁶ The Roman Empire chooses to use legal means to overcome the Christians. This leads the emperor to pass laws that target Christian beliefs. These laws, from which Jews are exempted, require Christians to sacrifice to Roman gods. Failure to do so results in torture and execution. Roman officials target the leaders of the Church, the deacons, presbyters, and bishops. Rather than submit, many of these leaders become martyrs. Their writings encourage the Church to persevere despite persecution.³⁷ Several of these leaders will be considered next.

Ignatius

Ignatius is Bishop of Antioch at the end of the first century. Tradition says that the infant Ignatius is held by Jesus, who blesses him.

³³Mar Marcos, “Persecution, Apology and the Reflection on Religious Freedom and Religious Coercion in Early Christianity,” *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft* 20, no. 1 (2012): 40, DOI 10.1515/zfr-2012-0003.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Robin W. Lovin, “Authority, Legitimacy and Sovereignty: Religion and Politics in the Roman Empire before Constantine,” *Studies in Christian Ethics* 29, no. 2 (2016): 180, doi:10.1177/0953946815623133.

³⁶Ibid., 184.

³⁷Oliver Nicholson, “Preparation for Martyrdom in the Early Church,” in *The Great Persecution: The Proceedings of the Fifth Patristic Conference, Maynooth, 2003*, ed. D. Vincent Twomey and Mark Humphries (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2009), 64. EBSCO.

Ignatius converts after receiving the gospel from the Apostle Paul.³⁸ In his “Epistle to the Romans,” Ignatius’ most personal letter, he speaks about his approaching martyrdom. “Let there come on me fire, and cross and struggles with wild beasts, cutting, and tearing asunder, racking of bones, mangling of limbs, crushing of my whole body, cruel tortures of the devil, may I but attain to Jesus Christ!” (Romans V.3).³⁹ According to Cobb, Ignatius “regarded salvation as one being free from the powerful fear of death and thus to face martyrdom bravely.”⁴⁰

Ignatius’ “Epistle to the Romans” becomes the most popular of his writings and is used by the early Church as a manual for martyrs.⁴¹ During the persecution of Trajan, Ignatius is taken to Rome. He “boldly vindicated the faith of Christ before the Emperor,” and then was tortured and finally killed by wild beasts.⁴²

Justin Martyr

Justin is a famous Christian philosopher of the first century. Born in AD 103, Justin is trained in Greek philosophy before converting to Christianity at the age of thirty. He becomes an evangelist to both the Gentiles and the Jews. Justin later moves to Rome and opens a school. During one period of persecution, he writes *The First Apology*, defending the Christian faith. After reading it, the Roman Emperor Antoninus issues an edict halting the persecution. Later, Justin writes *The Second Apology*, critical of the execution of a Christian in Rome.⁴³

In *The Second Apology*, Justin says the fearlessness of Christians he sees facing death convinces him of their innocence. Noting that Christians are being unjustly accused of terrible crimes, he writes, “Be ashamed, be ashamed, ye who charge the guiltless with those deeds which yourselves openly commit, and ascribe things which apply to yourselves and to your gods to those who have not even the slightest sympathy with them. Be ye converted; become wise.” He says that Christians should follow Virtue and hold death in contempt, even if it is

³⁸John Foxe, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs, or, The Acts and Monuments of the Christian Church: Being a Complete History of the Lives, Sufferings, and Deaths of the Christian Martyrs . . . to Which Is Added an Account of the Inquisition . . . with the Lives of Some of the Early Eminent Reformers*, (Philadelphia: J.B. Smith, 1856), 20-21.
<https://www.ccel.org/f/foxe/martyrs/home.html>.

³⁹Andrew Louth, ed., *Early Christian Writings: The Apostolic Fathers* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1988), 85-89, Global DTL.

⁴⁰L. Stephanie Cobb, *Dying To Be Men: Gender and Language in Early Christian Martyr Texts* (Columbia University Press, 2008), 3, Global DTL.

⁴¹Scaer, 258.

⁴²Foxe, 21.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 25-26.

possible to flee: “Death is a debt due by every man that is born. Wherefore we give thanks when we pay this debt.”⁴⁴ Creseus, a rival philosopher, betrays Justin to the Emperor. Justin is tried, condemned to death, and executed in AD 165.^{45,46}

Tertullian

Tertullian is a church leader and a prolific writer to the new Church in matters of theology and church practice. He is born in Carthage in AD 155 and dies in AD 220. Although he does not die a martyr, Tertullian writes to encourage martyrs in their faith. He is most famous for saying “the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.” Two of his works about persecution, *To the Martyrs* and *Flight in Time of Persecution*, are examined below.

In *To the Martyrs*, Tertullian offers spiritual encouragement to Christians who are in prison, either awaiting trial or awaiting execution for their confession of faith.⁴⁷ He uses the metaphors of soldier and athlete to show that they are engaging in spiritual battle. “We were called to service in the army of the living God,” and “consider whatever is hard in your present situation as an exercise of your powers of mind and body. You are about to enter a noble contest.”⁴⁸ Sider notes that for Tertullian, the “confession of the Name played a climactic part in the Christian’s warfare against the demonic, for the struggle to death was both combat and contest with Satanic power, and the Christian’s death, like the death of Christ itself, was a decisive and major victory over the devil.”⁴⁹

⁴⁴Justin Martyr, *The Second Apology 11-12*, in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, trans. Philip Schaff, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers Inc., 2004), 192. https://ccel.org/ccel/justin_martyr/second_apology/anf01.

⁴⁵Foxe, 25-26.

⁴⁶J. Quasten, *Patrology, Volume 1: The Beginnings of Patristic Literature* (Allen, TX: Christian Classics, 1983), p.197.

“The Prefect Rusticus says: Approach and sacrifice, all of you, to the gods.

Justin says: No one in his right mind gives up piety for impiety.

The Prefect Rusticus says: If you do not obey, you will be tortured without mercy. Justin replies: That is our desire, to be tortured for our Lord, Jesus Christ, and so to be saved, for that will give us salvation and firm confidence at the more terrible universal tribunal of our Lord and Saviour. And all the martyrs said: Do as you wish; for we are Christians, and we do not sacrifice to idols. The Prefect Rusticus read the sentence: Those who do not wish to sacrifice to the gods and to obey the emperor will be scourged and beheaded according to the laws. The holy martyrs glorifying God betook themselves to the customary place, where they were beheaded and consummated their martyrdom confessing their Saviour.”

⁴⁷Robert Sider, ed., *Christian and Pagan in the Roman Empire (Selections from the Fathers of the Church, Volume 2)* (Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 107, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt284v2g.8>.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 111.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 108.

