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Countering extremist ideology

Many efforts to provide counter-narratives for Salafi-jihadism are currently failing to address extremists' abuse of religious scripture directly

By Rachel Bryson and Milo Comerford

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (06.02.2018) - Efforts to combat extremism through religious counter-narratives are expanding across the Muslim-majority world. But while a new study of over three thousand diverse religious texts showcases the rich potential for mainstream Islam to rebut extremist interpretations of theology, it also finds that counter-narrative efforts are inadequately confronting extremists' abuse of scripture and recourse to disputed religious concepts.

The analysis of contemporary texts put out by groups from across a broad ideological spectrum highlights that the ideology of Salafi-jihadism, held by groups such as the Islamic State and al-Qaeda, is palpably distinct from mainstream Sunni Islam. Across a sample of thousands of documents, of the 50 most quoted verses (ayat) of the Quran in Salafi-jihadi texts, only 8 percent are also prevalent in mainstream material. Salafi-jihadi texts do quote Islamic scripture extensively to justify their ideology, with five times more Quranic references than mainstream texts. However, they cherry-pick the Quran, drawing on a small cluster of verses to affirm their ideological position. In contrast, the mainstream quotes from a broader range of verses, reflecting a wider thematic focus. Such scriptural selectivity undermines arguments, made by both Islamist and anti-Muslim ideologues, that extremists have more religious legitimacy than mainstream interpretations. Pointing out extremists' selective and narrow references to scripture may be one way to prevent them from defining the rules of the game.

Beyond references to specific verses, analysis of texts' predominant religious concepts demonstrates how different interpretations draw on distinct "arsenals of ideas." The analysis suggests extremists are considerably more concerned with legalistic elements of scripture than personal piety.

Notably, a number of hardline Islamist groups—including Hizb ut-Tahrir, Jamaat-i-Islami, and some variations of the Muslim Brotherhood (more mainstream political parties, such as Ennahda in Tunisia and the Justice and Development Party in Turkey, were not included in analysis because they drew on considerably less religious content)—use scripture and concepts similarly to Salafi-jihadi groups in their core texts. This ideological proximity between Islamists and Salafi-jihadis, and their distance from the mainstream, becomes particularly apparent in their respective uses of the Quran. In the study’s sample, 64 percent of the 50 most-referenced Quranic verses in the Islamists’ texts overlap with those of the Salafi-jihadi groups, whereas Islamists and the mainstream only have 12 percent in common. This similarity does not necessarily indicate a shared ideological character, as texts may reach different interpretations of the same quotations. However, understanding such relationships can inform the growing global policy debate around the interplay between violent and nonviolent extremism.

These findings can also help evaluate the success of religiously rooted counter-narratives to extremism. The study analyzed what Quranic verses and hadith counter-narratives reference, what concepts they promote or refute, and what scholarship they draw on, comparing these with the narratives in both Salafi-jihadi and Islamist texts. The counter-narratives split roughly three ways: content either condemns extremist actions as un-Islamic, offers peaceful alternatives and interpretations, or directly takes on and unpacks extremist arguments.

Yet most efforts are currently failing to respond to the key arguments peddled by extremists. They are only addressing and challenging the interpretations of 16 percent of the Quranic references prominently used by Salafi-jihadis in the study’s sample, demonstrating that much more can be done to reclaim religious discourse from Islamist and jihadi ideologues. For example, one of the most commonly quoted verses in Salafi-jihadi literature (Surat Al-Anfal, verse 60) warns Muslims to prepare against armed battle with their opponents, but counter-narratives are currently failing to capitalize on the verse that follows, which emphasizes peaceful resolution of conflict.

Counter-narratives seem to address the religious ideas explored in Salafi-jihadi literature more successfully, but still do not prominently tackle about 40 percent of the key ideological concepts of Salafi-jihadism. Most efforts are focused exclusively on tackling narratives of violence, such as suicide attacks. For example, “This is not the Path to Paradise,” a widely shared fatwa by Mauritanian sheikh Abdullah Bin Bayyah condemning the Islamic State’s claim to have established a caliphate, is one of only a few examples of a counter-narrative that directly confronts the religious nuance of an Islamic state.

