

Muslim Persecution of Christians



By Robert Spencer

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The popular image of the Crusades is of Christian warriors terrorizing non-Christians, forcing them to convert or expelling them from their lands, and establishing Christian rule. In the eyes of many, the Crusades are not just a relic of history; they're going on right now. To avoid further accusations of following in their dark footsteps, President Bush dropped the word from his vocabulary when Europeans scolded him for speaking of America's crusade against terror. In fact, however, the Crusades were an attempt to rescue Christian lands that had been conquered by Islam, while today's political correctness obscures the terrible reality of a resurgent Islam. There is no Christian Crusade (and only a weak-kneed, inconsistent campaign against terror). But there is a persecution of Christians in Muslim lands, where they are being victimized more relentlessly and brutally today than they have been since the defeat of the Islamic empire at the gates of Vienna on September 11, 1683.

Beginning with Osama bin Laden's infamous fatwa against "Jews and Crusaders," Islamic ji-

hadists have conducted a war against the West, while justifying their aggressions as a defensive campaign against a holy war war Christians were allegedly waging against Islam. Echoing these charges in Qatar, in January 2011, the celebrated leftwing journalist Seymour Hersh claimed that retired General Stanley McChrystal and military personnel currently serving in special operations units were part of a secret cabal bent on waging a new Crusade against Muslims: “They do see what they’re doing -- and this is not an atypical attitude among some military -- it’s a crusade, literally,” Hersh said. “They see themselves as the protectors of the Christians. They’re protecting them from the Muslims [as in] the 13th century. And this is their function.”¹

Like much that appears in the press, this is absurd. If McChrystal and others really considered themselves to be “the protectors of the Christians” from Islamic jihad attacks, they were failing miserably at their task. Iraq -- a nation largely liberated by Christians and still occupied by their armies -- is today an Islamic Republic that has instituted shari’a law in its Constitution. At the same time,

¹ Jeff Schogol, “McChrystal denies claims of secret military crusade against Islam,” *Stars and Stripes*, January 21, 2011.

Muslim persecution of Christians in the last decade has dramatically increased worldwide and is now worse than ever. In a now frequently heard cry of distress, Egyptian Catholic spokesman Fr. Rafic Greische told Vatican Radio in December 2010 that “Muslim fundamentalists...want the Christians to evacuate from the Middle East and leave. And this is what is happening every day.”² From Egypt to Nigeria, from Iraq to Pakistan, Christians in majority-Muslim countries face a grimmer present and a more uncertain future than ever, as Islamic jihadists step up their efforts to Islamize them or drive them out of their lands – or kill them outright.

Yet the world continues to avert its eyes. Fearful of offending Muslim sensibilities, the international community has largely ignored this persecution, allowing it to go on under the cover of silence. Thus unchallenged, Muslim persecution of Christians has become a drearily familiar narrative, repeated with terrifying frequency in Muslim-controlled areas throughout the world. An especially disturbing dimension of these persecutions is that in no other instance of violence around the world today is religious bigotry, hatred and bloodshed legitimized

² “Priest says Muslim extremists want to rid Middle East of Christians,” *Catholic News Agency*, December 19, 2010.

by holy writ, in this case the Qur'an and other Islamic texts and teachings. Nowhere else does religious bigotry have such bloody consequences. And yet nowhere else does such religious bigotry take place almost entirely without comment, let alone condemnation, from the human rights community.

Emblematic of how the mainstream media and human rights organizations gloss over the harsh reality of Christian persecution was a January 2011 *Associated Press* story about machete-wielding Muslims who had brutally murdered six Christians in Nigeria. *AP*'s headline was "6 dead in religion-torn central Nigerian region," as if the cause of the problem was a "sectarian strife" that was the equal responsibility of both sides. The lead paragraph read: "Authorities say machete-wielding attackers have killed six people in two attacks on Christian villages in central Nigeria."³ While the victims were identified, the attackers were not identified as Muslims until later in the story, and then only in the context of their retaliating against an earlier attack upon Muslims by Christians. The minority Christians have indeed fought back in Nigeria, but it is the Islamic jihadists who are the aggressors

³"6 dead in religion-torn central Nigerian region," *Associated Press*, January 24, 2011.

and who created the conflict. One would never, however, get that idea from the *Associated Press*.

Muslim persecution of Christians in 2010 and 2011 reached unprecedented levels. Yet human rights organizations gave only perfunctory recognition to these outrages, and world leaders yawned. Christians were evidently not fashionable or politically correct victims, so they suffered in a vacuum.

Iraq

The history of Christianity in Iraq goes back to the first century, when the Assyrians accepted the Christian faith. In the early Middle Ages, the Nestorian Church, based in present-day Iraq, stretched all across Asia and into China – before its vibrancy and reach were destroyed by the Mongol invaders who soon adopted Islam, a creed that meshed nicely with their warrior spirit.

Before the Gulf War, some estimates held the number of Christians in Iraq to be approaching a million or more; since 2003, however, over half of Iraq's prewar Christians have fled the country. This is not to suggest that the brutal regime of Saddam

Hussein, which America toppled, had been particularly hospitable to Iraqi Christians; even in the relatively secular Iraq of Saddam, where Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz was a Chaldean Catholic Christian, the small Christian community faced random violence from the Muslim majority. Aside from outbreaks of actual persecution, including murder, Christians were routinely pressured to renounce their religion and to marry Muslims.⁴

But now the situation has grown exponentially worse. Saddam did not enforce the fullness of Islamic law mandating the subjugation of Christians; now, numerous armed groups are determined to do so, or to punish those Christians who do not submit. Jihadists bombed forty Iraqi churches between 2004 and 2011 – seven on a single day, Orthodox Christmas Eve 2007.⁵ The most notorious attack came on October 31, 2010, a Sunday, when jihadists stormed the crowded Our Lady of Salvation church in Baghdad and began murdering worshippers in cold blood. Sixty-eight people were

⁴ Aid to the Church in Need, “Religious Freedom in the Majority Islamic Countries 1998 Report: Iraq.” http://www.alleanzaticolica.org/acs/acs_english/report_98/iraq.htm

⁵ Bridget Johnson, “Bipartisan effort pressures Obama to help Iraq’s Christians,” *The Hill*, December 25, 2010.

killed.⁶

Late in 2010 Iraqi Christians related how masked Islamic jihadists had come to their houses in the middle of the night, ordering them to “convert to Islam, leave or die.”⁷ Iraqi Christians today are streaming into Syria, or, if they can, out of the Middle East altogether. An Iraqi businessman now living in Syria lamented that “now at least 75% of my Christian friends have fled. There is no future for us in Iraq.”⁸ As she fled to a Christian area in Iraqi Kurdistan in late 2010, Ban Daub, a Christian woman who survived the October 2010 jihad massacre at Our Lady of Salvation church, explained: “We are afraid for our sons and our children. There is no life in Baghdad for the Christians.”⁹ Another refugee in Istanbul, asked if he was planning on going back to Iraq, responded: “Going back to what?”

