

What Kind of Persecution Is Happening to Christians Around the World?

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Philosopher Regis Debray, a French revolutionary who went to prison decades ago for fighting alongside Che Guevara in Bolivia, has spent the last ten years of his life decrying the maltreatment of Christians throughout the Middle East. Debray has not converted to Christianity. Politically, he still votes to the left of the left in France. But he remains very concerned that Christians—and with them their Christian histories—are being exterminated. Debray is frustrated that Westerners are not paying attention to what is happening to Christians around the world. According to Debray, “Anti-Christian persecution falls squarely into the political blind spot of the West.”¹ The aim of this article is to help evangelicals adjust the mirrors of our faith to eliminate whatever blind spots we have inherited from our culture concerning Christian persecution.

According to a study recently released by the Pew Research Center, about

three fourths of the population of the world lives under a government which has highly restricted religious freedoms.² Of those restrictions, the vast majority are aimed at Christians.³ Some international humanitarian agencies have estimated that 80% of all religious persecution in the world today is aimed at Christians. The Catholic Bishops Conference estimates that number to be only slightly lower, around 75%. Whatever the actual percentage, the reality is undeniable: “Christians are the single most widely persecuted religious group in the world today. This is confirmed in studies by sources as diverse as the Vatican, Open Doors, the Pew Research Center, *Commentary*, *Newsweek*, and the *Economist*.”⁴ The problem of Christian persecution is vast, involving more than 135 countries.

The Difficulties of Persecution Research

Yet before exploring the scope of the problem further, readers should be aware of some facts regarding the nature of persecution research. Accurate research is not always easy to obtain for several reasons.

Obtaining Eyewitness Accounts

First, those committing persecution are, obviously, not interested in reporting it, and those who suffer oftentimes have neither the means nor the time to report what has happened to them. Consider, for instance, this testimony from North Korea:

*Interviewee 37: ...A person caught carrying the Bible is doomed. When a person is caught [worshipping], he will be sent to *kwanliso* [prison camp] ... and the whole family may disappear.⁵*

Disappearing people are notoriously difficult to count. So, the nature of the persecution dynamic agitates against accurate reporting.

The Problem of Definition

Accurate research is also difficult to obtain because of a general confusion of categories. So, second, category confusion leads to skewed numbers relating to persecution statistics. What counts as persecution, and what is political oppression? When the Muslim Sudanese government in the North attacks and razes Christian and animist villages in the South, is the government guilty of persecuting Christians? True, hundreds of thousands of Christians were slaughtered in the Sudanese Civil War. However, thousands of animists and other non-Christians were killed at the same time. Their villages were targeted, too. In what category do the dead Christians of Sudan fit—victims of political oppression or victims of persecution?

There are many other such questions related to categories of suffering. What is legitimate criminal punishment and what is an abuse of the law for the purpose of persecuting an evangelist? Stories abound which describe successful evangelists being arrested and charged with gun smuggling, spying, or stealing—often evidence is planted in their homes or in their vehicles to substantiate the charges. Even more to the point, what happens when Christians actually defy the law and proselytize their neighbors or smuggle Bibles into forbidden places? When is the arrest an act of justice, and when is it systemic persecution?

The apostle Peter warns against suffering as a criminal or an evildoer. Peter makes plain that Christ's blessing is for those who suffer on account of Christ—not those who suffer for being criminals. Where exactly is that line drawn? One may be imprisoned, tortured, or killed for a principle or a cause, but that suffering may not necessarily be the suffering of a *martyr*. There are countless examples of people suffering and dying on principle (think about the Civil Rights movement or the actions of Dietrich Bonhoeffer). Such suffering may or may not have been the result of Christian persecution. Clear-cut categories are definitely needed in order to guarantee accurate figures concerning the size and scope of the Christian persecution problem. So, the numbers are affected by the lack of reporting and by the confusion of categories.

