

Consider that on our watch a historic exodus of Christians from the Middle East is underway—an exodus fueled by persecution.

German Lutheran pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer, faced with the tyranny and horror of Nazism, famously said, “Silence in the face of evil is itself evil. Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act.”

And that is precisely what many in the church did, or failed to do, as Hitler unleashed his murderous plans. I recently encountered this haunting account by a German Christian in the book *When a Nation Forgets God*:

“I lived in Germany during the Nazi Holocaust. I considered myself a Christian. We heard stories of what was happening to the Jews, but we tried to distance ourselves from it, because, what could anyone do to stop it?”

A railroad track ran behind our small church and each Sunday morning we could hear the whistle in the distance and then the wheels coming over the tracks. We became disturbed when we heard the cries coming from the train as it passed by. We realized that it was carrying Jews like cattle in the cars!

Week after week the whistle would blow. We dreaded to hear the sound of those wheels because we knew that we would hear the cries of the Jews en route to a death camp. Their screams tormented us.

We knew the time the train was coming and when we heard the whistle blow we began singing hymns. By the time the train came past our church we were singing at the top of our voices. If we heard the screams, we sang more loudly and soon we heard them no more.

Years have passed and no one talks about it anymore. But I still hear that train whistle in my sleep. God forgive me; forgive all of us who called ourselves Christians and yet did nothing to intervene.”

The parallels are imperfect but the sentiments are the same. Has our comfort led to complacency? Can the church in the West be galvanized to act?

A phrase not often heard outside the majority Muslim world is “First the Saturday people, then the Sunday people.” The “Saturday people” are of course the Jews. Their once vibrant communities in countries throughout the region are now decimated. In 1948 there were roughly 150,000 Jews in Iraq; today less than 10 remain. In Egypt, there were once as many as 80,000 Jews; now less than 100 remain.

It appears a similar fate awaits the ancient Christian community in these same lands. Iraq’s Christian population has fallen from as many as 1.4 million in 2003 to between 500,000 and 700,000 today. Churches have been targeted, believers kidnapped for ransom and families threatened with violence if they stay. In October 2010, Islamist extremists laid siege on Our Lady of Salvation Catholic Church in Baghdad killing over 50 hostages and police and wounding dozens more.

In Egypt with the ascent of the Muslim Brotherhood, Coptic Christians, numbering roughly 8 to 10 million, are leaving in droves. Ironically, some 2,000 years ago, the Holy Family sought refuge in this same land from the murderous aims of King Herod.

In the midst of devastating bloodshed in Syria, the Christian population is particularly vulnerable. A recent ABC News story reported, “They [Christians] are fearful that Syria will become another Iraq, with Christians caught in the crossfire between rival Islamic groups.”

Over the span of a few decades, the Middle East, with the exception of Israel, was virtually emptied of Jews. The same thing will happen to the Christian community if the current trajectory holds true. And yet, the silence of many in the West is deafening.

Such stories receive scant attention in the mainstream media, and perhaps more strikingly, are rarely spoken of from our pulpits.

A recent study on Christian persecution released by the British-based think tank Civitas explained the media’s seeming ambivalence this way: “Parts of the media have been influenced by the logical error that equates criticism of Muslims with racism, and therefore as wrong by definition. This has further distracted attention away from the hounding of Christians, helping to cement the surprisingly widespread idea that Christianity is a ‘Western’ faith.”

And yet, we in the church ought to know better. The Middle East is the very cradle of Christendom. Consider Iraq: with the exception of Israel, the Bible contains more references to the cities, regions and nations of ancient Iraq than any other country. The patriarch Abraham came from a city in Iraq called Ur. Isaac’s bride, Rebekah, came from northwest Iraq. Jacob spent 20 years in Iraq and his sons (the 12 tribes of Israel) were born in northwest Iraq. A remarkable spiritual revival as told in the book of Jonah occurred in Nineveh. The events of the book of Esther took place in Iraq as did the account of Daniel in the Lion’s Den. Furthermore, many of Iraq’s Christians still speak Aramaic, the language of Jesus.

So how do we account for the Church’s indifference? Is it political correctness? Lack of awareness? What tragedy must befall this community before we are propelled to act?

The persecution plaguing the Middle East is no exception. Christians are targeted throughout the world in countries like China, Vietnam and Pakistan. According to the Civitas study, “More Christians are imprisoned in China than in any other country in the world.” If the faith community in the West isn’t engaged, are we surprised when government leaders turn a blind eye to matters of religious freedom?

Consider the following: bipartisan legislation to create a special envoy position at the State Department charged with advocating on behalf of religious minorities in the Middle East and South Central Asia overwhelmingly passed the House of Representatives more than a year and a half ago. But it remained stalled in the Senate as a result of State Department opposition and the refusal of the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and presumptive secretary of state, John Kerry, to even hold a hearing on the legislation.

