

Saving Syrian and Iraqi Christians

Time is running out for the Middle East's persecuted followers of the Cross

By John Eibner

Persecuted Christians from around the world and their advocates and supporters will descend on Washington this month for the World Summit on Persecuted Christians. A three-day event sponsored by the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, the World Summit promises to attract the attention of senior political figures and generate welcome media attention.

According to the Pew Research Center, Christians are the world's most widely persecuted faith community. The systematic oppression of Christians, ranging from nonviolent discrimination to acts of extreme violence, is taking place in more than 75 percent of the countries of the world. But persecution is most severe in the Middle East. The "religious cleansing" of Christians in Iraq and Syria is calamitous.

Alarmed by the hijacking of the "Arab Spring" by violent Islamist forces, my organization, Christian Solidarity International, issued a genocide alert for the Middle East in the autumn of 2011. We warned that conditions for the eradication of Christians and other religious minorities were rapidly multiplying throughout the region. By the end of 2015, Pope Francis labeled this reality in Iraq and Syria "a kind of genocide."

Since the onset of Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003, Iraq's Christian population has plummeted from more than 1 million to roughly 200,000. Most who remain are destitute, living in misery as internally displaced people. They would seize any opportunity to leave the anti-Christian sectarian violence wracking their homeland for a new life in the West.

Few members of the Iraqi Christian remnant believe that they will ever have a persecution-free future in Iraq, whether or not the Islamic State is militarily defeated. As far as they are concerned, Operation Iraqi Freedom resulted in freedom for violent religious supremacists.

Many persecuted Iraqi Christians fled in neighboring Syria, where the secular state in that country accepted more than 1 million Iraqi refugees of all faiths. These Iraqi refugees lived under the protection of a dictatorship that tolerated no political opposition but respected social and religious pluralism. The Syrian authorities made credible efforts to integrate Iraqi refugees, including Christians, into Syria's religiously pluralistic society rather than isolate them in refugee camps.

Iraqi refugees in Syria, like indigenous Syrians, were able to live and practice their faith openly in peace and dignity. But this changed in 2011 when President Obama launched his Syrian regime-change efforts.

A huge swath of territory, stretching from near Syria's northwest

Mediterranean coastline to the outskirts of Baghdad has now been religiously cleansed of Christians. Much of it is controlled by the Islamic State. But most of the Christians have been victims of other Sunni jihadists, often referred to as "moderates" in the parlance of our organs of public diplomacy.

The great majority of the religiously cleansed Syrian Christians, together with most other displaced Syrians, seek refuge in the government-held parts of the country. But once there, they have to contend with another type of warfare in the form of draconian economic sanctions.

Sanctions imposed by Mr. Obama were ostensibly directed at Syria's political leadership but, in fact, constitute a form of collective punishment against all Syrians for the misdeeds of a ruler who, after six years, is still in power. Together with barrel bombs, beheadings and poison gas, these economically ruinous sanctions play a major role in impoverishing Christians and forcing them to flee the country, which is why Syria's Christian leaders are calling for the immediate lifting of sanctions.

Like Pope Francis, former Secretary of State John Kerry also used the "G-word" — genocide — in March 2016 to describe the religious cleansing of Christians in Iraq and Syria. But Mr. Kerry's genocide determination was limited only to the atrocities of the Islamic State. It took no account of terror inflicted by other Sunni supremacists.

Can the World Summit in Defense of Persecuted Christians persuade the Trump administration to halt the acknowledged genocide of Christians in Syria and Iraq? If so, the conclave must go beyond repeating religious freedom platitudes and routine calls for the rapid military defeat of the Islamic State. It must challenge American policies that have helped create conditions for Christian genocide.

The World Summit should start by insisting that Washington desist from overthrowing governments unless it can guarantee the physical safety and religious freedom of the population it purports to "liberate." We behold in Syria and Iraq the bizarre spectacle of a regime-changing

liberator — one claiming to lead a "global democratic revolution," to use the words of George W. Bush, or a "democratic transition," as termed by Barack Obama — unable or unwilling to match the religious freedom guaranteed by iron-fisted dictators like Saddam Hussein and Bashar Assad.

