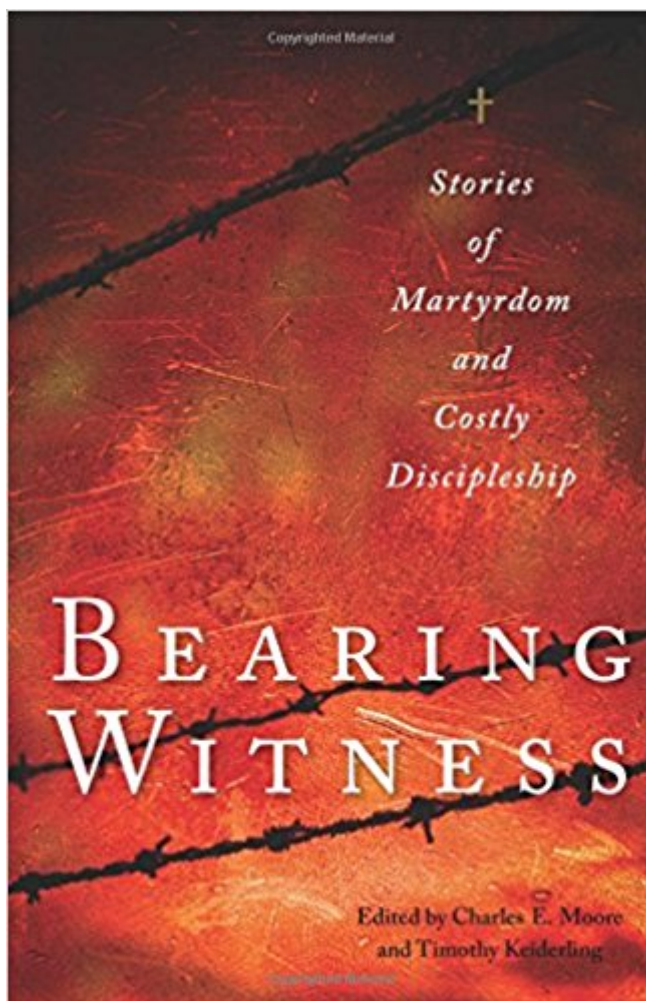


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# Bearing Witness: Stories Of Martyrdom And Costly Discipleship



## Synopsis

What does it cost to follow Jesus? For these men and women, the answer was clear. They were ready to give witness to Christ in the face of intense persecution, even if it cost them their lives. From the stoning of Stephen to Nigerian Christians persecuted by Boko Haram today, these stories from around the world and through the ages will inspire greater faithfulness to the way of Jesus, reminding us what costly discipleship looks like in any age. Since the birth of Christianity, the church has commemorated those who suffered for their faith in Christ. In the Anabaptist tradition especially, stories of the boldness and steadfastness of early Christian and Reformation-era martyrs have been handed down from one generation to the next through books such as Thieleman van Braght's *Martyrs Mirror* (1660). Yet the stories of more recent Christian witnesses are often unknown. *Bearing Witness* tells the stories of early Christian martyrs Stephen, Polycarp, Justin, Agathonica, Papyrus, Carpus, Perpetua, Tharacus, Probus, Andronicus, and Marcellus, followed by radical reformers Jan Hus, Michael and Margaretha Sattler, Weynken Claes, William Tyndale, Jakob and Katharina Hutter, Anna Janz, Dirk Willems. But the bulk of the book focuses on little-known modern witness including Veronika Löffelshans, Jacob Hochstetler, Gnadenhütten, Joseph and Michael Hofer, Emanuel Swartzendruber, Regina Rosenberg, Eberhard and Emmy Arnold, Johann Kornelius Martens, Ahn Ei Sook, Jakob Rempel, Clarence Jordan, Richard and Sabina Wurmbbrand, Tulio Pedraza, Stanimir Katanic, Samuel Kakesa, Kasai Kapata, Meserete Kristos Church, Sarah Corson, Alexander Men, José Chuquín, Norman Tattersall, Katherine Wu, and Ekklesiyar Yan'kuwa in Nigeria. This book is part of the *Bearing Witness Stories Project*, a collaborative story-gathering project involving Anabaptist believers from many different traditions.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In a world where people of faith are tempted to take up violence to protect their convictions and cultures, these martyrs show how genuine power is made perfect in weakness. This book is a gift to the entire church. (Gerald J. Mast, Bluffton University) Christian martyrdom and costly discipleship are not confined to some legendary past. With vivid storytelling and reliable sources, this book teaches us about nonviolent love in the face of opposition and challenges us to take risks for the gospel today. (J. Nelson Kraybill, president, Mennonite World Conference)

Stories of Christian martyrs from around the world and through the ages to inspire and challenge the next generation of believers.

Remarkable stories! Every Christian should read it.

