



Written by [James Murphy](#) on July 9, 2018

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Fearless Faith

From the print edition of The New American:

Though the persecution of Christians worldwide is on the rise, many Christians are keeping their faith — and actually spreading it.



Matthew 24:9 — Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake.

Not surprisingly, those words of Jesus have been prophetic. More than 2,000 years ago, the Lord Himself warned us that there would be persecution, and He was right.

Worldwide, every month, it is estimated that 255 Christians are killed for their faith; 180 Christian women are raped, otherwise sexually assaulted, or forced into marriage; and more than a hundred Christians are abducted — many of these are never heard from again; more than 60 churches are attacked; and 160 Christians are imprisoned, having never had a trial.

Every month. And these are low-end estimates.

In America, Christian persecution generally takes the form of mocking and derision from media elites, who see the faith as antiquated, regressive, and bigoted. Christians are easy targets for Hollywood entertainment moguls, who routinely skewer believers as fools or dangerous, backward-thinking cretins. In a country founded on Judeo-Christian principles, 21st-century American Christians may find themselves forced to bake wedding cakes for “gay marriages” or have their children taught Darwin’s theory of evolution as fact. These are forms of harassment for certain but, as of yet, American Christians are not facing death for their beliefs.

The group Open Doors has documented and fought against worldwide persecution of Christians for more than 60 years. Since 1992, the organization has produced the World Watch List, which ranks the 50 countries where it is most difficult to be a Christian. The list is exhaustive, detailing the difficulties that Christians face from hostile governments and other oppressive forces such as other religions — principally Islam. Open Doors estimates that as many as 250 million Christians face serious persecution, which includes intimidation, violence, imprisonment, and even death.

In the Middle East, American interventionist foreign policy has done much to exacerbate the problem. Since 2001, with the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, Christian populations in those regions have seen a sharp increase in harassment and discrimination by Muslim majorities. U.S. troops are seen as modern-day crusaders, and the minority Christian populations of these regions take the brunt of the backlash.

The terrible irony in Iraq is that, under the secular rule of Saddam Hussein, Christians and other minority groups were mostly protected from Islamic mob violence. Saddam was a tyrant — no question



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— but the “democratically elected” governments that have followed in his wake have not shared the relative religious tolerance of Saddam’s Ba’ath Party, by any means.

In present-day Iraq, Christians avoid public displays of their faith, since they are targeted by radical Muslims for kidnappings and murder. Government officials encourage Christians to leave the country if practicable but offer no assistance in doing so. If a Christian comes from a Muslim background, he is usually disowned by his family and sometimes even given up to authorities under blasphemy laws. Often, the Muslim family itself will beat, torture, and sometimes kill the Christian convert.

Afghanistan is an Islamic state by its constitution, thus any other religion is considered alien and potentially dangerous. Any Christian in Afghanistan is likely a convert from Islam and, if found out, heavily pressured by families and communities to convert back to Islam or face dire consequences. Sometimes, Christian converts are considered insane and committed to psychiatric facilities. Sometimes all of their property is taken from them. Sometimes, they simply disappear — never to be heard from again.

Revelation 20:4 — And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgement was given unto them: And I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus.

Is there anything more terrifying than the thought of being beheaded? In February of 2015, 21 Coptic Christians — 20 Egyptians and one Ghanaian — were beheaded on a beach in Libya. The gruesome event was carried out by ISIS, which shared a video of the heinous murder. The video was horrifying, showing the Christian men, all wearing orange jumpsuits, led to the shore of the Mediterranean Sea, and forced to kneel before having their heads literally sawn off by black-clad savages.

Photo of refugee camp in Iraq: AP Images

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The head monster, dressed in camouflage, then addressed the camera, saying, “Oh people, recently you’ve seen us on the hills of Al-Sham and on Dabiq’s Plain, chopping off the heads that had been carrying the cross delusion for a long time, filled with spite against Islam and Muslims, and today we ... are sending another message: Oh crusaders, safety for you will be only wishes, especially when you’re fighting us all together. Therefore, we will fight you all together until the war lays down its burdens and Jesus, peace be upon Him, will descend, breaking the cross, killing the swine. The sea you’ve hidden Sheikh Osama bin Laden’s body in, we swear to Allah, we will mix it with your blood.”

After some strong words from President Obama, the United States could only manage a tepid response to the incident. President Obama and Secretary of State John Kerry both went to great lengths to deny that the United States was “at war with Islam.” The Obama administration’s initial statement regarding the atrocity didn’t mention the victims’ faith at all, as if their Christianity was of no consequence.

After their bodies were discovered in a mass grave by Libyan authorities last September, the remains of the 20 Egyptian martyrs were returned home for burial. The remains of their Ghanaian companion remain in Libya.

Although the practice of beheading has been banned in all but a few Islamic countries, it is still commonly used by thuggish elements of some Muslim communities to instill terror and encourage allegiance to the prophet Muhammad.

But Islamic countries are not the only places that Christians face danger for their beliefs.



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Psalm 14:1 — The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God. They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doeth good.

Communism, that atheistic, godless philosophy that has given the world Joseph Stalin, Mao Tse-tung, and Pol Pot, continues to wreak havoc on people of faith. In China, president Xi Jinping's government has been systematically removing crosses from atop the nation's churches. In a chilling statement that recalls Mao's murderous Cultural Revolution, Xi has said that religions that are not adequately conformed to the country's communist government must become more "Chinese oriented."

But China is not the worst of the communist nations.

