

Learning to Love the Persecuted Church

by

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This essay is a revised version of a sermon preached in several churches in the US and Europe. It calls us to consider the recent, extreme levels of discrimination, persecution, or even martyrdom currently faced by Christians in almost every continent in the light of three passages from the New Testament: Romans 13:1–7; Revelation 13:1–10; and John 13:34–35. Because it may be helpful for the reader to review these biblical texts before reading the sermon, they are printed below. The thesis of the sermon is that Christians in the mostly free regions of the world have a lot to learn about how to love Christians in regions typified by greater persecution, and that beginning in this process of learning is a test of our discipleship as followers of Jesus.

Romans 13:1–7

Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and you will be commended. For the one in authority is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience. This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.

Revelation 13:1–10

The dragon stood on the shore of the sea. And I saw a beast coming out of the sea. It had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on its horns, and on each head a blasphemous name. The beast I saw resembled a leopard, but had feet like those of a bear and a mouth like that of a lion. The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority. One of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had been healed. The whole world was filled with wonder and followed the beast. People worshiped the dragon because he had given authority to the beast, and they also worshiped the beast and asked, "Who is like the beast? Who can

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wage war against it?” The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise its authority for forty-two months. It opened its mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven. It was given power to wage war against God’s holy people and to conquer them. And it was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—all whose names have not been written in the Lamb’s book of life, the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world. Whoever has ears, let them hear. “If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity they will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword they will be killed.” This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of God’s people.

John 13:34–35

Jesus said, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

In 2007 a young Turkish man, the father of two children, was planning to take a theology class that I was scheduled to teach when he was brutally martyred. Two other Christians, one Turkish and one German, were also murdered with him in the office of their Bible printing shop in Turkey. They were cut up with knives! I felt like I had been kicked in the stomach when I first read what had happened. Shocked and angry, I became deeply involved in reporting on and drawing attention to this terrible incident.

Afterwards I felt compelled (by God, I think) to consider how Christians face discrimination, persecution, and sometimes even martyrdom in many countries around the world. This included thinking about the different types of governments we see in different countries, since governments usually have some important role in relation to discrimination and persecution. I also contemplated our international duties within the Body of Christ, since we now live in a post-globalization world. This message shares some of what I have learned.

We find in the New Testament two complementary views of the State or of government, which we must hold together in our minds and in the practice of Christian discipleship. On one hand, Romans 13 describes what a state **should** be and do. This passage is very comfortable for us who live in free countries where we have official protection of human rights and the rule of law. “The one in authority is God’s servant for your good.

But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason.” Therefore we should generally obey the law and pay our taxes.

But on the other hand, in Revelation 13, we have a description of what a state or a government can become when everything goes wrong. A state can become a devouring beast, destroying everything in its path, and especially attacking Christians with demonic hatred. This was not only the experience of the church in the first century, under the persecutions by Nero in the sixties and Domitian in the eighties; it is also the experience of tens of millions of Christians today. A few months ago I was at a meeting with representatives of persecuted churches from dozens of countries.² When someone claimed that the slaughter of Christians in Syria and Iraq should be called genocide, no one disagreed. On the contrary, Christians from other countries responded by saying that what was happening in their nations should be considered genocide too! We may have multiple Christian genocides occurring right now at the hands of multiple, beastly governments. The beast of Revelation 13 is not just a reality from ancient history; **the beast has returned!**

In this light, we Christians who live in free countries, where the government generally fulfills Paul’s vision in Romans 13, need to carefully consider the challenging words of Jesus in John 13:34–35: “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

A generation ago, Francis Schaeffer taught us that visible love is the mark of a Christian, basing his teaching on Jesus’ words in John 13.³ Jesus has given our unbelieving neighbors, called “everyone” here, the astonishing right to evaluate our claim to be disciples of Jesus. They are to make this evaluation on the basis of our love for fellow Christians. Therefore, this love must be more than a feeling; it must become visible as sacrificial action for fellow Christians in need. In our largely globalized society, we need to fully engage with what it means for Christians in the free world to honestly love fellow

² This was the Tirana consultation on discrimination, persecution, and martyrdom in November, 2015, which is described at greater length below.

