

Introduction (0:00-1:50)

Subtitle (0:00)

Over 100 million Christians worldwide endure some type of persecution each year.

- Open Doors International

Christians are interrogated, arrested, and even killed for their faith.

Various Voices (0:25)

You can call it hell on the earth. Always they torture you, they beat you.

Churches being broken, houses being burned, there was a huge amount of rapes.

We have this public image of India as peaceful and pluralistic. It doesn't compute for there to be this kind of violence there.

There is no safety in Iraq. Not for family, not for me, not for children.

I begged them not to kill my husband.

It's a very Darwinian process, in the end, and that's what we're seeing – and we are seeing it at its most vicious right now.

Are Christians being disproportionately victimized? Are they the victims of a genocide that makes them maybe particularly worthy of objects of our attention?

The persecution concerns our own survival.

Part I – This Very Day, A Nightmare (1:50-3:28)

Daniel Philpott (2:13)

There is no more appropriate time for this conference. On this very day, Christians will be killed, exiled, find their property and houses of worship destroyed, and face humiliating discrimination in countries around the world. The Under Caesar's Sword project is an effort to study systematically and globally the kind of responses Christian communities make towards persecution. What do they do when they are under this kind of pressure and repression?

Timothy Shah (2:45)

Some people will say it's ethnic or religious cleansing, not genocide; these, I think, are quibbles. The important thing is that a massive humanitarian catastrophe is in front of us, and it is inextricably related again to the religious identity of very vulnerable Christians.

Ignatius Youssef III Younan (3:05)

The whole Middle East is without exception engulfed by a nightmare that seems to have no end and that undermines the very existence of Christians in many countries of the region.

Part II – Turkey (3:28-10:49)

Elizabeth Prodromou

(3:50)

The early church was comprised of five ancient patriarchates: Rome in the west, and then four in the east – Antioch, Alexandria, Jerusalem, and Constantinople – and those are all in danger of disappearing. They are literally living in an at-risk condition of great vulnerability.

Mustafa Akyol

(4:11)

A century ago, one third of the Istanbul population was non-Muslim, which would mean Greeks first – Greek Orthodox – then Armenians, then Jews. Today, it is less than one percent: very tiny communities. How did this happen? Well, Turkey got rid of its Christian minorities to a great extent, unfortunately, by population exchanges, by expelling them.

Subtitle

(4:42)

Today, Christians comprise less than 1% of Turkey's population of 80 million.

Elizabeth Prodromou

(4:49)

What we see in Turkish-occupied Cyprus is really the erasure of the Christian presence: churches demolished, all of the iconography associated with the early church stripped out of these churches – really a perverse effort to erase the historical footprint of the Christians of Turkey. There has been a growing discourse on Turkey about the conversion of the great Church of the Holy Wisdom, Hagia Sophia, into a functioning mosque – [the Hagia Sophia was] the largest Christian structure up until the cathedral of Notre Dame was built. And if that structure is to function as a religious site, it should function as a site for which it was built and intended, a Christian site that is part of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople.

Laki Vingas

(5:50)

The state has to accelerate its reforms. It used to be a very polyphonic country. and then it could be again.

Subtitle

(5:58)

Laki Vingas was the first Christian in Turkey elected to the General Directorate of Foundations. He represented over 150 non-Muslim minority groups, advocating for their human rights.

Laki Vingas

(6:07)

We go to the state, to the ministries, to the bureaucracy, and we claim or we explain our issues together. And we are so few now, so the solidarity in building up new ideas is essential.

Emre Karaali

(6:33)

Our church here in Izmit has around 30 people who come here regularly. Instead of staying behind closed doors, we want everybody to be informed about our religion. This upsets some people in the local community. I learned that two men were posing as members of this church for two years. They said they

were Christians, but in fact they were just monitoring my every move. We were holding a seminar on Christianity and invited many local officials. That morning the police arrested thirteen people. The police found out that they were planning to assassinate me.

Elizabeth Prodromou

(7:43)

Christian communities have longed focused on coping strategies, in terms of making life livable on a daily basis, and that has meant largely staying off the radar. And by that I mean simply trying to do whatever is necessary in order to stay within these very strict limits of the law.

Emre Karaali

(8:06)

For our security, we have a camera system to monitor the area. We have added bars over the windows. We also have screens to protect from rocks. Is it easy? No. We want to pray in peace and practice our beliefs freely. (Music plays.) Nevertheless, nobody in our community tries to hide their religious beliefs.

Laki Vingas

(9:05)

The non-Muslim minorities – we are reaching 200,000 people. So why [do] we have to be very vibrant and active? It is very simple, because we are part of this country; we are the heritage of the history of this country. We try to explain ourselves, to dialogue with people because they don't know us. We can see that there are millions and millions of people in Turkey that never experience any connection, any dialogue with any non-Muslim person, and we try to explain again from the beginning that we are not foreigners, that we are not strangers.

