



Written by [Steve Byas](#) on November 26, 2018

## Religious Liberty Declining in the World

Sixty-one percent of the world's population live in countries where the right to religious liberty is either heavily restricted or outright denied, according to a report released late last week by Aid to the Church in Need (ACN), a Roman Catholic charity that monitors religious persecution.



According to CAN, 327 million Christians face religious persecution, with another 178 million suffering discrimination of some sort due to their practice of the Christian faith.

Yet, while certain forms of religious persecution and discrimination can generate concern by western media, such as that faced by the Rohingya Muslims who must endure religiously based attacks in Myanmar, most anti-Christian persecution is ignored. John Pontifex, editor-in-chief of the report, said, "There are some like the Rohingya Muslims, whose plight has received due attention in the West, but so many others — such as Christians in Nigeria, Ahmadis in Pakistan and Baha'is in Iran — feel abandoned by the west where religious freedom has slipped down the human rights priority rankings."

Thomas Heine-Geldern, executive president of CAN, said, "Pope Francis, as well as his immediate predecessors, have all stressed that religious freedom is a fundamental human right rooted in the dignity of man. It is the purpose of this report to draw worldwide attention to this intrinsic link between religious freedom and human dignity."

The study found that, in 22 countries, the primary reasons for the attacks on religious liberty are rooted in radical Islam. In other countries, such as Russia and China, religious activity is seen as a threat to national unity (Russia) or to a secular regime (China). Pontifex said that many "minority faith groups feel like aliens in their own country."

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In addition to the increase in religious persecution in various nations with dictatorial governments, the study argued that there is a "curtain of indifference" about religious persecution, especially against Christians, but not limited to them. There is little doubt that the average person living in western countries is so apathetic about such persecution mainly because of ignorance of what is going on. And the reason for that ignorance is that the mostly liberal and secular media in the West have decided that religious persecution and the lack of respect for religious liberty is not a very important issue — at least not to them.

For example, the death of *Washington Post* "journalist" Jamal Khashoggi, allegedly at the hands of the Saudi government, has generated intense reaction among western media. But the ongoing persecution of Christians in Saudi Arabia is hardly reported. Conversion of a Muslim to any form of Christianity is a capital crime in Saudi Arabia. One cannot build a church building there or openly practice the Christian faith. ACN said that persecution of Christians (and other religions, including non-conforming Muslims) in the Saudi kingdom is "already so bad, it could scarcely get any worse." They added that the same thing could be said about North Korea and Yemen.



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*Newsweek* cited the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom in its condemnation of the Saudi practice of teaching hatred and violence through official school textbooks. “The textbooks particularly demonize and target Shi’a and Sufi Muslims, non-Muslims, critics of Islam, women, and members of the LGBT community.” Note that Christians are not specifically mentioned as one of the groups suffering persecution, but are instead lumped together in the category of “non-Muslims.”

Very little is said in the western media about the increased anti-Christian persecution in China, where the government has actually destroyed many houses of worship. Another place where persecution of Christians has increased is India, which now ranks 11th on the list of top 50 “most dangerous” countries to worship Jesus Christ. The group Open Doors has said, “Among those countries which saw the sharpest decline in religious freedom during the period in question, India is particularly significant as it is the world’s second most populous country with one of the world’s fastest-growing economies. Report after report has highlighted egregious acts of violence, each with a clearly-established motive involving religious hatred.”

Some might read this report and be thankful they live in America, where religious liberty is a foundational principle of the republic, even enshrined in its Constitution. While religious persecution and discrimination is much less in the United States than in places such as China and Saudi Arabia, it should be recognized that it not only exists, it is getting worse.

When Amy Comey Barrett was up for confirmation to the 7th Circuit Court of Appeals last year, California Senator Dianne Feinstein grilled her over her religious beliefs. “The dogma lives loudly within you, and that’s of concern,” Feinstein said of Barrett’s Catholicism. Even Russell Vought, a Trump nominee for deputy director of the Office of Management and Budget, was told by Senator Bernie Sanders, the Vermont socialist, that his belief in the “centrality of Jesus Christ in salvation” disqualified him for the post.

Multiple examples of anti-Christian bias could be cited — in academia, business, and government, but among the most shocking examples of the attitude that religious people, particularly Christians, should not be left alone to freely practice their faith is the anti-religious liberty view expressed by former New Mexico Governor Gary Johnson.

Johnson responded to a question about a baker being forced to celebrate a same-sex wedding with a curt response: “I just see religious freedom, as a category, as just being a black hole,” and insisted that laws protecting religious liberty as “just a way to discriminate against gay individuals, the LGBT community. That’s what they are about.”

What makes this particularly disturbing is that Johnson was the 2016 nominee of the *Libertarian Party!* (You know, as in belief in *liberty* — but apparently not religious liberty).

A fundamental misunderstanding of the concept of religious liberty was demonstrated by Senator Chris Van Hollen (D-Md.), after Senator Sanders announced that he would vote against Vought for deputy director of the Office of Management and Budget because Vought believed in the “centrality of Jesus Christ in salvation.” Van Hollen defended Sander’s implementation of a religious test on Vought: “I’m a Christian, but part of being a Christian, in my view, is recognizing that there are lots of ways that people can pursue their God.”

Hollen is certainly entitled to his religious view that faith in Jesus Christ is not necessary for salvation, but Vought is also entitled to his religious view that faith in Jesus Christ is necessary for salvation. Many of the men and women murdered in the Middle East by Muslim radicals are other Muslims who



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do not share their interpretation of the Koran, or other Islamic texts and traditions. Belief in liberty means that one believes that others have a right to believe and practice things one does not believe in or practice. One Muslim should not have to get permission from another Muslim to hold a different religious opinion, and neither should a Christian have to get Hollen's permission to interpret the Bible differently.

Roger Williams, one of the founders of the first Baptist congregations in colonial America, said it well. "Forced worship stinks in God's nostrils." Yet, as the ACN report demonstrates, many around the world think it is a good thing to persecute those who dare hold a different religious viewpoint.



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