

Charisma Founder Speaks Out on Persecuted Church at UN

Steve Strang, founder of *Charisma* and CEO of Charisma Media is addressing an event at the United Nations in New York at 5:28 PM today called “Not Peace but a Sword: The Persecution of Christians in the Middle East as a Threat to International Peace and Security.”

He is one of several speakers and was asked to address the topic: “The Role of the Media—or lack of—in Highlighting the Persecution of Christians in the Middle East.” Here is the text of his remarks:

It’s an honor to be here this afternoon at this historic event to speak about the role of the media in covering the plight of persecuted Christians in the Middle East.

Each year, 100 million Christians suffer persecution, imprisonment and even death for their sacred religious beliefs. According to The Voice of the Martyrs, a ministry dedicated to assisting the persecuted church worldwide, “more people have died for their faith in Christ in the last 100 years” than in the previous 19 centuries combined.

As you are probably aware, until recently, the media have largely ignored and downplayed the slaughter of Christians in the Middle East and throughout the world.

It should have shocked the conscience of the world, but it registered barely a blip on the media’s radar for decades.

There are exceptions, of course.

Several years ago, Saddleback Church Pastor Rick Warren, author of *The Purpose Driven Life*, held a forum on “The Persecuted Church,” noting that of all the religions in the

world that are being persecuted, “the single largest persecution is of the church—Christianity—far more than of Islam, of Buddhism, of Hinduism or any other religion.”

A few days after Easter this year, Pope Francis—reacting to the slaughter of nearly 150 Christians by Islamic militants in Kenya—called on the world to give tangible help to persecuted Christians, describing them as modern “martyrs.” The Vatican’s official preacher said there was a “disturbing indifference” among the world’s institutions and in public opinion to the killing of Christians.

Until recently, the media have mostly looked the other way, and even today we are still witnessing examples of how the media are ignoring, or minimizing the fact, that Christians are the primary targets of genocide by ISIS and other Islamic extremists in the Middle East. For instance, in January, numerous media outlets focused on the terrorist attacks on the satirical newspaper *Charlie Hebdo* while ignoring the ongoing massacre of Nigerians, including many Christians, at the hands of the terror group Boko Haram. As many as 2,000 people are believed to have been killed and several churches were burned.

As head of Charisma Media, one of the nation’s largest Christian media outlets, we have closely covered the persecution of Christians in the Middle East and throughout the world for four decades. Our writers, sources and readers have witnessed some of the most horrific acts of human depravity imaginable. As a journalistic observer of these atrocities for decades, I can tell you without a doubt that the situation is reaching an unprecedented dimension of crisis.

I have personally reported as recently as this month persecution of Christians in Egypt, Dubai and Malaysia based on interviews with Christian leaders from those countries.

A century ago, Middle Eastern Christians represented about 20

percent of the population. Now they represent about 4 percent. In Iraq, before the Gulf War, there were about 1.4 million Christians in 1990. Now there are about 200,000 and the head of the Catholic Chaldean Church in Kurdistan says Iraqi Christians have “little time left.” We are literally watching the genocide of Jesus’ followers in the Middle East.

From kidnappings and the execution of journalists and aid workers to beheadings, crucifixions and the burning of Christians, the Islamic State is exhibiting shocking cruelty. Thousands have died at their hands—more than 24,000 in the first eight months of 2014. This doesn’t include the 21 Coptic Christians who were beheaded or 45 Iraqi citizens who were burned alive. ISIS is also kidnapping children and selling them into the sex trade, or crucifying them like the Romans did to Christians in the 1st century.

With the rise of ISIS and its threats of bringing “Armageddon” to the West, along with concerns that Iran is developing nuclear weapons and ballistic missile technologies, all eyes are on the Middle East. As the world witnesses the beheadings, crucifixions and torture of thousands of Christians, it’s become clear that this will have far-reaching consequences for not only Christianity, but the entire world. Left unchecked, the inhumane carnage we are watching in the Middle East and other parts of the world will eventually come to the United States and other western nations. It will pose a threat to international peace and security.

Nevertheless, the media have largely failed to cover the plight of Christians in the Middle East, the United Nations has remained mostly silent and the U.S. government has turned a blind eye to all this—downplaying the role of Islamic extremists in these atrocities and that Christians are their primary targets.

Meanwhile, the pulpits have been stunningly quiet. A week ago, we ran a story about how Glenn Beck is “sounding the alarm

about a coming Christian holocaust in the Middle East—if Americans don't do something to rise up and help stop the slaughter." He said, "The American Revolution, the Civil War and the Civil Rights Movement came and were won from the pulpits first. The pulpits should be on fire, but our pulpits are barely an ember. It's shameful what is happening."

In another one of our articles, best-selling author Joel Rosenberg pleaded for the church to wake up. "Much of the church around the world is asleep to the threat," he said.

I share his lament. The pulpits and the media should be reverberating with righteous indignation at these injustices—the wholesale slaughter of our brothers and sisters in Christ in the cradle of Christianity's birth.

We must address the mass genocide of Christians in the Middle East.

And just as we saw in the years leading up to the American Revolution, the efforts to free African-American slaves during the American Civil War and the Civil Rights Movement, the media and the pulpits must take the lead in building the case and inspiring United Nations and U.S. leaders to pass resolutions to protect Christians and other religious minorities in the Middle East.

It's also vitally important that President Obama appoint a Special Envoy for the protection of religious minorities in the Middle East and call for the establishment of an International Day of Prayer in solidarity with Christians in the Middle East.

It's no coincidence that you are here today, or that you are listening at this time. The Lord will not hold us blameless if we pretend this isn't happening. We must act and we must act soon. We have been called by the Lord to serve at this critical time, not only in the history of our nation, but also in the history of the world.

Allow me to close with two thoughts—one from Edmund Burke and the other from Moses.

Burke, the Irish statesman best remembered for famously saying, “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.”

Moses, who received the Ten Commandments from God, offers us this encouragement down through the mists of time: “Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.”

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