⁶ “Baghdad church hostage drama ends in bloodbath,” BBC, November 1, 2010.

⁷ Zvi Bar’el, “*Christmas requiem for Iraq’s Christian community*,” Haaretz, December 24, 2010.

⁸ William Dalrymple, “The final place of refuge for Christians in the Middle East is under threat,” *The Guardian*, September 2, 2006.

⁹ Rebecca Santana, “Iraqi Christians get set for a grim Christmas,” *Associated Press*, December 19, 2010.

Getting killed?”¹⁰ After Sweden returned several Christian refugees to Iraq late in 2010, Iraqi officials met with Swedish authorities and asked them to stop. “We cannot receive Iraqi refugees deported forcibly from Sweden,” explained an Iraqi diplomat, “because we cannot protect them and their lives will be at risk if they are returned to Iraq.”¹¹

Those who remain in Iraq live in daily peril from random jihad attacks. In late December 2010, right after an Islamic group announced its intention to murder Iraqi Christians, jihadists planted bombs around at least fourteen Christian homes in Baghdad. Two Christians were killed and twenty more wounded. A Christian member of the Iraqi Parliament, Younadim Yousif, declared: “The government bears full responsibility for these attacks, because they already promised to secure the Christians. I think there is complicity by security forces helping insurgents to implement their attacks, because it is unbelievable that they could plant more than 10 I.E.D.’s in different areas targeting

¹⁰ “Haunted by violence, Iraqi Christians flee to Turkey,” *Agence France Presse*, January 16, 2011.

¹¹ Nuri Kino, “We Cannot Protect Assyrians and Other Minorities: Iraqi Official,” *Assyrian International News Agency*, December 27, 2010.

Christians.”¹²

The same threats led Christians in Kirkuk, Mosul and Basra to cancel Christmas celebrations for 2010, preferring instead to stay out of sight and away from the churches that were looking more and more like potential jihadist targets.¹³ Going to the authorities was not a viable option, either. An Iraqi Christian complained in December 2010 that Christians were afraid to contact Iraqi officials, because “contacting the authorities forces us to identify ourselves, and we aren’t certain that some of the people threatening us aren’t the people in the government offices that are supposed to be protecting us.”¹⁴

In January 2011, in a sadly typical incident, Islamic jihadists entered Mosul’s Rabi’a hospital and shot Nuyia Youssif Nuyia, a well-known Christian cardiologist who worked there, at point-blank

¹² John Leland and Omar Al-Jawoshy, “Christians Are Casualties of 10 Baghdad Attacks,” *New York Times*, December 30, 2010.

¹³ Yahya Barzanji and Sameer N. Yacoub, “3 Iraqi cities cancel Christmas festivities,” *Associated Press*, December 22, 2010.

¹⁴ Zvi Bar’el, “Christmas requiem for Iraq’s Christian community,” *Haaretz*, December 24, 2010.

range.¹⁵

That same month, jihadists armed with handguns (as well as steel pipes) stormed the Ashurbanipal Cultural Association, a Christian nongovernmental organization. As they stole computers, cellphones, and internal organizational documents, they warned the Christians present: “You are criminals. This is not your country. Leave immediately. This is an Islamic state.”¹⁶

Individual Christians, particularly clergy, face random jihad terror. On April 5, 2008, Youssef Adel, an Assyrian Orthodox priest at St. Peter and Paul church in Baghdad, was killed in a drive-by shooting as he was opening the gate of his house.¹⁷ This attack came just weeks after the death of Archbishop Paulos Faraj Rahho of the Chaldean Catholic Church, who was kidnapped in the Iraqi city of Mosul on February 29 while three Christians with him were also killed. On March 12, the kidnappers

¹⁵ Layla Yousif Rahema, “Christian doctor assaulted in Mosul,” *Asia News*, January 17, 2011.

¹⁶ John Leland, “Baghdad Raids on Alcohol Sellers Stir Fears,” *New York Times*, January 15, 2011.

¹⁷ Sameer N. Yacoub, “Christian Priest Killed in Baghdad,” *Associated Press*, April 5, 2008.

phoned a church in Mosul to announce that Archbishop Rahho was dead, and indicate where the body could be found.¹⁸

Such attacks have been going on for years. In October 2006, a Syrian Orthodox priest, Fr. Boulos Iskander, went shopping for auto parts in the Iraqi city of Mosul. He was never seen alive again. A Muslim group kidnapped him and initially demanded \$350,000 in ransom; they eventually lowered this to \$40,000, but added a new demand: Fr. Boulos' parish had to denounce the remarks about Islam Pope Benedict XVI had made the previous month by in Regensburg, Germany, that had caused rioting all over the Islamic world. The ransom was paid, and the church dutifully posted thirty large signs all over Mosul denouncing the Pope's statements. But it was to no avail. When Fr. Boulos' remains were discovered, he had not only been murdered but dismembered.

Five hundred Christians attended the funeral. Looking at the crowd, another priest commented: "Many more wanted to come to the funeral, but they

¹⁸ Sameer N. Yacoub, "Archbishop kidnapped in Iraq dead," *Associated Press*, March 12, 2008.

were afraid. We are in very bad circumstances now.”¹⁹

The intervening years have brought Iraq’s remaining Christians no relief.

Egypt

Before the Muslim conquest of the seventh century, Egypt was one of the foremost centers of Christianity. The Gospel writer St. Mark is said to have taken the message of Christianity to Egypt, and the patriarchate of Alexandria was for centuries one of the principal sees of the Christian Church – a leading hub of theological and liturgical development. The fourth-century St. Athanasius, the primary formulator of the Nicene Creed that formed the foundation of orthodox Christianity ever after, was an Egyptian, as was St. Anthony, the pioneer of Christian monasticism. At the time of the Muslim conquest, Egypt was 99% Christian.

