



Written by [Troy Anderson](#) on June 4, 2019

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A Dangerous Time To Be Christian

This past Easter will live in infamy — as an omen and wake-up call for global Christendom and Western civilization.

At a time when many of the world's 2.5 billion Christians were celebrating the resurrection of their crucified savior Jesus Christ, two shocking events just days apart sent reverberations around the world.

First, a few days before Easter, the world watched as the iconic Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris was largely consumed in flames. In an article the following day, nationally syndicated radio talk-show host Dennis Prager captured the tragic irony of the disaster. "The symbolism of the burning of Notre Dame Cathedral, the most renowned building in Western civilization, the iconic symbol of Western Christendom, is hard to miss," Prager wrote in his column "Notre Dame: An Omen."



"It is as if God Himself wanted to warn us in the most unmistakable way that Western Christianity is burning — and with it, Western civilization."

A few days later, on Easter Sunday, over 250 people were killed, including nearly 50 children, when three Christian churches and three luxury hotels in Sri Lanka were targeted in a series of coordinated Islamic terrorist bombings.

"What you have in these kinds of events are people who have a radical agenda who want to attack churches, attack Christians, and destroy the freedom of religious expression of Christians," David Curry, president and chief executive officer of Open Doors USA, told *The New American*.

"This attack on these churches, by the way, is not rare. It's happening regularly in various parts of the world where Christian churches are attacked, not just on Easter, but many times throughout the year. It's based on this radical idea that they think Christians are infidels and they want to eradicate them."

This attack on Christians, among the worst in modern history, came amid reports that persecution of Christ's followers globally is worse today "than at any time in history."

Not only are Christians more persecuted than any other faith group, but ever-increasing numbers are experiencing the very worst forms of persecution, according to the authors of a study by Aid to the Church in Need.

"There is a war being waged against the world's Christians and unfortunately American Christians have been lulled or shamed into silence while secular and progressive voices in media and our own



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government have sought to keep us in the dark about the brutal, worldwide war being waged against Christianity in a growing and record number of countries,” Dede Laugesen, executive director of Save the Persecuted Christians (STPC) coalition, said at the recent National Religious Broadcasters “Proclaim 19” convention in Anaheim, California.

“Rest assured, the cake baker here in the United States, the 15-year-old school girl being held by jihadists as a slave for life in Nigeria, and the imprisoned North Korean being slowly starved to death for the crime of being Christian, are casualties of the same brutal war that has been festering for centuries. This war, most accurately, a war between love and hate, a war between good and evil, is raging and spreading like a wildfire left to burn uncontrolled.”

All this has occurred, Laugesen continued, as the citizens of the only nation in the world built upon the principles of Christian love and justice, are safely sleeping in a “carefully constructed bubble of ignorance and distraction.”

This may be the most dangerous time in history to be a Christian.

“More Christians have died for their faith over the last 100 years than in all prior centuries since Jesus’ time,” Laugesen says.

An April 2019 study commissioned by the United Kingdom’s Foreign Office echoed this assessment, noting Christians are “by far the most persecuted” religious group and are experiencing what amounts to genocide in some parts of the world.

“The eradication of Christians and other minorities on pain of ‘the sword’ or other violent means was revealed to be the specific and stated objective of extremist groups in Syria, Iraq, Egypt, north-east Nigeria and the Philippines,” Bishop of Truro Reverend Philip Mounstephen wrote. “An intent to erase all evidence of the Christian presence was made plain by the removal of crosses, the destruction of Church buildings and other Church symbols.... Where these and other incidents meet the tests of genocide, governments will be required to bring perpetrators to justice, aid victims and take preventative measures for the future.”

“The main impact of such genocidal acts against Christians is exodus. Christianity now faces the possibility of being wiped out in parts of the Middle East where its roots go back furthest. In Palestine, Christians number below 1.5 percent; in Syria the Christian population has declined from 1.7 million in 2011 to below 450,000 and in Iraq, Christian numbers have slumped from 1.5 million before 2003 to below 120,000 today.”

Pockets of Christianity Facing Extermination

Today, according to Open Doors, which supports persecuted believers around the world, Christians are the most persecuted religious group on the planet.

While Christian persecution takes many forms, it is defined as any hostility experienced as a result of identification with Christ. The persecution of Christians is a serious issue for believers throughout the world, many of whom are beaten, tortured, beheaded, crucified, raped, imprisoned or enslaved, or wind up losing their livelihoods, homes, and assets as a result of their faith.