Lack of Attention

Third, the numbers are also affected by the lack of attention in general toward persecution. Relatively speaking, very few outlets are paying attention to Christian persecution. One need not be overly critical to notice the barrenness of reporting by secular media on behalf of Christians. John Allen explains that there is “a reflexive hostility to institutional religion, especially Christianity, in some sectors of secular opinion. People conditioned by such views are inclined to see Christianity as the agent of repression, not its victim.”⁶ Secular media, it seems, have a hard time tracking what they don't believe can exist.

While Allen notes the easily explained absence of reporting on Christian persecution by secular outlets, he has a harder time explaining the absence of reporting by Christian sources. Allen offers four reasons Christians aren't tracking the suffering of brothers and sisters around the world.

(1) Christians in America and in the West simply do not identify with the persecuted church. How can an American Christian relate to someone like Christianah Oluwatoyin Oluwasesin, who was beaten and burned to

death because she was a Christian teacher in a Muslim school in Nigeria? We have a very difficult time relating to what seems so fantastic and so unreal; thus we aren't sure what to do with the information once we find it. More important, we don't go looking for it in the first place.

(2) Another reason Christians are silent about investigating, reporting, and researching Christian persecution is that the topic itself is disconcerting. By nature, persecution challenges shallow faith and comfortable Christianity. From my own experience as an advocate for the persecuted church over the past fifteen years, I can affirm that many Christians—including pastors—are not comfortable hearing about persecution. While from a doctrinal perspective, we decry health-and-wealth, prosperity preaching, we, too often, actually prefer a Christian experience that is comfortable and safe for the whole family. Why confront a problem if it makes us so uncomfortable? It is easier to leave the matter alone.

(3) Christian persecution is a neglected topic of study and research because it requires hard work and serious resources to investigate and ferret out the details of the incidents, and, often, incidents happen in places difficult to reach. Christian entities in the West tend to use their resources in other ways and cannot fathom expending exorbitant amounts of cash to study persecution on the islands of Indonesia or in the sub-Saharan countries of Africa. Christian resources are limited.

(4) Christians also suffer the malady of “good cause” fatigue. Because no one is talking much about persecution, it gets displaced by other, more celebrated Christian causes: evangelism, missions, unreached people groups, church planting, church growth, pro-life issues, and other political concerns. In short, persecution is not really on the American Christian radar as a church priority.

So, for all these reasons—and probably others which have not been mentioned—Christian persecution research is lacking. Persecutors (and even the persecuted) cannot be relied upon to report on occurrences. Our categories concerning persecution are often confused. And the topic is one which has proven difficult for Christians and secularists alike to focus upon for a host of reasons. Nevertheless, the news is not all bad. There are a growing number of both Christian and secular groups paying closer attention to the suffering of Christ's body.

Organizations and Resources

Among those paying attention to Christian persecution, a few organiza-

tions stand out. First, there are ministries dedicated to serving the persecuted church. Three of the more popular ministries are Voice of the Martyrs (www.persecution.com); Open Doors (www.opendoors.org); and Barnabas Fund (www.barnabasfund.org), the latter of which operates out of the United Kingdom. These three organizations have long track records of ministry to the persecuted.

Second, there are research agencies dedicated (at least partially) to discovering the extent Christians are being persecuted around the world. Among the largest and most respected of these is the Pew Research Center, particularly the Center's Religion and Public Life Project, which publishes an annual report each January detailing religious hostilities around the world (www.pewforum.org). In addition to the Pew Research Center's work, other entities provide global documentation of Christian persecution:

- The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), chaired by Dr. Robert P. George, is a bipartisan commission which produces an annual report to the Congress of the United States detailing issues germane to religious freedom around the world (www.uscirf.gov).
- WorldWatch Monitor is a news agency which focuses on the persecution of Christians around the world (www.worldwatchmonitor.org).
- Forum 18 is a Norwegian human rights organization which covers religious freedom all over the world, but focuses primary attention on the former Soviet countries (www.forum18.org). The name is derived from Article 18 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights, which promises freedom of religion.
- The Hudson Institute Center for Religious Freedom provides publications, Op-eds, and information related to religious freedom in the U.S. and around the world (<http://crf.hudson.org/>).
- China Aid is a human rights organization focused on religious liberty issues in China. Founder Bob Fu was instrumental in negotiating the escape and eventual release of the blind legal activist Chen Guangcheng in 2012 (www.chinaaid.org).
- The Center for the Global Study of Christianity is a research institution which works diligently to uncover accurate demographic data "to the ends of the earth." This center is an outgrowth of work begun by David Barrett and his World Christian Encyclopedia research. This center resides on the campus of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (<http://www.gordon-conwell.edu/resources/Center-for-the-Study-of-Global-Christianity.cfm>).
- The Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics and Religious Liberty Com-

mission provides information about and raises awareness of religious liberty issues in the U.S. and around the world (www.eric.com).