The World Summit should also endorse the principles underpinning the Stop Arming Terrorists Act sponsored by Rep. Tulsi Gabbard, Hawaii Democrat, and Sen. Rand Paul, Kentucky Republican. This legislation, if passed, would prohibit the United States from arming and otherwise supporting the Islamic State, al Qaeda, and those that collaborate with them. Finally, the World Summit should appeal for an end to the collective punishment of ruinous economic sanctions.

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ILLUSTRATION BY GREG GROESCH

By J.T. Young

Although still early, conservatives who supported Donald Trump in November can feel vindicated. They can arrive at this conclusion by two routes: a net assessment of the administration's record and a comparison of what might have been. If all this seems self-evident now, it is worth remembering that for many it was not obvious just six months ago.

The first 100 days is an unrealistic measuring stick for any administration. It originated with Franklin D. Roosevelt's first term when he entered office as the Great Depression entered its fourth year. Roosevelt's party had overwhelming congressional majorities — 23 seats in the Senate and 196 in the House (Republicans currently hold a four-seat Senate majority and 37-seat House majority). FDR therefore had the presidency's greatest motivation and means when he took office.

For conservatives, measuring President Trump by this yardstick is particularly unrealistic because it only looks at half the equation. Exit polling showed the quality most voters sought was "change" — 39 percent, almost double the next highest ("right experience," at 22 percent). Change is measured by what is done, but also by what is not. Conservatives therefore should be equally concerned with what this administration chooses not to do — a far harder thing to quantify.

How then should conservatives appraise Mr. Trump's early record?

Unquestionably, Mr. Trump has had his failings. Obviously, the largest has been not replacing Obamacare. While hardly solely (or arguably, even primarily) attributable to Mr. Trump, what happens when you are president, you own — for better or worse.

The president has also had his successes. The largest is Judge Neil Gorsuch's confirmation to the Supreme Court. He has also signed 11 pieces of legislation passed under the Congressional Review Act overturning Obama regulations, and Mr. Trump has continued Mr. Obama's aggressive use of executive orders — only going in the opposite direction.

Yet the real conservative measuring stick for Mr. Trump — whether during an arbitrary first 100 days or four full years — comes down to a comparison

Rethinking the conservative position of 'never Trump'

Any way it's examined, the Donald beats the alternative



ILLUSTRATION BY GREG GROESCH

— not just of outcomes, but alternatives. And the biggest alternative to be considered is the state of affairs if Hillary Clinton had become president.

The idea that there could have been a different Republican nominee should be peremptorily dismissed. There was no shortage of Republican alternatives. Mr. Trump did not just beat them, he destroyed them. Republicans' nomination contest was far less close Democrats'. So imagining what a different Republican president would now be doing — let alone comparing him to the actual one — is just that, imaginary.

Similarly, the only alternative to the Trump presidency — for conservatives or anyone else — is a Clinton presidency. Those two alternatives then, must

equally form our comparison now.

For conservatives, this reality leads to four comparisons.

First, what should be obvious to everyone is that what conservatives like

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and Mr. Trump has done, Mrs. Clinton would not have done. Mr. Trump was the only alternative for these initiatives, such as the Gorsuch nomination, and he delivered.

Second, what conservatives dislike and Mrs. Clinton would have done, Mr. Trump has not done. Again, Mr. Trump was the only alternative to preventing such initiatives and he has delivered. All the last-minute Obama regulations would still be in effect were Mrs. Clinton president.

Third, what conservatives do not

like and what Mr. Trump has done, Mrs. Clinton would have done, too. Conservatives can fill in the blank here, if they feel it useful, but the end result would not have changed with Mrs. Clinton as president. And any hope for improvement here stands a far better chance with Mr. Trump than it would with Mrs. Clinton.

Fourth, what conservatives do like and Mr. Trump has not done, Mrs. Clinton would not have done, either. However far the Obamacare replacement fell short in March and may fall short in the future, Mrs. Clinton was not going to replace the law or allow it to happen — ever.

In other words, in these four basic comparisons, Mr. Trump is either an absolute or a net winner for conservatives.

