

Bribery and Murder Threats Still Spread the Faith of Islam

by Hugh Fitzgerald



During the last 1,400 years, many non-Muslims converted to Islam to avoid death or a wretched existence as dhimmis. Bribery and murder, as instruments of conversion, still take place today, in Muslim lands as diverse as Iraq, Nigeria, and Pakistan. The story of these conversions is [here](#).

It started with his father.

As fighting and instability ravaged Iraqi villages and cities, a local Shiite militia offered a means for him to save his family and himself: convert from Christianity to Islam, and gain not only protection but the promise of eternity in heaven. Or, they said, he could remain a Christian, and put his life and his children's at risk.

The father converted.

Then he demanded all his children do the same. "One daughter fled the home," Muna Tagi, a friend of the family based in

the United States, related in an email. "The teenage son was expelled from the home, but eventually came back as he had nowhere to stay, and had to be forced, along with his other sister, to convert their IDs to show them as Muslims."

Despite their conversion, however, the two teens secretly continued to wear their crosses beneath their clothes – until their Shiite friend discovered them. "The friend ... cut it from the teen's neck and threw it in the mud," Tagi said. Soon after, the boy received a letter, signed in blood, accompanied by a single bullet.

The letter, signed in blood, and with a bullet enclosed, is no different from the warnings given by the Mafia to its potential victims. The message is not "Pay up, or die," but, rather, "Convert, or die." The only other possibility for most Christians in Iraq to save themselves – unless they choose conversion under maximum duress – is to flee the country. And that is how some Iraqi Christians have handled their calvary. Many have fled the country, many have converted, and an impossibly brave minority still hangs on, most having moved to the Kurdish part of Iraq, deemed safer because the Kurds are not as fanatical in their faith as are the Arabs.

Such forced conversions are becoming increasingly common in post-Saddam Iraq, extending beyond the 2014 [capture and enslavement](#) of Yazidis, and not only because of the violence of ISIS militants. Under Saddam, Christians were largely left alone. Now, says Tagi, churches and Christian communities have come under violent attack because of Shiite rule, Islamist militancy, and Al-Qaeda's revitalization. Many Christians [have faced](#) torture, especially by ISIS militants, who beat them when they could not repeat passages from the Koran.

Unsurprisingly, then, Christians [have fled](#) the country in droves: over 1 million have sought sanctuary either in the

West or in the country's more tolerant Kurdish areas, leaving a mere 500,000 Christians in Iraq struggling for survival. Thousands who escaped ISIS in 2014 now live in semi-permanent camps, knowing they may never return home. And while most continue to resist conversion, more and more are starting to give in.

Before the war in 2003, there were 1.5 million Christians in Iraq. The secular despot Saddam Hussein protected them; he knew that they were no threat to his rule, unlike the Shi'a, or rivals among the Sunni population. Saddam employed Christians as his household staff, as cleaners, waiters, drivers, launderers, tasters—many of these Christian workers were inherited by the Americans living in the Green Zone. Saddam also employed—as his face to the world, his Foreign Minister, Tariq Aziz, a Christian who was living testimony to Saddam's tolerance.

It isn't just Iraq. In Algeria, the Algemeiner [reported](#) earlier this year, the government "prohibited Christians and other non-Muslims from speaking publicly about their faith, for fear of influencing Muslims." Moreover, "any Muslim accused of approaching Christians for the purpose of learning more about their faith or beliefs could face years in prison and a hefty fine."

In Algeria, the Arab rulers are most concerned about the Berbers, noticeable numbers of whom have, both in Algeria and in France, been converting to Christianity. Those Berbers, whose language and culture have been suppressed by the Arabs, have come to see Islam — as the late Anwar Shaikh argued — as a vehicle for Arab supremacism. After all, the message of Allah, the Qur'an, was delivered to an Arab, and in his language. Five times a day Muslims prostrate themselves in prayer, turned toward the qibla of Mecca, in western Arabia. At least once in their lifetime Muslims who are financially

able must make the pilgrimage to that same city of Mecca. So great is the prestige in Islam of the Arabs that new converts to the faith frequently adopt Arab names. Some Muslims go even further, calling themselves "Sayyids" – especially in non-Arab Pakistan – which indicates a claimed descent from the tribe of Muhammad himself, the Al Quraysh.

Thus the Algerian Arabs, to cut down on apostasy from Islam, have tried to shut off discussion of Christianity at both ends. They don't want Christians, or other non-Muslims, to speak about their own faith, and they don't want Muslims speaking to Christians to find out more about their faith. Breaking these laws can result in long prison sentences. Statistics on conversions are understandably not released by the Algerian government, so there is no way of knowing how effective the draconian laws preventing even the discussion of Christianity have been in discouraging apostates from Islam.

And in Nigeria, home to 80 million Christians (versus 90 million Muslims), Boko Haram and Hausa Fulani militants have made the country one of the most dangerous in the world for Christians, with an estimated 7,000 Nigerian Christians executed since 2015 for their religion. In its 2019 religious freedom report, the US State Department reported that "Muslim Fulani herdsmen killed 17 Christians who had gathered after a baby dedication at a Baptist church ... including the mother of the child." They were but a few of the 1,350 Christians estimated to have been killed in Nigeria last year.

In Nigeria, unlike in Iraq and Algeria, the Christians are not a tiny minority. They have been attacked by Muslims, both those in the terror group Boko Haram, and Hausa-Fulani tribesmen, determined to push Christians out of northern Nigeria, in a territorial grab that has an underlying religious basis.

