



LISTEN UP!

We witness today a global assault on Jesus Christ. This is nothing new. At the core of Christianity, stated at its barest, is his brutally unjust execution. It was succeeded by ten formidable persecutions of Christ's church by Rome and, from the seventh century, by her expunging from North Africa.

Whereas historic persecutions sought to prevent Christianity from spreading, today's hostility objects to Christianity being so widespread. After all, professing followers of Jesus have quadrupled over the last century, now numbering around 2.4 billion. Persecution, then, has the potential to become as widespread as the faith, while differing though from hemisphere to hemisphere: harassment (or low-grade persecution) of Christians in lands of Judeo-Christian heritage and outright (or high-grade persecution) in areas of non-Christian influence. It has various forms.

THE INTELLECTUAL ASSAULT

The assault on the mind dates back to the eighteenth century from whence it was taught that human powers of reasoning could, independent of God, decide truth. Universities founded on Christian principles were gradually taken over by secularists, such that Christianity is now disregarded as revealed truth in every field of study, even in that of theology.

A. N. Wilson tracks the western decline of historic Christianity in *God's Funeral* (1999) and, with it, the sense of loss among those planning the burial. Nevertheless, the influence of the intelligentsia has trickled out to society, and easily so in this age of mass media where the film industry warns of smoking but not of blasphemy!

THE ETHICAL ASSAULT

The assault on Christianity is never merely intellectual. It is a matter of the heart (Psalm 14:1; 53:1). Whereas Christianity offers freedom from sin, our natures seek freedom to

sin. After all, the conveniently enshrined theory of evolution teaches us that, as descendants of animals, we are liable to our animal impulses. Yet since we live in God's universe, made in his image and with his law written on our hearts, we feel unwittingly obliged, when disdaining the Ten Commandments and Christ's affirming of them, to establish our own "moral" code—one suiting our own preferences in sin. Thus, whereas Scripture summarizes the law in terms of love of God and of neighbor, the new code insists on love of self and love of tolerance. Familial dysfunction and societal chaos abound as a result.

THE POLITICAL ASSAULT

Wherever the kingdom of heaven spreads it benignly threatens the kingdoms of man. Especially vulnerable are the most powerful: the dictators. They use their fleeting power to crush all resistance, including Christian allegiance to Jesus Christ. While he is our first loyalty, Christians seek, in faithfulness to him, to be model citizens. But we oppose earthly powers where they seek to transgress God's will (Acts 5:29). Behind the iron curtain Christians were imprisoned and killed. Today, the Communist party in China demolishes churches, is rewriting the Bible in its favor, and threatens to withhold benefits from the poor who follow Christ. Who can say what ignominies are faced by Christians in the hidden world of North Korea?

THE RELIGIOUS ASSAULT

World faiths, while acknowledging Christ, care not for his claim to divinity, his ruling out of man-made contributions to peace with God, his resurrection from the dead, and his claim to be *the* way to heaven (e.g., John 14:6). Such exclusivism reflects poorly on the necessity of other world faiths. Some religions live with this, content to minister to those wanting to contribute to their spiritual well-being. Others don't, seeking complete submission. The *Qur'an* rightly says, though, that, "Those who believe [the *Qur'an*], those who follow the Jewish [scriptures], and the Sabians, Christians, Magians, and Polytheists—God will judge between on the Day of Judgment: for God is witness of all things" (*Sūrah-AlHajj* [The Pilgrimage] 22:17).

LITTLE FARMS CHAPEL (ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH)

2518 Arthur St E, Coopersville, MI 49404 • (616) 677 6170 • office@lfcopc.org

WORSHIP: SUNDAYS 9:30 AM and 5:30 PM

From His Fullness

CHEER UP!

Given the global opposition to Christ, we ask why so many are coming to faith in him outside the West and why, in the West, Christians refuse to bow to secularism.

SOME THEOLOGICAL REASONS

Atheists, for all their bluster, are far from pulling off God's burial. The consciences God gave us won't comply, other explanations of the universe are wearing thin (despite the heavy sell), and atheism's body count courtesy of godless states and the rejection of the sanctity of life is proving to be tragic and hypocritical.

Atheism offers a delusory utopia propped up by the theory of evolution. Its fallacy of man's ascendancy was blown apart by the devastation of World War I. Its natural selection counts eugenics and Nazi concentration camps among its achievements. Subsequently, the U.S.S.R. spent seventy years banning God's existence only to reap a brutal, corrupt society of oligarchs. There's good reason, then, why Christians neither can nor will drop our theism (Romans 1:18-32).