In addition to the ministries and research entities mentioned above, two recent books provide excellent information regarding the global crisis of Christian persecution. The first book covering the global crisis of Christian persecution is John L. Allen's, *The Global War on Christians: Dispatches from the Front Lines of Anti-Christian Persecution*. Allen, the senior Vatican analyst for CNN, writes his book from personal experience, detailing individual accounts of suffering he has seen firsthand as a reporter in situations of intense persecution.

The other book was written by Paul Marshall, Lela Gilbert, and Nina Shea—each of whom has affiliation with the Hudson Institute referenced above.⁷ In addition to producing a riveting book detailing the global persecution of Christians, these three authors—under the auspices of the Hudson Institute's Center for Religious Freedom—operate the website Persecution Report (www.persecutionreport.org) to keep Christians up to date concerning persecution throughout the various regions of the world. As the citations will show, much of the following information has been adapted from these two books.

Unprecedented Persecution

So what kind of persecution is happening to Christians around the world? In short, Christians are suffering in numbers exceeding historic proportions. For reasons outlined above, the numbers are often difficult to discover. So the estimates of annual martyrdom vary widely from a low of 7,300 per year to a high exceeding 100,000 annually. Allen asserts that half of all martyrdoms in Christian history occurred in the 20th century: "Full half, or forty-five million, went to their deaths in the twentieth century, most of them falling victim to either Communism or National Socialism. More Christians were killed because of their faith in the twentieth century than in all previous centuries combined."⁸

Again, the numbers are not as precise as one might hope, but there is no doubt that Christians are suffering torture, imprisonment, and death in unparalleled numbers:

Christians today are, by some order of magnitude, the most persecuted religious body on the planet, suffering not just martyrdom but all the forms of intimidation and oppression mentioned above in record numbers. That's not a hunch, or a theory, or an anecdotal impression, but an

undisputed empirical fact of life. Confirmation comes from multiple sources, all respected observers of either the human rights scene or the global religious landscape.”⁹

In several “hotspots,” Christians are literally in danger of becoming extinct. “Over the past one hundred years, according to a range of estimates, the Christian presence has declined in Iraq from 35 percent to 1.5 percent; in Iran from 15 percent to 2 percent; in Syria from 40 percent to 10 percent; in Turkey from 32 percent to 0.15 percent. Among the most significant factors explaining this decline is religious persecution.”¹⁰

Nigeria

However bad the situations above may be, the situation in Nigeria could be worse. Nigeria—especially northern Nigeria—is the most dangerous place in the world to be a Christian. At a panel discussion sponsored by the Hudson Institute in November (2013), Ann Buwalda, Executive Director for the Jubilee Campaign (www.jubileecampaign.org), declared that according to Jubilee Campaign’s research, Nigeria produced sixty percent of all martyrs in 2012—more than the number of martyrs in Pakistan, Syria, Kenya, and Egypt combined.

In Nigeria, the problem is particularly acute, as Muslims in the North have been fighting with Christians in the South for decades. The problem has intensified of late because of “the increased influence of radical Islam, manifested especially in two trends. One has been the overt attempt to apply Islamic law nationwide; the other, which is overlapping, is the growth of Islamic militias.”¹¹

One Islamic militia in particular has been devastatingly deadly in Nigeria: *Boko Haram*, a group recently named an official terrorist organization by the U.S. Department of State. In October 2012, an armed militia—believed by experts to be *Boko Haram*—attacked the Federal Polytechnic College in the town of Mubi, in the state of Adamawa, Nigeria. In fact, three different schools were attacked that weekend, with a death toll estimated by the news agency AllAfrica to exceed 46 students.

