

Editorial: Stand up for someone's rights today

December 8, 2016

*Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves,
for the rights of all who are destitute.*

*Speak up and judge fairly;
defend the rights of the poor and needy.*

(Proverbs 31:8-9)



Marv KnoxNow, as never before, U.S. Christians need to stand up for the rights of persecuted people, both around the world and in the United States. This weekend, members of the Baptist World Alliance—including Texas Baptists—join concerned global citizens in observing Human Rights Day.

This event historically is held Dec. 10 to coincide with the anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted shortly after the end of World War II, in 1948. Baptists observe Human Rights Day on the closest Sunday, which this year is Dec. 11.

Great timing

Recognition of Human Rights Day providentially falls during Advent, when Christians around the globe anticipate the coming of Jesus, the Prince of Peace. Unfortunately, people of many faiths the world over cannot

experience peace because they are persecuted for their religious beliefs.

Baptists, of all people, should champion religious liberty and stand up for human rights. We were born out of religious strife a little more than 400 years ago, when a band of English Separatists, seeking freedom, moved to Holland and started the first Baptist church. Throughout our early years, Baptists suffered religious persecution, both in Europe and in the New World.

But Baptists did not seek liberty for ourselves alone; we did not hoard freedom. Thomas Helwys, one of Baptists' founders, died in a London prison after penning a tract advocating religious liberty for all people and earning the wrath of King James. A generation later, Baptist Roger Williams founded Rhode Island Colony in America to preserve religious liberty for people of all faiths and of no faith. More than a century after that, John Leland, a Baptist pastor, helped secure guarantees for religious freedom in the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

Equal-opportunity scourge

Today, Baptists join Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Yazidis, Baha'is and adherents of other faiths who suffer and die for their religious beliefs. For the most part, the persecuted were unfortunate to have been born in a part of the world where followers of their faith comprise a minority. And so followers of other faiths—in an act of cowardice and cruelty that defies any faith—torment them and kill them. Some also suffer at the will of atheistic governments, whose internal logic may be more consistent but whose consequence is equally callous.

Many U.S. Christians, and particularly evangelicals, confuse the issue by claiming persecution for themselves. They apparently mistake adamant disagreement for persecution. They evidently mistake requirements to behave as other citizens for oppression. They seemingly expect privilege

and exemption for themselves and consider anything less as tantamount to mistreatment.

Such thinking is unproductive and unwarranted, particularly in light of the presidential election. Eighty-one percent of evangelicals voted for Donald Trump, providing a solid bloc that ensured his margin of victory. Trump has said—[and his key evangelical supporters have confirmed](#)—he will remember and reward their fidelity. So, cries of persecution from the privileged ring hypocritical and disingenuous.

Stand with the persecuted

Meanwhile, Christians and people of other faiths elsewhere bleed and die for their beliefs. And if Trump lives up to his campaign promises, Muslims will suffer persecution and discrimination by the U.S. government, solely for their religious convictions.

Because of realities abroad and threats at home, Christians must stand up for others' religious liberty the world over. Human Rights Day is upon us, and if you have not already prepared, you may not have time to work it into your worship or Sunday school planning for this Sunday.

But that doesn't give us a pass. Let's observe Human Rights Day by committing to educate ourselves and others, then by speaking up for those who endure religious persecution and denial of basic rights. Here are some links to help you follow through:

- Baptist World Alliance: Human Rights Day
<http://www.bwanet.org/human-rights-day-2016>
- The 21st Century Wilberforce Initiative
<http://www.21wilberforce.org>
- The United Nations: Human Rights Day 2016

<http://www.un.org/en/events/humanrightsday>

- Stand Up for Human Rights

<http://www.standup4humanrights.org/en>

- U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom

<http://www.uscirf.gov>

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