"Christian Martyrdom as a Pervasive Phenomenon"
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(What follows is an abstract and some of the key findings of our article published in *Society*, Vol. 51, No. 6, December 2014, pp. 679-685).

Abstract
Historians have undertaken the study of Christian martyrdom primarily to understand its impact on the growth of the religion since its inception. This article takes a different perspective on the study of martyrdom, instead examining how many Christians around the world have died in situations of witness every year. Included is a comparative analysis of twentieth- and twenty-first-century trends regarding the phenomenon, highlighting both qualitative and quantitative differences between the two periods. Measuring Christian martyrdom is not without controversy, however. Here, the number of martyrs per year is determined by a specific set of criteria that takes into consideration historical, sociological, and theological arguments. This article will present a definition of martyrdom highlighting two important aspects: (1) the motivation of the killed rather than the killer, and (2) the inclusion of Christians who have died as a result of mass killings and genocides. Drawing on historical and contemporary descriptions of martyrdom situations, we argue that martyrdom is a broad-based phenomenon not limited to state persecution that is profoundly affecting thousands of Christians in the context of civil war, genocide, and other conflicts.

Key ideas and findings
The demographic study of Christian martyrs began with church statistician David B. Barrett in 1986, the first to systematically think about martyrdom as an annual phenomenon that required monitoring. In 2001, Barrett and Todd Johnson published a list of more than 600 martyrdom situations over the course of history, estimating that more than 70 million Christians had been martyred over the last two millennia, more than half of whom were killed in the twentieth century under fascist and communist regimes. The average annual rate at the end of the twentieth century was estimated to be about 160,000 martyrs per year (or 1.6 million over the decade 1990–2000). This included large numbers of Christians killed in the Rwandan genocide and the Sudanese civil wars.

The work of counting Christian martyrs has continued into the twenty-first century because the phenomenon itself has persisted. From the 10-year period 2000–10, we estimate that one million Christians were killed in martyrdom situations, an average of approximately 100,000 Christian martyrs each year. The vast majority of these were in the Democratic Republic of Congo, a situation also discussed in detail below. The demographic assessment of Christian martyrdom is not without controversy. Other scholars and observers have criticized these estimates as being too high. However, the number of martyrs per year will vary according to how "martyr" is defined. We determine the number of martyrs per year by a specific set of criteria that takes into consideration historical, sociological, and theological arguments. Other definitions will result in other estimates.

This article will present our definition of martyrdom, highlighting two important aspects: (1) the motivation of the killed rather than the killer, and (2) the inclusion of Christians who have died as a result of mass killings and genocides. Drawing on historical and contemporary descriptions of martyrdom situations, this paper argues that martyrdom is a broad-based phenomenon not limited to solely to state persecution profoundly affecting thousands of Christians in the context of civil war, genocide, and other conflicts.

Definition
In this quantitative analysis, Christian martyrs are defined as "believers in Christ who have lost their lives prematurely, in situations of witness, as a result of human hostility." This definition had five essential elements:

a. "Believers in Christ". These are self-identified individuals found within all of global Christianity, including Roman Catholics, Orthodox, Protestants, Anglicans, and Independents. In 2010, there were over 2.2 billion Christians in the world.

b. "Lost their lives". Martyrs are Christians who have actually been put to death by another human being (see "as a result of human hostility" below), not those who have died from natural or other causes.

c. "Prematurely". Martyrdom is typically sudden, abrupt, unexpected, and normally unwanted. This aspect of the definition includes those who are starved, die from mistreatment after release from prison, and die as the result of torture.

d. "In situations of witness". "Witness" in this definition is not restricted solely to public testimony or proclamation concerning belief in Jesus. It refers to the individual's entire lifestyle, regardless of whether or not he or she was actively proclaiming at the time of death. That is, persons who act out of Christian conviction (such as in

defying unjust orders from police or soldiers, or trying to restrain mob violence) and are killed as a result might not be making an explicit verbal proclamation of their faith at their times of deaths. However, they are counted as martyrs to the extent that their actions in such situations were grounded in, and therefore witness to, their faith.

e. "As a result of human hostility". Human hostility takes a variety of forms, including war, conflict, random killing, and genocide, and can be conceptualized as either individual or communal (such as by governments). This descriptor excludes deaths through accidents, crashes, earthquakes, illnesses, or other causes, however tragic.