³ See Francis Schaeffer, *The Mark of the Christian* (L’Abri Fellowship, 1970), now available from InterVarsity Press.

Christians who live under a variety of beasts. We have a lot to learn. And this process of learning is a test of our discipleship.

As we learn how to love Christians living under the beast, we should also consider what this will do for us. I suppose that many of us in the free world are a bit lukewarm about the gospel. We take the gospel and the church for granted, as if they are not so special. One of the benefits of honestly engaging with persecuted Christians is that it may break us out of our spiritual lethargy. How can one remain unmoved when hearing or reading stories of martyrdom and of tens of thousands of our brothers and sisters in Christ fleeing for their lives? Initiatives that change the situation for persecuted believers may also have a large effect on us!

An additional benefit is that such engagement with persecuted Christians may prepare us for problems in our own countries. In the free world, we do not have hundreds of martyrs or thousands fleeing for their lives, but we do sometimes face real and serious discrimination on account of our faith.⁴ And we do not know what the future will be for those of us who now enjoy freedom. Many Christians now facing severe persecution did not expect it in their countries just a few decades ago. In some parts of the world we observe a progression: discrimination leads to persecution, which leads to martyrdom. Getting involved with Christians facing persecution may equip us to face discrimination, which could escalate at some point to become persecution for us too. And never forget: this love in action will be noticed by a watching world, leading some to consider Jesus whose disciples we have proved to be.

A word about Romans 13: Paul is presenting a very compressed version of a political theory that merits extensive explanation. For now, I will simply note that Paul assumed several other themes and texts in the Bible. For example, he assumed what Jesus said in Matthew 22:21: "So give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's." Paul also assumed what Jesus said to Pilate in John 19:11: "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above." And Paul clearly thought that most people serving in government can distinguish between good and evil, so that usually states can

⁴ An example would be the way the radical gay rights movement has challenged the legal status of some Christian institutions because they teach traditional values. Discrimination against Christians in the free world is usually because of the application of Christian ethics to public questions, not because of attending a church.

attempt to punish the evil and reward the good, even if very imperfectly. And there are other biblical assumptions underlying what both Jesus and Paul said about government: the creation of humans in God's image, the fallenness of each person, the existence of an objective moral law, and the authority of written documents.

When we look around the world today and see where Christians and others enjoy a significant level of freedom of religion and other basic human rights protections, I think I see a pattern. I see the influence of the biblical themes assumed in Romans 13 upstream in the culture and educational systems, as a condition of the current experience of freedom and human rights protections. It is not by accident that some countries enjoy freedom and other countries do not. In the countries where the people enjoy freedom, even if the populace does not widely acknowledge Jesus as their Savior, there has usually been some significant influence of a few key ideas from the Bible within the last few hundred years. It is the cultural influence of Bible being felt in the political sphere. I have begun to think of this part of the world as "the Romans 13 world." People in this world believe there is a realm of life that does not belong to Caesar. They may believe that modern Pilates are accountable to God for their actions. They may believe that people have a special dignity, even if they do not know where this dignity comes from. They believe that even top government officials should obey written laws. Most of us reading this message live in this world.⁵

Now a word about Revelation 13. There have been so many wildly speculative theories about the beast or the dragon or the antichrist that responsible theologians may hesitate to mention these themes at all. That would be a mistake. It is beyond the scope of this message to offer a complete interpretation of the book of Revelation, but I think that the apostle John was giving us a pictorial interpretation of events of his time, designed to help believers throughout history to respond to similar events.