Trends show that countries in the Middle East, Asia, and Africa are intensifying persecution against Christians, and perhaps the most vulnerable are Christian women and girls, who often face sexual



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assault and double persecution for their faith and sex.

Each month, on average, 345 Christians are killed for faith-related reasons, 105 churches and Christian buildings are burned or attacked, and 219 Christians are detained without trial, arrested, sentenced, or imprisoned, according to Open Doors.

Today, nearly a quarter billion Christians experience high levels of persecution in the countries on Open Door's World Watch List.

"It's severe and we base that on the fact that there are more Christians being persecuted than ever before and the intensity is higher," Curry says. "Sometimes it's governments that are doing it, other times it's non-state actors and radical groups like ISIS, and others. Persecution has been spiking for the last seven to eight years in record numbers and every year it seems to be getting more intense."

Christians in a record number of countries are being subjected to brutal human rights abuses and even genocidal violence by authoritarian regimes and radical groups, according to STPC, a coalition of over 130 faith leaders and community influencers.

"There have been 26 million martyrs over the past 100 years which is more than the previous 1,900 years combined," says Kevin Jessip, chairman of the Board of Directors of STPC, which endeavors to provide American policymakers with the popular support they need to effect real change worldwide and alleviate the suffering being experienced by so many of those following Christ.

"If you think of the worst atrocities in the history of the world — what Pol Pot did in Cambodia, what Adolf Hitler did in the Third Reich, what Joseph Stalin did in the Soviet Union, what Mao Tse-tung did in China — and if you put the numbers of people that they killed together, they would pale by comparison to the number of lives that are being destroyed — not in every case people being killed — but their lives are being destroyed around the world today," says Frank J. Gaffney, president and chief executive officer of STPC and former deputy assistant secretary of defense for nuclear forces and arms control policy during the Reagan administration.

In 2018, Open Doors estimated there were 215 million Christians who were heavily persecuted — not just inconvenienced or suffering, but heavily persecuted, meaning tortured, raped, sold into slavery, crucified, murdered, expelled from their homes, and harmed in egregious ways, including genocide, Gaffney says.

"But their estimate [in 2019] is there are now 245 million Christians who are experiencing that kind of persecution," he says.

One in Nine Christians Experiences High Levels of Persecution

Globally, one in nine Christians experiences high levels of persecution, and Islamic oppression fuels Christian persecution in eight of the top 10 countries on Open Doors' World Watch List.

Open Doors has identified many factors behind the increase in persecution, including the rise and spread of radical Islam.

"It's more than just whether ISIS owns territories," Curry says. "They don't need territory to share their ideas. These ideas — first recognized in Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda — are now widely spread and it's like a cancer that has metastasized."

"That's a driver that is still in place and it's driving persecution in a number of countries in the world,



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so when you look at the top countries on the World Watch List, North Korea is number one, but then you jump to Afghanistan, Somalia, Libya, Pakistan, Sudan, Eritrea, Yemen, Iran. All those countries are driven by radical Islam. They have a radical ideology that wants to force Islamic belief on other people, attack Christians and restrict the rights of Christians.”

This means that for millions of Christians — particularly those who grew up Muslim — openly following Jesus can have painful consequences.

But it’s not just adherents of radical Islam that persecute Christians. For the first time since the start of the World Watch List over two decades ago, India has entered the top 10. Additionally, China jumped 16 spots, from 43 to 27.

Hindu nationalists in India continue to attack Christians with what seems like no consequences, and in China, the increased power of the government and the rule of Xi Jinping continue to make open worship difficult in some parts of the country, according to Open Doors.

And while the violent excesses of ISIS and other Islamic militants have mostly disappeared from headlines in the Middle East, their loss of territory there means the fighters have dispersed to a larger number of countries not only in the region but, increasingly, into sub-Saharan Africa.

“Despite broad-based agreement that people should not suffer for their faith, in spite of most of the world’s countries signing on with the U.N. Declaration on Human Rights, more than 80 percent of the world’s population lives in a religiously-restricted atmosphere,” Sam Brownback, the U.S. ambassador-at-large for International Religious Freedom, told hundreds of mostly Christian television and radio broadcasters at the NRB International Christian Media Convention.

“As I travel the world, I’m struck with stories of men and women who suffer restrictions, discrimination and persecution, yet their souls are beautifully crafted through pain. It is their voices that spur me on in our office and work, and I believe it is their voices that will help turn the tide of religious persecution around the world.”