Certainly, there will be conservatives of Machiavellian persuasion who will muse about alternative scenarios with better long-term outcomes — if Mrs. Clinton won last November, if Mr. Trump doesn't seek re-election, if Mr. Trump loses to a Democrat in 2020. However, all rest on far flimsier assumptions than the solid reality of conservatives' current situation.

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Ditto, that Mr. Trump won't be renominated or will lose re-election: No sitting president has been denied renomination in the last century and only three elected presidents (Herbert Hoover, Jimmy Carter and George H.W. Bush) lost re-election.

That somehow a Trump general election loss would better advance conservatives' goals? The three presidents who did lose re-election were each replaced by presidents who won multiple terms. Conservatives could reasonably expect a liberal to be in office for eight years.

Conservatives can certainly take issue with Mr. Trump's performance in office. However, his presidency has confirmed one thing: He was the only alternative to the continuation of the Obama legacy. As a result, for conservatives "never Trump" is less and less justified, and even less and less a realistic option for the achievement of their goals.

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Hanson

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and students now know precisely which speech will endanger their careers and which will earn them rewards.

The terrified campus community makes the necessary adjustments. As with the German universities of the 1930s, faculty keep quiet or offer politically correct speech through euphemisms. Toadies thrive; mavericks are hounded.

Shortchanged students collectively owe more than \$1 trillion in student-loan debt — a sum that cannot be paid back by ill-prepared and often unemployed graduates.

Test scores have plummeted. Too many college students were never taught the basic referents of liberal education. Most supposedly aware, hip and politically engaged students can't identify the Battle of Gettysburg or the Parthenon, or explain the idea of compounded interest.

Many students simply cannot do the work that was routinely assigned in the past. In response, as proverbially delicate "snowflakes," they insist that they are traumatized and can only find remedy in laxer standards, gut courses and faculty deference.

"Studies" activist courses too often are therapeutic. They are neither inductive nor Socratic, and they rarely teach facts, methods and means of learning without insisting on predesignated conclusions. Instead, the student should leave the class with proper group-think and ideological race/class/gender fervor of the professor — a supposed new recruit for the larger progressive project.

Universities talk loudly of exploitation in America — in the abstract. But to address societal inequality, university communities need only look at how their own campuses operate. Part-time faculty with doctorates are paid far less than tenured full professors for often teaching the same classes — and thus subsidize top-heavy administrations.

Graduate teaching assistantships, internships and mentorships are designed to use inexpensive or free labor under the protocols of the medieval guild.

One reason that tuition is sky-high is because behind the facade of "trigger warnings," "safe spaces" and "culture appropriation" are costly legions of deputy associate provosts, special assistants to the dean, and race/class/gender "senior strategists" and facilitators (usually former faculty who no longer teach).

Few admit that a vastly expanding and politically correct administrative industry reflects a massive shift of resources away from physics, humanities or biology — precisely the courses that nontraditional students need to become competitive.

One of the great mysteries of American life is nontransparent university admissions. No one knows quite how alumni legacies, deference to college athletics, or poorly defined affirmative action and haphazard diversity criteria actually operate.

At the California State University system — the nation's largest — nearly 40 percent of incoming students need remediation in math and English after failing basic competency tests. Universities are now scrambling to offer university credit for what are, in truth, remedial high school courses, apparently to prevent eager (but entirely unprepared) students from hurt feelings when they butt up against the reality of college classes.

Careerist university administrators more often make the university change to accommodate the student rather than asking the incoming student to prepare to accommodate the time-honored university.

The results are watered-down classes, grade inflation — and student frustration and anger upon learning that entering college is not quite the same as graduating from college.

The way to ensure student confidence and self-reliance is not through identity-politics courses that emphasize racial, sexual and religious fault lines. Instead, only classes ensuring that students are well trained in writing, speaking, computing and inductive thinking will give assuredness of achievement — and, with it, self-confidence.

Apart from the sciences and the professional schools, campuses are a bubble of unearned self-congratulation — clueless that they have broken faith with a once-noble legacy of free inquiry and have lost the respect of most Americans.

The now melodramatic university has become a classical tragedy.

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