

Book
Review



by Tavi Rendon

By Their Blood

*Christian Martyrs from the Twentieth Century
and Beyond*

James & Marti Hefley

*"... let your laughter be turned to mourning
and your joy to heaviness."*

James 4:9

*"...How long, O Lord,... dost thou not judge
and avenge our blood...?"*

Revelation 6:10

James and Marti Hefley have produced a thoroughly readable book despite the grim, even heartbreaking, subject matter. *By Their Blood* presents the tragedies and triumphs of martyrs in the twentieth century. Reading the Hefleys' book will stir emotions, bring conviction and inspiration, and give insight into what has been happening around the world for the last one hundred years.

A word about the Hefleys' definition of *martyr* is in order. According to the preface, they are using an "inclusive" definition of *martyr*, i.e., "one who dies, suffers, or sacrifices for a principle, cause, etc." rather than a "traditional" definition, i.e., "one who submits to death rather than renounce his religion." Such a choice of definition becomes clear in view of the complex situations facing Christians in the twentieth century.

For example, the five American missionary men killed in Ecuador by the Aucas were not killed because the Aucas opposed the gospel; rather, the Aucas feared the men might be cannibals wanting to eat them and their people. The men were not killed directly, but indirectly, because of the gospel. So the Hefleys' "inclusive" definition allows for a broad range of circumstances and people including Protestants, Evangelicals, Roman Catholics, and Greek Orthodox. Also, not all those included actually

die but they do sacrifice and suffer in some way. The book's use of *martyr* may not be as accurate as some would like, but it is adequate for the Hefleys' purposes.

One of the strengths of the book is the way the information is arranged. Rather than being chronological with geographical subsections, the chapters are geographical with chronological subsections. The book is comprised of ten chapters, each chapter being a different area of the world (e.g., China, Nazi Germany and Occupied Europe, Sub-Saharan Africa, Caribbean and Latin America, etc.). Each chapter then traces the development of Christian mission and martyrdom for that region over the last one hundred years or so. As such it gives the reader a sense of modern Christian history up to the present day. Homeschooling families may find the book to be a useful supplement when doing social studies or church history.

The stories themselves make for interesting and very, very sober reading. It is not so much the kind of suffering that makes the book interesting as it is the kind of people who choose to suffer. Some of those within its pages are well known names such as Elliot and Saint, John and Betty Stam, and Bonhoeffer. But most of the names mentioned are probably new to many of us and represent thousands of common folk whose lives passed without notice in this world, much like most of us will. A few of the names like Chet Bitterman of Colombia and Harriet Fields and Hattie Kneeland of Peru are familiar to my family. Perhaps there are others that some of our readers would know as well, like Betty Olsen of Vietnam. It was her questions as a youth that helped Bill Gothard develop the Basic Institute of Youth

Conflicts. Of course, there are scores of people mentioned from other parts of the world that may indeed be well known to Christians in those various places. Reading about so many who have suffered so recently helps to make martyrdom so real, so relevant, to our own lives. One final note of caution would be that though the authors have not been overly graphic in presenting accounts of brutal deaths, the book should be reviewed by parents before giving to younger readers.

At 363 pages the Hefleys', *By Their Blood*, may not be a quick read. It may not even be an easy read due to the content. But it would be a profitable read if accompanied by meditation on Jesus and His call to take up our cross and follow Him, even as others have done.