Through his or her confession and death, the martyr imitates Christ and crushed the power of evil.⁵⁰

In *Flight in Time of Persecution*, Tertullian asks the question, “Is it right for Christians to run away from persecution?”⁵¹ Some believers are fleeing persecution, basing their actions on Jesus’ teaching that the persecuted should “flee from town to town” (Matthew 10:23).⁵² Tertullian also noted that some Christians are buying false certificates saying they have sacrificed to the gods, while others are paying bribes to avoid exposure.⁵³ Tertullian writes that persecution is “willed by God,” because the result of persecution is “the glory of God.”⁵⁴ He observes that some good comes from persecution, including that believers become more careful in their preparations and give more attention to fasting, praying, mutual charity, and holiness.⁵⁵ Tertullian emphasizes that the believer is neither allowed nor able to flee from persecution, because it is God’s will.⁵⁶ Tertullian encourages the leaders of the churches (deacons, presbyters, bishops) to stay and face persecution as examples to their congregations: “When those in authority take flight . . . who of the common crowd can hope to persuade anyone to stand firm in battle?”⁵⁷

Cyprian

Cyprian convertes to Christianity and is baptized in AD 246 at the age of thirty-five. In recognition of his virtuous lifestyle, he is elected bishop of Carthage two years later. He flees Carthage during the Decian persecution in AD 250 but returns eighteen months later.⁵⁸ During the Valerian persecution in AD 256, Cyprian writes his *Exhortation to Martyrdom*. Cyprian uses the faithfulness of past martyrs to encourage Christians. He relates the stories of Hananiah, Mishael, Azariah, and Daniel as they defy the king and proclaim their allegiance to God. He shares how the seven sons of the Maccabees were tortured and executed by King Antiochus. He notes the multitude of martyrs in Revelation who have died during the great tribulation. “But if the assembly of the Christian martyrs is shown and proved to be so great, let no one think it

⁵⁰Ibid., 109n10.

⁵¹Ibid., 137.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Ibid., 137-138.

⁵⁴Ibid., 141.

⁵⁵Ibid..

⁵⁶Ibid., 143.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Foxe, 34.

a hard or a difficult thing to become a martyr, when he sees that the crowd of martyrs cannot be numbered.”⁵⁹

Cyprian prefers to give believers scriptures upon which they could reflect and be strengthened, rather than prescribing guidelines for behavior. He encourages them not to depend on human teaching but on the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to endure persecution. In his *Exhortation*, Cyprian also emphasizes that believers are part of the greater body of Christ that is faithfully obeying God. Cyprian is tried, convicted and executed by Roman authorities on 14 September, AD 258.^{60,61}

Origen

Origen is a presbyter and catechist from Alexandria. He later establishes a school in Caesarea. He is considered one of the great scholars of the early Church. At the age of sixty-four, near the end of the Decian persecution, he is imprisoned and tortured.⁶² After the death of Emperor Decius, Origen is released from prison but dies of his wounds in AD 254.⁶³

⁵⁹Cyprian, *Exhortation to Martyrdom*, <https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/exhortation-to-martyrdom-addressed-to-fortunatus-ad-fortunatum-de-exhortatione-martyrii-11416>, (accessed April 12, 2023).

⁶⁰Foxe, 34.

⁶¹W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 319.

“*Galerius Maximus*: ‘Are you Thascius Cyprianus?’

Cyprian: ‘I am.’

Galerius: ‘The most sacred Emperors have commanded you to conform to the Roman rites.’

Cyprian: ‘I refuse.’

Galerius: ‘Take heed for yourself.’

Cyprian: ‘Do as you are bid; in so clear a case I may not take heed.’

Galerius, after briefly conferring with his judicial council, with much reluctance pronounced the following sentence: ‘You have long lived an irreligious life, and have drawn together a number of men bound by an unlawful association, and professed yourself an open enemy to the gods and the religion of Rome; and the pious, most sacred and august Emperors . . . have endeavoured in vain to bring you back to conformity with their religious observances; whereas therefore you have been apprehended as principal and ringleader in these infamous crimes, you shall be made an example to those whom you have wickedly associated with you; the authority of law shall be ratified in your blood.’ He then read the sentence of the court from a written tablet: ‘It is the sentence of this court that Thascius Cyprianus be executed with the sword.’

Cyprian: ‘Thanks be to God.’”

⁶²Foxe, 31.

⁶³*Ibid*.

In *An Exhortation to Martyrdom*, Origen encourages the practice of separating oneself from the world as preparation for the ultimate separation at death. “I think that God is loved with the whole soul by those who through their great longing for fellowship with God draw their soul away and separate it not only from their earthly body but also from every corporeal thing. For them no pulling or dragging takes place even in putting off their lowly body.”⁶⁴

Origen views the persecution of believers as “a testing and trying of our love for God.”⁶⁵ He encourages those facing persecution to remember the eternal rewards promised to the saints who persevere. He holds to the promise that those who confess God until the end will be confessed by Jesus before the Father (Matthew 10:32).⁶⁶ Commenting on Mark 8:34-37, Origen writes, “If we wish to save our soul in order to get it back better than a soul, let us lose it by our martyrdom. For if we lose it for Christ’s sake, casting it at His feet in a death for Him, we shall gain possession of true salvation for it.”⁶⁷

The persecution of the early Church continues until AD 313 when Western Roman Emperor Constantine I and Emperor Licinius of the Balkans issue the Edict of Milan. The Edict recognizes Christianity as an “officially sanctioned traditional imperial religion.”⁶⁸ For over two centuries the early Church has endured persecution. The writings of Ignatius, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Cyprian, Origen, and others provide strong guidance for believers to persevere in their faith. The themes of salvation, fearlessness in the face of death, spiritual warfare, leadership, separation from the world, and the promise of eternal reward strengthens the believers. The stories of biblical and intertestamental martyrs become examples to those facing persecution. Finally, the need for a deep relationship with God and a reliance on the indwelling Holy Spirit are seen as essential to bringing the believer through martyrdom and into their eternal reward.

In the last two millennia, Christianity has spread beyond the Roman Empire into the entire world. Wherever it has been the minority religion,

⁶⁴Origen, *An Exhortation to Martyrdom: Prayer, First principles: Book IV, Prologue to the Commentary on the Song of Songs, Homily XXVII on Numbers*, trans. Rowan. A. Greer (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 42. www.EBSCOsearch.net. (Accessed April 12, 2023).

⁶⁵Ibid., 45.

⁶⁶Ibid., 48.

⁶⁷Ibid., 49-50.

⁶⁸Jason A. Whitlark, “Restoring the Peace: The Edict of Milan and the Pax Deorum,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 37, no. 3 (Fall 2010): 316, ATLA.

Christians have been persecuted, even in countries where religious freedom is supposedly guaranteed by the government. One such country is Indonesia, where Christians are persecuted by the Muslim majority population. In the next section, we will see if the themes about persecution common to the biblical, intertestamental, and early Church writings are also found in the writings of the persecuted Indonesian church.

Persecution and Theological Response in Indonesia

Indonesia gained its independence in 1945 after 350 years of Dutch colonization and four years of Japanese occupation. Before becoming a nation, Indonesia was divided into many kingdoms located throughout the archipelago. These kingdoms adopted Hinduism and Buddhism as traders from India and China came to Indonesia during the first millennium AD. Muslim traders brought Islam to Indonesia in the thirteenth century and the religion quickly spread throughout western and central Indonesia.⁶⁹ Spanish and Portuguese traders brought Christianity to Indonesia in the sixteenth century, but it primarily spread in the islands of eastern Indonesia where Islam had not penetrated. The Dutch colonizers were mainly interested in Indonesia's natural resources. Evangelism was not a priority. There were few conversions from the majority Muslim population and Christianity continued to be a minority religion.

