

## **A Costly Confession. No Ten**

One of the secular media's glaringly unreported stories, which is even ignored by the Christian world, is the persecution of millions of Christians for simply being Christian. Suffering for the sake of the Gospel is one of the hallmarks of a genuine church. In His beatitudes our Lord said to His disciples: "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me" (Matt.5: 11). The apostles, who first brought the Gospel into the world, were persecuted. They were finally killed by the world which refused to accept their testimony. The early churches were persecuted and hated. Many Christians were killed. Think of the terrible persecution under the Roman emperors. The early martyrs met the lions "in the sure hope of the Resurrection to eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ." They were able to handle death. Martin Luther defined the church as those "who are persecuted and martyred for the gospel's sake." Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the Lutheran pastor who was hanged by direct order of Himmler in the Flossenburg concentration camp on April 9, 1945, wrote: "Discipleship means allegiance to the suffering Christ, and it is therefore not at all surprising that Christians should be called upon to suffer."

Who is a martyr? A martyr is any witness to the Lord Jesus Christ who has laid down his life for his confession. Why martyrdom? Because Satan strives for the possession of this world, he wages a ferocious battle against the Kingdom of Christ. The kingdom of darkness cannot stand the Kingdom of Light. The martyrs are those who did not worship the anti-Christ (Rev.20:4). The world considers the martyrs slain for Christ, losers. But in heaven they get special mention. They are the blessed ones. What the world thinks as great loss is the martyrs' gain. They belong to the Church triumphant. Heaven is for them the winning post at the end of a race, a tabernacle of safety and a protection against the threats of Satan. They are honoured in heaven. They eagerly long for the time when the Lord will be fully glorified. The sovereign and holy Lord will judge and avenge their blood upon His return to earth. He will vindicate them. This is Divine justice, not the watered-down justice of our day. In a vision, John saw "under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. They called out in a loud voice, 'How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?'" (Rev. 6:9,10).