At the Federal Polytechnic school alone, more than two dozen students were killed. Particularly harrowing in this incident is how the murders took place. The attack was by night, when students were either studying or sleeping. Students were brought out of their apartments and separated. The Christians—who were called out by name—were then executed, either by having their throats slit or by a bullet to their heads.

According to a spokesman from Open Doors, this area of Nigeria has suffered violence every day since 2011. With such ongoing violence, Nigeria may be, as the Hudson Institute has said, the most dangerous place on earth to be a Christian.

Eritrea

Unfortunately, Nigeria is but one of several places in stiff competition for such a dishonorable designation. Consider the small, desert country of Eritrea, located in the Horn of Africa along the Red Sea. One of the worst human rights atrocities of our day is taking place in the Me'eter Prison in Eritrea, with the full knowledge of the watching world.

Me'eter Prison was opened in 2009, basically, to serve as "a concentration camp for Christians."¹² The atrocities described there have been documented by WikiLeaks since 2011. Inmates are forced to live in cargo containers so crowded they are never able to lie down. They have no protection from the searing heat during the day (often exceeding 110 degrees Fahrenheit) and no recourse from the cold at night. Arid desert climates can experience 50 degree temperature changes from day to night. Inmates may die from starvation, dehydration, heatstroke, cholera, diphtheria, or other infectious diseases. The inmates who survive the deplorable conditions are subjected to other forms of torture and abuse. Stories abound of sexual abuse and physical beatings. Even the work and exercise prescribed are forms of torture—such as counting the grains of sand in a certain area during the noon-day heat or squatting to move rocks from one side of one's body to the other, repeated endlessly.

Again, affirming Regis Debray's depressing point, such abuse falls into the blind spot of Western academics and media elites. The atrocities at Me'eter are documented in books, on WikiLeaks, via internet sources, and through activists like gospel singer Helen Berhane, herself an inmate at a prison in Eritrea from 2004-2006, because of her faith in Christ. The information is available for those adequately concerned, but who is concerned about persecuted Christians? Certainly not the UK Border Agency. Helen Berhane was scheduled to speak to a Release International gathering in the UK on behalf of other persecuted Christians, but she was denied entry by the UK Border Agency. Parliament passed unanimously Early Day Motion 1531 in support of Berhane (and condemning the Border Agency decision), but Berhane was not allowed entry to tell her story in person. And Christians still languish in putrid prison conditions in Eritrea on account of Christ.

North Korea

Another nation vying for worst place on earth to be a Christian is North Korea. “North Korea is the most militantly atheistic country in the world.”¹³ For the past 50 years, North Korea has sought (somewhat successfully) to eradicate Christianity from the country. “Nearly all outward vestiges of religion have been wiped out, and what exists is under tight government control.”¹⁴

The USCIRF has produced the most extensive research to date on the status of Christians and Christianity in North Korea. The organization’s latest report is titled, “A Prison Without Bars,” obviously alluding to the fact that the entire country is a giant prison cell for its inhabitants. Quite a humanitarian aid industry has cropped up along the border lands of China and North Korea, hoping to help North Korean refugees escape their oppression and find Jesus Christ. As a result, the North Korean government has been training officials to pose as Christians and as pastors in order to infiltrate these Christian and humanitarian groups and uncover the identities of North Korean Christians.

Often, refugees will flee North Korea and find help in China. Christians, especially, work very hard to provide food, shelter, and aid to these refugees. A number of the refugees find Christ, but the Chinese government deports North Koreans back to their country. If North Korean officials discover the identities of these refugees, they will arrest them and their families. Interviewee 20 in the USCIRF report tells of such an incident:

Interviewee 20: “There was even a case of a child (16 years old). That kid was the same age as my kid. They made that kid stand on the platform, in front of gathered parents. They declared that it is a big problem how teenagers cross the river too often and how they spread rumors about God. There, the kid’s entire family was arrested in order to show an example. It happened in 2003 at Yuseon boys’ middle school. According to the rumor, that kid had learnt whole Bible scriptures by heart and that was the reason he was arrested. He stayed in China for eight months and got caught. And because of religion, he and his family were all arrested.”¹⁵