Currently, Christians comprise fifteen percent of Indonesia's population, or about thirty million believers. Most of these Christians are found in Christian-majority areas in eastern Indonesia or in urban centers like Jakarta, Surabaya, and Medan. In majority Muslim provinces like South Sumatra, Christians comprise only 1.5 percent of the population.⁷⁰

After Indonesia's independence in 1945, the government needed to unify a diverse population consisting of hundreds of ethnic groups and every major world religion. To this end, the Indonesian government adopted the philosophy of *Pancasila*. Enshrined in the Indonesian constitution, *Pancasila* consists of five pillars, or *sila*. The first pillar concerns religion: "*Ketuhanan yang maha esa* (Belief in the one and only God). Through this philosophy, the government taught Christians, Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists that they all worshipped the same God, reducing the potential for religious conflict. The strong centralized

⁶⁹Mohammad Zariat Abdul Rani, "The History of Hinduism and Islam in Indonesia: A Review on Western Perspective," *Makara, Sosial Humaniora* 14, no. 1 (July 2010): 53, <https://doi.org/10.7454/mssh.v14i1.571>.

⁷⁰Joshua Project.

government under President Suharto (1965-1998) enforced peace between ethnic groups and religions. The Christian church grew rapidly during this period, primarily among ethnic Chinese Indonesians from a Buddhist background.

After the resignation of Suharto, Indonesia entered a new era of reform.⁷¹ The strong centralized government backed by the Indonesian military gave way to regional autonomy. The military's authority to intervene in domestic affairs was taken away. Radical Muslim groups that had been suppressed under Suharto grew in number and began a movement to establish a Muslim caliphate in Southeast Asia. Terrorist acts against the government and persecution of the Christian minority started to rise. A religious conflict in 1999-2000 between Muslims and Christians in the province of Maluku claimed over 10,000 lives and led to the displacement of both Christian and Muslim communities. Christmas Eve bombings in the year 2000 targeted thirty-eight Christian places of worship in nine cities, killing eighteen and injuring eighty-four.⁷² Physical violence against Christians and their places of worship has continued to rise since 2000, with frequent reports of Christians being beaten and killed for their faith.⁷³ A "Religious Unity" law passed in 2006, intended to simplify the registration of buildings as churches, has instead been used by Muslims to prevent new churches from being built and resulted in the closing of over 1,000 existing places of worship.⁷⁴

Theological Response

How has the Indonesian church responded to religious persecution in the reform era? In this section, we will examine seven theological articles addressing persecution, evangelism, and suffering. Following a summary of these articles, we will look for common themes, and then compare these themes with those from the early Church Fathers to see if

⁷¹Jock Cheetham, "The Role of Morality in Religious Persecution in Indonesia during Yudhoyono's Presidency (2004-2014)," (Master's thesis, University of Sydney, 2017), 31, oai:ses.library.usyd.edu.au:2123/16964.

⁷²Paul Barber, "Chronology of Christmas Eve Bombings and Acts of Terror in 2000," *Joyo Indonesian News*, January 25, 2001, <http://lists.topica.com/lists/indonesia-act@jgc.topica.com/read/message.html?sort=d&mid=702557008>.

⁷³"2021 Report on International Religious Freedom: Indonesia," Office of International Religious Freedom, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/indonesia/>. (Accessed April 19, 2023).

⁷⁴Morgan Lee, "How Indonesia's 'Religious Harmony' Law Has Closed 1,000 Churches," *Christianity Today*, November 10, 2015, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2015/november/how-indonesias-religious-harmony-law-has-closed-1000-church.html>.

the theological response from Indonesian theologians mirrors their writings.

Tarore

Tarore's article "Strategy to Evangelize the Poor" emphasizes the need for churches to fulfill the Great Commission and says that churches should have answers for the poor. Tarore says evangelism requires sacrifice, defined as "a decision to do God's will and evangelize those who haven't heard the gospel, including radical Muslims who oppose Christianity."⁷⁵ The strategy of evangelizing the poor must incorporate contextualization so that teams are not immediately rejected by intolerant Muslim communities. Tarore also says that Christians must be prepared to face persecution, that evangelism is "a life or death task, and will result in persecution."⁷⁶ Tarore recommends that Christians make long-term preparations to face persecution, but does not identify those preparations.⁷⁷ Of note is Tarore's assumption that ministry to the poor in Indonesia will involve religious persecution, as Muslims comprise eighty-five percent of the population.

Siswanto

Siswanto's article "The Church's Response to Persecution Based on Matthew 10:17-33" says that every Christian will suffer persecution as a test of faith and that persecution is a sign of the end times.⁷⁸ A person's faith can be shaken if they are not prepared to face persecution.⁷⁹ Siswanto gives five responses of a believer to persecution. First, remain vigilant. Second, bravely testify, because persecution will bring opportunities to share the Gospel, and the role of the Holy Spirit is to help the believer testify. Third, don't deny the faith. Christians will be persecuted even by their own family members, but Jesus will confess faithful believers to the Father. Fourth, endure pressure. Here Siswanto uses John the Baptist, Stephen, and James as examples of those who were faithful until death. Fifth, do not be afraid. Jesus has conquered death,

⁷⁵Renita Novia Tarore, "Strategi penginjilan dalam wilayah masyarakat di bawah garis kemiskinan," (2020): 14, <https://osf.io/dt8y9/download>, (accessed April 21, 2023).

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸Krido Siswanto, et al., "Respon Gereja terhadap penganiayaan berdasarkan Matius 10:17-33," *Skenoo: Jurnal Teologi dan Pendidikan Agama Kristen* 1, no. 1 (2021): 12, <https://journal.sttia.ac.id/skenoo>.

⁷⁹Ibid.

and Satan cannot hurt believers who are faithful. Believers are precious in the eyes of the Lord, and God will not let them fall.⁸⁰

Chao

Chao's article "A Strategy of Evangelism Born During Persecution" looks for lessons from the experience of the persecuted church in China during the 1980s to help Indonesian believers face persecution. Chao evaluates a spiritual training program that was conducted weekly to strengthen Chinese Christians and train them to share the gospel. The training program had seven main teachings: knowing the gospel, being willing to suffer for Christ, being able to correct false teachings, building the local church, discipling new believers, fellowshiping with other churches, and sending those with the gift of evangelism to places where the gospel has not been heard. Evangelists were trained for three years and were then sent out in pairs. They were expected to suffer for the gospel just as Jesus suffered, believing that God would reward them with future glory.⁸¹

Situmorang

Situmorang's article "Internal and External Factors in a Strategy to Evangelize Unreached People Groups" acknowledges that minority believers who share their faith will always experience persecution. However, persecution for Christian witness should be considered a victory, not a defeat. Because Indonesian Christians trying to reach unreached people groups will face physical and mental persecution, a strategy must be developed before evangelism begins.⁸²

Situmorang says that Christian evangelists can develop internal attitudes and take external actions that will help the evangelist face persecution or even reduce persecution. The internal factors consist of practicing humility, self-denial, prayer, and awareness.⁸³ External actions that may reduce persecution include learning to love the target ethnic group, working to improve their well-being, and providing job skills training for economic development.⁸⁴

⁸⁰Ibid., 11-19.