The motives of the victims are more important than those of the killers

Some have insisted that in order for a situation to be considered martyrdom, the persecutor needs to have singled out individuals or groups exclusively because of their Christian faith. International Catholic journalist John Allen, Jr., calls this a "myth." He states that "to grasp whether there was a religious or Christian component to a given incident, we need to understand not only why someone committed the act but also why the target was in a position where it could happen." He illustrates this point with the account of forty Catholic seminarians and staff in Burundi in 1997 whose school was known as a refuge from the Hutu-Tutsi violence that plagued the region. They organized themselves around the doctrine of Christian fraternity in their resistance of ethnic driven animosity. When ordered by a Hutu rebel group to identify themselves as Hutu or Tutsi, they refused in an act of deliberate Christian witness. The rebels did not kill them explicitly because they were Catholic, but because of their defiance—yet this defiance was grounded in, and inseparable from, their Catholic convictions.

Another important example is the life and death of American Catholic nun Dorothy Stang. Stang worked tirelessly in the Amazon region of Brazil on behalf of local farmers who were being oppressed by wealthy ranchers. In February 2005, a powerful rancher ordered that the houses belonging to twelve local farmers be burned. Stang organized a meeting with the farmers to resist this illegal act. On her way to the meeting she was approached by two gunmen, to whom she began reading the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3–12), beginning with "blessed are the poor in spirit." One of the gunmen shot her six times, leaving her dead. She was not targeted specifically because she was a Christian, but because of her stand for social and environmental justice on behalf of poor farmers (a stand that, again, proceeded directly from her Christian faith).

Famous martyrs not killed solely because they were Christians

Ambiguity concerning the circumstances of death is often an issue surrounding Christians considered "famous" martyrs. In the 1500s, the builders of London's Westminster Abbey left empty ten niches in the entrance. When a major restoration of the Abbey was launched in 1973, church leaders decided that these niches would be filled with statues of ten significant martyrs of the twentieth century. They chose men and women, Anglicans, Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestants. Four were chosen from the Global North and six from the Global South. All ten fit our definition above, yet many of the ten were killed for reasons besides the fact that they were Christians. This is especially apparent for the three most famous: Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Óscar Romero. Bonhoeffer was killed for his involvement in a plot to assassinate Adolf Hitler. King was assassinated for his role in the US civil rights movement. Romero was killed for standing up to an unjust economic system on behalf of the poor. What is important in these three cases is not the technical reason for their deaths but their own witness as they opposed Nazism, racism, and economic oppression, respectively.

The importance of victims' motivations is further illustrated in one of the most famous martyrdom accounts in Protestant Evangelicalism: the five missionaries in their late 20s killed in Ecuador in January 1956. These men flew into the Amazon region of Ecuador to reach the Auca Indians with their message. Having never before seen a white person, the Auca assumed they were cannibals and speared them to death after a few initial encounters. These men were not killed specifically because they were Christians; they could have been atheist anthropologists and the outcome would have been exactly the same. Yet, these are among the most celebrated martyrs of Protestant Evangelicalism. This account illustrates that the motivations of the killed are more important than the motivations of the killer. It is an oversimplification to state that martyrs always die strictly as the result of religious persecution. More accurate is to state that Christian martyrs die in circumstances related to their witness to Christ.

Mass killings and genocide often result in martyrdom

While we realize the controversial nature of this particular stance, our analysis of martyrdom includes many Christians who have died as a result of mass killings and genocide. Two main factors lead us to this conclusion: the interwoven nature of religion and ethnicity, and the mixed motivations of persecutors.

Armenian genocide

The 1915 Armenian genocide is an example of the complexities that exist with religious and ethnic identities. One might argue that the Armenians were killed because of their ethnicity or in the context of war, not because of any religious profession, but Orthodox Christianity was an inseparable part of Armenian identity for most of the victims. A plaque at the Armenian Martyrs Memorial Monument in Montebello, California, reads, "This Monument, erected by Americans of Armenian descent, is dedicated to the 1,500,000 Armenian victims of the Genocide perpetrated by the Turkish Government, 1915–1921, and to men of all nations who have fallen victim to crimes against humanity." Armenian Christian men, women, and children died as they went about their daily lives as much due to their faith as to their ethnicity.