Voices of the Persecuted

One of these voices is American Pastor Andrew Brunson, who spent a couple of years in a “nightmare prison” in Turkey until President Donald Trump intervened late last year.

Afterward, Brunson, who had been in Turkish custody since October 2016, returned to the United States. He was accused of being party to a failed coup attempt against Turkish leader Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, charges he denied.

Brunson’s imprisonment sparked a diplomatic conflict between the United States and Turkey, with Vice President Mike Pence, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, and Trump’s Twitter accounts all calling for Brunson’s release, while Erdoğan insisted on a prisoner exchange. Then, in October 2018, a Turkish court ordered Brunson’s release amid reports of a “secret deal.”

“President Trump got this done,” Brownback said. “I was pushing, pushing, but he just got fed up and said, ‘I’m going to slap these tariffs on, tank the economy, and wait for them to do the right thing.’ And they eventually did. No other president has ever put tariffs and sanctions on a fellow NATO ally, but this president did.”

While Brunson’s story has a happy ending, many of the believers imprisoned for their faith around the



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world face horrifying conditions.

Hea Woo, a pseudonym Open Doors created for a woman who spent time in North Korean prisons, lost her husband and daughter and narrowly escaped with her own life.

In 1997, amid a famine in North Korea, her daughter starved to death. Woo's husband fled to China, where he became a Christian, but he was caught by the secret police and thrown in a North Korean prison. He died there.

It wasn't long after that Woo also escaped to China. A short time later, she was also caught by the secret police, sent back to North Korea, and put in a prison camp. In an interview with Open Doors, she explained what the conditions were like:

"There were different parts within the prison," Woo says. "Some [sectors] did agriculture, some did construction work, some did mining. Men and women were separated; all the inmates seemed like they were about to faint. They were all hopeless and in despair. And plus, they were starving. Each person received one handful of rotten corn [and] there was nothing else to eat."

"We got something watery — it wasn't even a soup. We got those as food for the whole year. Nothing else. And people are obligated to work more than cows or animals. Because everyone is forced to labor, people die from malnutrition. People died from accidents while working, too.... So many died — and there was no hope in the prison. All [inmates] were on the verge of death."

Open Doors estimates about 250,000 people are suffering in North Korea's "Nazi-style prison camps," 50,000 of whom are imprisoned for their faith.

A 2017 report by the International Bar Association War Committee noted that a child survivor of the World War II concentration camp Auschwitz said the conditions in North Korea were as bad — or even worse — than what he experienced at the hands of the Nazis.

The report described routine public executions carried out in front of both children and adults, designed to "subdue the prison population."

Dominic Sputo, director of STPC and author of *Heirloom Love: Authentic Christianity in This Age of Persecution*, visited persecuted believers in the Middle East several years ago and met a man who had been "shot by men with beards and machineguns for preaching the gospel."

"The Lord miraculously healed him and when I arrived, I met him in the same place and he was still preaching the gospel," Sputo says. "I was scared hanging out with him that day."

Sputo went to his home and visited with him, his wife, and three children.

"It just etched something deeply in my spirit to see and meet with brothers and sisters who, for them, the normal Christian life is taking up the cross and denying themselves in ways that I never would have imagined," Sputo says. "After I left them, a couple of weeks later, a brother in their church was clubbed to death on his driveway in front of his family. Another was shot in the back of the head."

China and Social Credit Scores

The violent persecution of Christians in the Middle East and other parts of the world is just one aspect of the persecution that believers are experiencing globally.

In China, the world's largest country, with 1.4 billion people, the nation's rapidly growing Christian



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population has recently experienced serious persecution. China's Communist Party is intensifying religious persecution of Christians, closing and demolishing churches, jailing pastors, and proposing a new state translation of the Bible that will establish a "correct understanding of the text."

"Think about the 90 million Christians in China who are followers of Jesus who are now facing growing restrictions, having to deal with facial recognition technologies and having a social credit score," Curry says.

"China is increasing the pressure and trying to force Christians into a 'China first' kind of idea — and that's because there are now more Christians in China than the Communist Party, and they quickly realized they needed to control the Christian movement. So, they are starting to force unregistered churches to register with the government, allowing cameras to be posted in the churches and outside the churches, and trying to approve the theology and sermons of pastors."