⁵ Recently I read a fascinating account of an official from Communist China who had heard that Christians prayed the communists out of power in East Germany in the 1980. This official was afraid that Christians would also pray the Chinese communists out of power! I see this as an example of the influence of a biblical theme, the direct accountability of all people to God, even among people who do not yet acknowledge that they believe in God—in this case, a Chinese communist official who probably had to profess atheism. This account is found in a report written by Thomas Schirrmacher, forthcoming from the WEA Religious Liberty Commission.

In the 30 years before John wrote this text around 95 AD, as already noted, Christians endured two waves of persecution, under the emperors Nero and Domitian.⁶ Though there were probably differences between the two, in both cases the Roman Empire became beast-like. The first period of persecution, under Nero, probably lasted about 42 months, until his death and a change of government. Tradition claims that both Peter and Paul were martyred under Nero, making it an especially painful time for Christians. I think the apostle John lost trusted friends during Nero's persecution. John saw both of these persecutions as ultimately instigated by Satan, represented by the dragon. In John's lifetime, Satan had repeatedly attempted to use a beast-like government to destroy Christians and the churches. The beasts he described were not speculation about some mysterious time in the future; they were his depiction of what the churches had experienced, but presented in such a manner as to prepare future Christians for what would happen again.

John also mentions a false prophet in another chapter; I think this refers to the redevelopment of emperor worship at his time in history. Some people within the Roman Empire were afraid that the empire would completely fall apart, leading to chaos and poverty. They thought that the religion of emperor worship, along with a very powerful emperor, would unify and save their society. The religion of emperor worship served as an ideological justification for an all-powerful Emperor. The Roman Empire would take control of everything external in society while the religion of emperor worship would get inside people's hearts and minds, leaving no place that belongs only to God and not to Caesar. In this way, the false prophet, representing false religion, gave spiritual support to a beastly government.

What we must notice here is that the central creed of the early Christians, that "Jesus is Lord," was the exact opposite and denial of the central creed of emperor worship, "Caesar is Lord." Both were claims to be lord of everything in life; both were foundations of a complete worldview and approach to life. When the combination of the Roman Empire and emperor worship became totalitarian, claiming the people's whole heart,

⁶ There has long been a historians' debate whether John wrote the book of Revelation about AD 95 or about AD 68, before the destruction of Jerusalem. Following what I take to be the view of Irenaeus (AD 132–202), I think that the later date is more likely, but this difference has little effect on the theme of this message, except that John would not yet have experienced Domitian's persecution.

mind, and life, it came into complete spiritual and moral conflict with Christians and the biblical message.

Recently I heard a very moving speech by a Christian woman from Syria, describing what she had seen and experienced in the last few years. I obtained a printed copy of her speech so that I can quote her accurately. It shows us that the beast described by the apostle John in Revelation 13 is not only ancient history. A state, or supposed state, acting like a devouring beast is the experience of many Christians today. Listen to the words of Rosangela Jarjour:

- From the Christian quarters of al Hamidiya and Bustan el Diwan in the old city of Homs, the city where I spent my childhood and teenage, more than 80,000 Christians were cleansed from their homes in early 2012, and their homes were occupied by the militant rebels (al Farouq brigade).
- Eight kilometers away from my parents' village lies Saddam, a peaceful town that was mentioned twice in the Bible. The townspeople lived peacefully for tens of years until late October 2013, when both the Free Syrian Army and Al Nusra Front attacked Saddam and brutally murdered 53 civilians, including an entire family of six who were blindfolded, shot in the head, and thrown in a well.
- The 100th Anniversary of the Armenian Genocide was commemorated in Aleppo with the Islamic factions' leveling to the ground of seven buildings in Al-Suleimania Christian neighborhood on Good Friday (April 10, 2015). Twenty-nine Christians lost their lives and 56 were injured. Easter Sunday was the day to mourn the dead family members and relatives as the whole town was in deep shock.
- Only three weeks before that, 179 Christian families lost shelter and all possessions after al Nusra Front stormed the city of Idlib. Of these families, only 85% of Christians were able to flee with women wearing Islamic robes and hijabs; the others faced an unknown fate.
- The daily mortar and missile attacks by the so-called Moderate rebels on Meharda and the Christian neighborhoods of Damascus and Aleppo have

claimed hundreds of innocent Christian civilians' lives—among them children in attacks on schools and nurseries.