⁸¹Jonathan Chao, "Gereja bertumbuh di tengah penganiayaan," *Momentum* 3 (October 1987): 1-2, <https://misi.sabda.org/edisi-e-jemmi/e-jemmi-no45-vol102007>.

⁸²Elizabeth Situmorang, "Faktor eksternal dan internal strategi penginjilan menghadapi penganiayaan di suku terabaikan," *Teologi Kristen* 3, no. 2 (October 2021): 134, <https://doi.org/10.36270/pengarah.v3i2.74>.

⁸³Ibid., 127-130.

⁸⁴Ibid., 130-134.

Silalahi

Silalahi's article "The Concept of Persecution in Matthew 10:16-33 and Its Relevance for Christians Today" begins by reviewing the recent history of religious persecution experienced by Christians in Indonesia. The author compares the persecution of Christians in Indonesia to the persecution of the early Church under Nero. Silalahi states, "Sadly, persecution has brought a false understanding of the essence of persecution among Christians. A misunderstanding of the word of God is the primary cause of this confusion . . . and eventually becomes a barrier to spiritual growth."⁸⁵

Silalahi notes five positive outcomes of persecution presented in Matthew 10:16-33. First, Christ is glorified when we are faithful when persecuted. Second, the faith of believers grows under persecution. Third, the Gospel spreads when the Church is persecuted. Fourth, the Church will grow when persecuted. Fifth, the unity of the Church is strengthened under persecution. When the positive outcomes of persecution are kept in mind, persecution itself will no longer cause confusion or become a barrier to the spiritual growth of Indonesian Christians.⁸⁶

Suwito, Hermanto, and Tanama

Suwito, Hermanto, and Tanama explore the relationship between evangelism and persecution in their article "Suffering in the Context of Evangelism." The authors note that evangelism is commanded by Jesus in the Great Commission and Christians must obey. After defining suffering, martyrs like Stephen and Polycarp are presented as models of those who suffered martyrdom for being witnesses of Jesus. Suffering for Jesus is not a sign of failure but of victory.⁸⁷

The Apostle Paul is portrayed as the primary example of one who obeys the command to evangelize while suffering persecution. The authors see Paul's calling as an apostle and his suffering as inextricably linked.⁸⁸ The authors see suffering as a test of the depths of one's faith, so evangelists must be prepared to deny themselves and take up one's cross.⁸⁹ A list of the original disciples is presented along with each of

⁸⁵Junior Natan Silalahi, "Konsep penganiayaan dalam Injil Matius 10:16-33 dan relevansinya bagi orang percaya pada masa kini," *Voice of HAMI* 2, no. 1 (August 2019): 1-2, <http://stthami.ac.id/ojs/index.php/hami/article/view/2>.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, 11-12.

⁸⁷Tri Prapto Suwito, Yanto Paulus Hermanto, and Yulia Jayanti Tanama, "Penderitaan dalam konteks penginjilan," *Phronesis*. 4 no. 1 (June 2021): 89, <https://jurnal.sttsetia.ac.id/index.php/phr/article/view/139/106>.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*, 93.

⁸⁹*Ibid.*, 93-94.

their fates as martyrs for the gospel. The authors conclude by noting that the gospel portrays Jesus as not of this world, and therefore the world will reject those who witness about Jesus. This rejection is the reason evangelists suffer.⁹⁰

Nessy

Nessy's article "The View of the Apostle Paul Regarding Suffering Experienced by Christians" also begins with a summary of religious persecution in Indonesia in the reform era. Nessy notes the 2000 Christmas Eve bombings and the closing and burning of many churches.⁹¹ He presents a biblical overview of persecution, listing Hananiah, Mishael, Azariah, Daniel, and Jeremiah from the Old Testament and the Apostle Paul from the New Testament as believers who were persecuted. Ignatius is presented as the early Church example of a martyr.⁹²

Nessy says that persecution has four benefits: it results in victory for the believer, it brings glory to Jesus, it promotes the spread of the gospel, and it promotes church growth.⁹³ Nessy concludes by saying that Christians have always suffered persecution, but that we should not be afraid of the one who can kill the body but not the soul. He quotes the Apostle Paul, "To live is Christ and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21).⁹⁴

Common Themes

The first common theme in these articles is that Indonesian Christians will suffer persecution. Most authors link persecution to those who share the gospel with Muslims, but Siswanto says that all Christians will suffer persecution as a test of faith. Two of the articles detail incidents of persecution during the reform era, both citing the Christmas Eve bombings in 2000 and the closing of churches under the Religious Unity law.

The second common theme is using Old Testament, New Testament, and early Church martyrs as examples of how to persevere under persecution. Three of the seven articles provide names of martyrs. These

⁹⁰Ibid., 98.

⁹¹Jeffry Octavianus Nessy, "Pandangan Rasul Paulus terhadap penganiayaan yang dialami orang Kristen," *Teokristi* 1, no 1 (May 2021): 26, <https://doi.org/10.38189/jtk.v1i1.121>.

⁹²Ibid., 29.

⁹³Ibid., 34-36.

⁹⁴Ibid., 37.

martyrs are all identified as those who were faithful to the end. A fourth article cites the persecution of the early Church under Emperor Nero.

A third common theme is the need for Christians to prepare to face persecution. Tarore and Situmorang each note the need for a training program, while Chao evaluates the training program for Chinese evangelists. A training program will help Christians persevere during the inevitable persecution and will address both the spiritual maturity of the believer and their attitude towards the lost.

A fourth common theme is encouraging Christians to see persecution as a blessing. Silalahi and Nussy both list multiple benefits of persecution, including increased spiritual growth, opportunities for evangelism, and church growth. Silalahi says that recasting persecution in a positive light will remove a barrier to a believer's spiritual growth.

A fifth common theme is fearlessness. Siswanto and Nussy both encourage believers not to be afraid of death. Both point to the power of God to preserve the believer, even if the persecution results in martyrdom. Chao notes that believers who persevere will receive future glory.

Other themes from these articles include the role of the Holy Spirit in the witness of persecuted believers, persecution as a sign of the end times, and the role of the local church and church networks to strengthen believers in times of persecution.

How do these articles compare with the writings of the early Church? There are several common themes. Both assume that Christians will be persecuted for their faith. Both cite the need for training to prepare Christians to face persecution. Both use examples of biblical and subsequent martyrs to encourage believers to persevere. Both teach that persecution is a testing of faith and a blessing, with the promise of eternal rewards for those who are faithful. Both highlight the role of the Holy Spirit in aiding persecuted believers when they testify. Additionally, both see persecution as a sign of the end times and the local church as a source of strength for believers facing persecution.