Where did the Christians go? Most people assume that they became Muslim over the centuries, simply out of attraction to the light of Islam. Some historians say that the lands conquered by the ear-

¹⁹ “Iraq: Kidnappers Behead Priest In Mosul,” *Compass Direct News*, October 12, 2006.

ly Muslims were happy to be free of their corrupt Byzantine rulers and welcomed the invaders. Reality, however, was not so rosy. The Egyptian-born historian Bat Ye'or's eye-opening book *The Decline of Eastern Christianity Under Islam* recounts a history that both the West and the Islamic world would prefer to sweep under the rug:

Sophronius [Bishop of Jerusalem], in his sermon on the Day of Epiphany 636, bewailed the destruction of churches and monasteries, the sacked towns, the fields laid waste, the villages burned down by the nomads who were overrunning the country. In a letter the same year to Sergius, patriarch of Constantinople, he mentions the ravages wrought by the Arabs. Thousands of people perished in 639, victims of the famine and plague that resulted from these destructions.”²⁰

That's how it happened in one place and time. But it's a story that's been repeated, again and again, wherever Muslim armies were triumphant.

²⁰ Bat Ye'or, *The Decline of Eastern Christianity Under Islam*, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1996, p. 44.

Here is a contemporary account of the Muslims' arrival in Nikiou, an Egyptian town, in the 640's:

Then the Muslims arrived in Nikiou. There was not one single soldier to resist them. They seized the town and slaughtered everyone they met in the street and in the churches — men, women and children, sparing nobody. Then they went to other places, pillaged and killed all the inhabitants they found. . . . But let us now say no more, for it is impossible to describe the horrors the Muslims committed when they occupied the island of Nikiou. . . .

Not only did this involve massacres, but exile and enslavement — all based on a broken treaty:

Amr oppressed Egypt. He sent its inhabitants to fight the inhabitants of the Pentapolis [Tripolitania] and, after gaining a victory, he did not allow them to stay there. He took considerable booty from this country and a large number of prisoners. . . . The Muslims returned to their country with booty and captives.

The patriarch Cyrus felt deep grief at the calamities in Egypt, because Amr, who was of barbarian origin, showed no mercy in his treatment of the Egyptians and did not fulfill the covenants which had been agreed with him.

Once the Muslims were entrenched in power, they began to levy the jizya, the tax on non-Muslims:

...Amr's position became stronger from day to day. He levied the tax that had been stipulated . . . But it is impossible to describe the lamentable position of the inhabitants of this town, who came to the point of offering their children in exchange for the enormous sums that they had to pay each month, finding no one to help them because God had abandoned them and had delivered the Christians into the hands of their enemies.²¹

After the Muslims took over and subjected Egyptian Christians to the institutionalized dis-

²¹ Bat Ye'or, pp. 271-272.

crimination inherent in dhimmi status, the Christian community began a slow and steady decline that continues to this day. Coptic Christians have suffered discrimination and harassment for centuries. A law dating from 1856, strongly influenced by classic Islamic restrictions on subjugated non-Muslim dhimmi communities remains on the books to this day, and severely restricts the construction of new churches.²² That law is part of a pervasive tendency toward discrimination. Human Rights Watch reported in January 2011 that “despite the fact that the Egyptian Constitution guarantees the equality of rights, there have been reported cases of widespread discrimination against Egyptian Christians.”²³

The situation of Christians in Egypt has sharply worsened today, with mob attacks on churches and individual Christians becoming more frequent.

Late in 2010 Copts in Egypt experienced an unprecedented reign of terror. An Islamic jihad-martyrdom suicide bomber murdered twenty-two

²² Mary Abdelmassih, “Collapsing Churches Prompt Protests in Egypt For New Law on Church Construction,” *Assyrian International News Agency*, January 22, 2011.

²³ “Christians: HRW Report, Discrimination In Egypt Widespread,” *ANSamed*, January 24, 2011.

people and wounded eighty more at the Coptic Christian Church of the Saints in Alexandria, Egypt on New Year's Eve.²⁴ Just days later, as Christmas (which Copts celebrate on January 7) 2011 approached, an Islamic website carried this ominous exhortation: "Blow up the churches while they are celebrating Christmas or any other time when the churches are packed."²⁵

In February 2007, rumors that a Coptic Christian man was having an affair with a Muslim woman – a violation of Islamic law – led to a rampage that resulted in the destruction of several Christian-owned shops in southern Egypt.²⁶ A similar rumor induced Muslims to torch Christian homes in southern Egypt in November 2010.²⁷ And besides physical attacks, Christians have been restricted from speaking freely. In August 2007, two Coptic rights activists were arrested for "publishing articles and declarations that are damaging to Islam

²⁴ "Death toll in Egypt church bomb blast rises to 22," *Press Trust of India*, January 3, 2011.

²⁵ "Egypt on alert as Copts gather for Christmas Eve," BBC, January 6, 2011.

²⁶ "Love rumour sparks Muslim-Christian clash in Egypt," *Reuters*, February 13, 2007.

²⁷ Salah Nasrawi, "Muslims torch Christian homes in southern Egypt," *Associated Press*, November 16, 2010.

and insulting to Prophet Mohammed on the United Copts web site.”²⁸

Mistreatment of Christians in Egypt frequently meets with indifference -- or complicity -- from Egyptian authorities. In November 2010, Egyptian security forces opened fire on a crowd of unarmed Christians who were protesting against the discrimination and harassment they faced in Egyptian society; four people were killed.²⁹ In June 2007, rioters in Alexandria vandalized Christian shops, attacked and injured seven Christians, and damaged two Coptic churches. Police allowed the mob to roam free in Alexandria’s Christian quarter for an hour and a half before intervening. *The Compass Direct News* service, which tracks incidents of Christian persecution, noted: “In April 2006, Alexandria was the scene of three knife attacks on churches that killed one Christian and left a dozen more injured. The government appeared unable or unwilling to halt subsequent vandalism of Coptic-owned shops and churches...”³⁰

²⁸ “Egypt Christian activists held for ‘insulting Islam,’” *Middle East Times*, August 9, 2007.

²⁹ “Egyptian Security Used Live Ammunition on Christian Coptic Protesters, 4 Killed,” *Assyrian International News Agency*, November 30, 2010.

³⁰ “Egypt: Mobs Attack Churches Near Alexandria,” *Compass Direct News*, June 15, 2007.

The ordeal of Suhir Shihata Gouda exemplifies the experience of many Egyptian Christians, and principally of Christian women, who are frequently victimized by Muslim men.³¹ According to the Jubilee Campaign, which records incidences of Christian persecution:

[A Christian woman named Suhir] was kidnapped on February 25th [1999] by a group of Muslims who forced her to marry a Muslim man, Saed Sadek Mahmoud. After Suhir failed to return home from school, her distraught father rushed to Abu-Tisht police station to report the incident, but instead of assisting him, a police officer began assaulting Suhir's father...beating and cursing him. Three days later, Suhir's father and brother returned to the police station to ask for help and they were subjected to the same abuse, as a result of which the father had to be admitted to hospital for treatment.

