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NK and Muslims

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Religious differences run deep in our pluralistic world. It may come as no surprise that such disagreements sometimes end up in violence.

Yet that rarely is the case in what might be called Christendom. Indeed, in large part there is little discrimination let alone persecution against spiritual minorities in majority Christian nations. The exceptions tend to be countries that suffered under Communism or other authoritarian forms of rule.

In contrast, brutal mistreatment of religious minorities of all faiths is the norm in majority Muslim countries. The degree of harm varies—Christians live better in the small Gulf States than in Saudi Arabia, for instance, where not a single church is allowed to exist. Yet only under a secular dictator like Iraq's Saddam Hussein did religious minorities appear to enjoy anything approaching legal equality.

This ugly reality is evident in the latest "Hall of Shame" report released by International Christian Concern. The group starts with the Worst of the Worst.

As always, North Korea heads the list. In this totalitarian state the national leader is treated as divine. To believe in anything else is political heresy. ICC estimates that 400,000 Christians have been martyred in the North since that country was established in 1948.

Tens of thousands are believed to be imprisoned for their faith today. In this case, religious persecution is simply another facet of probably the most extreme totalitarian rule on the planet.

Next are Iraq and Syria. Both were inadvertent havens for Christians and other religious minorities because the two countries were ruled by secular dictators. Unfortunately, the Bush administration's ill-considered invasion of Iraq blew up Iraq and ultimately the region, triggering a sectarian war, of which Christians were among the biggest victims. The subsequent rise of the Islamic State intensified the persecution.

Noted ICC, "Today, Christianity in Iraq and Syria is on the verge of extinction as a result of atrocities by ISIS, other militant Islamic groups, and a widespread increase in radical Islamic thought." Many religious minorities who left are unlikely to return.

ICC includes Nigeria, explaining: "Christians in the North and Middle Belt regions face brutal daily persecution for their faith from the Islamic extremist groups Boko Haram and the Fulani militias." Alas, the central government's high-profile campaign against Boko Haram has had only middling success at best and actually caused the terrorist group to concentrate its ill attention on Christians.

Next come what ICC terms "Core Countries," which tend to be less bloody but no less constant in their persecution. Saudi Arabia is a veritable totalitarian state: "Only Sunni Islam may be practiced publicly and any Saudi citizen who converts to Christianity or another faith is immediately guilty of apostasy, punishable by death. Even non-Saudi Christians living in the Kingdom risk imprisonment and deportation if they attempt to meet privately to pray or read the Bible."

China acts like a typical Communist nation in attempting to suppress any organized groups loyal to anything other than the party and state. Explains ICC, "China frequently uses intimidation, arrests, destruction of church property, and church closures to persecute Christians."

In Egypt "Christians have endured persecution for 1,400 years since Islam arrived. They are treated as second-class citizens," while the government does little to protect them from violence. For instance, "Christian women are regularly abducted, raped, and forcefully married and converted," often with the assistance of the police.

Pakistan is another brutal Islamic state in which all religious minorities are at risk. Noted ICC, "Pakistani Christians suffer from rigid job discrimination, potent blasphemy laws, abductions, and forced conversion and marriage, as well as bombings and terror attacks from Islamic radicals."

Unfortunately, violence and mistreatment of religious minorities have increased since the triumph of the Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party in 2014. Violent attacks are common. In some areas radical Hindus "assault and social boycotts (denying them public services, jobs, and goods) against" Christians.

Finally, ICC has added a "New and Noteworthy" category for nations which are not nearly as bad as the foregoing, but nevertheless where events "indicate declining religious freedom and are cause for alarm." The U.S. heads this list, since political correctness now legally trumps religious liberty in many states.

Russia increasingly has been discriminating against faiths other than Orthodoxy. Ministers have been punished for proselytizing, holding services, preaching, and baptizing.

Although Mexico is a nominally Catholic nation, "discrimination against Christians in Mexico runs rampant in rural villages and other local communities, with little or no government intervention." Evangelicals, in particular, have been beaten, exiled, and sometimes murdered.

In its latest "Hall of Shame" report ICC touches on only a few of the many instances of religious persecution around the globe. Despite rising social and legal hostility toward Christians in some

Western countries, these believers remain lucky. Religious liberty is precious yet sadly in short supply in so many nations.

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