Such stories abound—some even more heinous. According to one soldier interviewed by a human rights organization about the persecution he witnessed, his unit “rounded up the church’s pastor, two assistant pastors, and two elders. The five bound men were placed in front of the bulldozer and given a final opportunity to renounce their Christian faith. When they refused, they were crushed to death in front of other members of the church.”¹⁶ Not all stories from North Korea are so gruesome, of course, but

the situation there is bad enough that the country has been at the top of Open Doors' World Watch List for eleven years in a row.

As terrible as the situation has become in North Korea, the end result is not defeat for Christ or His kingdom. Sketchy reports pieced together indicate that even in North Korea, the Church of Jesus Christ is growing. "There is emerging evidence that, at great risk, there are small Christian gatherings in private homes that may collectively encompass hundreds of thousands of people."¹⁷ But one USCIRF interviewee thinks an underground church would be impossible in North Korea:

Underground *believers* would be a more appropriate term than underground *church*. Church would be something like a place where people can gather and listen to a sermon, but it's impossible to exist for long. Instead, underground believers can exist. There is a chance that two people pair up and hold their hands together to pray. However, a gathering of three or more is dangerous.¹⁸

Egregious violations of basic human rights abound in North Korea, Nigeria, Eritrea. These violations target Christians inordinately, and these countries are not alone in their severe maltreatment of the bride of Christ. The Middle East, too, abounds with horrendous mistreatment of Christians on account of Christ.

The Middle East

Earlier, statistics were quoted to demonstrate the demise of Christianity throughout the Middle East. Perhaps the only aspect of Christian suffering throughout the Middle East which is more stunning than its magnitude is the magnitude of the silence on behalf of world leaders in the face of it. This is not to say that no one is speaking out. Many folks are sounding the alarms, as noted throughout this article. But the scope of suffering is startling. Ayaan Hirsi Ali, not exactly a Christian apologist, said in a 2012 *Newsweek* article, "From one end of the Muslim world to the other, Christians are being murdered for their faith."¹⁹

Hirsi Ali, like John Allen and others who study Muslim violence against Christians in the Middle East, has offered possible explanations for the relative silence of Westerners on behalf of Christians. One of her primary reasons for the lack of support Christians receive from the media is fear, stating the perception that reporting negatively on Islamic violence might beget further violence. Yet Hirsi Ali forcefully concludes, "The conspiracy

of silence surrounding this violent expression of religious intolerance has to stop. Nothing less than the fate of Christianity—and ultimately of all religious minorities—in the Islamic world is at stake.”²⁰

Silence is certainly a problem, but so, too, is the confusion of categories. Islamic violence in the Middle East is not targeted solely against Christians. In Bahrain, for example, the large increase in religious hostility (noted by the Pew Research Center) had more to do with Sunni Muslims discriminating against Shia Muslims. According to Pew, “Shia Muslims were vilified in the state-run media, and thousands were dismissed from public- and private-sector jobs. The government also destroyed Shia mosques and other places of worship.”²¹

The important point for Christians to remember when discussing the Middle East (and North Africa) is that the matter is more complicated than a simple hatred of Christianity. With that said, however, the demise of Christianity is both drastic and devastating for religious freedom. Christians, as noted in the title of an article in *The Telegraph*, are close to extinction in the Middle East: “Christianity faces being wiped out of the ‘biblical heartlands’ in the Middle East because of mounting persecution of worshippers...”²²

In the Middle East (and the northern tier of Africa), Arab Christians made up twenty percent of the population at the turn of the twentieth century. “Today, however, that vibrant Arab Christianity feels like a dying species. Christianity now represents just 5 percent of the population, no more than twelve million people, and current projections show that number dropping to six million people by the middle of the century.”²³

In Egypt, the situation continues spiraling toward a crisis. In February 2011, when the U.S. called for an orderly transition away from Hosni Mubarak’s reign in Egypt, there was hope of what many were then calling an Arab Spring. Now, more than a few editorials have referred to the aftermath as an Arab Winter, or, more accurately, a Christian Winter. The reason is that religious freedom—particularly freedom of the Christian religion—has suffered great loss in Egypt. By the end of April 2011, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) recommended to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton that Egypt be classified as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC). The main reason for this recommendation is the dramatic increase in violations of religious freedom—most against Christians.