One of the biggest concerns among proponents of religious freedom involves China's social credit scores that rate a person's trustworthiness. In China, the government and private companies collect data about people's finances, social-media activities, credit history, online purchases, health records, legal matters, tax payments, and the people they associate with — information gleaned from the nation's hundreds of millions of surveillance cameras.

This data is used to determine citizens' social credit scores. Generally, higher scores give people advantages, such as avoiding deposits on rental properties. Those with lower scores may find their ability to purchase a new house restricted or be prohibited from buying airline tickets.

"For a long time, China viewed Christians as a great part of society," Curry says. "They taught a moral framework that the Chinese didn't teach, drug use wasn't as prevalent in the Christian population, and so they saw it as a valuable thing." He added:

Now they see it as a threat to their communist system. The fear is that anybody with a low social credit score will be denied rights that others would otherwise have. Now that sounds like a new thing to us in the West, but this is what has happened in other places like North Korea where Christians are considered enemies of the state. They're the last to get food in a famine and are put in labor camps, sometimes for up to three generations because their grandfather was a Christian or was found with a Bible.

Brownback says it's "truly scary what is taking place" in China and could be exported to other countries.

"I saw a report recently that nearly 400 million security cameras are being deployed in China by the end of next year," Brownback says. "And then there are the facial-recognition systems behind it to be able to recognize who is going into the church, who is going into a mosque, and then be able to sort through that data."

"And now they have the social credit score system that they are saying is to make people better people, but it can also be used to remove you from your apartment, keep you from your job, and not allow your children in school. So, they've got these systems they're developing as a security apparatus and are using artificial intelligence to sort through the data to really focus on persecuting people of faith, to marginalize you in society. How do you participate in society with this?"

Brownback says he's concerned that China may sell the system to other countries, and those nations



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will be able to “use this system to put down populations that governments don’t like.”

“The Chinese Communist party does not trust its own people to allow them to choose their own path for their souls,” Brownback says. “There are over one billion souls at stake. It seems the Chinese government is at war with faith, and it is a war they will not win.”

“A War They Will Not Win”

In response, Brownback says, the Trump administration is committed to helping persecuted Christians throughout the world and is “pursuing this aggressively,” with economic sanctions on countries that persecute Christians and other measures.

“Religious freedom is a top foreign policy priority for this administration,” Brownback says. “We believe this is a universal and natural right. When I reflect on my own faith, I think about how God gave man the free will to choose to believe or not. That freedom is a beautiful one, a sacred right. If God has given man this freedom, how much more should governments leave it to their citizens this freedom to do with their own soul as they choose?”

Western media, many elected officials, and even some faith leaders have been silent for too long about this anti-Christian plague of oppression and death sweeping the globe. These crimes against humanity have thus festered and proliferated, according to the STPC.

To combat this, STPC (www.savethepersecutedchristians.org) is determined to raise America’s awareness of the plight of the world’s Christians and call them to join in a movement to hold the persecutors accountable and create real costs for their crimes. The group seeks not only to alleviate the suffering, but also to discourage and ultimately stop those responsible. The movement is bringing political pressure to bear on governments that are engaged as a matter of state policy in the persecution of Christians, on those who allow it to take place on their watch, and on those who persecute with impunity. One of the strategies STPC is encouraging the Trump administration to use, as it did with Turkey, involves the imposition of economic sanctions.

“The problem clearly isn’t being ameliorated just by trying to relieve some of the suffering,” Gaffney says. “Our theory is that’s because the persecutors don’t perceive any particular downside to doing what they’re doing. They see the upside — it’s good for the party, it’s good for the leader, it’s good for their service to Allah — whatever their particular rationale may be, but they just don’t see real costs associated with doing so. And our job, it seems to me, is to create those costs, to hold the persecutors accountable, and to create penalties for engaging in this kind of behavior.”

Many organizations in America and elsewhere, including Open Doors, are doing important work on behalf of persecuted Christians, helping feed, clothe, shelter, and otherwise help them. What is needed is more awareness on the part of the American faithful to drive charitable giving, and to apply political pressure to enact policy that will relieve the suffering, obtain justice for those harmed, and exact heavy costs on persecutors of Christians, according to STPC.

