

Counted Worthy of the Kingdom

Women from Around the World on Suffering

As the good news of Jesus spread rapidly around the world in the first-century, persecution grew and spread with it. Our early brothers and sisters were driven from Jerusalem, Stephen was stoned to death, others were beaten and abused, riots arose, the Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the Christians, but still *"the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power."*

This New Testament pattern is being repeated today as the word of God is spreading in ways not seen since the first century. The world is opposing the Kingdom of God all over the globe. But through this persecution shine bright stars of faithful sisters taking comfort in Peter's words, *"Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed"* (1 Peter 4:12-13).

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Persecution from Family and Friends



The following are true accounts of the trials that individual sisters and churches have been facing. These reports come from the British Isles (Birmingham, London and Manchester), India (Bangalore, Bombay and New Delhi) and Mexico (Mexico City). As you read, be inspired by their faith and perseverance. Pray that they will continue to stand firm.

Meena Ganywani of Bombay has faced persecution for going against the cultural tradition of an arranged marriage with a man who is not a disciple. She is 33 years old and still unmarried. Familial pressure and persecution have mounted steadily over her unmarried state. Several times her family has brought a man from their native place with a marriage proposal. Last month, they attempted to lure her back for a cousin's marriage. Only through a tip-off from a sister-in-law did Meena learn that the intention was to marry her at the same time. She is standing firm and trusting God's plan for her life and leading a house church of 16 women.

Nalini, in Bangalore, comes from a Hindu background, and her persecution started as she was studying the Bible to become a Christian. Her family refused to let her come to the church, but she read her Bible daily for a month on her own, and finally came on her own and became a Christian. She has been beaten, locked in her house, and taken to the police over the last few months. She was kicked out of her house, and then a riot started in central Bangalore when her family tried to drag her home the next day. Though she is regularly locked in, she secretly meets with the Christians after college each day for prayer and encouragement. At church, she is a tremendous example of joy and faith. Instead of complaining about her trials, she is a constant encouragement, writing notes to other sisters undergoing trials less severe than her own.

When our sister Gloria called Ana, she was crying and begging her to come over because she was afraid her mother was going to kill her. Ana immediately got a brother and a sister to accompany her to Gloria's home. When they arrived, Gloria ran out of the house crying and clung to Ana, asking to go home with her. Ana tried to talk calmly with Gloria's mother, and for a minute it seemed to be working. However, what no one knew then was that Gloria's mother was only stalling for time until a street gang and the police (who are perhaps the more dangerous of the two) had arrived. Our brother was beaten, Cristina was hit and Ana was shoved into a police car and taken to jail. On arriving she was allowed to make a phone call and two of the brothers went. Several hours passed

during which Ana talked about how she had been pulled out of the car, her hair after being fondled by several of the policemen. Then, amidst threats and insults they were allowed to leave.

Not only are new Christians persecuted by family and friends, but disciples are also facing increasing opposition from those they are reaching out to. In New Delhi, for example, four sisters were evangelizing Nehru University and enjoying building relationships with the students living on campus. Within a few short weeks, the students realized that the sisters wanted them to join the Christians in their worship of God. They were Hindu from a communist background. They alerted the dormitory security and claimed they never knew us. Less than two months later, a similar progression of events took place at an all-women's college. The Christians had been more involved there and had even led a Bible discussion in the dormitory. One day while following up on a girl that had been met, two Christians were confronted at the entrance by angry students. They took the Christians to an office and detained them there until the police came. It was incredible the height of emotion that had been generated by angry Hindus fighting the conversion of their friends. Although the crowd of angry students grew to more than 40, the Christians remained calm, but hurt because some of those in protest were girls to whom they had given their hearts. The policemen were kind, and since they had done nothing wrong, let them go.

Although every situation is not as dramatic as those you have just read about, the beatings, the suicide threats by the mothers, imaginary illnesses "caused" by their children's conversions, being thrown out of their homes, arranged marriages with non-Christians, kidnappings and blackmail are everyday realities in the lives of many of our sisters around the world.

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Persecution from the Media



The church as a whole can receive persecution as well. The churches in the British Isles have received perhaps the most intense media persecution. Unlike American newscasters and journalists who feel ethically bound to present both sides of any given issue, the British feel no such constraint. Articles and television shows have appeared that were totally negative with no balancing statements.

In Birmingham, recently, the British Broadcasting Company (BBC) sponsored criticism of the church on "Woman's Hour," a national radio program dedicated to women's issues. A daily, national newspaper carried a full-page article, brashly headed "Evil Campus Cult Turns Students into Zombies," with a picture of the women's counselor, Siobhan Dannatt, and her husband. A student, with whom a Christian had been studying the Bible, appeared the next day on television slandering the church. Every first-year student at Birmingham University received a formal letter from the vice-chancellor in the first week of the term, warning them about the church. Despite this, more female students are on the verge of becoming Christians.

From Page in Manchester
The work in Manchester officially began on November 5, 1989, with 540 people in attendance at the first ser-

vice. Yet within days of the inaugural service there were negative front-page headlines in all of Manchester's major newspapers. They included such headlines as: "City Kids at Risk from Cult," "Religious Cult Banned from Campus" and "Church of the Poisoned Mind." Television was quick to follow suit with two programs within a week of each other accusing the church of using brainwashing techniques, sleep deprivation and harassment of the students. In spite of such opposition, eight were baptized into Christ the first month. In addition, God moved to allow Richard Dunbar, the leader of the Manchester Christian Church, to appear on a nationwide BBC documentary program to answer the allegations. Unlike previous shows, the program allowed members of the church to respond freely and without being edited.

"Exit Counselors" in London
Like persecution in other cities, some London sisters have been locked up, beaten or threatened, and have had their Bibles destroyed. They have also faced newspaper articles and television programs. In addition, they have had persecution from "exit counselors." One sister wrote, "When I first became a Christian my Mum was overjoyed. But then when she saw my involvement...and commitment, she began to get concerned... She tried to get my sister to persuade me to leave. When that did not work, she pursued other avenues such as arranging for me to see someone who has had a lot of dealings with cult organizations. At first when we used to meet she would have a lot of literature ready for me on brainwashing, cult movements and how to recognize a cult..." The media continues to provide material for Satan to use in a damaging way against God's church.

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As the battle to take the gospel to the world continues such persecution and resistance will certainly continue and intensify with it. We must continue to take our stand and fight for the souls of both women and men. We must remember that *"our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the ruler, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms"* (Ephesians 6:12).

The fight that these sisters are making as they stand firm against Satan is certainly inspiring. To them and others who suffer alongside them, we dedicate our love and prayers, and *"among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring. All this is evidence that God's judgment is right and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God"* (2 Thessalonians 1:4-5). **D**