

Devastating the Witness - The Church in Captivity



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[Under physical persecution as in the Sudan or under freedom with PC, tolerance, and Secularism?] Apologetics

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BreakPoint with Charles Colson - The Church in Captivity

Commentary #030513 - 05/13/2003

Note: This commentary was delivered by Prison Fellowship President Mark Earley. Baroness Caroline Cox, a member of the English House of Lords, is a great advocate for the persecuted Church. Not long ago she traveled into southern Sudan, bringing supplies and a Catholic priest. **The Muslim government was systematically repressing the Church there, and many Christians had disappeared. Others lived in a primitive camp with barely enough food to survive.**

[So, we have persecution in modern times, it seems?]

At great personal risk, the priest had brought bread and wine. In that sweltering African savannah, **even as the bodies of many were being broken and the blood of many was being shed in the neighboring province, this flock celebrated the sacrament of the broken body and shed blood of Jesus Christ.**

Now go halfway around the globe to another congregation gathered to worship at **Denver's Plymouth Congregational Church**. Before the service, the pastor made a startling announcement. **He was gay, he said, and was therefore terminating his twenty-five-year marriage.**

[What? On one hand we have Christians dying and living at great peril in the name of Jesus Christ and on the other hand, we have 'Christians' making a mockery of being a Christian?]

How did church members respond? They **enthusiastically applauded their minister**. One commentator could not help asking: **Would the church members have applauded if the reverend had announced he was dumping his wife to marry a twenty-year-old woman?** I doubt it. Why, then, the enthusiastic support for his homosexuality?

The answer is that to come out as **gay is seen as heroic**. When one takes a stand

against such "repressive" customs as marital fidelity and heterosexuality, the thinking goes, he is liberated, able to fulfill his biological destiny. Infidelity is thus transformed into a form of laudable self-actualization.

Given these two scenarios, where is the Church in bondage today? In a land filled with Islamic troops who kill, torture, and sell believers into slavery? Or in beautiful American sanctuaries, where Christians have embraced the worst of secular wisdom? While the Church has refused to buckle under the heavy hand of Muslim oppression in Sudan, in the United States, it has become increasingly difficult to distinguish the Church from the surrounding culture.

How did this happen? How did the Western Church end up in captivity?

Some congregations like the one in Denver obey cultural imperatives instead of the commands of Christ. Others lack a biblical worldview and so focus only on personal issues. If we view Christianity as nothing more than therapy or as an individualistic spirituality, or attending church as a way to get a spiritual fix to help us through the week, then we're going to become thoroughly irrelevant.

Some churches put more emphasis on recruitment than repentance measuring success by the numbers. The problem is, we can become so focused on getting people into our pews that we end up doing anything to keep them there. Often, this means omitting hard teachings about sin or refusing to confront sinful behavior.

We must never forget that the early Church turned the world upside down because believers confessed that Jesus, not Caesar, was Lord. They didn't embrace the culture; they scandalized it.

You and I must do the same. As Chuck Colson and Ellen Vaughn write, the Church will again be the Church-against-the-world-yet-for-the-world not when it becomes politically correct, but when it's under attack for proclaiming a truth so bold, so vibrant, that a watching world cannot ignore it.



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