As part of this effort, STPC is building a movement such as one in the 1970s that helped free another population suffering from heavy persecution — Soviet Jews — to impel policy changes that will hold the persecutors accountable and increase the costs for their crimes against humanity. During the Cold War, the Soviet Union ruthlessly persecuted the religious, particularly those of the Jewish faith. However, in the 1970s, the “Save Soviet Jewry” campaign launched an effort that would one day help free the Soviet



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Union's oppressed Jews. This campaign began with banners and signs outside synagogues and other houses of worship across America.

"Over time it developed into a powerful political force and a guy I happened to work for later by the name of U.S. Senator Henry 'Scoop' Jackson turned it into the kind of punitive sanctions on the Soviets that we're talking about," Gaffney says. "It was called the Jackson-Vanik Amendment and what it said was simply that the Soviets would not get most-favored nation status unless they let the Jews out and anybody else who wanted to go."

President Ronald Reagan used "economic warfare against the Soviet Union decisively to not only free a lot of Jews, but hundreds of millions of other people who were enslaved in the Soviet empire, the 'Evil Empire,' as it was famously called."

The same thing could happen today with persecuted Christians, Gaffney says.

At the first-ever Help the Persecuted Summit in Washington, D.C., in March, Vice President Pence said no people of faith face greater hostility or hatred than followers of Christ. "In Iraq, we see monasteries demolished, priests and monks beheaded, and the two-millennia-old Christian tradition in Mosul clinging for survival," Pence said. "In Syria, we see ancient communities burned to the ground and believers tortured for confessing the name of Christ."

"It's heartbreaking to think that the Christian population in Syria has been cut in half in just the past six years, and many of those who remain have been displaced from their ancient homes. In Iraq, the followers of Christ have fallen by 80 percent in the past decade and a half."

Like the "miracle" that helped free millions of Soviet Jews and others, Gaffney believes "another miracle is entirely possible."

"Now maybe it's not going to stop all the persecution all over the world," he says. "Christ said that won't happen, but we could alleviate it in any of the places where it's currently happening, save lives — and save a few souls too."

In addition, the group is lobbying Trump and Congress to serve notice that those responsible for persecution of Christians will jeopardize the benefits they garner from U.S. foreign aid, military sales, bilateral relations and the opportunity for the leaders of these countries, their family members, and citizens of their nations to visit the United States, go to college and maintain bank accounts in America.

Critics of America's foreign policy in the Middle East have noted that the policies couldn't be intentionally designed to do a better job of liquidating Christians.

Many of the Christians who have suffered and died have lived in countries that receive billions of U.S. taxpayer dollars every year. After trillions of dollars and thousands of American lives were sacrificed by the U.S. government over the last few decades intervening in the Middle East — the birthplace of Christianity — Christian communities now face genocide and serious persecution.

In many cases, U.S. taxpayers are either subsidizing the slaughter by distributing billions of dollars to oppressive regimes, or worse, helping to create the conditions that allow the persecution to happen in the first place.

In response, Gaffney says, STPC is urging Trump and Congress to withhold foreign aid from those nations that are persecuting believers.



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"The point is that when Christians are persecuted in places around the world like these we find that they often feel as though they have been abandoned by the rest of us, which only further emboldens their persecutors," Gaffney says. "So, I'm very pleased to say I'm leading an organization that aspires to become a movement that will change the calculus with these persons, not simply by helping people who are providing symptomatic relief to those suffering, but by holding the persecutors accountable and creating real costs for what they're doing."

SaveUs Banner

The SaveUs movement asks houses of worship and concerned Americans to place a SaveUs banner in a prominent place to build awareness.

People can encourage their pastors to visit the STPC website and order a free banner to display in front of their houses of worship. These banners feature a graphic "SaveUs" plea with a cross and the coalition's website where Americans can learn about the global persecution of Christians and find out what they can do to help stop the violence.

STPC also invites people and groups to host their traveling exhibit, "The People of the Cross." This exhibit shows what millions of Christians are suffering.

In the summer of 2018, as a side event to the U.S. Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom, STPC debuted an exhibit at the U.S. Capitol that featured a series of more than 20 7-foot-by-32-inch vertical banners showing what millions of people experience simply because they follow Christ. Since then, the banners have toured the nation and been featured at 21 events in 10 states, reaching an audience of at least 14,500.

Also, with such staggering statistics, and the knowledge that most of these crimes are not covered in the media, STPC developed a special news aggregator — www.ChristianPersecutionNews.com — to capture those present-day stories of persecution that do make the news and to provide STPC coalition members an easy way to share these heartbreaking stories with others.

Photo credit: AP Images

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