

## **Surviving persecution: How to understand, prepare, and respond**

Vernon J. Sterk

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Vernon Jay Sterk has been working for more than 40 years as a missionary among different people groups of the Mayan in Mexico's Southern state of Chiapas. The book obviously builds on Sterk's PhD dissertation at Fuller Theological Seminary (*The Dynamics of Persecution*, 1992) although I didn't find this fact mentioned in the book.

While working in Mexico, the US-American Sterk personally lived through different stages of church planting and of persecution together with the people he served. That makes his contribution to "surviving persecution" very valuable. Each of his thoughts about persecution is supported by practical experience. Very helpful are thesis-like summaries that are included at the end of each topic.

After giving the "Historical Context of Persecution in Chiapas", the author asks about the role of worldview in persecution. If a community feels that its fundamental worldview is threatened by the Christian message, persecution is one of the options to react. Sterk argues for knowing and appreciating the existing worldview of a given community as much as possible in order to avoid unnecessary and early confrontation.

In systematic order the author then writes about the origins and the stages of persecution, about the role of the missionary in the process, the results of and the responses to persecution. After exploring appropriate responses of the persecuted, Sterk emphasizes the responses of the national and the international church.

Compared with other books about a Christian view of suffering for Christ's sake Sterk's book is very vocal about the negative results that persecution may have: church growth may be stopped, young Christian communities may be dispersed. Because persecution certainly doesn't lead to growth and maturity automatically, it is the responsibility of the missionary/leader to properly teach and prepare young Christians about persecution and appropriate responses.

Sterk's book is not a systematic theological treatise about persecution. To build on very practical experience in the historical and geographical context of young churches in Chiapas is a strength, but brings with it certain limitations. Taking this into account the book can be a very helpful guide for practical approaches to persecution.

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