SOME CHRISTOLOGICAL REASONS

Christianity stands or falls not with theism but with Christ. Many have claimed to be divine, and have either been ignored, busted, or ridiculed, but Christ they sought to kill (John 8:58-59). On CNN recently, the host, Don Lemon, with no relevant credentials, stated as fact that, "Jesus Christ, admittedly, was not perfect when He was here on earth." Contrary to such hubris we have Peter's exclamation, "*Depart from me for I am a sinful man*" (Luke 5:8). John testifies that they saw Christ's glory in a fullness of truth and grace (John 1:14). Pilate who handed Jesus over to death said he found no fault in him (Luke 23:4; John 19:4). A Roman centurion observing him at the cross said, "*Truly, this man was innocent*" (Luke 23:47). He and those with him described him as "*the Son of God*" (Matthew 27:54; Mark 15:39).

SOME SOTERIOLOGICAL REASONS

Without Christ's authenticity there is no salvation (*soteria* in Greek). We embrace Christ because he is both divine and human. No one other than a divine Savior can make us right with God. Yet, no one less than fully human can pay for our sins. In Christ, then, we have the greatest of gifts from God—a Savior who actually saves (Matthew 1:21)! No wonder, Paul, a former persecutor of Christians, called him God's "*inexpressible gift*" (2 Corinthians 9:15).

We also embrace Christ for his life and his death. The testimonies of his perfection unto his death on the cross

are significant because his atoning for sin would otherwise be worthless. A sin-stained atonement would itself need atoning. Christ, though, in his perfection, qualified to bear his Father's righteous judgment. His shed blood, covering the sins of the world, took them away (John 1:29, 36). "*It is finished!*" Christ testified. He had atoned for sinners! By raising him from death, the Father certified that the payment had gone through in heaven.

SOME ETHICAL REASONS

Yet, if Christ is alive, raised writes Paul, as "*the Son of God in power*" (Romans 1:4), why is his church so far from being perfect?

First, because Scripture teaches us that not all professing Christians are authentic. Jesus said that by the fruit of holiness we evince our legitimacy as Jesus' followers: "*By this [abiding in Christ] my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples*" (John 15:8). Only Christ knows infallibly his followers. He warns there will be those who say, "*Lord, Lord*" and who act in his name, who will not see heaven, for they do not do the will of God the Father (Matthew 7:21-23).

Second, every Christian has to mature in following Jesus. Wrote Paul, "*he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ*" (Philippians 1:6). God's forgiveness is received upon resting in Christ for his salvation, but the journey into conformity to Christ's fullness of grace and truth takes a lifetime. Only when we awake in God's presence shall we be satisfied with his likeness (Psalm 17:15). In the meantime, those who are genuine echo King David: "*Let not those who hope in you be put to shame through me, O LORD God of hosts; let not those who seek you be brought to dishonor through me, O God of Israel*" (Psalm 69:6).

Third, the more we mature spiritually the greater our sensitivity to sin. Penitent slave trader, John Newton (1725–1807), who penned *Amazing Grace*, spoke for each of us: "Dear God, I confess that I am not what I should be. I am not what I want to be. I am not what I will be, but by your grace I am what I am, and that I am not what I once was!" It is because Christ lives that we grow at all. We encourage one another to do so. In the words of



pastoral theologian Jack Miller (1928–1996), "Cheer up: You're a worse sinner than you ever dared imagine, and you're more loved than you ever dared hope." God's love does not excuse our remaining sin, but it reminds us that he who saves us gradually transforms us. (Photo: <https://dashhouse.com/day-jack-changed/>.)

WAKE UP!

Few people in history have done more to bring the good news of God's grace to our race than George Whitefield (1714–1770). Yet, in today's Woke movement that knows neither the gospel nor forgiveness, he, too, has become a target of what in the West is called "the cancel culture."

THE MAN

Born in Gloucester, England, it was as a student at Pembroke College, Oxford University that Whitefield became a Christian under the influence of two brothers: John and Charles Wesley. The three became some of the best-known names of Christianity from that day to this, for through their preaching God revived his church in the English-speaking world and brought masses to faith in Jesus Christ.

Besides preaching an estimated 18,000 times to ten million people, Whitefield sailed multiple times to the American colonies. Following his first trip to Georgia he found the Anglican churches in England closed to his ministry, further evincing that not all professing to be Christian love the sum and spread of the gospel. He therefore took the good news of Jesus outside the church walls to the working classes, preaching to tens of thousands gathering to hear him in the British Isles and in the American colonies.

Over the Atlantic he connected with the likes of Benjamin Franklin and America's theologian Jonathan Edwards. At each place he preached Whitefield collected for the orphanage he had found in 1738 in Georgia. It was an endeavor close to his heart in line with what the New Testament calls "*religion that is pure and undefiled*" (James 1:26-27). Slaves would so love to come and hear him preach that Whitefield's ministry is seen as a contributor to African-American Christianity.

Worn out and sick, he died the morning after field-preaching in Newbury, Massachusetts, fulfilling his conviction that he "would rather wear out than rust out."

THE MESSAGE

The good news of God's free grace (unmerited favor) in Jesus Christ burned in his soul. It is said he preached on the words of Jesus, "*You must be born again*" (John 3:3) four hundred times. When asked why he preached on the text so much, he responded, "Because you *must* be born again!"

