



ART AND THE ULTIMATE DESTINY OF THE SUFFERING CHURCH

Yesterday's devotions focused on Hungary, an advocacy partner for the Suffering Church. I mentioned their museum exhibit, *Cross-in-Fire*. The exhibit is both spiritually and artistically powerful. *Hungary knows the value of creativity in advocacy, and so should we all.*

God sometimes uses the arts speak to people in ways that sermons and teachings do not. The arts create a lasting impression – an image or a sound that cannot be forgotten. **Advocates for the Suffering Church should be CREATIVE.** We should utilize paintings, photography, poetry, sculpture, drama, films, songs, and other creative avenues to tell the story of persecuted brothers and sisters. Here are a few examples of art as advocacy:

- The art with this article is an icon of the 21 Martyrs (20 Egyptian Copts and one convert from Ghana) slaughtered in Libya by ISIS. This icon was created by their fellow Coptic Christian in America, [Tony Rezk](#). Rezk made the icon free for copying and sharing.
- As I mentioned previously, the Save the Persecuted Christians coalition has created a photographic exhibit of Christian persecution around the world entitled "People of the Cross." The exhibit includes [Jordan Allott's](#) powerful photo of Ibitsam, the widow of one of the Coptic martyrs mentioned above.
- A Christian college in the US created a garden sculpture dedicated to the memory of 147 Christian students slaughtered by al-Shabaab in northern Kenya in 2015. They named the piece "Habakkuk's Wound" after Habakkuk 1: 1-3: *O LORD, how long shall I cry for help, and You will not hear? Or cry to You "Violence!" and You will not save? Why do You make me see iniquity, and why do You idly look at wrong? Destruction and violence are before me, strife and contention arise.* After a year they planted four trees on the piece, and changed the name to "Habakkuk's Balm," after [3: 17-19](#).



- One of the most moving poems I ever heard about Christian persecution in Sudan, “Sheet Lightning Over the Veldt,” was written by a young man in Knoxville, Tennessee. [Last year I found that poem after having lost it over ten year ago](#). I decided to [read the poem](#) as a Spoken Word poem on video for our Institute on Religion and Democracy’s blog, [Juicy Ecumenism](#).
- Churches and youth groups that are – dare I use it? – “woke” to global persecution of Christians have produced plays about the Suffering Church. A powerful stage play that exposes the persecution not just of Christians, but all people, in North Korea’s horrible labor camp system, was the 2006 musical [Yoduk Story](#). Critics praised it as “the *Les Mis* of North Korea.”
- Filmmaker Jason Jones’ [Sing a Little Louder](#) packs a **wallop** in less than 12 minutes. Watch it online immediately and share it with your friends and fellow church members.
- Filmmaker [Jordan Allott](#) and [Joshuacord](#) was released [Christians in the Mirror](#) in 2018. This film profiles persecuted Christians from Iraq, Syria, Egypt, India, and Sudan. According to the website, “The documentary seeks to ask the audience the question what do they see as followers of Christ in the mirror? Does it reflect Christ or is it skewed or distorted?” The creators hope that Christians and churches across America will have screenings that will lead to more prayer and advocacy for persecuted brothers and sisters and make the film as accessible as possible to all.
- Finally, we need songs to tell the story of the Suffering Church. In recent years a powerful musical tribute to Christian martyrs is “[The Greater Tide](#),” performed by the band Attalus, and written by the former lead singer [J. Seth Davey](#).* “The Greater Tide” describes the martyrdom of “long forgotten men who lost their lives beneath the tide”

*Some faced the sword/Some faced the rack/Some burned alive inside the flames
But heroes all/Both great and small/They proved their faith was not in vain
Those humble men/Those children dear/Beneath the crushing wave they cried
That saving name/Of Him who comes/Bringing forth a greater tide.*

“Come hear the tale and stand amazed at those who rest beneath the waves,” it continues. I am reminded of the 21 Martyrs. Although ISIS thought to terrorize and discourage Christians by releasing their horrific video — “the tale” — God used it to “amaze” people all over the world. The Body of Christ has grown stronger, especially in Egypt, where many rededicated their lives to Christ as a result of these martyrs and the faith of their widows and orphans.

Davey’s [song](#) concludes triumphantly with a powerful instrumental section to reinforce the lyrics. “Come hear the tale and stand amazed at those who dance upon the waves. Their minds are new, their hearts are safe, upon that Sea beyond the grave.” Not only the 21, but millennia

of martyrs, who in the Book of Revelation are identified as “a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language” dance upon the waves.

In Philippians, St. Paul tells us to think about whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent and praiseworthy. Advocates are always focusing on the sadness, heartbreak, evil, and destruction endured by the Suffering Church. But the artist helps the advocate to see beauty in spite of all that.

The man or woman who becomes an advocate for their persecuted brothers and sisters sees what is true and right and excellent as something to be defended at all cost. And art reveals the pure and lovely and noble in what only appears to be broken and violated and victimized. It proclaims admirable and praiseworthy those that only appear to be poor and downtrodden. And it helps us to see the end – the ultimate destiny – for both those for whom we are advocates and for ourselves: *dancing upon the waves on that Sea beyond the grave.*

Scripture: *Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation. God, the LORD, is my strength; He makes my feet like the deer's, He makes me tread on my high places.* Habakkuk 3: 17-19

Prayer: *LORD, it is easy to see the beauty created by artists and skilled craftsmen is important to You. As we read through Exodus, we see the beauty and significance in the details of the Temple, of the robes of the High Priest, and so many other intricate details. Thank You for giving us the beautiful and true to help point us to You. Thank You for art that touches hearts and convicts spirits of people, awakening them to the suffering and triumph of Your Body around the world. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

*This style music may not be to everyone's taste, but I love it. I think the passion of the words is echoed in the music. This song touched me so deeply that I contacted the songwriter/lead singer, [Seth Davey](#), a man who loves Jesus. Attalus broke up in 2018, and Davey is now writing and illustrating books for children, helping support an orphanage in Uganda.