³¹ Jubilee Campaign, "Muslim Extremists Pressure Egyptian Christians to Convert to Islam," February 23, 1999. <http://sikhnet.com/sikhnet/discussion.nsf/By+Topic/b2a356d25fe67fa887256aef0079616e?Open>

Suhir herself managed to escape, but was recaptured “and beaten for running away and is currently under heavy guard.” Her Muslim “husband” accompanied a mob to her father’s house where they threatened to kill all the Christian men in Suhir’s home village, and carry off all the women, if her family took legal action.³²

Islamic authorities in Egypt are disinclined to discuss the plight of Christians there. When Pope Benedict XVI spoke out in January 2011 against the persecution of Christians in Egypt and elsewhere in the Middle East, Al-Azhar University in Cairo, the world’s most prestigious Sunni Muslim institution, reacted angrily, breaking off dialogue with the Vatican and accusing the Pope of interference in internal Egyptian affairs. In a statement, Al-Azhar denounced the pontiff’s “repeated negative references to Islam and his claims that Muslims persecute those living among them in the Middle East.”³³ This was not the first time Al-Azhar had moved against those who decried the persecution of Christians in Egypt rather than against the per

³² Jubilee Campaign, “Christian Girl Kidnapped and Forced to Marry Muslim,” March 19, 1999, <http://sikhnet.com/sikhnet/discussion.nsf/By+Topic/b2a356d25fe67fa887256aef0079616e?Open>

³³ “Sunni Islam’s al-Azhar freezes talks with the Vatican,” *Deutsche Presse Agentur*, January 20, 2011.

secutors: just weeks before taking issue with the Pope's statements, Al-Azhar demanded that Copts repudiate a U.S. report on Coptic persecution.³⁴ The Mubarak government of Egypt, meanwhile, recalled its ambassador to the Vatican.³⁵

This persecution combined with denial in Egypt is bad enough, but even worse, Muslims are also targeting Copts worldwide. *The Canadian Press* reported in December 2010 that "the Shumukh-al-Islam website, often considered to be al-Qaeda's mouthpiece, listed pictures, addresses and cellphone numbers of Coptic Christians, predominantly Egyptian-Canadians, who have been vocal about their opposition to Islam." Accompanying this information were calls to murder those listed.³⁶

With the toppling of the Mubarak regime, the situation for Christians became even more precarious. The likelihood that the Muslim Brotherhood would play a significant role in a post-Mubarak

³⁴ "Al-Azhar asks Coptic Church to denounce US religious discrimination claims," *AlMasry AlYoum*, November 26, 2010

³⁵ "Egypt recalls Vatican envoy over pope remarks," *Agence France-Presse*, January 11, 2011.

³⁶ "Canadian-Arab Christians targeted on website," *The Canadian Press*, December 21, 2010.

government boded ill for the Christians, since the relatively secular Arab regimes of Nasser, Sadat, and Mubarak more than once looked the other way when Muslim hardliners terrorized Christians precisely so as to appease Brotherhood elements and prevent them from overthrowing the government. Now that that government is gone, the Christians are more vulnerable than ever, with the group most invested in making life miserable for them in Egypt now most likely to control the direction of Egyptian politics for the foreseeable future.

That was why two thousand Christians mounted a protest in Cairo in late February 2011, calling for a change in Egypt's Constitution to guarantee a secular state. Although Egypt does not fully implement Islamic law, Article 2 of its Constitution currently stipulates that, "Islam is the religion of the state. Arabic is its official language, and the principal source of legislation is Islamic jurisprudence (Sharia)." Protesters chanted: "Tell the people that the revolution is a cross and crescent!" One declared: "We sacrificed our souls for the sake of Egypt, and our aim was a civil state not a religious one. I came here to ask for equality, the Constitution has to be changed and article 2 removed."³⁷

³⁷ Ahmed Zaki Osman, "Egypt's Copts march to demand a secular state," AlMasry AlYoum, February 20, 2011.

But few outcomes seemed less likely, as the world's most influential Islamic cleric, the Muslim Brotherhood spiritual leader Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, who has called Hitler's "final solution" God's well-deserved punishment of the Jews, preached a Friday sermon to a massive crowd in Cairo's Tahrir Square two days before the Christians' much smaller demonstration. Clearly the current in Egypt was moving toward, not away from, the Islamic supremacists. And that boded ill for the Christians.

Pakistan

In Pakistan the situation for Christians is no better. Christians are physically attacked and falsely accused under the nation's blasphemy laws so frequently that a steady stream of Christians is converting to Islam simply in order to be safe from legal harassment and rampaging Islamic supremacist mobs.³⁸ In 2010 blasphemy charges against a Christian woman, Asia Bibi, gained international attention and widespread criticism of Pakistan's blasphemy laws. Yet when the governor of Punjab, Salman Taseer, spoke out in favor of the repeal of

³⁸ Rick Westhead, "Some Christians in Pakistan convert fear into safety," *Toronto Star*, January 20, 2011.

such laws, he was assassinated by an Islamic supremacist who explained that he was acting in defense of the blasphemy laws.³⁹

And just as Al-Azhar reacted angrily when the Pope spoke out against the persecution of Christians in Egypt, in Pakistan Islamic supremacist groups became enraged when the pontiff called for repeal of the nation's blasphemy laws: Farid Paracha, the leader of the largest pro-Sharia party in Pakistan, Jamaat-i-Islami, fumed: "The Pope's statement is an insult to Muslims across the world."⁴⁰ Islamic supremacist groups held rallies protesting the Pope's statement as "part of a conspiracy to pit the world's religions against each other," in the words of Pakistani parliamentarian Sahibzada Fazal Karim.⁴¹

Fr. Emmanuel Asi, chairman of the Theological Institute for Laity in Lahore and secretary of the Catholic Bible Commission of Pakistan, said in August 2007 that Pakistani Christians are frequent-

³⁹ "Punjab governor Salman Taseer assassinated in Islamabad," BBC, January 4, 2011.

⁴⁰ "Pope insults Muslims, say MPs," *The Times*, January 12, 2011.