- The Christian population of 400,000 in Aleppo, many of Armenian descent, had already been reduced to an estimated 45,000 by March 2015.
- In the North, 30 Christian Assyrian villages were attacked and wiped out. Many were massacred and the rest either became IDP's or left the country. Up till this minute, 200 families are still held hostages by ISIS.

For many Christians in Syria, it has become commonplace for Islamic extremists, including ISIS and Syrian rebels, to storm Christian neighborhoods, towns and villages; destroy their churches, tear down their crosses and deface their icons and murals; and kidnap Christians for ransom or murder them. Those Christians, who chose to live peacefully on their ancestors' land, are now being eradicated by merciless militants for no other reason than being followers of the Christian faith while the Western world has remained silent and even reluctant to listen to their voices or answer to their intense suffering.⁷

When I thought about her words, I wished I could tell her that the persecution of her group of Christians will only last another few months, to reach the 42 months referred to in the book of Revelation. But I do not think that this reference is a literal promise that all severe persecutions will end in that period of time. Maybe the 42 months mentioned by the apostle John were meant to describe the time of intense persecution under Emperor Nero in the first century; maybe they are symbolic of a limited period of time, not to be taken too literally. So on the basis of the Bible, I do not think we can tell Mrs. Jarjour that the Syrians' time of tribulation is almost over. I am not sure that would be true.

What I am sure of is that today millions of Christians are living under the beast, in a Revelation 13 world, while we live in a Romans 13 world, enjoying freedoms that are partly the result of the Bible's influence on our world. And Jesus has told us that the

⁷ English grammar and sentence structure have been lightly corrected with no change of content. This speech was given at the consultation on the discrimination, persecution, and martyrdom of Christians held in Tirana, Albania, November 2–5, 2015.

watching world will know that we are disciples of Jesus by the way in which we love each other, including the group of Christians to which Mrs. Jarjour belongs.

I am sure we are all wondering what we can do that will truly help Christians in Syria and Iraq. But before we consider that question, I should mention that the Christians in Syria and Iraq are not the Christians under the highest level of persecution today. The story gets worse.

About three years ago, in 2013, I participated in an international consultation on religious freedom research in Istanbul, Turkey. Many had perceived that the persecution of Christians in many countries was getting worse, so 40 or 50 researchers and activists gathered to discuss the problems. We quickly realized that Christians from around the world and across traditions within Christendom needed to cooperate much more extensively in responding to growing persecution. So the World Evangelical Alliance, working with the Vatican, the World Council of Churches, and the Pentecostal World Fellowship, called a meeting of representatives of persecuted churches. Because we were concerned about an ISIS attack, we held this meeting secretly in Albania in November 2015. About 70 representatives of persecuted churches and about 75 representatives of churches in the free world attended.

My role in this event was that of senior editor; this means that, with a team, I edited the books that we specially printed to give to the delegates who attended. As part of this effort, we combined information and analysis from evangelical and Roman Catholic researchers about the status and causes of persecution in the 50 worst countries around the world. While I was working on these data, studying stories of terrible brutality, I sometimes felt sick to my stomach. One day I looked to see where my waste basket was, in case I began vomiting at my desk. But we confirmed important patterns among the causes of Christian persecution. For example, at that time in 78% of the 50 worst countries where Christians are under serious persecution, one of the main causes, often combined with another cause, was some type of extremist Islam (though there are very different types of Islamic extremism). In several other countries, the leading cause of the persecution of Christians is some type of Hindu or Buddhist nationalism. And in a few places, the main cause of the persecution of Christians is organized crime or simple

corruption. But the country with the worst level of persecution of Christians is North Korea.

