

Christians globally experiencing both revival and persecution

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WACO—In a time of global religious revival, people of faith face significant ongoing persecution, human rights advocate Elijah Brown told a Baylor University crowd.

The same trends—expansion and repression—that characterize religion in general apply particularly to Christians and more specifically to Baptists, said Brown, executive vice president of the [21st Century Wilberforce Initiative](#) and general secretary-elect of the Baptist World Alliance.

Global revival and religious expansion

“Baptists around the world are currently living in an age of their greatest global revival and expansion. It is unprecedented growth,” said Brown, who delivered the Dawson Wamble Lecture Oct. 3 at Baylor. “And in many respects, this is true for Protestantism and Christianity more broadly, and even for some other religions.”

Brown noted seven of the top 10 countries with the highest Protestant populations are in Africa, Asia or Latin America, and there are more Protestants in Asia than in Europe and North America.

Protestants in Europe and North America combined total about 151 million, compared to 228 million in Africa, he reported.

“Protestantism writ large is experiencing significant global expansion,” he said.

Turning to Baptists in particular, Brown noted in the past 25 years, the All Africa Baptist Fellowship grew 832 percent, the Union Baptists of Latin America grew 193 percent, the All Pacific Baptist Fellowship grew 122 percent and the Caribbean Baptist Fellowship grew 76 percent.

Significant religious persecution

However, people of faith around the world face significant religious restrictions, Brown said. The latest report from the Pew Research Center notes widespread government harassment increased 24 percent in one year, expanding from 85 countries to 105 countries.

He pointed to three key trends in religious persecution—ongoing crisis in Syria and Iraq, transnational activities by groups such as ISIS, Boko Haram and Al-Qaeda, and repression by authoritarian governments.

Brown reported four out of 10 Baptists live in a context where government-sponsored mass state killing is a possibility.

“Baptists face persecution around the world,” he said.

- In 36 countries, Baptists face high to very high religious freedom restrictions. “To put it another way, Baptists are more diversely persecuted than are adherents to traditional indigenous religion, Hindus, Buddhists or those who hold to no faith,” he said.
- About 35 million Baptists in 125,000 churches associated with the BWA face high to very high government restrictions or social hostilities due to their faith.
- Globally, 78 percent of all Baptists, 74 percent of all Baptist churches and 40 percent of all BWA member bodies live in a context where they regularly encounter social hostilities, injustice and persecution.

While the numbers can seem overwhelming, Brown acknowledged, he pointed to examples of ways individuals or small groups of people have been able to influence attitudes toward persecuted groups and shape public policy to protect the religious liberty rights of all people.

“Religious freedom belongs to people of all faiths or it belongs to none of us,” he emphasized.

Brown called for greater engagement by the U.S. government, by churches, by universities and by individuals.

He noted several specific initiatives:

- **The International Religious Freedom Scorecard.** Compiled and published by the 21st Century Wilberforce Initiative, the scorecard grades all 100 U.S. Senators and 435 members of the House of Representatives on their support for international religious freedom. “I don’t know offhand the records of all 535 individuals, but I can say if you live in Texas and you are not from the Houston area, your representative did not get an A,” he noted. Download the scorecard by clicking [here](#).
- **Speak Freedom Texas.** The partnership between the 21st Century Wilberforce Initiative and the Baptist General Convention of Texas calls on churches to focus attention on victims of religious persecution Nov. 4-5. To download tools for church engagement, click [here](#).
- **#RedWednesday.** The #RedWednesday campaign is an international event that started in the United Kingdom last year and the 21st Century Wilberforce Initiative is promoting in the United States this year Nov. 22. Participants are asked to wear red that day and post photos on social media using #RedWednesday to

let other people know they are standing with people who are persecuted for their faith. “What would it look like if a group of students came together to encourage Baylor University to use red floodlights all day on that Wednesday to light up some or even all of its buildings?” he asked.

- **Prayer.** “Prayer is the most important way for us to engage,” Brown said. “Be intentional with your prayers to remember those who are giving witness in the midst of a costly time. On average, every day around 20 Christians are martyred for their faith.”
- **Letters.** Pastors Langjaw Gam Seng and Dumdaw Nawng Latt remained [imprisoned in Myanmar](#) for helping a journalist who documented evidence of the military’s bombing of a Catholic church. “Their freedom may well depend upon the actions taken on their behalf,” Brown said. He encouraged students and others to write letters of encouragement to Seng and Latt at Lashio Prison, Lashio Township, Northern Shan State, Republic of the Union of Myanmar. Even if the letters are not forwarded to the pastors, they likely will receive better treatment if prison officials know the international religious community is aware of their situation and concerned about them, he added.