I've always enjoyed tales of Christian history. I find myself edified by hearing the discussions over doctrine, the stories of the spread of the gospel and the stories of those who have suffered or died in Christ's name. So, when I received the opportunity to review Plough Publishing House's new book, *Bearing Witness: Stories of Martyrdom and Costly Discipleship*, I was sure that it would be a book that I would enjoy reading. I was not to be disappointed. *Bearing Witness* is a book that traces four periods of Christian history with martyr stories and stories of those who were persecuted for their religious beliefs. Although I wouldn't classify all the martyrs covered as Anabaptists, the book does focus on martyrs of the Anabaptist tradition. The book is separated into four sections. The first covers early Christians such as Stephen, Polykarp and Perpetua. The second section deals with martyrs of the reformation such as William Tyndale, Jakob and Katharina Hutter and Dirk Williams. The third section is the early modern witness, including martyrs and persecuted Christians such as Ahn Ei Sook, Gnadenhutten, and Veronica Lohans. The final section covers such people as Clarence Jordan, the Wurmbands and Sarah Corson. Not all of the people are equally famous, but what is equal is their passion for Christ and willingness to give all in his service. The stories were not equal in length. Some stories are only a couple of pages, and others are quite lengthy. Some stories are

also more engaging than others for me. There were a couple of times with the conscientious objectors that were persecuted where I was literally saying, "Come on, guys. Just go work on the farm and grow the plants or be part of the medical unit." However, an important cornerstone for much of the Anabaptist movement is nonresistance and pacifism. As such, doing that would have violated their consciences and been a sin for them. However, because I don't share that conviction, it was so frustrating, even for me as a Christian, to see them suffer what I would feel was needless persecution. The chapter at the end on Ekklesiyar Yanƙuwa a Nigeria and their persecution by Boko Haram discusses how many martyrs there are as a result of the Anabaptist pursuit of nonviolence. Many of us Americans think of martyrs as a thing of the past or as an isolated incident, and yet the evidence of this book and others like it prove that danger in Christian service is a constant danger for many Christians around the world. This is a book best read over time. I think that one or two of the stories a day would be a great balance from this book so that you have time to digest and think about what you've been reading. As a homeschool mom, I intend to put this book on my shelf to share with my children in their high school years as part of their education in church history. It's a great resource for learning about martyrs of both the past and present.

Disclosure of Material Connection: I received one or more products or services mentioned above for free in the hope that I would mention it on my blog. Regardless, I only recommend products or services I use personally and believe will be good for my readers. I am disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255: "Guides Concerning the Use of Endorsements and Testimonials in Advertising."

This is one book that will challenge all your notions of what it really means to be a Christian. You may not agree with the moral teaching imbedded in each of the stories LeBlanc selected, but they will captivate your mind and move you to earnestly think about what being a Christian means personally to you. From the very brief "Biographical Sketch," we see that Tolstoy was apparently a tragic figure who, in spite of much success, was "plagued with suicidal thoughts" until he took a "look beyond his own circle" and "noticed that the peasants, despite their poverty, had an instinctive sense of life's purpose. Their faith in God and simple labor propelled them to live. And then it dawned on him: he too only lived at those times he believed in God. It was a decisive conversion experience, after which never left him" (p.xiii-xiv). However, he left the Church when it ordered praying for the utter destruction of Russia's enemies "with sword and bombshell." Tolstoy outspoken

pacifism influenced men like Gandhi, Shaw, MLK, Jr. He made sacrifices giving up his wealth, profits, property, and even breaking with his family that would throw him and his wife into constant battle. He renounced all of his publication rights and signed all his property to wife and children. The writing selected reveal a man who saw the sharp inconsistency of the teachings of Christ and the way Christians believed and lived. It seems many of the stories are of persons seeking for a purposeful and happy life but failing until they come to realize that "To know God and to live come to one and the same thing. God is life" (p.43). This is not a book for the Christian who is too lazy to seek for why God put him where he is, or for one too enamored with his own self and possessions to care for others, too attached to his own theologically moral and ethical, and, yes, even his political presuppositions...but, wait! No, maybe that is just the person who should read this book...the lazy, the self-absorbed, the purposeless, the know-it-all, the seeker. I believe these selections of Tolstoy by LeBlanc will keep you thinking and thinking, struggling to come to some satisfying conclusion on just what it means for you to live the genuine Christian life and how much are you willing to pay to live it.

*Bearing Witness: Stories of Martyrdom and Costly Discipleship* is a collection of brief biographies that is part of the Bearing Witness Stories Project, a collaborative project of Anabaptists that continues the tradition of telling the stories of costly discipleship that began with Thieleman van Braght's 1685 collection of martyr stories, *Martyrs Mirror*. While *Martyrs Mirror* remains inspiring and relevant for the stories of Christian discipleship, it doesn't include the testimonies of the Anabaptists who have also suffered for their faith in the years since 1685. That's what makes *Bearing Witness* such an important collection. When I first read this collection, my immediate response was one of being driven to prayer in thanksgiving. These stories tell the life of faithful discipleship from the Church's earliest days (Stephen, Polycarp, etc.) to the stories of those of the Radical Reformation (John Hus, William Tyndale, etc.). But there are more modern stories here, and stories of lives lived throughout the world (from the Virgin Islands to the Congo to Romania). What you find here is a testimony of lives that point to the King of kings and Lord of lords. Lives that live and die in testimony to the Prince of peace. *Bearing Witness* is an important spiritual discipline for the contemporary church, because it's here that we learn to tell the story of Jesus in real, every day lives. That makes *Bearing Witness* a book not to be missed. \_\_\_\_\_ I received a free copy of this book from Plough Publishing in exchange for my honest review here.

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