The theological response of the Indonesian church to persecution may contribute to developing a theology of persecution that will help Indonesian believers overcome the spiritual impact of persecution as a barrier to evangelism. However, there are other impacts of persecution besides spiritual. In the following section, the sociological, physical, psychological, and economic impacts of persecution are considered. Any program to help Indonesian believers overcome persecution must also address these issues.

Sociological, Physical, Psychological, and Economic Impacts of Persecution

Current research describing the impact of persecution primarily focuses on those who are refugees. Losing one's home and going through a resettlement process results in physical and psychological trauma. However, most Indonesian Christians who experience persecution are residents of a community. Although we have seen the theological response of the Indonesian Christian community to persecution, little research has been done on the sociological, psychological, physical, and economic impacts on believers. This section will survey research on the impact of persecution on established populations and suggest that persecuted Christians in Indonesia have similar experiences. We start with the issue of the sociological impacts of persecution.

Sociological Impacts

The way individuals and groups view each other has been the object of extensive research. Mutual understanding reduces the distance between individuals and groups. Research indicates that individuals tend to have a better understanding of each other when they engage in daily interaction. However, moving from the individual to the group brings a level of misunderstanding.

In research related to our discussion of the impacts of religious persecution, Seger divides individuals into two groups, the ingroup and the outgroup.⁹⁵ In the Indonesian context, the persecuted Christian minority are considered the ingroup and the majority Muslims in their communities are the outgroup. Research shows that individuals in the same group can generally identify the emotional climate of that group. And individuals in the ingroup can generally identify the emotions of individuals in the outgroup with whom they frequently interact. However, these individuals are not adept at identifying the emotions of the collective outgroup. This lack of perception leads to misunderstanding of the emotions and motivations of the outgroup. In fact, members of the ingroup tend to attribute the emotions of high-profile members of the outgroup (often fanatics) to the entire outgroup.⁹⁶

Seger examined three hypotheses regarding the ability of an ingroup to correctly discern the emotions of an outgroup. The results of his study are useful when discussing the interaction between a Christian minority

⁹⁵Charles Seger, et al., "Knowing How They Feel: Perceiving Emotions Felt by Outgroups," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 45, no. 1 (2009): 80-89, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2008.08.019>.

⁹⁶*Ibid.*

ingroup and the Muslim majority outgroup that persecutes them. First, research confirms that individuals within a group accurately discern the emotions of their group. Second, there is a correlation between the emotions expressed in the ingroup and the emotion expected in the outgroup. This correlation exists whether the actual measured emotions of the two groups are similar or not. Finally, there is an “evaluative intergroup bias in estimates of group emotion, with the outgroup being estimated to experience more intense negative emotions and less intense positive emotions than the outgroup reports experiencing.”⁹⁷ The research shows that while the ingroup (e.g., persecuted minority Christians) understands the outgroup on a personal level (assuming frequent individual interactions), the ingroup erroneously assigns emotions and motivations to the outgroup based on exposure to high-profile members of the outgroup. Fallacies of this type perpetuate stereotypical interactions between groups.⁹⁸ Exposure of the ingroup to high-profile individuals who are more moderate could help bridge the gap between the two groups.

Physical Impacts

The trauma and scars of physical violence are an obvious impact of persecution. But researchers have discovered another physical impact of persecution. A study shows that prolonged exposure to conflict and violence during childhood results in “elevated rates of morbidity and mortality from chronic diseases of aging.”⁹⁹

The research was conducted among children who experienced significant stress during childhood, including maltreatment and poverty. It further noted that childhood was a “sensitive period for effects of stress to become embedded in some physiological systems for the long term.”¹⁰⁰ Miller notes that “early stress has direct and lasting influences on some disease-relevant biological processes,” and that “various forms of childhood stress presage the clustering of risk factors for coronary heart disease in adulthood.”¹⁰¹

The research notes that various factors contributed to the overall levels of stress among children. These factors contribute to what the researchers called “chronic stress,” and noted that the research was

⁹⁷Ibid.

⁹⁸Ibid.

⁹⁹Gregory Miller, Edith Chen and Karen Parker. “Psychological Stress in Childhood and Susceptibility to the Chronic Diseases of Aging: Moving Toward a Model of Behavioral and Biological Mechanisms.” *Psychology Bulletin* 137, no. 6 (November 2011): 959. doi: 10.1037/a0024768.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., 967.

¹⁰¹Ibid., 959.

applicable to children regardless of the specific stress factors.¹⁰² The study also observes that the physical impact of this chronic stress is not the result of a lifetime of stress, but the result of the childhood exposure. The study shows that, as adults, these children “tended to have poor health practices, high levels of inflammation, and be at risk for coronary heart disease.”¹⁰³

The implication of this research is significant for persecuted Christians in Indonesia. The physical impact of persecution was previously thought to be limited to those exposed to physical violence. It is possible that persecuted Christians in Indonesia are experiencing more inflammation, a higher incidence of coronary heart disease, and shorter life expectancy because of the chronic stress they experienced during their childhood. Additional research in this area is required.

Psychological Impacts

Not only does persecution have sociological and physical impacts, but research has shown that persecution also affects the mental well-being of individuals. Symptoms experienced by the victims of persecution include denial, fearfulness, a feeling of vulnerability, depression, and alcohol or drug abuse.¹⁰⁴ Those who have suffered physical violence often suffer from forms of post-traumatic stress disorder.¹⁰⁵ Other research shows that the family and friends of the persecuted may also suffer. A study from the Netherlands discovered that nine years after eight hostage-taking incidents involving five-hundred victims, fifty percent of the victims and twenty-nine percent of the families displayed symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, including “anxiety, phobias, and psychosomatic symptoms.”¹⁰⁶

Significant psychological effects are found in those who suffer persecution during their developing years. Recent research into class persecution in China has concluded that “early-life negative experiences generate life-long psychological trauma.”¹⁰⁷ A study by Qian researched the adverse outcomes of negative interventions in early childhood. He

¹⁰²Ibid., 990-991.

¹⁰³Ibid.

¹⁰⁴Abdu'l-Missagh Ghadirian, “Psychological and Spiritual Dimensions of Persecution and Suffering,” *Journal of Baha'i Studies* 6, no. 3 (1994): 3, https://bahai-library.com/pdf/g/ghadirian_psychological_dimensions_suffering.pdf.

¹⁰⁵“Religious Issues,” Good Therapy, <https://www.goodtherapy.org/learn-about-therapy/issues/religious-issues> (accessed April 29, 2023).

¹⁰⁶Ghadirian, 3.