Around the Muslim-majority world, prominent religious institutions and leaders are increasingly proactively issuing rebuttals of extremist thought rooted in sound Islamic knowledge. While it is still in its early stages of development, Al-Azhar University’s online Observatory for Combating Extremism, launched in June 2015, tracks the Islamic State’s propaganda and rebuts extremist religious interpretations—for example, it issued an online feature correcting common misconceptions about Islam and publishes theologically founded replies to terrorist ideologies. It is also expanding its work to train young imams to use social media to effectively counter such narratives in their own communities. In addition, political leaders in Muslim-majority countries are increasingly associating good citizenship with confronting extremist worldviews. For the United Arab Emirates’ national day, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi Mohammed bin Zayed stressed “the pressing need that the Arab peoples, the young in particular, know that [extremist] ideologies are maiming the beautiful and shining face of our faith.” Saudi Arabia’s Etidal Center, opened in May 2017, aims to coordinate efforts by governments and international organizations to fight extremism, and hundreds of its analysts have been tasked with identifying and engaging with extremist “perversions” of Islam online.

Although some counter-narratives directly address the scripture and concepts violent extremist groups express, those who follow such a violent stance often have louder voices. Extremist interpretations are well funded, well organized, and effectively communicated. To drown them out, alternative Muslim voices are seeking to amplify their rebuttals against distortions of their faith. Initiatives such as the Sawab Center in Abu Dhabi provide strategic communications expertise on understanding audiences, helping mainstream religious leaders effectively engage a range of media and platforms when presenting arguments. For example, in November 2017 the Sawab Center launched a joint Twitter campaign with the Al-Azhar Observatory to emphasize the values of mercy and tolerance. But grassroots religious responses still face challenges in garnering resources, using effective platforms, and coordinating efforts with counterparts.

In Western countries, diverse Muslim-led civil-society responses—such as the UK-sponsored Imams Online project—also provide credibility and community access for counter-narratives. And as more local actors refute extremist interpretations of Islamic scripture, governments can distance themselves from accusations that their efforts to counter destructive ideologies are an attempt to cultivate a state-sanctioned Islam, a perception that plays into extremists' hands. As public debates about Islamist extremism grow, efforts to counter it may be more effective if they directly take on verses and hadith most cited by extremists, engaging with the concepts they most focus on, and offering alternative interpretations.

International Convention «Law and Freedom of Belief in Europe, a difficult journey»



European Federation for Freedom of Belief (21.01.2018) - <http://bit.ly/2G48eSb> -

In the prestigious setting of Sant'Apollonia Auditorium at the homonymous XIV century convent complex located in Via San Gallo, in the historic center of Florence, the international convention of the European Federation for the Freedom of the Belief (FOB) took place on 18th and 19th January, **under the auspices of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe (Dr. Thorbjørn Jagland), of the patronage of the Tuscany Regional Council, of the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) and of the University**

of Florence.

The Medal of the President of the Italian Republic was conferred to the convention. Prof. Silvio Calzolari (Secretary of FOB), presenting it together with **attorney Alessandro Amicarelli (President of FOB)**, publicly thanked the President of the Republic "for having expressed his appreciation for FOB's initiative, as an event of particular cultural and social value, through the attribution of a representation prize, a medal, which honors us".

After the greetings of **Prof. Silvio Calzolari (Secretary of FOB)**, the **President of the Council of the Region of Tuscany, Dr. Eugenio Giani**, took the floor and brought the greetings from the administration he presides since from May 2015. It was then the turn of **Honorable Riccardo Migliori, past president of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly**, who reiterated what he already expressed in Florence at the presentation of

the Proceedings on 7 April 2017, namely that the importance and the goodness of FOB's initiatives are, in fact, even bigger and more influential than FOB itself believes.

Attorney Alessandro Amicarelli presented the appeal of the Federation to national and European authorities for the protection of the freedom of belief and disbelief, and for the protection of the fundamental rights of religious minorities. This appeal calls for a concrete commitment by the various member states of the European Union to adopt the FoRB (Freedom of Religion or Belief) guidelines unfortunately still not sufficiently considered or even disregarded here and there in the countries of the Union.

