

# Global Christians, Americans hold different view of persecution

January 9, 2014

SAN ANTONIO (ABP)—In the United States, a reality TV star gets suspended for [controversial remarks](#) on race and homosexuality, and many conservative Christians claim victim and martyr status in the media. In Egypt, Islamist mobs torch churches and Christians there respond with humility and prayers for their persecutors.

 Gavin Rogers, right, examines the charred remains of a Christian convent in Egypt in 2013. (ABP Photo courtesy of Gavin Rogers)It's the kind of irony that drives Gavin Rogers a little crazy sometimes.

"I have to challenge myself not to get angry about it," said Rogers, a former youth minister at [Trinity Baptist Church in San Antonio](#) who traveled to strife-torn Egypt twice in 2013.

Those journeys, one during the Egyptian army's crackdown on Islamists and another immediately after it, included visits to Coptic, Anglican and other churches attacked last summer by angry supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood.

The recent controversy involving Duck Dynasty star Phil Robertson—who temporarily was suspended from the show after criticizing homosexuals and giving his perspective on some aspects of life in the Jim Crow South—has exposed the disconnect between how conservative American Christians view persecution compared to many other Christians around the world.

In a recent *Christianity Today* blog post titled [“A Real Cause for Christian Outrage,”](#) writer Halee Gray Scott urged American Christians to educate themselves about what persecution really is by drilling into international events and by supporting the work of organizations like [Open Doors USA](#) and [Voice of the Martyrs](#).

### **Tribal, ethnic tensions**

But some Baptists and other Christians who have experienced attacks personally in foreign lands say it’s sometimes even difficult to know when anti-Christian violence overseas can be accurately classified as religious persecution.

✘ Nell Green “The article is true that in some areas, Christians are being targeted and thrown out,” said Nell Green, a veteran [Cooperative Baptist Fellowship](#) missionary who has witnessed and even suffered attacks in the Middle East and Africa.

Those incidents include robberies and violent attacks against her and her family, but Green said it’s hard to say differences of faith motivated the Muslim attackers.

“The violence that sometimes happens to Christians is not so much that they are Christians as that they (the Christians) are in risky places” where pre-existing tribal or ethnic tensions already exist, she said.

### **Numbers hard to pin down**

It’s one reason why organizations that raise awareness and support for persecuted Christians worldwide often shy away from attempting to keep exact statistics on persecution, said [Todd Nettleton](#), director of media development for Voice of the Martyrs.

✘ Todd Nettleton “We avoid a number because we don’t have a way to

accurately state ‘this many people were killed for their faith in Jesus Christ,’” Nettleton said. “Sometimes, it’s more (ethnic or national) identity than a Christian witness, and in some cases it’s not known at all.”

But intentional, anti-Christian persecution clearly exists, and that’s why the organization tracks instances of persecution and tries to help victims and families of those who are targeted for their beliefs, he said.

“On a worldwide level, you have to say Christian persecution is becoming more of a significant issue,” he said. “But you have to say that the good news is that’s because there are more Christians, so there are more people to be persecuted.”

While the organization’s watch list does not include the United States or North America, Nettleton said it does scrutinize hate-speech laws and instances where abortion clinic protestors have been targeted in the United States and Canada.

### **‘Duck Dynasty’ controversy**

The recent Duck Dynasty controversy would not rise to that level, he added.

“Part of a free society is a TV station can choose who they have or don’t have on their station,” Nettleton said. “I don’t identify what happened here as an issue of Christian persecution.”

What American Christians can focus on instead is to remember the persecuted body of Christ around the world, Nettleton said.

“The reality is that Christians are imprisoned for their faith every day of the year, so we would love to see the American church make it more of a part of their everyday prayer life.”

### **‘It’s more complex’**

In fact, Rogers said, prayer was the No. 1 request of the Christians he met in Egypt—especially of those whose churches were burned down in 2013.

“They also said instead of coming over here necessarily, this is how you fight back—love your neighbor ... right where you live,” said Rogers, now the minister of youth and young adults at an Episcopal church in San Antonio.

Green will host a webinar this spring featuring Americans, Egyptians, Christians and Muslims discussing the violence that occurred in Egypt last year and examining its deeper sources.

“It’s to help our Christian brothers and sisters, and others, hear another voice and to understand it’s more complex than Muslims coming up against Christians,” Green said.