In the past few years I have met representatives of persecuted Christians from some surprising places—surprising in the sense that I did not expect those people to be able to travel so freely: Syria, Iraq, Iran, Nepal, Kurdistan, Kazakhstan, Vietnam, Cambodia, or China. But I have never met a Christian from North Korea. Not many Christians from North Korea are able to travel to tell their story, but the reports I have heard suggest that the combination of communism with a personality cult makes a ferocious beast.

But what should we do? What is the duty of love that Christians in the Romans 13 world owe to Christians in the Revelation 13 world? One of the purposes of the meeting in Albania was for leaders and researchers from churches in the free world to listen to leaders from the persecuted church, so that we could develop better “to do” lists. Love has to be practical. Two types of “to do” lists were developed in the meetings, one oriented toward churches and the other toward the world. I think these lists are extremely valuable and must be implemented in our circles. But two matters seemed so important that they came before practical “to do” lists.⁸

Our first duty is prayer for the persecuted churches. Even if we do not know much about their theology, ethics, and worship, we can pray for them. As I have listened in person to the prayer requests from persecuted Christians, two themes have caught my ear. The first is the fear that they will be forgotten or abandoned by other Christians. They do not want to die for their faith without other Christians knowing about their martyrdom. The second theme is their prayer request for boldness in witness and proclamation while many of their members are being killed. I have heard people say, “Pray that we would be bold till we die, so that there will still be a church in our country to bring the gospel to our neighbors after this time of persecution is past.” I think it is appropriate to include prayer for persecuted Christians in private, in our families, and in our normal congregational prayer, as well as to have special Lord’s days dedicated to prayer for the persecuted churches.

⁸ The entire text of the Tirana message is found in an appendix at the end of this essay.

The second matter that seemed to come before a practical “to do” list was to address our tragic Christian history of internal intra-Christian persecution. At the suggestion of the Pope, our Roman Catholic colleagues took the lead in asking us to say: “We repent of having at times persecuted each other and other religious communities in history, and ask forgiveness from each other and pray for new ways of following Christ together.”

In this context, it seemed clear that the Roman Catholic Church had openly repented to Evangelicals and Protestants for their role in persecuting them in the past. This repentance was accepted by Evangelicals and Protestants at the meeting. I see this as a result of the work of the Holy Spirit. The era of intra-Christian persecution should be past. This achievement was of extreme value, and by itself this made the time and treasure invested in the meetings worthwhile. The history of Christians persecuting other Christians has been forgiven. In principle, internal Christian persecution should be finished!

Some other themes in our Tirana “to do” lists are important and must be implemented. We said:

In communion with Christ we commit ourselves:

- (a) To listen more to the experiences of Christians, Churches, and of all those who are discriminated against and persecuted, and deepen our engagement with suffering communities.
- (b) To pray more for Churches, Christians, and for all those suffering discrimination and persecution, as well as for the transformation of those who discriminate and persecute.
- (c) To speak up more with respect and dignity, with a clear and strong voice together, on behalf of those who are suffering.
- (d) To do more in mutual understanding to find effective ways of solidarity and support for healing, reconciliation, and for the religious freedom of all oppressed and persecuted people.

The second “to do” list coming from the Albania consultation was oriented toward the world, and it includes the types of things that should, in my opinion, work gradually—over the very long term—to help in changing Revelation 13 countries into Romans 13 countries. To quote from this list, the consultation called on:

All persecutors who discriminate against and oppress Christians and violate human rights to cease their abuse, and to affirm the right of all human beings to life and dignity.

All governments to respect and protect the freedom of religion and belief of all people as a fundamental human right. We also appeal to governments and international organisations to respect and protect Christians and all other people of goodwill from threats and violence committed in the name of religion. In addition, we ask them to work for peace and reconciliation, to seek the settlement of on-going conflicts, and to stop the flow of arms, especially to violators of human rights.

All media to report in an appropriate and unbiased way on violations of religious freedom, including the discrimination and persecution of Christians as well as of other faith communities.