¹⁰⁷Xuechao Qian, “Long-term Effects of Childhood Exposure to Persecution: Human Capital, Marriage Market, and Intergenerational Outcomes,” (Department of Economics, The Ohio State University, 2019), 22. <https://www.aeaweb.org/conference/2020/preliminary/paper/3nhRDF78>.

studied children in three age groups: early childhood (0-6), primary education years (7-12), and adolescence (13-18). His results show that children are most impacted by persecution experienced during their early childhood years.¹⁰⁸ Qian notes that people attain less formal education, have lower cognitive skills, and earn less income if they experience prolonged persecution in early life.¹⁰⁹

Specifically, Qian finds that adults who have experienced persecution in their early childhood years on average are twenty percent less likely to attain a higher education degree than their counterparts who did not experience persecution. Further, he notes that “the impact of childhood exposure to persecution on highest education level is almost linear with education degrees.”¹¹⁰ Not only does early childhood persecution impact achieved education levels, but it also adversely impacts cognitive skills. Those persecuted during early childhood score 4.9 percentage points lower in math skills and 3.4 percentage points lower in verbal skills. Finally, those suffering early childhood persecution in Qian’s study earned 15.9 percent less income than their non-persecuted peers.¹¹¹ Qian concludes that “individuals with longer exposure to persecutions in early childhood (0-6 years old) completed less formal schooling, have worse verbal and math skills, and earn lower incomes in the long-term.”¹¹²

Research is needed to determine if these impacts are also found among persecuted Indonesian Christians.

Economic Impact

The final impact of persecution to be considered is the economic impact. Without persecution, economies can grow. Studies have shown that religious freedom is one of three factors vital to economic development. Religious freedom historically results in reduced conflicts and a more stable society, essential for economic growth. A study of the early United States by Alexis de Tocqueville found that the growth of Christianity resulted in the establishment of institutions of higher education, the founding of hospitals, prisons, and schools, and the promotion of literacy. A former director in the World Bank’s Asia and Africa regions notes that faith communities not only help develop

¹⁰⁸Ibid., 1-2.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., 4.

¹¹⁰Ibid., 11.

¹¹¹Ibid., 12.

¹¹²Qian, i.

education and health services but also provide a social safety net that many governments are not able to provide.¹¹³

On the other hand, religious persecution and discrimination against Christians “create climates that can drive away local and foreign investment, undermine sustainable development, and disrupt huge sectors of economies.”¹¹⁴ Qian’s research in China, besides finding a 15.9 percent decrease in income for those persecuted in early childhood, also showed “the life-long impact of early life exposure to persecutions on individual human capital development, which is highly associated with individual economic achievement and social economic development.”¹¹⁵ A study of the persecuted Christian church in Ethiopia finds that persecuted Christians were discriminated against in job openings, found it hard to find gainful employment, and had their businesses boycotted by the majority Muslim population.¹¹⁶ Religious violence in Egypt “has adversely affected the tourism industry, among other sectors. Perhaps most significant for future economic growth, young entrepreneurs are pushed to take their talents elsewhere due to the instability associated with high and rising religious restrictions and hostilities.”¹¹⁷ In general, where religious persecution and discrimination are found, economic development suffers.

Research has clearly documented the lasting sociological, physical, psychological, and economic impacts of persecution.¹¹⁸ These include misunderstanding the attitudes and motives of the outer group, shortened life expectancy, a shortfall in educational advancement and cognitive ability, and even a reduction in expected income. The impacts of persecution appear greatest when they are experienced by the very young. Studies in Indonesia have primarily focused on the extent of religious persecution and have documented the effects of trauma and violence during periods of active persecution. The long-term impacts of the systemic persecution which affects the thirty million Christians living in

¹¹³“Socioeconomic Impact of Religious Freedom,” Religious Freedom & Business Foundation, <https://religiousfreedomandbusiness.org/socio-economic-impact-of-religious-freedom> (accessed April 12, 2023).

¹¹⁴Ibid.

¹¹⁵Qian, i.

¹¹⁶Aweis Ali, “Persecution of Christians and Its Effect on Church Growth in Somalia” (PhD diss., Africa Nazarene University, Nairobi, 2021), 102-104, <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.12642.45769>.

¹¹⁷Religious Freedom & Business Foundation.

¹¹⁸Mauricio Drelichman, Jordi Vidal-Robert, and Hans-Joachim Voth, “The Long-Run Effects of Religious Persecution: Evidence from the Spanish Inquisition,” Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, August 13, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.20228811>.

Indonesia have not been adequately researched. These are areas in which future studies may bear fruit.

Overcoming the Barrier of Persecution

Indonesian Christians have suffered both violent and systemic persecution at the hands of the majority Muslim population, discouraging believers from sharing the gospel with their Muslim neighbors. If Indonesian believers are going to function as an evangelism force, they must be prepared to face persecution. But the Church must also explore ways to reduce the persecution experienced by most Indonesian believers. In this final section, we will discuss how Indonesian Christians can overcome the barrier of persecution, first, by preparing individuals and churches to face persecution, and second, by attempting to reduce systemic persecution through human rights education and interfaith dialogue.

Preparing for Persecution

A common theme running through the writings of the early Church Fathers and Indonesian theologians is the need for what Cyprian called “methodical preparation” before persecution begins.¹¹⁹ Both individuals and churches need to be prepared to endure persecution.¹²⁰ Chinese Christians reported that knowing that persecution was coming allowed them to be mentally prepared, which eased the impact of persecution.¹²¹ Christians in the early Church who were spiritually unprepared, like those who suffered persecution in Lyon in AD 177, “were manifestly unready and untrained and still weak” and fell away into apostasy.¹²² Lactantius, observing Christians suffering during the Great Persecution of AD 303-313, notes that they displayed *inspirata patientia*, or an inspired capacity to suffer.¹²³ What preparation can be given to Indonesian Christians to inspire such strength?

The first step of preparation is to develop a strong theology of persecution. Ali, writing of the persecuted church in Somalia, says their theology of persecution “serves as the glue that holds the Somali Christians together.”¹²⁴ Christians who understand biblical teachings

¹¹⁹Nicholson, 78.

¹²⁰*Ibid.*, 76-77.

¹²¹Rachel Sing-Kiat Ting and Terri Watson, “Is Suffering Good? An Explorative Study on the Religious Persecution among Chinese Pastors,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 35, no. 3 (Fall 2007): 207–208, <https://doi.org/10.1177/009164710703500303>.

¹²²Nicholson, 75.

¹²³*Ibid.*, 65.