⁴¹ "Pakistan: Islamists criticise Pope's anti-blasphemy law comments," *AdnKronos International*, January 11, 2011.

ly denied equality of rights with Muslims and subjected to various forms of discrimination. Jihadist aggression, he said, can “at any time” bring “every imaginable kind of problem” upon Pakistan’s Christians.⁴² As in Egypt, Christians in Pakistan have been subjected to mob violence and threats. In August 2007, Christians (as well as Hindus) in Peshawar in northern Pakistan received letters from a jihadist group ordering them to convert to Islam in a matter of days or “your colony will be ruined.” The deadline passed, but according to *Compass Direct*, the Christians continued “to live in fear, canceling church activities and skipping services.”⁴³

Elsewhere in the Islamic world

The same dispiriting story is repeated all over the Muslim world. There are unknown numbers of Christians in Afghanistan, but they generally live underground, lacking churches and not daring to declare themselves openly as Christians for fear of arrest or worse. One secret Christian in Afghani-

⁴² “Priest: Pakistan Short on Religious Freedom,” *Zenit News Agency*, August 21, 2007.

⁴³ “Pakistan: Religious Minorities Told To Convert Or Die,” *Compass Direct News*, August 16, 2007.

stan said in 2011 that the situation had actually gotten worse since the fall of the strict Taliban regime: “I used to carry my Bible everywhere -- I don’t any more. I don’t want to call myself a Christian, people would think I’m immoral.”⁴⁴

Also early in 2011, reports emerged from Besheno, a city in Ethiopia, of Muslims physically attacking Christians and affixing notices to the doors of their homes telling them to convert to Islam or else leave the city; the Christians who remained, said the notices, would be killed. Several Christians have been seriously hurt; others have fled the city, and some have converted to Islam.⁴⁵

In June 2007 Christians in Gaza appealed to the international community for protection after jihadists destroyed a church and a school.⁴⁶ In Sudan, the Khartoum regime has for years waged a bloody jihad against the Christians in the southern part of the country, killing two million Sudanese

⁴⁴ Emmanuel Duparcq, “Afghan Christians live in fear of jail, exile, or worse,” *Agence France Presse*, January 26, 2011.

⁴⁵ “Ethiopian Muslims Warn Christians to Convert, Leave City or Face Death,” *International Christian Concern*, January 25, 2011.

⁴⁶ Khaled Abu Toameh, “Gaza’s Christians fear for their lives,” *Jerusalem Post*, June 18, 2007.

Christians and displacing five million more.⁴⁷ In Spring 2003 jihadists burned to death a Sudanese Christian pastor and his family while carrying out an unprovoked massacre of 59 villagers.⁴⁸

In Nigeria, Muslim mobs have torched churches, enforced Sharia codes on Christians, and even horse-whipped female Christian college students whom they deemed improperly dressed.⁴⁹ Islamic jihadists murdered 86 Christians in bomb attacks at churches on Christmas Eve 2010.⁵⁰ This follows a pattern of jihad violence dating back to 2001, when over 2,000 people were killed in Muslim-instigated riots in the city of Jos. All over Nigeria, Islamic jihadists continue to try to impose the Sharia over the whole country, despite its sizable Christian population. A report warned that in Jos, “the conflict could recur, since Muslim militants

⁴⁷ John Eibner and Charles Jacobs, “France and Germany Abet Genocide,” *Boston Globe*, March 18, 2003.

⁴⁸ “Islamists burn to death Christian pastor, family,” WorldNet-Daily.com, June 4, 2003.

⁴⁹ “Religious rioters torch 10 buildings in Jigawa,” *The Guardian* (Nigeria), September 21, 2006; “Muslim Fundamentalists Attack Xtian Female Students in FUT,” *Daily Champion* (Lagos), reprinted at AllAfrica.com, September 24, 2005.

⁵⁰ “Islamic Sect Claims Nigeria Attacks, Toll At 86,” *Reuters*, December 28, 2010.

are still bent on attacking Christians.”⁵¹ Communities that date back almost two thousand years to the dawn of Christianity have been steadily decreasing in numbers; now the faith is on the verge of disappearing from the area altogether.

The total absence of Christian expression in Saudi Arabia does not surprise anyone familiar with the origins of Islam. The Islamic prophet Muhammad declared: “I will expel the Jews and Christians from the Arabian Peninsula and will not leave any but Muslims.”⁵² According to a modern Islamic legal manual, Christians are “forbidden to reside in the Hijaz, meaning the area and towns around Mecca, Medina, and Yamama, for more than three days.”⁵³ In fact, the highways in Saudi Arabia that lead to Mecca and Medina feature, a good distance away from the holy cities, exits marked “Non-Muslims Must Exit Here.”

⁵¹ “Nigeria: Death Toll Mounts in Religious Conflict,” *Compass Direct News*, January 28, 2002.

⁵² Abdul Hamid Siddiqi, translator, *Sahih Muslim*, Kitab Bhavan, revised edition 2000, book 19, number 4366.

⁵³ Ahmed ibn Naqib al-Misri, *Reliance of the Traveller: A Classic Manual of Islamic Sacred Law*, translated by Nuh Ha Mim Keller. Amana Publications, 1999, o11.6.

The Punishment for Conscience is Death

Converts from Islam to Christianity are often hunted in the Muslim world, where virtually all religious authorities agree that such individuals deserve death. Muhammad himself commanded such a punishment: “Whoever changed his Islamic religion, then kill him.”⁵⁴ This is still the position of all the schools of Islamic jurisprudence, although there is some disagreement over whether the law applies only to men, or to women also.

At Cairo’s Al-Azhar University, the most prestigious and influential institution in the Islamic world, an Islamic manual certified as a reliable guide to Sunni Muslim orthodoxy states: “When a person who has reached puberty and is sane voluntarily apostatizes from Islam, he deserves to be killed.” Although the right to kill an apostate is reserved in Islamic law to the leader of the community and other Muslims can theoretically be punished for taking this duty upon themselves, in practice a Muslim who kills an apostate needs to pay no indemnity and perform no expiatory acts

⁵⁴ Muhammed Ibn Ismaiel Al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari: The Translation of the Meanings*, translated by Muhammad M. Khan, Darussalam, 1997, vol. 9, book 84, number 57.

(as he must in other kinds of murder cases under classic Islamic law). This accommodation is made because killing an apostate “is killing someone who deserves to die.”⁵⁵

IslamOnline, a website manned by a team of Islam scholars headed by the internationally influential Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, explains, “If a sane person who has reached puberty voluntarily apostatizes from Islam, he deserves to be punished. In such a case, it is obligatory for the caliph (or his representative) to ask him to repent and return to Islam. If he does, it is accepted from him, but if he refuses, he is immediately killed.” And what if someone doesn’t wait for a caliph to appear and takes matters into his own hands? Although the killer is to be “disciplined” for “arrogating the caliph’s prerogative and encroaching upon his rights,” there is “no blood money for killing an apostate (or any expiation)” – in other words, no significant punishment for the killer.⁵⁶

Two Afghans, Said Musa and Abdul Rahman, know all this well. Both were arrested for the crime

⁵⁵ *Reliance of the Traveller*, o8.1, o8.4.

