
A DIFFERENT CROSS

BY MICHAEL CARD

"... there is a different cross for the Church in the West."

-- Brother Yun

If you are like me, every time you hear the testimonies that come from the persecuted Church you become aware of a deep sense of guilt and shame. Unfortunately, many overseas mission groups twist this dagger in order to make us respond to their legitimate appeals for financial support. The needs *are* legitimate but the means to meet the needs often seem manipulative. Regrettably, guilt has been just about the only motive that produced any results.

I just finished reading David Hunt's remarkable little book, *The Heavenly Man*. It tells the story of a young man, Yun, coming to faith in China, receiving the Call to serve Christ and suffering unimaginably for his faithfulness. David's account presents the powerful story in forthright simplicity, without producing the slightest hint of guilt. Brother Yun's experience of torture and solitary confinement over the years have led those in the underground Church to regard him as perhaps the most persecuted believer in China, a mark of reverence which he would undoubtedly despise. David tells his complete story; his miraculous release from prison as well as those moments when he had sunk so low that he complained to God in prayer. His genuine struggles in following the impossible and scandalous call of Jesus flow seamlessly into scenes of his childlike faith which literally opened prison doors and healed the deaf and the blind. Brother Yun's life is as near a perfect response as we will likely see to the question, "What should a follower of Jesus do in the face of persecution?" I found Brother Yun's answer, powerfully incarnate in his own suffering life, both disturbingly clear and wonderfully comforting.

I learned long ago that when Christ breaks through all our old concepts are shattered and redefined. Brother Yun said, "The people who are in prison are not the ones who are suffering, but the ones in the West who are free..." He said that we, in our freedom, are the ones who are truly suffering in a spiritual sense. "The real people who suffer are the ones who never experience God's presence... there is a different cross for the Church in the West."

Before, when I would hear such stories, I would shrug my shoulders, hang my head and limp in the other direction, away from the Gospel. But now, in the light of Yun's life, I am left to struggle with a new set of questions in terms shattered and redefined. His life is an answer to the question, "What does a disciple do in the face of persecution?" What I'm beginning to realize is that question does not, cannot, apply to those of us in the West who know no persecution. The question we should seek to answer with our lives is, "What does a disciple do in the face of freedom?" The answer to the first question is ringing loudly in China and elsewhere from the persecuted Church. The time has come, not from guilt but from our place of freedom, to answer the second question for ourselves. We know what they have done with their poverty. What will we do with our wealth? We know how faithfully they have suffered. But what does faithfulness look like when lived out in the context of comfort? If Yun is right and the West truly has a different cross, what does the faithful carrying of that cross look like?

Brother Yun, whose unspeakable experiences in torture chambers and prisons should qualify him to provide the most reliable of all definitions of the word *suffering*, radically redefines the word for those of us in the West. We must strain with all that is within us to hear and understand as Christ speaks through him to us: Real suffering comes from not knowing God's presence.

In the face of our freedom, wealth and comfort, Satan would have us guiltily toss a few coins in the plate and feeling all the more guilt that we do not demonstrate our faith in the face of persecution as those in China and elsewhere. What I believe Brother Yun would encourage us, with tears, to do is take up the cross that's been given to the West, the cross of a perceived absence of God's presence and to speak boldly to our sisters and brothers (and to ourselves!) who have for so long felt cut off because of their comfort, who have been weakened by the immensity of their wealth, who have taken for granted their freedom. I pray that in the weeks to come we would astonish our persecuted brothers and sisters with the magnitude of our response to their suffering; that the impact of our prayers, spoken in security, would be felt throughout the suffering Church; that the experience of profound relief, from the excess of our financial riches, given in joy, would provide them a moment's comfort, a cup of cold water. ☞