Attorney Amicarelli therefore declared open the proceedings of the convention by introducing **Prof. Pietro Nocita, director of the magazine Criminal Justice and past president co-founder of FOB**, who moderated the first session dedicated to the 'Philosophy and theory of law', of which he was also the first speaker with a highly esteemed speech on 'The Legal Status of Religious Denominations Other Than the Roman Catholic'.



It was then the turn of the intellectual creator of the themes of the convention, **lawyer Fabrizio d'Agostini of Turin** and then, gradually, the rest of the speakers as per the planned program.

The convention, organized in collaboration with the associated **Soteria International, the European Interreligious Forum for Religious Freedom (EFIRF), the European Coordination for Freedom of Conscience (CAP)**, was aimed to promote, without timidity, the defense of freedom of belief and religion in a hope for peace, peaceful coexistence and mutual respect and recognition.

Numerous members of associations working for the protection of the fundamental human rights, such as that of freedom of belief, were present: **Prof. Massimo Introvigne (Center for New Religions Studies, CESNUR), Dr. Willy Fautré (Director of**

Human Rights Without Frontiers, HRWF), Dr. Rosita Soryté (President of the International Observatory of Religious Liberty of Refugees, ORLIR) and many others including a large delegation of the Church of Almighty God led by Dr. Ruiqing Xu, the Imam of Florence and president of UCOI Izzedin Elzir and Dr. Andrea Bottai (National Councilor of the Italian Buddhist Institute Soka Gakkai, IBISG).

In the hall was also present a stand of **Pacini Editore SpA of Pisa**, a renowned publishing house established in 1872 which the reference publisher of the Federation.

The initiative saw a prestigious parterre of speakers and moderators, including the aforementioned **Prof. Nocita, Prof. Roberto Celada Ballanti (professor at the University of Genoa), Prof. Marco Vannini of Florence (philosopher), Prof. Marco Ventura (professor at the University of Siena), Prof. Luigi Berzano (priest, professor at the University of Turin), Prof. Enzo Pace (professor at the University of Padua), Prof. Stefano Allievi (at the University of Padua), Prof. Aldo Natale Terrin (priest, professor at the Santa Giustina Theological Faculty of Padua), Prof. Susan Palmer (professor at the Concordia University, Montreal, Canada), Prof. Germana Carobene (professor at the University of Naples), Prof. Nicola Colaiani (former magistrate of the Supreme Court of Cassation and professor at the University of Bari), Dr. Fabio Fanfani (Consul and Vice-Dean of the Consular Corps of Florence), Prof. Mohamed Bamoshmoosh (Islamic Community of Tuscany), Prof. Stefano Grossi (professor at the Theological Faculty of Central Italy) and Prof. Paolo Naso (professor at the University of Rome La Sapienza) who he was also entrusted with the moderation of the second session of Thursday.**

Among the numerous public, in addition to representatives of the academic world including important jurists such as **Prof. Francesco Onida and Prof. Giuseppe Casuscelli**, also representatives of religious and spiritual communities such as **Dr. Andrea Bottai (National Councilor of the Italian Buddhist Institute Soka Gakkai, IBISG), Father Fausto Sbaffoni (prior of the Florentine Convent of San Marco)**, and others.



During the two days of the convention, a number of important issues were discussed, including: the sociology of religions (with a view to both the issue of religious freedom and that of the new geography of religious minorities), ecclesiastical law and the legal aspects of religious confessions, the ideological and legal obstacles to the right to freedom of belief in Europe (among which the secular state, the drift of anti-sectarianism, the alarmist propaganda against the new religious movements and the consequent attempts to establish the controversial crime of "mental manipulation").

The session moderated by **Prof. Introvigne** titled '*ideological and juridical obstacles to the right to freedom of belief in Europe*' focused on these latter themes: the spotlight was turned on a questionable legislative initiative such as the French law About-Picard which has unjustly penalized a large number of religious groups, the lack of neutrality of the French state on these issues and the controversial **FECRIS** (the European Federation of Research and Information Centers on Sectarianism), an NGO (an abbreviation that literally means non-governmental organization) which, however, seems to betray its own qualification since it is financed by the Paris government, as FOB has repeatedly denounced.