Rwandan genocide

A more recent example of genocide as a martyrdom situation is the 1994 Rwandan genocide. This situation is unique in that both victims and perpetrators were majority Christian and the underlying motives were seemingly grounded in ethnic tensions. The situation was extremely complicated, however, with religion and ethnicity so closely bound on each side that it is difficult to make clear-cut statements regarding the motivations of either. Many Tutsis specifically sought out churches as places of refuge in the midst of the killing. As human rights organization African Rights claims, "more Rwandese citizens died in churches and parishes than anywhere else." Both Catholic and Protestant churches were multiethnic, and the genocide occurred within Christian communities. Historian Timothy Longman explains, "Hutu who attacked the churches where Tutsi sought refuge were themselves often members of the very churches they attacked, and in a number of cases, Tutsi priests and pastors were killed by their own parishioners." Longman goes on to explain, "Organizers of the genocide exploited the historic concept of sanctuary to lure tens of thousands of Tutsi into church buildings with false promises of protection; then Hutu militia and soldiers systematically slaughtered the unfortunate people who had sought refuge." This description sheds light on the role religion played in the genocide, including how Tutsis relied on their faith to protect them, putting them in situations of witness at the times of their deaths.

Democratic Republic of Congo

With the essential aspects of motive and mass killing in mind, we now turn to what we consider the largest martyrdom situation today: civil conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), where atrocious acts of violence began in the late 1990s and have continued to the present. According to the International Rescue Committee, from 1998 to 2007 approximately 5.4 million excess deaths occurred in the DRC. While some deaths are directly related to violence, most victims died from indirect causes such as disease or starvation. The vast majority of those killed in the DRC have been Christians, mainly in five insecure eastern provinces. Although the circumstances of all these deaths would not be considered situations of witness, we estimate that a substantial proportion of those who have died meet our definition of martyr.

Rather than being easily identifiable anti-Christian government officials, the persecutors in the DRC include at least twenty different rebel groups and nine government armies, all of which seem to lack a clear cause or objective. Our definition of martyrdom, however, focuses more on the witness of the Christian community than the killer's motives. Rebels, for example, often single out people because they do not cooperate with malicious plans to expand rebel territory. When Christians are killed as a result of actions related to their faith, they fit our definition of martyr, whether or not those actions were the sole reason for their deaths.

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, we find an additional 200,000 Christians killed in situations of witness in Sudan, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, India, Iraq, Mexico, Nigeria, China, and a handful of other countries. Together with those killed in the DRC, this equals one million Christians matching our definition of martyr between 2000 and 2010.

Trends

From Global North to Global South

In 1910 over 80% of all Christians lived in Europe and Northern America (the Global North). By 2010 this had fallen to less than 40%, with the majority of Christians located in Africa, Asia, and Latin America (Global South). In the twentieth century, the majority of Christian martyrs were Europeans killed under Soviet or fascist rule. In the twenty-first century, a disproportionate number of Christians in the Global South are killed in the chaos of civil wars and mass killings. In addition, we anticipate that more Christians in the South will experience persecution, with 75% occurring in the south in 2010, and 80% in 2020

From Orthodox and Catholic to Pentecostal and Independent
The shift of Christianity geographically from North to South has also caused a shift in the kinds of Christians who die in martyrdom situations. In the twentieth century, persecution was based largely in the Global North, with fascists and communists persecuting Orthodox, Catholics, and Protestants, especially in the Soviet Union. In the twenty-first century, killings are based largely in the Global South, where victims are often Pentecostals and Independents (the two fastest growing traditions in global Christianity). Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant Christians are among those killed, but no longer in the overwhelming majority.

From state-based to society-based persecution
Persecution of Christians in the twentieth century was largely state-based, such as by Stalinists in Russia and Nazis in Germany. Persecution in the twenty-first century is both state-based and society-based. Persecutors today represent a wide variety of perspectives, such as communism, religious nationalism, and various cultural and social traditions.

Our estimate of one million martyrs between 2000 and 2010, an average of 100,000 per year, is based on a specific set of criteria: believers in Christ who have lost their lives prematurely, in situations of witness, as a result of human hostility. The two important underlying aspects—the motivation of the victim over that of the killer and the inclusion of Christians killed as a result of genocide—provide further nuance to the study of martyrdom in the twenty-first century. It is our hope that the demographic assessment presented here does justice to a very real and very grave situation.

Note: More details on counting Christian martyrs are found in Part 4, "Martyrology," in Barrett and Johnson, *World Christian Trends* (South Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2001). The compilation of data on Christian martyrs in all countries over the 20 centuries of Christian history is found in two large tables: Table 4–10 describing 600 major martyrdom situations in 150 countries, AD 33–2000; and Table 4–11, "Alphabetical listing of 2,500 known Christian martyrs, AD 33–2000".