I have had the privilege of meeting individuals who boldly follow Jesus despite unbelievably hostile circumstances. Shabbaz Bhatti, Pakistan’s federal minister for minority affairs, and the only Christian Member of the cabinet and an outspoken critic of his country’s blasphemy laws, was one such man. On March 2, 2011 he was murdered, his car riddled with bullets, leaving his mother’s house for work. In a video filmed shortly before his assassination (accessible on my Web site at <http://wolf.house.gov/bhattivideo>), Bhatti appears to sense that the path he has chosen will come with a price.

When asked about the threats against his life, he said, without malice or fear, “I believe in Jesus Christ who has given his own life for us. I know what is the meaning of [the] cross. And I am following the cross. And I am ready to die for a cause.” And so he did.

The book of Proverbs tells us to “Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves . . .” Bhatti can no longer speak. The Chinese bishop under house arrest cannot speak. The North Korean believer enslaved in the gulag can’t speak. The Iraqi nun fearing for her life cannot speak.

Will we be their voice? Martin Luther King, Jr. famously said, “In the end, we will

remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends.” Are we not their friends?

The Church globally is under assault. Our response must not be to simply sing more loudly, thereby drowning out the cries for help from our brothers and sisters. Rather we must speak out, advocate and act on their behalf.

From my perspective the Church in the West, specifically in America, is failing in this regard. Can you, as a leader in the Church, help? Are you pained by these accounts of persecution? Do you have ideas about how best to respond? Will you use your sphere of influence to raise the profile of this issue—be it through a sermon, writing or media interview? I welcome your thoughts and invite your engagement in this monumental task.

Next week, when Congress reconvenes, I intend to reintroduce the special envoy legislation and press for passage in both houses of Congress. I don’t pretend to think that a special envoy will single-handedly solve the problem, but it certainly can’t hurt to have a high-level person within the State Department bureaucracy who is exclusively focused on the protection and preservation of these ancient communities. Furthermore, to do nothing is simply not an option.

We in the West must speak out on behalf of the persecuted church around the world.

Best wishes.

Sincerely,

FRANK R. WOLF,  
*Member of Congress.*

P.S. I know you are busy and have so many competing priorities but your involvement could really make a difference in the lives of believers around the world.

## CONGENITAL HEART DEFECT AWARENESS WEEK

HON. BILLY LONG

OF MISSOURI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, January 22, 2013*

Mr. LONG. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Congenital Heart Defect Awareness Week, which is February 7th–14th.

This week is dedicated to the millions of Americans who have been diagnosed with Congenital Heart Defects, the challenges their families face and for the families of those who have sadly lost loved ones to this condition. Congenital Heart Disease is considered to be the most common birth defect and is also the leading cause of birth defect related deaths worldwide.

Each year approximately forty thousand babies are born in the United States with Congenital Heart Defects and some remain undiagnosed for months or even years after birth. This dangerous condition, if left undiagnosed, can cause sudden cardiac death especially in young adolescent athletes.

Unfortunately, despite these statistics, newborns and young athletes are not routinely screened for Congenital Heart Defects and funding for research regarding the condition is limited.

Mr. Speaker, Congenital Heart Defects affect millions of Americans and I rise to recognize those affected by this condition and to help bring awareness to this important cause.

## OUR UNCONSCIONABLE NATIONAL DEBT

**HON. MIKE COFFMAN**

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, January 22, 2013*

Mr. COFFMAN. Mr. Speaker, on January 3, 2009, the day I took office, the national debt was \$10,627,961,295,930.67.

Today, it is \$16,432,619,424,703.06. We've added \$5,804,658,128,772.39 to our debt in 4 years. This is \$5.8 trillion in debt our nation, our economy, and our children could have avoided with a Balanced Budget Amendment. We must stop this unconscionable accumulation of debt.

## TRIBUTE TO CLAUDIA LUPPINO

**HON. KEN CALVERT**

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, January 22, 2013*

Mr. CALVERT. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor and pay tribute to an individual whose dedication and contributions to southern California are exceptional. Our community has been fortunate to have dynamic and dedicated leaders who willingly and unselfishly give their time and talent to make their communities a better place to live and work. Claudia Luppino is one of these individuals. On Friday, January 4, 2013, Claudia ended her tenure as the Area Director for the Inland Area jurisdiction of the Social Security Administration (SSA) after 37 years of service.

Claudia grew up in Erie, Pennsylvania, where she and her future husband Bud were high school sweethearts. After graduating from Erie Business College, the young military wife began her government career with the U.S. Army Computer Systems Command at Fort Belvoir, Virginia, later transferring to March Air Force Base in Riverside. In 1977, after Bud left the Air Force, she began her career with Social Security as the Administrative Aide in the Riverside District office. Since then, she has held more than a dozen positions with the Agency, including Claims Representative, Operations Analyst and Operations Supervisor.

In 1985 Claudia was selected as the Area Analyst in the Inland Area Director's Office (ADO), and in 1987 she became the District Manager in the Redlands Office, where she served for two years before being selected as the Operations Officer in San Bernardino. In 1993 Claudia rejoined the Inland ADO as the Area Administrative Assistant, and later went on to serve as the Assistant District Manager in Palm Springs, District Manager in North Las Vegas, District Manager in Victorville, Deputy Area Director in the Inland Area Director's Office and the District Manager for the Riverside District. Claudia is a graduate of the Region IX Leadership Development Program and has received numerous awards, including the Regional Commissioner's Citation.