All educational institutions to develop opportunities and tools to teach young people in particular about human rights, religious tolerance, healing of memories and hostilities of the past, and peaceful means of conflict resolution and reconciliation.

We have to see the significance of these words. Representatives of almost all the organizations in the world that call themselves Christian churches were calling on the other main institutions in society, government, media, and education to take up their proper roles to reduce the persecution of Christians and related human rights abuses. This is not something we can do in five minutes after church. This requires serious long-

term efforts by people responsible for our churches, government, media, and educational institutions. And, I believe, these duties fall especially on those Christians and churches that have a rich intellectual and educational history, and that therefore can figure out how to express effective love for persecuted Christians in government, the media, and education.

Keep in mind what I claimed a few minutes ago: the governments in the Romans 13 world usually have some important moral influences upstream of what they decide to do today. In many or most of the countries with religious freedom, somewhere in the last 200 years, there was a significant influence of some biblical themes—perhaps about human dignity, perhaps about freedom of conscience before God. We have to use the means of church, government, media, and education to try to make that happen for Christians in the Revelation 13 world. Many researchers think the persecution of Christians around the world has become much worse in the last five years. Multiple beasts have returned. We have to use all legitimate means to respond.

So what should you do, personally or with your church? Let me give some suggestions:

1. Pray!
2. Start to read about the problem. My favorite source for reliable information is the World Watch List, which provides both shorter and longer reports about the countries where religious persecution is extreme.⁹ For many years I have helped to develop the books, journals, and various reports published by the International Institute for Religious Freedom; we have a growing body of serious literature written by our researchers that addresses many dimensions of the problem.¹⁰
3. Start to learn about human rights documents and principles. At least since the United Nations endorsed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), freedom of religion has been regarded as an important human right, even if many nations ignore it. It would be a worthwhile step if all Christians knew something about human rights.

⁹ <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/>.

¹⁰ <http://iirf.eu/>.

4. Ask what your government says and does in regard to religious freedom and persecution. Do not be surprised if your government is not completely consistent with its own principles. Ask your officials if they are implementing their own principles in both domestic and foreign policy.
5. Ask if your school or university should do something more educationally with regard to human rights and religious freedom.
6. Ask if your church could develop a partnership with a particular persecuted church.

I hope that the location of our November consultation on discrimination, persecution, and martyrdom might be an encouragement to persecuted Christians. We held it in Albania, not only for security reasons but also to celebrate the fact that the terrible persecution under communism has ended. Albania itself would have been near the top of the list of persecuting countries a generation ago. For many years during that country's totalitarian regime, it was effectively illegal not to be an atheist.¹¹ But this changed with the end of communism, so that there is now a good level of freedom of religion in Albania. Severe persecution often comes to an end; freedom often returns. With this in mind, I would like you to finish reading this essay by praying for the persecuted church, keeping in mind the requests I have heard from persecuted Christians.

¹¹ This policy direction began during the closing months of World War II and reached its high point in Albanian law in the constitution of 1976 and the penal code of 1977. The ban on religion was effectively reduced in 1985, and since 1990 Albania has enjoyed a good level of religious freedom. The efforts of Mother Teresa contributed to the transition.

APPENDIX: THE TIRANA CONSULTATION MESSAGE

04 November 2015

“If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together.”

(1 Corinthians 12:26)