⁵⁶ Robert Spencer, “Death to the Apostates,” *FrontPageMagazine.com*, October 24, 2006.

of leaving Islam for Christianity.⁵⁷ The Afghan Constitution stipulates that “no law can be contrary to the beliefs and provisions of the sacred religion of Islam.”⁵⁸ Even after Abdul Rahman’s arrest, which took place in 2006, Western analysts seem to have had trouble grasping the import of this provision. A “human rights expert” quoted by the *Times of London* summed up confusion widespread in Western countries: “The constitution says Islam is the religion of Afghanistan, yet it also mentions the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and Article 18 specifically forbids this kind of recourse. It really highlights the problem the judiciary faces.”⁵⁹ But while the Constitution may declare its “respect” for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it also says that no law can contradict Islamic law. The Constitution’s definition of religious freedom is explicit: “The religion of the state of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan is the sacred religion of Islam. Followers of other religions are free to ex-

⁵⁷ “One-legged Afghan Red Cross worker set to be hanged after converting to Christianity,” *Daily Mail*, February 7, 2011; Sayed Salahuddin, “Man faces death over Christianity,” *Reuters*, March 19, 2006.

⁵⁸ Afghanistan Constitution, Adopted by Grand Council on January 4, 2004. http://www.servat.unibe.ch/law/icl/af00000_.html

⁵⁹ Tim Albone, “Anger over Christian convert in Kabul who faces death,” *The Times*, March 21, 2006.

ercise their faith and perform their religious rites *within the limits of the provisions of law*" (emphasis added).

The Islamic death penalty for apostasy is deeply ingrained in Islamic culture -- which is one reason why it was Abdul Rahman's own family that went to police to file a complaint about his conversion. Whatever triggered their action in 2006, they could be confident that the police would receive such a complaint with the utmost seriousness. After an international outcry, Abdul Rahman was eventually spirited out of Afghanistan to relative safety in Italy. Despite the publicity, his case was hardly unique, as the nearly identical case of Said Musa, in February 2011, amply attested. While there was international indignation over the arrest and trial of Abdul Rahman, the world community showed hardly any interest in Said Musa. Perhaps the intervening years had rendered the world's opinion makers inured to Islamic atrocities against Christians.

Meanwhile, in Egypt in August 2007, Mohammed Hegazy, a convert from Islam to Christianity, was forced to go into hiding after a death sentence was pronounced against him by Islamic clerics.

He refused to flee Egypt, however, and declared: “I know there are fatwas to shed my blood, but I will not give up and I will not leave the country.”⁶⁰ Early in 2008, his father told Egyptian newspapers: “I am going to try to talk to my son and convince him to return to Islam. If he refuses, I am going to kill him with my own hands.” Hegazy remains in hiding in Egypt.⁶¹

Qur’anic Justification for the persecution of Christians

Like Christians, Muslims respect and revere Jesus. Islam teaches that Jesus is one of the greatest of God’s prophets and messengers to humankind. Like Christians, every day, over 1.3 billion Muslims strive to live by his teachings of love, peace, and forgiveness. Those teachings, which have become universal values, remind us that all of us, Christians, Muslims, Jews, and all others have more in common than we

⁶⁰ Maggie Michael, “Threats force Egyptian convert to hide,” *Associated Press*, August 12, 2007.

⁶¹ Abdallah Daher, Sarah Pollak & Dale Hurd, “Ex-Muslim on the Run for Conversion,” *CBN News*, March 27, 2008.

think.

So read an advertisement that the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR), an organization created by the Muslim Brotherhood, places in newspapers around the country around Christmastime. The ad's message about bridges between Islam and Christians appeared to have a Qur'anic precedent. The Islamic holy book asserts that Christians will be the closest friends to Muslims: "Strongest among men in enmity to the believers wilt thou find the Jews and Pagans; and nearest among them in love to the believers wilt thou find those who say, 'We are Christians': because amongst these are men devoted to learning and men who have renounced the world, and they are not arrogant" (5:82).

But within the Muslim world there is no reason to pretend to ecumenism. The Saudi Sheikh, Marzouq Salem Al-Ghamdi, recently preached in a mosque in Mecca that "Christians are infidels, enemies of Allah, his Messenger, and the believers. They deny and curse Allah and his Messenger . . . How can we draw near to these infidels?"⁶²

⁶² Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), "Friday Sermons in Saudi Mosques: Review and Analysis," MEMRI Special Report No. 10, September 26, 2002. www.memri.org.

The Sheikh's words recalled another Qur'anic verse: "O ye who believe! Take not the Jews and the Christians for your friends and protectors: they are but friends and protectors to each other. And he amongst you that turns to them (for friendship) is of them. Verily Allah guideth not a people unjust" (5:51).

The Qur'an has a great deal more to say about Christianity and Christ. It teaches Jesus's Virgin Birth (Sura 19, which is entitled "Mary," contains a long description of this event) and calls him Allah's "Word" and "a spirit proceeding from Him," but it also denies the Trinity and insists that Jesus is not the Son of God (4:171). It places Jesus in a line of prophets including many Old Testament figures: "Say ye: 'We believe in Allah, and the revelation given to us, and to Abraham, Isma'il, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and that given to Moses and Jesus, and that given to (all) prophets from their Lord. We make no difference between one and another of them, and we bow to Allah (in Islam)'" (2:136).

In the Qur'anic view, this line culminates in Muhammad, the last and greatest prophet whose revelation completes and corrects all previous revelations. Hence Muslims traditionally believe that

Islam is the final revelation from Allah, but that Jews and Christians also received genuine revelations (hence their Qur'anic designation "People of the Book"), which they have criminally altered, in the case of Christians to exalt Jesus as the Son of God and remove references to the coming of Muhammad. Christians also added the false doctrines of the Trinity and the Divinity of Christ: "So believe in Allah and His messengers, and say not 'Three.' Cease! (it is) better for you! Allah is only One Allah. Far is it removed from His Transcendent Majesty that He should have a son" (4:171).

