



Written by [Bruce Walker](#) on February 10, 2012

## Syrian Christians Fear Genocide if al-Assad Falls to Muslim Extremists

Catholic bishops are warning that if the Bashar al-Assad (left) regime in Syria falls to Islamists, there may well be a mass genocide of Christians, such as seen in Iraq after the fall of Saddam Hussein. Though Christians cannot support the brutality of the Assad dictatorship, few believe that rule by Muslim extremists will be any better.



Syria — home to Damascus, one of the most important cities of the ancient world and of special religious significance to Christians — has long had a tolerant attitude toward religious minorities. Syria's Christians — estimated to be about 10 percent of the population, or 2.5 million — cherish this tradition of non-religious government. The Ba'athist Party of Syria had a counterpart in the Ba'athist Party of Iraq, whose last leader was Saddam Hussein. The party was actually founded by Michael Aflaq, a Syrian Christian, and although there are many objectionable features to its politics (it is, for example, overtly socialist), people of all faiths were able to live in relative safety even in a Syria in which the overwhelming majority of the inhabitants are Muslims.

Ignatius Joseph III, Patriarch of the Syrian Catholic Church, explained the plight of the Syrian Christians:

The Christians in Syria face a dilemma. They are morally obligated to support the protestors, but if Assad falls, sectarian strife could ravage the country and Islamic terrorists will target Christians as they have in Iraq and Egypt. If they support Assad and he falls they could be targets for revenge. That is why the Christian community in Syria is largely silent, not knowing what to do.

Gwendolyn Cates, a filmmaker who has produced documentaries on religious minorities in the Middle East, agrees that Assad's is "a very repressive regime," but also notes that Syria has been open to religious refugees who flooded the country after the rise of the Islamic regime in Iraq. She has interviewed Christians who have left Syria, and relates that the situation of those still in the country is grim.

David Wood, a Christian activist who focuses on radical Islam, notes:

Assad is brutal, but he's equally brutal towards everyone, Muslim and non-Muslim. If Islamists



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take over the country, and they most certainly will if the secular regime falls, they will be every bit as brutal as Assad, but they will not treat people equally. Christians will be in quite a bit of trouble.

A church leader in Syria who fears to make his identity known, spoke of the peril to Christians:

Look at what happened in Egypt and Iraq. Christians want to peacefully go out and ask for certain changes, but Islamist groups are sneaking in with their goal, which is not to make Syria better but to take over the country with their agenda. Christians will be the first to pay if this happens.

Others have predicted the dangerous position for the few Christians who might remain if there is a general exodus of Christians. The more who flee, the smaller the Christian vote in any democratic process as well as the smaller the Christian presence in community life, where many of the Christians in Syria have deep and ancient roots in their homeland.

Disturbingly, the U.S. government has been vocally supporting “democratic movements” in Syria, as it has in Egypt and Libya.



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