He knew, contrary to every global religion, that man cannot get to God by his personal merit and good works.

Only by the gift of God's Son as Savior and only by the gift of God's Spirit empowering a penitent faith in God's Son can we enter into a relationship to God, taking our place, at death, in his heavenly home. Indeed, that night before Whitefield did so, he exclaimed in his last sermon, "Works! works! A man gets to heaven by works! I would as soon think of climbing to the moon on a rope of sand."

Nicknamed "a marvel of the age," Whitefield's preaching, as also that of John Wesley, limited the effects of the age of reason on the British Isles and spared the country the bloody horrors of the French Revolution (1789). Moreover, countless numbers were prepared for their deaths by the bloodshed, disease, and imprisonment in the Revolutionary War (1775–1783) which occasioned the founding of the United States of America.

THE MANIA

We don't presume Whitefield would have wanted a statue in his honor. Created by R. Tait McKenzie (1919), it flies in the face of Whitefield's sentiment: "Let my name die everywhere, let even my friends forget me, if by that means the cause of the blessed Jesus be promoted." (<https://archives.upenn.edu/exhibits/penn-history/campus-art/mckenzie-whitefield>.)

Nor do we claim Whitefield to have been a Christ figure. He could be impulsive, whether in marrying (four ministers refused to officiate) or in boldly going off his intuitions to prophesy God's use of his newborn son

John. He died at four months.

Whitefield was, however, ahead in some ways of his age. He not only preached but cared for orphans, slaves, and widows. Although he lived prior to the abolitionist movement, was donated fifty slaves, educated them, spoke out against cruelty to slavery, there is against him his petitioning for the legalizing of slavery so that Georgia could prosper and his orphanage would have the necessary workers.

Whereas Whitefield believed slavery could be humanized then ended by the conversion of sinners, today's Woke movement only has ears to hear of the slavery. Yet, when we bear in mind that their political leanings are toward those who, historically, defended the system of slavery, hindering its abolition and opposing equal rights, now supporting the mass slaughter of the unborn (nearly four times more black babies than white ones in the U.S.) we suspect that their problem is not ultimately with Whitefield, but with the Christ whom he preached. "*If,*" said Jesus, "*they persecute me, they will also persecute you*" (John 15:20).



Residential Address:

LOOK UP!

Our point is not to win a culture war in the West nor a battle of global religions, but to commend Christ to you. We each need him. As the Bible says, *“all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”* (Romans 3:23). What is required in our day, then, is an end to the chatter and noise and a fresh awareness of who God is and what we are by comparison. God has given us his law, wrote Paul, *“that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God”* (Romans 3:19).

It is when we become conscious of our personal sin that we become less opinionated about others, focusing rather on our own need to repent and to rest in Jesus.

God, through the Bible, impresses on us that there is nothing more needed for our salvation than that which Christ has already accomplished at the cross. Atonement cost Jesus his life, but the forgiveness he merited for us is free. God lovingly invites us, then, to look to Jesus (Hebrews 12:2). He was *“lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life”* (John 3:14).

One of the thieves crucified with Jesus did just that. Conscious of his sin, concluding that he deserved death because of it, and unable, nailed to his cross, to even attempt to atone for all he had done to offend God, looked to Jesus: *“Jesus, remember me when you enter into your kingdom.”* Who can forget Jesus’ reply? *“Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise”* (Luke 2:42-43).

You, too, may look to Jesus. Don’t delay. Says the hymn, “There is life for a look at the crucified one, There is life at this moment for thee; Then look, sinner, look unto him and be saved, Unto him who was nailed to the tree. Look, look, look and live; There is life for a look at the crucified one, There is life at this moment for thee.”

Next Issue Due Out: December 1

WHAT’S ON OFFER TO YOU?

If you have been to *ArtPrize* or around the malls of Grand Rapids you will likely have heard of Rahi the Artist.



You are, then, warmly invited to hear Rahi and his wife Lili tell of their journey from their native Iran, through the years of their pursuit of God and the political struggles of asylum seeking, to the discovery on Cyprus of the good news of Jesus Christ and the difference

He makes in their lives.

THEME: Iran to Christ!

FEATURING: Rahi and Lili Soltani

DATE: Saturday, September 12

VENUE: Little Farms Chapel, Coopersville (see front page for the address).

TIME: 4–7 PM

- *4–5:15 PM ~ Free caricatures and hair wraps for girls.*
- *5:15–6:00 PM ~ Pizza meal (COVID sensitive).*
- *6:00–7:00 PM ~ Interview with the Soltanis about their spiritual journey, with discussion and questions to follow.*

RESERVATIONS: All are welcome, but if you wish to join us for the meal, please call the church office (616.677.6170) or email office@lfc.org by 4 PM on Thursday September 10, to let us know. Thank you!

The Christian Flag

“I pledge allegiance to . . . the Savior for whose kingdom [this flag] stands, one Savior, crucified, risen, and coming again, with life and liberty to all who believe.”