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) is a communist nation of approximately 25 million people. A small percentage of those people, somewhere around 300,000, are Christians. These people live their lives in constant danger for their faith. Of those 300,000 Christians, as many as 75,000 have been imprisoned in labor camps for their beliefs.

"It's unbelievable what they have to face on a daily basis to follow Jesus," said Robert Kenna, the senior director for content for Open Doors USA. "With the spy networks. With the fact that they could get pulled into a prison camp just because they own a Bible or share or try to meet at a Church. Not just them but their whole families could be at risk."

The only acceptable form of worship in North Korea is that of Kim Jong-un, who has continued the personality cult created first by his grandfather Kim Il-sung and expanded on by his father, Kim Jong-il. Wishing to be seen as god-like by their citizens, the Kim family has created a mythology around themselves, claiming to be superhuman and detailing those claims with absurd stories about themselves, such as Kim Jong-il once having shot a round of golf with 11 holes-in-one. The unstable Kim family has held dictatorial sway over North Korea since the late 1940s, and Christians have suffered because of it.

In 2008, Choi Kwanghyuk escaped from a North Korean work camp, where he had been sent by the government. His crime? He had founded a small underground church with a congregation of nine.

"We couldn't raise our voice during a service, we couldn't sing out loud during a worship.... That was hard," Choi told Fox News. "Also, we had to hide so that other people could not see us."

Choi dodged authorities for many years, going back and forth between his North Korean home in North Hamgyong Province and the People's Republic of China. But in 2008, the North Korean government finally caught up with him. Government officials jailed him, and he was interrogated and tortured for his faith.

Choi was on the verge of being sent to a more brutal labor camp known as Camp 22, an 87-square-mile penal colony where those considered enemies of the state are sent. For Choi, who was already infirm due to torture, Camp 22 would have been a death sentence.

Also known as Hoeryong Concentration Camp, Camp 22 is one of the world's most infamous gulags. Prisoners are routinely forced to stand on their toes in water up to their noses for 24 hours at a time; they are beaten while hung upside down and they are fed starvation rations.

Choi, who still bears the scars of torture, escaped to China and then to America, where he lives today. He is one of the lucky ones.



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With all of the serious oppression that Christians face around the world and a seemingly apathetic version of the faith in the Western world, the question must be asked: Can Christianity survive?

Christianity is still the world's largest religion, with approximately 2.3 billion adherents worldwide, according to a 2017 Pew Research poll. However, the same study shows that the growth of Christianity — especially in Western nations — is slowing. Also, it is well known that many Westerners who claim to be Christians are only so by tradition, not necessarily by choice. How many American Christians would still claim the mantle of Jesus under the threat of torture or death?

Islam, on the other hand, is the fastest growing faith, with approximately 1.8 billion followers, according to Pew. Muslims also have the highest fertility rate of any of the groups studied. Sometime in the next decade, Islam will likely become the largest religion in the world.

Psalm 125:1-2 — They that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth forever.

As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round His people from henceforth, even forever.

Tucked far in the northeast corner of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, in the Punjab Province, is the City of Faisalabad. Most Americans have never heard of the place. But miracles are happening there.

As the official name suggests, Pakistan is an Islamic country. A full 97 percent of Pakistanis claim Islam as their faith. More than 80 percent are of the Sunni sect; about 15 percent are Shias. The remaining faiths — Christianity, Hinduism and Sikhism — consist of a small minority of segregated and mostly impoverished souls. Pakistan is listed as number five on Open Door's World Watch List of the worst places in the world to be a Christian.

Although it is not technically illegal to be a Christian in Pakistan, it might as well be. Walled Christian enclaves, where the faithful must stay, are common there. Evangelizing outside of these walls is both illegal and extremely hazardous to one's health.

Still, even in Pakistan, a remnant of Christ's church soldiers on. The Voice of Gospel (VOG) Ministry routinely ventures outside the walls of its reservation to preach the Gospel to Muslims in Faisalabad. Evangelist Arooj Nabeel and her husband, Nabeel Khuram, head the ministry. They literally put their lives in God's hands when they share their testimony with those around them.

"Our vision is to reach unreachable people and bring the message of God; to share the Gospel," Arooj said. "We want to serve our Lord in Pakistan among the Christian and non-Christian."

And serving they are. The ministry has planted 17 house churches in cities, villages, and remote areas of Pakistan. They have four Sunday schools and a large children's ministry, designed to spread the Good News of Christ to the young people of the nation. They offer food to the destitute and free education to children. They arrange for free medical clinics and procure medical necessities for people in need.

Because they minister to the poor and destitute, VOG depends on funding from American partners to do their work. "The kind-hearted people who feel our people's pain stand with us and send their funds," Arooj said. "They send their donations for our Godly mission."

Fully understanding the risks involved in their ministry, the VOG soldiers continue to do what they see as their duty. An unshakeable faith and a belief in their cause drives them forward. They are brazenly



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doing God's work in a country where doing so can get you imprisoned, tortured, or killed. When asked if she was ever afraid, Arooj said simply, "God is with us. He protects us so nobody can harm us."

Whether you're a Christian or not, that kind of courage deserves respect.

So, even in the most oppressive regions of the world, Christians are working hard, shining their light into the darkness. To be a Christian in a place such as North Korea or Pakistan is difficult; still many choose to do so. Even though it would be much easier, and less hazardous, to follow another "approved" path, they choose Jesus. With dictatorial governments and antagonistic followers of other religions threatening their very existence, they choose Jesus.

With brave souls such as Choi, Arooj, and Khuram working on the front lines, Christianity is in fine shape. Christians in America would do well to follow their example and be fearless for their faith.

Photo: AP Images



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