The blessing of the waters, the Epiphany, as we call it, is a very special day. And we came with all our bishops, and our people, and our parishes – and all members of the larger community. There were Turkish Muslims, Armenians. We were happy because everything goes smoothly. Even if today Turkey and the countries around are facing several problems, we – in a very secure way – we have celebrated today. Definitely 15, 20 years ago this could be impossible. We still have a long way to go because we see what's happening in the Middle East: first Iraq, and now Syria. We have millions of people, refugees, coming into Turkey, of course. It seems that for the last centuries, freedom for Christians has limited understanding in the region.

Part III – The Middle East (10:49-13:42)

Subtitle

(10:49)

The recent unrest in the Middle East has left Syrian and Iraqi Christians with few options. Most have been forced to flee their homelands in response to renewed persecution.

Joshua Landis

(11:02)

In 1914-1922, in Turkey, the Christians – 20% of them – were forced out, and many of them fled to Syria and Iraq. And today, they were being driven out of Syria and Iraq, and they are finding refuge in Turkey. Now, so far, the Turks have been extraordinarily accepting: 2 million refugees.

Ignatius Youssef III Younan

(11:27)

When there is chaos in a country mostly composed of [an] Islamic majority, minorities, especially Christians, are very much vulnerable.

Evan Layth Adil

(11:43)

I decided to leave Iraq because there is no safety for my children, and to come to Turkey because Turkey is better. Homeland – to return to our homeland – is a bigger problem. Now, in this time, it's a bigger problem.

Suad Matti Bahoo

(12:00)

We feel like we were kicked out (of Iraq). We heard they were kidnapping young girls, so we ran away.

Evan Layth Adil

(12:11)

They come to me and tell me, you should give us money or [we will] kill you, or hurt your family.

Suad Matti Bahoo

(12:22)

I want to find a place to live where my family's future is more secure.

Silva Kurtaran

(12:31)

People come first to Turkey when they flee their homeland. They see it as a gateway to Europe. They've left behind their town, their houses, their schools, their churches. In this community, our organization tries to make it feel like home here.

Joshua Landis

(13:27)

It isn't everybody who has fled. You do have incidents of the Assyrians, for example, around the Khabur River in Syria, that took up arms and formed a militia – but those are small responses.

Part IV – Following the Way (13:42-16:58)

Daniel Philpott

(13:42)

One of the remarkable things that we've found among Christian communities around the world is how few of them have resorted to violence as the answer. We want to be careful to not judge communities who have made that difficult decision that maybe armed defense is the only way for them to survive, but we do note that in the global profile, armed violence is very rare.

Timothy Shah

(14:04)

Christians have spontaneously responded to their own suffering by enlarging their concern and compassion – work for justice – to include others as well. It is important because that's what their faith calls them to, but it's important, too, in that I think many Christians realize that the only world in which they are going to be more secure is a world in which everyone is more secure.

Cardinal Charles Bo

(14:43)

Our social mission helped to reach out to the heart of the majority community, especially its poor. Like Pope Francis we become the voice of the voiceless from all communities, especially all the poor from every community.

Dr. Paul Bhatti

(15:15)

Shabaz was my younger brother; he dedicated 28 years of his life to foster the ideal of human equality, interfaith harmony and mutual love and forgiveness. He died only a few meters in front of the home. My mother heard the thunder of bullets killing my brother. Even today, it is impossible to imagine her pain. But to my amazement, my mom told me without hesitating that his mission should continue and that I was the right person for this job. She explained that she had forgiven the killers of my brother and that she was free from desire of revenge or retaliation against them. Later she reminded me that Shabaz's way of life was rooted in forgiveness and love, following the way of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Subtitle

(16:08)

Helen Berhane, a gospel singer from Eritrea in East Africa, was arrested for recording an album of Christian music. She was imprisoned in a shipping container for over two years.

Helen Berhane

(16:24)

(Singing.) My imprisonment is 32 months, inside the container. There is not enough air, it's not clean. They ask you to deny your faith. So I refused.

Part IV – India (16:58-24:16)

Daniel Philpott

(16:58)

The Pew Forum reports that 76% of the world's population lives in a country where religious freedom is seriously curtailed. In India, hundreds of Christians have been attacked by Hindu extremists whose violent efforts have been encouraged by the rise to power of a Hindu nationalist government.

Chad Bauman

(17:38)

Christians have been around in India from at least the third century. There was a long period, a millennium or more, of relatively peaceful coexistence between Christians and other religious people in India.

Shoma Chaudhary

(17:56)

There was a huge embrace of Christians in this country – the Christian missionaries and the schools they set up. Very commonly, Christmas was celebrated by all of India; it's been a kind of secular practice almost, a celebration.

Chad Bauman

(18:14)

[People in] the Western world generally have a notion of Hinduism and Buddhism as religions of peace, yoga, meditation, friendliness – and this is a problem of perception.