In Iran, there is both severe persecution and a measure of hope. There are indications of a healthy underground church in Iran. In addition, 2013 brought an election in which a moderate president, Hassan Rowhani, was elected, promising protection for all minority religions. But the country it-

self is actually run by Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who in the past has referred to Christians as the enemies of Islam and has warned the Iranian people of the threat of Christianity's spread in the country. The government severely restricts Christian freedom, does not allow the Bible to be printed in Farsi, limits college to those who declare Islamic orthodoxy, and does not protect Muslims who convert to Christianity. Converts can be killed with no legal ramifications.

In Iraq, the situation is bleak. Since the ouster of Saddam Hussein in 2003, Iraq has seen two-thirds of its Christian population flee to other countries. Legend has it that the apostle Thomas founded a church in what is now Iraq, indicating the very long history of gospel faith in that region of the world. Yet, "the one-two punch of Sunni and Shia extremism, combined with deep governmental discrimination and indifference, now threatens the very existence of Iraq's ancient Christian churches. Some of these still pray in Aramaic, the language of Jesus of Nazareth."²⁴

Undoubtedly, the situation in Iraq was very bad after 2003, and it grew much worse in October 2010. On October 31, 2010, Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church—a Syrian Catholic church in Baghdad—was attacked during a worship service. Nearly 60 parishioners and priests were killed; scores of others were injured, including children as young as three. By the end of that year, Joseph Kassab, the executive director of the Chaldean Federation of America, wrote, "Things are deteriorating very fast in Iraq; our people are left with no choice but to flee because they are losing hope and there is no serious action taken to protect them as of today."²⁵

Iraq is not the only Middle Eastern country in which Christians are losing hope. Allen explains, "Today there's tremendous fear among Christian leaders that Syria will be the next Iraq, meaning the next Middle Eastern nation where a police state falls and Christians become the primary victims of the ensuing chaos."²⁶ Hundreds of thousands—if not more than a million—Christians have fled their homes and villages in Syria. One of the hardest hit areas is Homs, where ninety percent of the Christian population has been killed or expelled. Homes and property have been confiscated, and, according to many reports, the Christians become targets if they head to one of the refugee centers set up by the U.N. So, these Christians are, literally, homeless and desperate. Attacks against Christians have become fairly common over the past eight years.

In Saudi Arabia, the situation is less violent, but even more oppressive. Saudi Arabia is a total Muslim state. No other churches are allowed. No open manifestations of Christianity are tolerated. Even private prayer meet-

ings will be shut down and participants punished by beatings or possibly even killed. According to Saudi law, all citizens must be Muslim. “In March 2012, Saudi Arabia’s Grand Mufti Abdulaziz ibn Abdullah Al al-Sheikh ... issued a religious fatwa declaring it ‘necessary to destroy all the churches’ in the region, including those outside of Saudi Arabia itself.”²⁷ Suffice it to say, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia seeks to squelch any reference to the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Stopping the conversation here seems something like stopping a trans-American road trip in Salinas, Kansas—there is so much more left to see. In Afghanistan, for example, Christians are a negligible portion of the overall population, but they seem to be a constant focus of attention for the Taliban and some governing authorities there. Christians can be arrested and killed for converting from Islam. The Taliban has vowed to eliminate the tiny population of Christians (maybe 2,500) and also eradicate any influence Christianity has in the country, including targeting humanitarian agencies with ties to Christianity.

This essay has yet to address other parts of the Muslim world where violence against Christians is intense: Pakistan, Indonesia, Morocco, Somalia, and Sudan. And there has been no sustained discussion of the continued efforts of Communist governments in Vietnam, Laos, and Cuba, to eradicate faith. By sheer numbers, more persecution is happening in China than in any nation on earth. There are more Christians in prison in China than in any other place.

