

Religious Freedom

by Bill Crews

It is difficult for most Americans to realistically visualize how people in many other nations must live — the type of government they have, the freedoms they are allowed, the average per worker wage, the standard of living that is theirs, the average level of education among the people.

Surely no people in the history of the world have enjoyed more freedom than have the citizens of the United States of America. Ironically, though, it seems that no people, as a whole, have ever appreciated freedom less or abused freedom more than these same citizens.

In some nations around the globe it is illegal, under penalty of imprisonment or death, for men and women to believe and obey the Bible. Some nations have their state religions and either prohibit or restrain all others. In some nations people are permitted to meet and worship God, but their doors must be closed and their windows covered during services. They cannot display a sign, or go from house to house to invite others to services. They cannot purchase newspaper ads or distribute religious handbills. They must keep their religion to themselves — precisely the opposite of what God requires of His people.

The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, under the control of Communist leaders, made atheism the state religion and persecuted severely those who professed to be Christians. Untold millions of peasants, workers, soldiers, business men, teachers, intellectuals and religious people were systematically arrested and either exterminated or imprisoned for years or for life. Many parents were arrested and sentenced for publicly avowing their religious faith and for teaching the same to their children. One woman was given a ten-year prison sentence for writing, “You can pray freely, but just so God alone can hear.” The religious education of children was classified as a political crime, as counter-revolutionary propaganda.

Today, long after the break-up of the above “Republics,” in Russia and in many other countries, religious freedom as we enjoy it, does not exist. In many Muslim-controlled countries it does not exist. In Communist China it is not allowed. Thousands are forced to meet in secret and live under the fear of arrest and imprisonment, or even death.

One of the greater responsibilities resting upon the shoulders of those who profess to be the saints of God in America is that of really using their religious freedom to spread the gospel of Christ (which, in most cases, includes convincing people that they are lost or that they have embraced religious doctrines that are false). How many individuals and congregations are really using their religious freedom by doing what they could? Is it possible that Christians, living in nations without religious freedom, are converting more lost souls than we are with our wonderful religious freedom? We often thank God in our assembly prayers for our religious freedom. Do we then demonstrate that we treasure it by using it? Some members of the Lord’s church who say that they are thankful to God for the freedom to meet “unmolested” will not even make it point to attend all of the church assemblies they are able to attend. Some never invite one soul to those assemblies. Let us all do what we can to take full advantage of our national freedom of religion.

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