John Dayal

(18:28)

India is a democracy; it is a constitutionally secular place. The state is not supposed to be involved in religion, but in reality, the state has always been involved, particularly in favor of the Hindu religion.

Chad Bauman

(18:43)

If you go in a police station, you will find the pictures of gods and goddesses and garland, and so those spaces are very often marked out as at least quasi-Hindu spaces, and Christians maybe feel that they are not fully represented.

Shabnam Hashmi

(19:00)

It has been a slow consistent process over decades. What is happening now did not happen in one day. It was a preparation of tens of years, of a very slow poisoning of minds across India.

Chad Bauman

(19:17)

Since about 1998, there has been a real rise in incidents of violence against Christians. The Kandhamal riots were really of a far more widespread and far more significant nature.

Fr. Manoj Nayak

(19:42)

The crowd – maybe about 300 to 400 people – came in the morning, and from this spot itself they started attacking the people, breaking the houses, and burning the houses, and the violence continued all throughout the day.

Kanaklata Nayak

(20:00)

We stayed inside our home until they attacked it. Then, we and the other Christians tried to escape.

Shoma Chaudhary

(20:11)

In Kandhamal, there was a huge Christian purge, a lot of killings, a lot of rape, churches being broken and looted.

Kanaklata Nayak

(20:22)

They beat my husband badly as we pleaded with them to stop. They dragged him for a kilometer with a cycle chain around his neck.

Subtitle

(20:41)

Many Christians were forced to convert to Hinduism or be killed. Kanaklata's husband refused to convert.

Fr. Manoj Nayak

(20:53)

They tortured him. He had to suffer. So inhumanly, they killed him in front of his wife and two children.

Kanaklata Nayak

(21:15)

I escaped into the forest with my children.

Subtitle

(21:30)

The Kandhamal riots left 45 people dead and more than 80 churches destroyed. Nearly 18,500 Christians were forced to flee their villages.

John Dayal

(21:41)

The first response is prayer. We don't retaliate. We don't respond as possibly other communities would do.

Chad Bauman

(21:55)

After things settled down, a broader range of options became available to Christians, and many of them began to very intentionally engage with their neighbors for the sake of bolstering or developing their social capital, expanding their social networks. I think they realized that they needed to reach out more effectively to other groups. So, they began doing visits: they'd go to a Muslim service or festival, they'd go to a Hindu service or festival, they'd go to a Buddhist service or festival – and they would invite people from other religions into their own celebrations.

Shabnam Hashmi

(22:32)

We began to encounter the hate ideology, and to do that we worked on modules; we organized residential training camps. In the last 12 years, more than 15,000 or 20,000 young people have undergone those camps. This is mainly fighting prejudices, fighting hatred.

Fr. Manoj Nayak

(22:53)

After the attack, I was part of the peacebuilding process, along with the district administration. I went for peacebuilding meetings in different villages. In the youth program, some of the sports competitions we conducted brought the community people together from both the religions, from both the castes. The divisiveness and the doubts that were there, those also could be resolved in the meetings, because the youth had not been able to talk – the people had not been able to talk – after the violence. So these gave space to come together, and people slowly started talking and building relationships.

Chad Bauman

(23:35)

They tried to make their own religious buildings more ecumenical in spirit, more interfaith in spirit. So instead of building something that could only be a church, they might build a community center that had the symbols of various religions in it.

John Dayal
(23:51)

We are now understanding that the Christian community in India is part of a larger national group. We are protected by the constitution; we are protected by the United Nations charter. India is a signatory [of the UN charter] – therefore there is no harm. In fact, we are duty bound to seek support from everywhere, to raise a voice everywhere.

Part V – The Dream of Human Rights (24:16-26:20)

Timothy Shah
(24:24)

My overwhelming feeling now – having heard the stories that we heard, having met many of the most remarkable Christians leaders who face persecution around the world – is not one of discouragement.

Shabnam Hashmi
(24:38)

Our diversity, our pluralism, our decades of struggle for a democratic, secular India, is waking up again. Everyone will fight until the last breath.

Emre Karaali
(24:55)

I hope one day our political leaders will treat all people as equals.

Laki Vingas
(25:07)

We have to work to create a bridge, and this bridge cannot be built only from one side; we have to work on both sides and create a bridge of confidence.

Daniel Philpott
(25:24)

People of very different religions and ethnicities and national communities being able to live in the same society. That's critical to the dream of liberal democracy, the dream of human rights.

Joshua Landis
(25:38)

It's very hard to see how you're going to get to a society where religious freedoms are central to the legal system, but many people are beginning to see the merits, and see that it's the only thing that's going to keep the societies they love from being swept away.

Timothy Shah
(25:58)

My overwhelming feeling despite challenges is that one can have hope, and that things can improve, and that integrity and faithfulness, in the long run, matter more than anything else.

Credits (26:20-26:51)