1. For the first time in the modern history of Christianity high level leaders and representatives of the various Church traditions gathered together to listen to, learn from, and stand with discriminated and persecuted Churches and Christians in the world today.
2. This global gathering of 145 people took place from 2 – 4 November, 2015, in Tirana, Albania, a country that was declared by its constitution to be an atheist state in 1967, and now has flourishing churches in a framework of religious freedom even though some discrimination may remain.
3. The Consultation, entitled *Discrimination, Persecution, Martyrdom: Following Christ Together*, was convened by the Global Christian Forum together with the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (Roman Catholic Church), the Pentecostal World Fellowship, the World Evangelical Alliance, and the World Council of Churches. It was organized in close collaboration with the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania, the Albanian Bishops' Conference, and the Evangelical Alliance of Albania.
4. We have come together because discrimination, persecution and martyrdom among Christians and people of other faiths in the contemporary world are growing due to a complex variety of factors in different realities and contexts.
5. As we follow Christ, Christians can be exposed to any form of persecution, suffering and martyrdom, because the sinful world is against the Gospel of salvation. But from earliest times Christians experienced the hope and reality of the Resurrection through walking the way of the Cross. Together we follow Christ as we “hunger and thirst for righteousness” (Matthew 5:6) for all.
6. The life of the Church for centuries has been a constant witness in two ways: the proclamation of the Gospel of Christ, and the testimony through the shedding of the martyr's blood. The 21st century is full of moving stories of faithful people who have paid for their dedication to Christ through suffering, torture and execution. Christian martyrs unite us in ways we can hardly imagine.
7. We acknowledge that solidarity among Christian churches is needed to strengthen Christian witness in the face of discrimination, persecution, and martyrdom. In the 21st century, we need

to urgently strengthen the solidarity of all Christians, following up on what has been accomplished with insight and discernment from this Consultation.

8. We repent of having at times persecuted each other and other religious communities in history, and ask forgiveness from each other and pray for new ways of following Christ together.

In communion with Christ we commit ourselves:

- (a) **To listen more** to the experiences of Christians, Churches, and of all those who are discriminated against and persecuted, and deepen our engagement with suffering communities.
- (b) **To pray more** for Churches, Christians, and for all those suffering discrimination and persecution, as well as for the transformation of those who discriminate and persecute.
- (c) **To speak up more** with respect and dignity, with a clear and strong voice together, on behalf of those who are suffering.
- (d) **To do more** in mutual understanding to find effective ways of solidarity and support for healing, reconciliation, and for the religious freedom of all oppressed and persecuted people.

9. Listening to the experience of those going through challenging times, praying and discerning together ways of following Christ in these harsh realities, the Consultation calls on:

- (a) **All Christians** to include more prominently in their daily prayers those who are discriminated against, persecuted, and suffering for the fulfilment of God's Kingdom.
- (b) **All Christian organisations on regional, national and local levels** from various traditions to learn, pray and work together in their localities for the persecuted to ensure they are better supported.
- (c) **All Churches** to engage more in dialogue and co-operation with other faith communities, and be "as wise as serpents and innocent as doves" (Matthew 10:16) by remaining vigilant, watchful and fearless in the face of discrimination and persecution.
- (d) **All persecutors** who discriminate against and oppress Christians and violate human rights to cease their abuse, and to affirm the right of all human beings to life and dignity.
- (e) **All governments** to respect and protect the freedom of religion and belief of all people as a fundamental human right. We also appeal to governments and international organisations to respect and protect Christians and all other people of goodwill from threats and violence committed in the name of religion. In addition, we ask them to work for peace and reconciliation, to seek the settlement of on-going conflicts, and to stop the flow of arms, especially to violators of human rights.
- (f) **All media** to report in an appropriate and unbiased way on violations of religious freedom, including the discrimination and persecution of Christians as well as of other faith communities.
- (g) **All educational institutions** to develop opportunities and tools to teach young people in particular about human rights, religious tolerance, healing of memories and hostilities of the past, and peaceful means of conflict resolution and reconciliation.
- (h) **All people of goodwill** to work for justice, peace and development, knowing that poverty and disrespect of human dignity are major contributing factors to violence.

10. We recommend that the Global Christian Forum evaluates within two years the work of this event, and reports to all four bodies for their follow up.

May God the Father who created us equal by His grace, strengthen our efforts to overcome all forms of discrimination and persecution.

May His Holy Spirit guide us in solidarity with all those who seek peace and reconciliation.

May He heal the wounds of the persecuted and grant us hope as we look forward to the glorious coming of our Lord Jesus Christ who will make all things new.