In South Asia, Christians are persecuted heavily in Bhutan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. In 2008, Orissa State in India became a violent hotspot in which Christians of all denominations living in the area had to run for their lives:

[Hindu] mobs killed at least forty people and burned thousands of houses, hundreds of churches, and thirteen educational institutions. During the attacks, a large number of women and girls were victims of sexual violence. Nearly two years later, about sixty of the area’s women were found in Delhi. They had been sold into sexual slavery. The attacks led to ten thousand fleeing from their homes.²⁸

There is violence against Christians all over the world. This brief overview is intended to portray only the magnitude of the problem. Obviously, this article focuses only on the persecution of Christians. Muslims are the persecuted, too. In fact, Islam is the second-most persecuted religious group in the world—often the persecution is carried out by

other Muslim groups in the name of “true Islam.” But Muslims suffer. And by proportion of population, ethnic Jews are persecuted perhaps more than any other group. The world has an awful problem establishing religious freedom.

But for Christians, there are unique expectations. Nearly every New Testament writer speaks of persecution, Jude being the lone example to the contrary. Persecution, because it is tied to the presence of Christ, is endemic to the gospel. Persecution is expected—even promised—for all believers (2 Tim 3:12). As a result it is a topic on which all Christians should be informed.

The writer of Hebrews, in fact, commands his readers to remember their brothers and sisters who are being persecuted. Hebrews 13:3 commands Christians to remember those who are in prison as though in prison with them, to remember those suffering ill treatment on account of Christ. The reason Christians are commanded to remember brothers and sisters suffering is “since you yourselves are in the body.”

Whatever the reason has been for Christians to neglect this important subject, let us take from this article a hunger and an appetite to eliminate our own blind spots and take up the biblical command to remember our brothers and sisters suffering for Christ. We are connected in Christ to those who suffer for righteousness. We, too, stand in the way of righteousness with them when we remember.

¹ John L. Allen, *The Global War on Christians: Dispatches from the Front Lines of Anti-Christian Persecution* (New York: Image, 2013), 16.

² Pew Religious Hostility.

³ Estimate from Lessenthin, in Pew Religious Hostility, 33.

⁴ Paul Marshall, Lela Gilbert, and Nina Shea, *Persecuted: The Global Assault on Christians* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2013), 4.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁶ Allen, *The Global War*, 15.

⁷ Marshall, Gilbert, and Shea, *Persecuted*.

⁸ Allen, *The Global War*, 33.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁰ Marshall, Gilbert, and Shea, *Persecuted*, 6.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 239.

¹² Quote and following Me’eter description from Allen, *The Global War*, 1-4.

¹³ Marshall, Gilbert, Shea, *Persecuted*, 52. The description of North Korea is taken largely from Marshall, Gilbert, and Shea, *Persecuted*, 52-62, with supplementation from other sources.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 52.

¹⁵ Michael Cromartie, Chair, United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, “Prison Without Bars: Refugee and Defector Testimonies of Severe Violations of Freedom of Religion or Belief in North Korea,” (2008), 27.

¹⁶ Allen, *The Global War*, 84.

¹⁷ Marshall, Gilbert, and Shea, *Persecuted*, 59.

¹⁸ As quoted in *ibid.* from Interviewee 34 of the USCIRF report.

¹⁹ Ayaan Hirsi Ali, "The Global War on Christians in the Muslim World," *Newsweek*, February 6, 2012.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Pew Research Center, "Arab Spring Restrictions on Religion Findings." Online: <http://www.pewforum.org/2013/06/20/arab-spring-restrictions-on-religion-findings/#harassment-of-specific-groups>; accessed January 31, 2014.

²² Edward Malnick, "Christianity 'close to extinction' in Middle East," in *The Telegraph*, December 23, 2012.

²³ Allen, *The Global War*, 117.

²⁴ Marshall, Gilbert, and Shea, *Persecuted*, 229.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 237.

²⁶ Allen, *The Global War*, 142.

²⁷ As quoted in Marshall, Gilbert, and Shea, *Persecuted*, 156.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 91.