¹²⁴Ali, 172.

about persecution “can make sense of all the sufferings they face because of their Christian faith.”¹²⁵ A theology of persecution also helps persecuted believers “maintain a right attitude towards their persecutors” and helps them glorify God through their actions.¹²⁶ This theology of persecution will allow the Indonesian church to thrive by living for Christ despite facing persecution.¹²⁷

A theology of persecution will include relevant scriptures from the Old and New Testaments that highlight biblical examples and teachings about persecution. Stories from Daniel, Jeremiah, and Acts show perseverance in the face of persecution. The teachings of Jesus in the gospels and Paul in the epistles will guide believers through persecution and toward eternal life.¹²⁸ The book of Revelation shows the participation of the martyrs in the ultimate victory of Jesus. A theology of persecution will also include Moltmann’s eschatology of hope, which inspires divine hope in the hearts of believers during times of persecution.¹²⁹

Spiritual preparation for persecution must also encourage Indonesian believers to develop a deep relationship with God and to depend on the Holy Spirit for anointing and guidance. Notes Nicholson, “True martyrs were sustained by their relationship with God; anyone attempting to survive such tortures in any other way would find them intolerable.”¹³⁰ St. Gordius, centurion of Caesarea, retreated to the mountains in preparation for his confession of faith. When he came down, he was “like an athlete who is sufficiently trained, anointed for the struggle by fasts, vigils, by prayer and ceaseless meditation on the oracles of the Holy Spirit.”¹³¹ Believers must be taught that persecution is spiritual warfare, and perseverance brings victory to the believer and eternal rewards. Persecuted Christians must realize that suffering for their faith is not a punishment from God, but a blessing as they share in the sufferings of Christ.¹³²

Indonesian churches must also be prepared for persecution. The early Church was organized to endure persecution. Duties of believers towards the persecuted included showing hospitality to Christian refugees, providing food, money, and spiritual support for prisoners, and

¹²⁵Ibid.

¹²⁶Ibid.

¹²⁷Ibid.

¹²⁸Scaer, 265.

¹²⁹Ali, 42.

¹³⁰Nicholson, 74.

¹³¹Ibid., 78.

¹³²Rachel Sing-Kiat Ting and Terri Watson, “Is Suffering Good? An Explorative Study on the Religious Persecution among Chinese Pastors,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 35 No. 3 (Fall 2007): 207, <https://doi.org/10.1177/009164710703500303>.

traveling to other cities to visit and provide support for persecuted Christians.¹³³ According to Lovin,

Christians developed a network of disciplined and interconnected communities that sustained the faithful against official, and sometimes popular, opposition . . . It was also during this time that the leadership role of the bishop came to be defined, along with the subsidiary tasks of presbyters and deacons—an effective, logical and hierarchical division of labor that survives in some form in many Christian communities to this day.¹³⁴

Chinese pastors interviewed after release from prison report that “the companionship of other church fellows or family members also helped alleviate the sense of isolation and loneliness in facing imprisonment.”¹³⁵

Indonesian churches play a key role in helping believers endure and overcome persecution. Pastors, elders, and deacons are examples to their congregations of faithful perseverance. The church is a place of mutual support and provision for those suffering the physical and economic impacts of persecution. Pastoral care and counselling will help those suffering psychological trauma. Ministry to suffering congregations in other parts of Indonesia can be organized by district and national church officials.

Churches and denominations can also keep historical records of persecution suffered by their members. Just as Riccardi’s *Century of Martyrdom* records the suffering of believers in the twentieth century, documenting the persecution of Indonesian Christians will strengthen the faith of believers. Says Riccardi, “Because so much of the Christianity of yesterday and of today is the history of martyrdom, each of us and each community must gather in a glass cup the tears and blood of the persecuted, preventing it from being lost or trampled into the ground.”¹³⁶

¹³³Nicholson, 76.

¹³⁴Lovin, Robin W. 2016. “Authority, Legitimacy and Sovereignty: Religion and Politics in the Roman Empire before Constantine.” *Studies in Christian Ethics* 29 (2): 185-186. doi:10.1177/0953946815623133.

¹³⁵Ting and Watson, 207-208.

¹³⁶Huibert van Beek and Larry Miller, ed., “Witness, Martyrdom, and Persecution: Following Christ Together. Report of the International Consultation, Tirana, Albania, 2-4 November 2015” (Germany: Global Christian Forum, 2018): flyleaf, https://globalchristianforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Tirana_Report_DPM_Consultation-1.pdf.

Human Rights Education

One method to reduce systemic religious persecution in Indonesia is through human rights education. Cotler says, "Freedom of religion remains the most persistently violated human right in the annals of the species."¹³⁷ Indonesia is a signatory of the 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Article 18 of the UDHR states, "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance."¹³⁸ Human rights in Indonesia are frequently abused, and the level of persecution against Christians in Indonesia has grown significantly since the reform era began in 1998. A Pew Research Center report published in 2019 noted that hostility towards Indonesian believers ranked as 'high or very high', along with other countries such as China, India, and Pakistan.

Mack suggests that collaboration between human rights organizations and religious institutions can lead to "the notion of religious freedom as a shared value in society."¹³⁹ A United States Institute for Peace report notes that one solution to the problem of persecution was "educating youth about human rights and pluralism." The report made recommendations to help education systems eliminate "stereotyping, false narratives and prejudices from curricula and include training in human rights, including freedom of religion or belief."¹⁴⁰ A Ministerial to Advance Freedom of Religion or Belief was convened by the United States in 2018 to address the issue of religious persecution. The diverse nations who attended the meeting emphasized education as a solution to religious persecution, noting "the importance of creating global citizens who respect human rights and pluralistic societies." A second emphasis was achieving the United Nations' Sustainable

¹³⁷Irwin Cotler, "Jewish NGOs, Human Rights, and Public Advocacy: A Comparative Inquiry," *Jewish Political Studies Review* 11, no. 3/4 (1999): 63, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25834458>.

¹³⁸Thomas K. Johnson, "A Case for Ethical Cooperation between Evangelical Christians and Humanitarian Islam," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 44, no. 3 (August 2020): 206, https://worldea.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Humanitarian_Islam_Report_with_ERT_cover.pdf.

¹³⁹Michelle L. Mack, "Religious Human Rights and the International Human Rights Community: Finding Common Ground – Without Compromise," *Notre Dame Journal of Ethics, Law & Public Policy* 13, no. 2 (February 2014): 465, <https://scholarship.law.nd.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1372&context=ndjlepp>.

¹⁴⁰Knox Thames, "Human Rights Education as the Solution to Religious Persecution," United States Institute of Peace, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2020/11/human-rights-education-solution-religious-persecution> (accessed April 12, 2023).

Development Goals, including Goal 4, which highlights the need to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all."¹⁴¹

As previously noted, the impacts of persecution are significant during the early childhood years. Including human rights awareness in the Indonesian primary school curriculum could reduce persecution and mitigate its impact on Christian children. The Indonesian Ministry of Education develops curricula at the national level for all primary and secondary schools. The following recommendations from the 2019 Abu Dhabi Guidelines on Teaching Interfaith Tolerance could be implemented by the Ministry of Education. First, develop strong partnerships between government and other organizations and religious leaders "to ensure expansion of interfaith knowledge among students and the effective equipping of teachers." Second, provide sufficient resources to support teacher training and develop curricula about interfaith tolerance and understanding. Third, combat intolerance with better teaching methodologies and textbooks. Fourth, encourage parents to be involved in the education of their children. Involvement reflects their right "to transmit their religious values to their children and promotes freedom of religion or belief." Finally, encourage engagement by national and international partners with formal and informal educational institutions "to advance interfaith understanding and knowledge about human rights and religious freedom."¹⁴² As the Abu Dhabi Guidelines state, "Education is the most effective means of preventing intolerance."¹⁴³

Interfaith Dialogue

The final section of this paper recommends overcoming the barrier of persecution through interfaith dialogue. Previously we saw that the sociological impact of persecution led the ingroup (Christians) to erroneously assign emotions and motivations to the outgroup (Muslims) based on exposure to high-profile members (radicals) of the outgroup.¹⁴⁴ We suggested that exposure of the ingroup to high-profile individuals who are more moderate could help bridge the gap between the two groups. Mustaqim, an Indonesian Muslim scholar, is one such moderate.