Claudia recently concluded an assignment as the Acting Area Director in the Los Angeles Metro Area. She served for over six months as the Acting Area Director in the Inland Area, where she oversaw 540 employees in 16 offices in Riverside and San Bernardino counties, and all of Nevada. It was a responsibility

she took seriously. According to her, "There is no other government agency that provides the critical services SSA does, providing retirement, survivors and disability benefits as well as Supplemental Security Income benefits to the American public." What she will miss most about her job, she said, "is that very ability to make a difference in the lives of so many people."

In her retirement, Claudia plans to help her husband Bud with his business, Bud's Tire and Wheel, Inc. in Riverside, and a shop in Moreno Valley. They will soon begin construction on a third location in Riverside. She also looks forward to traveling more, learning Italian and spending time with her three grandsons.

In light of all Claudia has done for southern California seniors, it is only fitting that she be honored for her many years of dedicated service. Claudia's tireless passion for public service has contributed immensely to the betterment of the Inland Empire and I am proud to call her a fellow community member, American and friend. I know that many community members are grateful for her service and salute her as she retires.

## RECOGNITION OF STEVEN GOLDSTEIN

**HON. FRANK PALLONE, JR.**

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, January 22, 2013*

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Mr. Steven Goldstein as he embarks on a new venture in life. Mr. Goldstein has worked tirelessly on behalf of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community in New Jersey and it is my honor to celebrate him at Garden State Equality's Inauguration Brunch.

Steven Goldstein founded Garden State Equality in 2004 and has since led it as CEO and Chair. During his tenure, Garden State Equality has seen 213 LGBT civil rights laws enacted in N.J. A proponent of equal rights for all, Garden State Equality, under Mr. Goldstein's leadership, also advocated for anti-bullying laws and created programs aimed at helping N.J.'s youth. As Mr. Goldstein passes on the torch as CEO and Chair of Garden State Equality to pursue a new career as Associate Chancellor for External Affairs at Rutgers University—Newark, he remains committed to the organization and its cause and will serve as its Honorary Chair on the Board and executive committee.

Mr. Goldstein earned a B.A. from Brandeis University, an M.P.P. from Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government, an M.S. from the Columbia School of Journalism and a J.D. from Columbia Law School. In addition to his time at Garden State Equality, Mr. Goldstein's resume includes working as a senior staff member in the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate, a co-campaign manager of a U.S. Senate campaign in N.J., a television producer and an educator. He also endeavors to become a rabbi and is working toward that goal.

Mr. Speaker, once again, please join me in thanking Steven Goldstein for his years of service to Garden State Equality and his immeasurable contributions to the State of New

Jersey. Mr. Goldstein's leadership and ongoing accomplishments are truly deserving of this body's recognition.

## HONORING CONGRESSWOMAN JO ANN EMERSON ON HER RETIREMENT

**HON. WM. LACY CLAY**

OF MISSOURI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, January 22, 2013*

Mr. CLAY. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor a great American who leaves this body today to return to the private sector, my wonderful friend from Cape Girardeau . . . Congresswoman JO ANN EMERSON. Her retirement is a great loss to the citizens of southeast Missouri, to our State, and to our Nation.

As the outgoing dean of Missouri's congressional delegation, she has led our group with fairness, respect, and a spirit of cooperation. As she retires today, I know that every member of the Missouri delegation, as well as her many friends on both sides of the aisle, join me in congratulating her on an exceptional career in the U.S. House. Congresswoman JO ANN EMERSON has represented southeast Missouri with honor and integrity and in the face of so much discord, so much distortion, and too often, an inability to compromise,

Jo ANN has always been a voice of calm, reason, and good common sense. There is no doubt that the center aisle caucus will miss her strong, principled leadership. Congresswoman EMERSON is a member who searches for common ground . . .

Both out of instinct and because of her deeply held belief that Congress was sent here to work together to solve problems, not to obstruct the government, not to incite intolerance or rancor, not to set one region of the country against the other, but to seek out, and then support a common agenda that will do the most good for America.

That is how Jo ANN has lived her life, and that is how she has served. Congresswoman EMERSON is a skilled legislator, she is a wonderful colleague, and she is a great friend of mine. Congresswoman EMERSON represents the best of Missouri.

I will miss her wise voice as Democrats and Republicans seek common ground to move the Nation forward. My only consolation on her retirement, is the knowledge that my good friend, her husband, attorney Ron Gladney, and their wonderful children . . . will finally have their wife and mother back. And that is a great family blessing that we should all understand and appreciate. From the dark days immediately after she assumed the congressional seat of her late husband . . . Congressman Bill Emerson.

Jo ANN has brought the Missouri values of common sense, family, community, faith, and freedom to the floor every day.

I shall miss her wisdom, her kindness, and her decency, and I know that our State, this honorable body, and our Nation will be forever grateful for her service.

Congresswoman, I thank you for all your help and friendship, I congratulate you on your retirement. May God bless you and your family.