Consequently, there is a deceptiveness in the claim to westerners by some who claim to speak in the name of Islam that Islam recognizes Christianity as a legitimate faith. For the Christianity that the Qur'an recognizes is not Christianity as millions practice it around the world today. The Qur'an says of Jesus: "We sent him the Gospel. Therein was guidance and light, and confirmation of the Law that had come before him, a guidance and an admonition to those who fear Allah. Let the people of the Gospel judge by what Allah hath revealed therein. If any do fail to judge by (the light of) what Allah hath revealed, they are (no better than) those who rebel" (5:46-47).

When Muslims began to have contact with Christians on a large scale, this passage put them in an uncomfortable position: they held that the Gospel bore witness to Muhammad's status as a prophet and that accordingly if Christians judged by it rightly, they would become Muslims. But instead Muslims found that the New Testament affirmed the Christian understanding of Jesus that the Qur'an repudiated, and contained no trace of an idea that a later prophet would come with a final revelation. Thus Muslims began to teach that Christians had corrupted the pure Gospel that was given to Jesus by Allah.

This idea is still common in the Islamic world today. The Muslim scholar Abdullah Yusuf Ali, translator of a popular English version of the Qur'an, includes an explanatory note in his Qur'an about the Gospel: "The Injil [Gospel] mentioned in the Qur'an is certainly not the New Testament, and it is not the four Gospels, as now received by the Christian Church, but an original Gospel which was promulgated by Jesus as the Tawrah [Torah] was promulgated by Moses and the Qur'an by Muhammad al Mustafa."⁶³

⁶³ Abdullah Yusuf Ali, "On the Injil," *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, Amana Publications, 1999, p. 291.

Thus while there are, of course, many Muslims willing to live in peace and harmony with Christians, there are others who feel they are doctrinally justified by their faith to despise Christians as corrupters of Allah's word and bearers of his curse. This is a key source of much of the enduring enmity between Muslims and Christians. And compounding that enmity is the Islamic doctrine of jihad: the idea that it is part of the responsibility of the Muslim community to wage war against unbelievers until they either convert to Islam, submit to Muslim rule (which involves accepting a number of humiliating regulations), or be killed.

This triple choice, announced by Muhammad himself, is founded on the Qur'an, which states explicitly that it is to be extended to Jews and Christians: "Fight those who believe not in Allah nor the Last Day, nor hold that forbidden which hath been forbidden by Allah and His Messenger, nor acknowledge the religion of Truth, (even if they are) of the People of the Book, until they pay the Jizya [a special poll tax levied only on non-Muslims] with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued" (9:29).

Persecution of Christians: A living tradition

Muhammad's last military expedition was against the Byzantine Christians in the northern Arabian garrison of Tabuk, and shortly after their prophet's death Islamic jihadists conquered and Islamized what had up to then been the Christian lands of the Middle East, North Africa and Spain. The jihad then pointed toward Christian Europe and continued there for centuries, with a high water mark coming in 1453 with the conquest of Constantinople. In September 1683, however, the Ottoman siege of Vienna was broken, and the Islamic tide in Europe began to recede. But the doctrines that fueled the jihad against Christians were never reformed or rejected by any Islamic sect.

Consequently, with the renewal of jihadist sentiments among Muslims in the twentieth century came renewed persecution of Christians. This chilling story told by a woman who lived during the Ottoman Empire of the late nineteenth century captures the moment of that renewal in one household:

Then one night, my husband came home and told me that the padisha had sent word that we were to kill all the Chris-

tians in our village, and that we would have to kill our neighbours. I was very angry, and told him that I did not care who gave such orders, they were wrong. These neighbours had always been kind to us, and if he dared to kill them Allah would pay us out. I tried all I could to stop him, but he killed them — killed them with his own hand.⁶⁴

The Christian population in Turkey has declined from 15% in 1920 to one percent today. In Syria, it has declined from 33% to 10% in the same span. In Bethlehem, 85% of the population was Christian in 1948; today, 12% hold to the faith founded by the town's most celebrated native son.⁶⁵ The burden of the past lies heavy on the present for Christians in the Muslim world. Sheikh Omar Bakri Muhammad, a controversial pro-Osama Muslim leader who lived for years in Great Britain but is now barred from reentering that country, wrote in October 2002, "We cannot simply say that because we have no Khilafah [caliphate] we can just go

⁶⁴ David Pryce-Jones, *The Closed Circle: An Interpretation of the Arabs*, Ivan R. Dee, Publisher, 2002, pp. 31-2.

⁶⁵ Stephen Farrell and Rana Sabbagh Gargour, "All my staff at the church have been killed - they disappeared," *The Times*, December 23, 2006.

ahead and kill any non-Muslim, rather, we must still fulfill their Dhimmah.”⁶⁶ The Dhimmah is the Islamic legal contract of protection for Jews, Christians, and some other inferiors under Islamic rule; those who accept this protection, and the concomitant deprivation of various rights, are known as dhimmis.

In 1999, Sheikh Yussef Salameh, the Palestinian Authority’s undersecretary for religious endowment, according to Jonathan Adelman and Agota Kuperman of the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, “praised the idea that Christians should become dhimmis under Muslim rule, and such suggestions have become more common since the second intifada began in October 2000.”⁶⁷

In a recent Friday sermon at a mosque in Mecca, Sheikh Marzouq Salem Al-Ghamdi spelled out the Sharia’s injunctions for dhimmis:

If the infidels live among the Muslims,

⁶⁶ Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), “Islamist Leader in London: No Universal Jihad As Long As There is No Caliphate,” MEMRI Special Dispatch No. 435, October 30, 2002.

⁶⁷ Jonathan Adelman and Agota Kuperman, “Christian Exodus from the Middle East,” Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, December 19, 2001. Reprinted at: http://www.defenddemocracy.org/publications/publications_show.htm?doc_id=155713.

in accordance with the conditions set out by the Prophet — there is nothing wrong with it provided they pay Jizya to the Islamic treasury. Other conditions are...that they do not renovate a church or a monastery, do not rebuild ones that were destroyed, that they feed for three days any Muslim who passes by their homes...that they rise when a Muslim wishes to sit, that they do not imitate Muslims in dress and speech, nor ride horses, nor own swords, nor arm themselves with any kind of weapon; that they do not sell wine, do not show the cross, do not ring church bells, do not raise their voices during prayer, that they shave their hair in front so as to make them easily identifiable, do not incite anyone against the Muslims, and do not strike a Muslim ... If they violate these conditions, they have no protection.⁶⁸

These Sharia provisions have not been fully enforced since the mid-nineteenth century, but

⁶⁸ Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), “Friday Sermons in Saudi Mosques: Review and Analysis,” MEMRI Special Report No. 10, September 26, 2002. www.memri.org. This sermon is undated, but it recently appeared on the Saudi website www.alminbar.net.