¹⁴¹Ibid.

¹⁴²"Abu Dhabi Guidelines on Teaching Interfaith Tolerance," *Freedom of Religion or Belief Learning Platform*, 5-6, accessed April 12, 2023, https://www.forb-learning.org/uploads/1/1/3/5/113585003/abu_dhabi_guidelines_on_teaching_interfaith_tolerance.pdf.

¹⁴³Ibid., 1.

¹⁴⁴Seger et al., 80-89.

In his article “Theological Conflict and Religious Violence through the Lens of Koranic Interpretation,” Mustaqim argues the Koran seeks to resolve conflict and encourages people of different faiths to live in peace.¹⁴⁵ Mustaqim distinguishes between religion itself and man’s practice of religion and claims that no religion promotes conflict and that persecution arises from a misunderstanding of religion.¹⁴⁶

Mustaqim lists seven ways the Koran can help resolve conflicts between religious groups. These include clarifying the issues, promoting mediation efforts, building community action, asking for mutual forgiveness, promoting peace and good works, pursuing justice, and guaranteeing religious freedom.¹⁴⁷ He encourages Indonesians to resolve religious conflicts in their multicultural society by “changing enemies into brothers, moderating extreme views, replacing intolerance with tolerance, and being inclusive rather than exclusive.”¹⁴⁸ Inviting moderate Indonesian Muslim scholars like Mustaqim to an interfaith dialogue could lead to greater understanding and relationship between Muslims and Christians in Indonesia.

At the international level, a significant interfaith dialogue has begun between the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), representing 600 million Christians worldwide, and the *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU), the largest Muslim organization in Indonesia with 90 million members. NU has traditionally held moderate views and was led from 1984-1999 by Abdurrahman Wahid, the grandson of the NU founder who later became Indonesia’s fourth president. In response to the rise of ISIS in 2014 and the indiscriminate killing of Muslims and non-Muslims, the NU issued a statement rejecting the radical religious views of ISIS. Later, in 2017, the NU released a theological framework called ‘Humanitarian Islam.’¹⁴⁹ Humanitarian Islam “supports religious freedom and human rights for Christians and people of other faiths.”¹⁵⁰ Humanitarian Islam also “contains a serious assessment of universal moral norms, the relation between faith and reason, fundamental human goods, the laws (both civil and religious) needed to protect those human goods, and the role of religions in societies.”¹⁵¹ Bishop Dr. Thomas Schirmacher, now

¹⁴⁵ Abdul Mustaqim, “Konflik Teologis dan Kekerasan Agama Dalam Kacamata Tafsir Al-Qur’an,” *Epistémè* 9, no. 2 (June 2014): 156, <https://doi.org/10.21274/epis.2014.9.1.155-176>.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 157.

¹⁴⁷ Mustaqim, 167-173.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 174.

¹⁴⁹ Thomas K. Johnson and C. Holland Taylor, eds., *God Needs No Defense: Reimagining Muslim-Christian Relations in the 21st Century*, (Germany: CPI Books, 2021): 1-4, <https://world-ea.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Festschrift-for-Thomas-Schirmacher-web-color.pdf>.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 206.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

Secretary-General of the WEA, travelled to Indonesia in November 2019 and engaged the leaders of Humanitarian Islam in a dialogue. As a result of this engagement, a Humanitarian Islam/WEA Joint Working Group (JWG) was established.¹⁵²

Thomas Johnson, the WEA Special Envoy for Engaging Humanitarian Islam, suggests several ways for Christians to foster cooperation with Humanitarian Islam. These include holding joint events where leaders discuss religion's role in society, producing joint publications, gathering political leaders from both religions to develop civil laws based on a common moral understanding, providing information to business, government, and education sectors promoting interactions between people from different religions, and addressing humanitarian problems such as homelessness, human trafficking, and other problems.¹⁵³

Interfaith dialogues at national and international levels will allow Indonesian believers to meet and understand moderate Muslim leaders. During these dialogues, Christians will also be able to share their own views and influence Muslim perceptions of Christians. Continued interactions will allow both sides to find common ground, and to then work together to solve humanitarian problems. The safe space created by interfaith dialogue will help Indonesian Christians overcome the barrier of persecution in sharing their faith with their Muslim neighbor. Dialogue and respect between followers of the two religions will help to "establish greater social integration, avoid conflict, alleviate mistrust and improve the social climate."¹⁵⁴

Conclusion

The persecution experienced by Indonesian Christians has become a barrier that keeps these believers from sharing the gospel with their Muslim neighbors. The purpose of this paper was to identify ways in which Indonesian believers could overcome this barrier. The first section studied persecution in the Bible and intertestamental writings and identified three elements common to all persecuted witnesses: physical suffering, a clear testimony of God, and a view beyond this world toward God and his kingdom. We then turned to a study of the early Church to

¹⁵²Johnson and Taylor, 8.

¹⁵³*Ibid.*, 217.

¹⁵⁴Lucia Boccacin and Linda Lombi, "Religious Persecution, Migrations and Practices in Faith-Based Organizations: Some Recommendations from a Qualitative Study," in *Migrants and Religion: Paths, Issues, and Lenses*, ed. Laura Zanfrini (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 499, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004429604_015.

see how it faced persecution. The writings of Ignatius, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Cyprian, and Origen brought us face to face with martyrs who chose death rather than deny their faith. Their writings echoed the biblical themes regarding persecution and emphasized the need for spiritual preparation before facing persecution. A review of the theological response by Indonesian Christians to rising persecution followed, noting many common themes with biblical and early Church writings, including the need for spiritual preparation to endure persecution.

With the spiritual impact of persecution examined, a review of four other impacts of persecution was undertaken. Research on the sociological, physical, psychological, and economic impacts of persecution was presented, and a picture of how persecution affects the whole person was developed. The final section of the paper described three methods to overcome the barrier of persecution in the lives of believers. The first method is to prepare individuals and churches to face persecution. The preparation includes developing a theology of persecution and practical ways for churches to strengthen and support their congregations during times of persecution. Two methods to reduce systemic persecution in Indonesia were presented. The first is for the Indonesian Ministry of Education to develop and implement human rights education in the Indonesian school system. The second is to encourage interfaith dialogues between Christians and moderate Muslims, including those promoting Humanitarian Islam. Human rights education and interfaith dialogue will increase tolerance and ultimately reduce the level of persecution in Indonesia.

Over 192 million Indonesian Muslims are waiting to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ. Over thirty million Indonesian Christians must overcome the barrier of persecution to reach them. This is possible through preparation, education, and dialogue. Then Indonesian believers will be able to share the good news with their Muslim neighbors, and Indonesia will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord.

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