And 2020 is turning out to be similarly horrific, [warns](#) the Alabama Baptist. A video posted to YouTube on July 22, for instance, shows the execution of five Christian men, and a report issued by former MP Lord David Alton, co-founder of the Movement for Christian Democracy, counts at least 27 murders of Christians during the 24 hours between July 19-20.

Non-Muslims, not only Christians, continue in many Muslim countries to face the threat of violence, including being killed if they refuse to convert to Islam. That has always been the major reason for conversion to Islam, and not, as Muslims would have you believe, the self-evident sheer wonderfulness of Islam. As Muslims swept out of Arabia and conquered new lands, they offered the non-Muslims they vanquished only three choices: death, conversion to Islam, or wretched lives as dhimmis, “tolerated” minorities who had to submit to a host of political, social, and economic disabilities, including payment of the capitation tax known as the Jizyah. It’s no wonder that so many non-Muslims have over the centuries converted to Islam to save their own, and their families’ lives, and to avoid the crushing economic burden visited upon dhimmis.

But it isn’t only the fear of violence that is driving conversions to Islam. While the New York Times [reports](#) that the “forced conversions of Hindu girls and women to Islam through kidnapping and coerced marriages occur throughout Pakistan,” other Muslim groups use bribery to seduce impoverished Hindus, Sikhs, and Christians to abandon their faith. Indeed, in June, several dozen Hindus [converted](#) in a mass ceremony in South Pakistan seeking to escape the constant discrimination – in jobs, housing, and society – that Hindus typically experience in the Muslim majority country.

“The dehumanization of minorities coupled with these very

scary times we are living in – a weak economy and now the pandemic – we may see a raft of people converting to Islam to stave off violence or hunger or just to live to see another day,” former Pakistani lawmaker Farahnaz Ispahani [told](#) the Times in August.

One wealthy Muslim in Pakistan has taken particular advantage of the current economic crisis. In a video [posted](#) on the social media site [TikTok](#), Mian Kashif Zameer Chohadary announced his plan to pay 200,000 rupees (about \$1,200) to any Christian who converts to Islam – with 1 million rupees (nearly \$6,000) for a family. “Please accept Islam,” he says in the video, “which is the best religion.” The video, according to AsiaNews, quickly went viral.

Yet even these non-violent methods are problematic, the Times reports, noting that: “Hindu rights groups are also troubled by the seemingly voluntary conversions, saying they take place under such economic duress that they are tantamount to a forced conversion anyway.”

Moreover, once non-Muslims convert to Islam, they are unable to return to their former religion: apostasy is punishable by death in Islam, and many countries – including Iraq and Pakistan – consider it a capital offense.

Of course for the impoverished Christians in Pakistan, who are confined to such menial and ill-paid jobs as garbage collectors, tannery workers, and lavatory cleaners, the amounts they are offered to convert are huge sums, and it is no wonder that some cannot resist conversion – but can we really describe these conversions, as Pakistani Muslims insist, as “voluntary”? It’s under extreme economic duress that these desperately poor Christians convert to Islam, in what are clearly forced conversions.

For her part, Muna Tagi is equally troubled about the situation in Iraq. “My concern for Iraqi Christians, at

present, is that there are many unreported incidents like this one, never known ... [for fear of] retaliation. And I strongly believe it will get worse in the future, as ... each conversion success will empower these militia[s] to pursue the next."

"It is largely, then, up to the West to aid these endangered families: "Open, firm talk between leaders of the west and Iraqi government is [needed] first," Tagi believes. And second, "to help these families to migrate, if they choose to do so."

Does the West think it can pressure Muslim governments to prevent their people from attempting to bribe, or to threaten with death, non-Muslims, unless they convert? What kind of law could those governments enact that would prevent fanatics from threatening, or killing, or bribing non-Muslims? Wouldn't angry Muslims rise up against such attempts to limit their freedom to convert the Infidels, and threaten the stability of the government?

In Iraq, the best solution would be to aid Christians to migrate to the safety of the West, a migration that has already been underway since 2003. In that year there were 1.5 million Christians still in Iraq; today there are scarcely 500,000. In Nigeria, the West could help with funds, and possibly troops, to ease the move of Christian Nigerians from the Muslim-dominated north to the safety of central and south Nigeria, where they can resettle among fellow Christians. But the best solution for the plight of Nigeria's Christians was that which was attempted in the Biafra War in 1967-1969. In that war the Christian tribes of the south, particularly the Igbo, who were by far the largest in numbers, after pogroms were unleashed by Muslims against Christians in the north, decided to declare the Christian-populated south as the independent state of Biafra. A bloody civil war ensued. Shamefully, the major Western powers did not intervene to help

Biafra; some of them thought that it was “important” – but why? – that the most populous African state remain in one piece. The U.S. and U.K. did nothing to help the Biafrans; only Israel and Ghana extended both diplomatic recognition and military aid. Meanwhile, the Muslims were given aid by some Arab states. Egyptian Migs, with Egyptian pilots, freely bombed Ibo villages, killing hundreds of thousands of defenseless civilians. In the end, Biafra – outgunned and outmanned – lost the war and was again folded into the Nigerian state.

But times have changed, and if there were another attempt today by Nigeria’s Christians to declare an independent state of Biafra, this time the Western powers, having now been subject themselves to Muslim aggression and terrorism, would likely intervene on the side of Biafra, by sending weapons, including planes, to the Christian fighters of Biafra Redux. And this time Biafra would win.

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