today's jihadists want to restore these laws along with the rest of the Sharia. The idea that Christians must "feel themselves subdued" (Qur'an 9:29) in Islamic lands is also very much alive. When the first Catholic Church in Qatar opened in March 2008, it sported no cross, no bell, no steeple, and no sign. "The idea," explained the church's pastor, Fr. Tom Veneracion, "is to be discreet because we don't want to inflame any sensitivities."⁶⁹

In the Philippines, the church in the nation's one Islamic city, Marawi, has also done away with the cross. Catholic priest, Fr. Teresito Soganub, explains: "To avoid arguments and to avoid further misunderstandings we just plant the cross deep in our hearts." Fr. Soganub, according to Reuters, "doesn't wear a crucifix or a clerical collar and sports a beard out of respect for his Muslim neighbors." He celebrates few weddings, since roast pork is a staple of wedding receptions for Filipino Catholics.⁷⁰

It is easy to see the need for such discretion.

⁶⁹ Sonia Verma, "First Catholic Church Opens in Qatar, Sparking Fear of Backlash Against Christians," FoxNews, March 14, 2008.

⁷⁰ Carmel Crimmins, "Philippines' Islamic city proud to be different," *Reuters*, March 17, 2008.

Preaching in a mosque in Al-Damam, Saudi Arabia, the popular Saudi Sheikh Muhammad Saleh Al-Munajjid recommended hatred of Christians and Jews as a proper course: “Muslims must,” he declared, “educate their children to Jihad. This is the greatest benefit of the situation: educating the children to Jihad and to hatred of the Jews, the Christians, and the infidels; educating the children to Jihad and to revival of the embers of Jihad in their souls. This is what is needed now...”⁷¹

The Crime of Silence of Human Rights Groups

What Justus Reid Weiner, an international human rights lawyer, stated in December 2007 about Christians in Palestinian areas applies to Christians in the Islamic world generally: “The systematic persecution of Christian Arabs living in Palestinian areas is being met with nearly total silence by the international community, human rights activists, the media and NGOs.” He said that if nothing were done, no Christians would be left there in fifteen years, for “Christian leaders are being forced to abandon their followers to the forces of

⁷¹ This sermon is undated. Like the others quoted here, it was posted at the Saudi website Al-Minbar (www.alminbar.net).

radical Islam.”⁷²

The nearly total silence manifests itself in the curiously euphemistic manner in which human rights groups report on the plight of Christians, when they notice that plight at all. For example, Amnesty International’s 2007 report on the human rights situation in Egypt dismisses the suffering of Coptic Christians in a single sentence so filled with euphemism and moral equivalence and so lacking in context that it almost erases the crime it describes: “There were sporadic outbreaks of sectarian violence between Muslims and Christians. In April [2006], three days of religious violence in Alexandria resulted in at least three deaths and dozens of injuries.”⁷³ In reality, the strife began when a Muslim stabbed a Christian to death inside a church, and when armed jihadists attacked three churches in Alexandria that same month.⁷⁴

The passive voice seems to be the rule of the day where jihad violence against Christians is con-

⁷² Etgar Lefkovits, “Expert: ‘Christian groups in PA to disappear,’” *Jerusalem Post*, December 4, 2007.

⁷³ Amnesty International Report 2007: Egypt. <http://thereport.amnesty.org/eng/Regions/Middle-East-and-North-Africa/Egypt>

⁷⁴“Sectarian tensions flare in Egypt,” BBC News, April 16, 2006.

cerned. The 2007 Amnesty International report on Indonesia includes this line: “Minority religious groups and church buildings continued to be attacked.” By whom? Amnesty International is silent. “In Sulawesi, sporadic religious violence occurred throughout the year.”⁷⁵ Who is responsible for that violence? AI doesn’t say. Amnesty International seems more concerned about protecting Islam and Islamic groups from being implicated in human rights abuses than about protecting Christians from those abuses.

It appears that Christianity -- even indigenous Egyptian Christianity, which of course predates the advent of Islam in that country -- is too closely identified with the United States and the West for the multiculturalist tastes of the human rights elite. The situation is dire. Melkite Greek Catholic Patriarch Gregory III, who lives in Damascus, declared in April 2006 that “after 11 September, there is a plot to eliminate all the Christian minorities from the Arabic world....Our simple existence ruins the equations whereby Arabs can’t be other than Moslems, and Christians but be westerners....If the Chaldeans, the Assyrians, the Orthodox, the Latin

⁷⁵ Amnesty International Report 2007: Indonesia. <http://thereport.amnesty.org/eng/Regions/Asia-Pacific/Indonesia>

Catholics leave, if the Middle East is cleansed of all the Arabic Christians, the Moslem Arab world and a so-called Christian Western world will be left face to face. It will be easier to provoke a clash and justify it with religion.”⁷⁶ Several years later, Gregory III himself showed he felt the pressure to please the Muslims or else, when he publicly blamed the Muslim persecution of Christians not on Islamic supremacists, but on that ever-present bogey of Middle Eastern conspiracy theories, the Zionists.⁷⁷

Yet some American Christians and non-Christians are surprised just to discover that there are ancient communities of Christians in Islamic lands at all, and have no idea that Christians in the Islamic world are being persecuted. Others are indifferent because of the growing movement of fashionable atheism which sees all religions as equally repugnant and liable to lead to violence, whatever the differences in their actual teachings. And many Westerners, particularly those in the human rights elite, are wedded to a worldview in which only non-Western non-Christians can possibly fit into

⁷⁶ “We are the Church of Islam,” Interview with the patriarch of Antioch Grégoire III Laham by Gianni Valente, 30 Days, April 2006.

⁷⁷ Mohammed Zaatari, “Sidon archdiocese reopens following refurbishment,” *Daily Star*, December 6, 2010.

the human rights groups' victim paradigm: Christians are identified with white Western oppressors, and could not be victims. Some Westerners even indulge in a certain *schadenfreude* at the persecution of Christians worldwide, as they see in it a comeuppance for a church and a belief-system that they have long despised and blamed for many of the ills of the world, both large and small, societal and individual. The fact that Christians in Muslim lands are generally poor, disenfranchised, and worlds away from the oppressive force that is the Church of Leftist myth doesn't seem to enter their minds.

With ever increasing confidence and brutality and virtually no protest from the West, Islamic jihadists and Sharia supremacists continue to prey on the Christians in their midst. These embattled communities are now on the verge of extinction, with no one to speak up for them. Their continued existence and safety at this point would require nothing short of a miracle.

