

## FEBRUARY 2017

**Jesus said to them: “Watch out that no one deceives you.” Mark 13:5**

**“All mortals tend to turn into the thing they are pretending to be. This is elementary.”**

**— C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters***

### Dear Friends,

Some say that art imitates life. Oscar Wilde wrote in his 1889 essay *The Decay of Lying*, that “Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life.” In a more recent essay, written in 2011, Dr. Steven Garber, Director of the Washington Institute for Faith, Vocation & Culture, and a longtime friend, reminds us that “culture is upstream from politics” (and law). How true this is.

It is with this in mind that we are greatly encouraged to announce that we will be supporting our colleagues from Brazil as they closely monitor the human rights bodies of the world’s oldest regional body, the Organization of American States (OAS): the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. The decisions and advisory opinions that these bodies issue are indeed following culture.

Beginning in 2017, a team of lawyers from ANAJURE will monitor and report on religious liberty cases—initially from Mexico and Cuba—that come before the Commission and the Court. Unfortunately, there is a growing effort, through these two bodies, to implement an anti-Christian and authoritative agenda with regard to issues such as religious freedom, freedom of expression, conscientious objection, abortion, prostitution, infanticide, homosexuality, drugs, and bioethics, among other issues related to fundamental civil liberties. Our hope is that we can keep a watchful eye on these bodies, report on their efforts to the broader church, and better help us to determine how we should respond to harmful decisions, and how to build better guardrails across the region through better laws.

Joining in partnership with us in the project are our friends from ADF, who are helping us to fund the project. We are greatly encouraged that our colleagues from Latin America have taken on such an important task to help protect the Body of Christ across the region. Please join with us in praying for the OAS Team as they fight this battle. If you feel led to support this effort financially, we’d be most grateful.

Another project which confirms the maxim that culture is upstream of politics is our ongoing work in Albania, where Roger Sherrard has assembled a team to film a documentary on the amazing efforts of the religious communities in Shkoder, who came together to help one another to rebuild their places of worship. Their efforts, in the face of the politics of the recently deceased dictator, Enver Hoxha, are an extraordinary example of peace and reconciliation at work in a society in which owning a Bible, Koran or religious artifact resulted in a 25 year prison sentence.

We are encouraged to see how the documentary is proceeding and strongly believe that this story can be a powerful teaching tool to other nations who may be in the throes of upheaval and change.

Yet another way in which the work of Advocates in 2017 is keeping watch on the culture of our day is by taking a look back on a significant time in history in which the culture and politics was radically changed by followers of Jesus intent on making sure that the Church was the true Bride of Christ. That was the Protestant Reformation.

As I travel this month to join our Advocates from Europe at their conference in Tenerife, Spain, I'm grateful that the theme of the conference is the 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Reformation. It was in 1517 that Martin Luther (whose education also included law school) introduced his 95 Theses in response to what he believed was the corrupt culture within the Catholic Church. In many ways, politics and the church in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century were very much intertwined and such a response to the culture in those days was as much needed as our own response to today's increasingly secularized culture.

In November, the theme of the 12<sup>th</sup> Advocates Latin America Conference is also a closer look at religious freedom through the lens of the 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Reformation. Many of our colleagues continue to see familiar patterns between the challenges Martin Luther faced and what they are facing with the creeping secularization in their own nations. Please pray with us for discernment as we equip and enable these advocates to be willing to stand against the downstream nature of politics and law as the culture presses in.

Finally, I'm encouraged to report that Mark Mudri's tenure as our Acting Deputy ED for the Global Council has been a terrific success. In the short time he has been in the role, he traveled to Singapore and Jakarta, where he met with lawyers, church leaders, and politicians. God intervened in several miraculous ways throughout the trip and I will share Mark's report in March. Moreover, through Mark's leadership and relationships, Advocates will be introducing our new website in the near future, designed by the company of a young man whom he mentored.

Thanks again for your continued prayers and financial support that allow us to encourage, enable and equip our advocates to keep watch and be prepared to fight for legal change if culture brings laws that are contrary to God's laws.

May the Lord bless and keep you in His perfect . . .

Grace and Peace,



Brent M. McBurney  
President & CEO

