

Review: Renee Dylan, *Vietnam: A Legacy of Long Suffering, Living Sacrifice* Book Co., Bartlesville, OK, 2013

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A Quagmire of Persecution

The enemies of the gospel in Vietnam have been legion: traditional Confucianism and Buddhism; then Catholicism; and finally Marxism.

‘Protestantism’ only made some progress in the early 20thC, and there is one encouraging story of the Tin Lanh (“Good News”) church surviving over a hundred years. However, current Communist persecution is ever-present, with state approval required for new churches (rarely granted in rural areas), and constant monitoring.

This gives a good overall background of the dark spiritual forces involved for one preparing to witness in Vietnam.

Vietnam was known as the Kingdom of Annam, named so by the Chinese in 1164, and when Christianity arrived it was branded as a “false religion”.

In 1533, it issued an edict condemning, “the false doctrines [of Jesus]”, naming one “I Nu Khu” (possibly the Jesuit Ignatius).

Portuguese and Spanish friars undertook missionary work there in the 1600s. Jesuit Alexander de Rhodes (b. 1593, Avignon) was their early leader.

There was a power struggle between rival Nguyen and Trinh clans.

De Rhodes found three main religions when he arrived: Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism. During his mission in Tonkin (1627-30), conversions angered Buddhist monks, and he was expelled in May, 1630. After exile, he spent ten years in Macau, China.

In 1639, Lord Nguyen ordered seven Jesuits to leave.

In 1640, de Rhodes returned.

In July, 1644, Andrew of Phu Yen became Vietnam's first known martyr.

On 3/7/1645, De Rhodes left Vietnam forever, and died in Persia, 1660.

The Nguyen Minh Mang reigned from 1820-1841 and was a great persecutor of Christians, torturing and executing 130.

In 1825, new missionaries were banned.

The Vietnamese condemned teachings of heaven and hell and refusal to worship Buddha and ancestors.

French Missionary Joseph Marchand was involved in Vietnamese politics against Minh Mang, and had his flesh pulled off by metal tongs.

Communists took over the country in the 1970s.

France invaded Vietnam in 1857 which was under the rule of Tu Duc. However, in 1947, Duc had decreed all Christian missionaries be killed by having a large stone fastened to their necks and bodies thrown in to the sea.

Christianity was labelled *ta do* ("perverse religion") and these very words were branded into the cheeks of Vietnamese Christians.

In 1862, Tu Duc signed the Saigon Treaty, giving away the southernmost portion of Vietnam (the Cochinchina region) as a French colony.

An estimated 30K Christians were killed during Tu Duc's reign.

Confucianists blamed the occupation on Christianity, leading to a great persecution between 1873 and 1888.

Despite persecution, there were an estimated 870K Vietnamese Christians in 1915.

Communism began revolution in 1930 as the Indochinese Communist Party.

After the French union fell in 1954, China and Russia sought to move into the vacuum with Communism. The Geneva Accord temporarily partitioned the country at the 17th parallel; civilians were given 300 days' freedom to traverse the line.

Christians in the North were viewed as unpatriotic troublemakers.

The U.S. lost the Vietnam War in 1973 and signed over the South in 1975 to Communism. All foreign missionaries were then expelled.

Over fifty ethnic minorities live in Vietnam.

The Hmong people arrived from south China in the 19thC, and were beholden to Animism. During the Vietnam War many sided with the Americans.

Tin Lanh ("Good News") Church is the oldest Protestant group, founded 1911. In 2001, it was finally granted official recognition.

In 2004, the U.S. State Department designated Vietnam as a, "Country of Particular Concern".

Almost no village churches receive approval.

Mennonite Pastor Quang believes government registration is the new front-line in the battle for religious freedom: "registration is not freedom of religion".