The second day of the works ended with a round table attended by representatives of the various associations for freedom of belief in Europe, and during which the various representatives of the religions present reiterated the problems existing in the various countries of origin between which the existence of rights only on paper but in truth scarcely protected when not properly trampled (dramatic, in this sense, is the case of the **Church of Almighty God in China**).



Of particular interest, for the juridical aspects that has touched, was the report of Prof. Nocita who spoke of the legislative superstructures present in the Italian legal system, which instead of guaranteeing the implementation of the Constitution diminish it or subordinate it to a machine sometimes oppressive, as well as cumbersome, especially when it comes to allowing religious minorities to have a space in society and fully assert their fundamental rights.

Equally prominent has been the report of **Prof. Ventura, a European jurist**, who pointed out and highlighted the inconsistencies between laws at the European level and stressed the need for the Union to put its administrative system in order by seizing the already available opportunities. In this way, the FOB convention did not just launch a cry of alarm; it also indicated a very specific path that Europe can take to improve things.

This is really necessary because, as the various speakers have gradually indicated each one from their own specialist perspective, if the existing protections are not actively maintained and guaranteed, inevitably we will end up opening the door to some liberticidal drifts.

In fact, at the end of the event, on the occasion of the final greetings, Prof. Introvigne presented a very brief but very interesting and sensitive analysis of the social genesis of religious persecutions, a phenomenon unfortunately no longer limited to dark phases of history but terribly present in various parts of the world. The spiral begins with intolerance, continues with discrimination and then leads to persecution: a thesis, this, presented during a convention held in Rome in 2015 under the aegis of the OSCE.

Covered in FOB event, was also the issue of hate and alarmism campaigns that prepare the ground for religious discrimination and violence which is a keystone of the Federation's activities: in fact, it is precisely this that makes FOB and its work even more important and crucial, that is, the objective of preserving freedom of conscience and the right to believe or not believe, not only in Italy or in Western European countries (in to

which this prerogative is apparently still guaranteed), but also where there are already signs of serious and far more serious violations of fundamental rights such as Russia and China.

Widening awareness on these issues is even more important in the countries where religious freedom is apparently guaranteed, precisely because failure to intervene whenever there are signs of intolerance could result in the triggering of the mechanism of discrimination and hatred which, as a consequence, lead to discrimination, persecution and from there even faster to violent repression.

The example brought by Introvigne, simple but very effective, is that of a little ball placed on an inclined plane: if the little ball is not stopped at the start, its descent becomes so rapid that attempts to stop it become impossible.

That's the intent of FOB: to stop the small ball before it is too late.

The convention was graced by the short but very intense performances of **Vincenzo Zitello (bardic and celtic harp)** and **Flavio Cucchi (classic guitar)**.

See the Italian version at

<https://freedomofbelief.net/it/attivita/convegno-internazionale-diritto-e-liberta-di-credo-in-europa-un-cammino-difficile>

HRWF Footnote: Session on anti-sect movements and FECRIS

The papers of Attorney Patricia Duval, Willy Fautré and Thierry Valle can be obtained through HRWF

17:30 - Professor Susan J. Palmer, University of Concordia, Montreal
The "Protective" State and application of France's About-Picard law

17:55 - Dr. Patricia Duval, Lawyer in Paris

State neutrality and anti-sect movements, the France case

18:20 - Mr Willy Fautre, Director of Human Rights Without Frontiers Int.

Anti-sect Movements and Laïcité: the French-Russian Orthodox Connection

18:45 - Mr Thierry Valle, Director of the NGO CAP Liberté de Conscience

FECRIS, an NGO financed by the French government

Thursday, 18 January 2018

Believers of all faiths and atheists in prison: 24 countries of particular concern

Freedom of religion and from religion: Human Rights Without Frontiers publishes over 2200 documented of prisoners on its database online

HRWF Int'l (10.01.2018) – **Human Rights Without Frontiers Int'l** has released its 2017 database of believers and non-believers who have been imprisoned for exercising their freedom of religion or belief.

Twenty-four countries in all were identified by *Human Rights Without Frontiers Int'l* for depriving believers and unbelievers of their freedom in 2017: **Algeria, Azerbaijan, China, Egypt, Eritrea, India, Indonesia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mauritania, Nepal, North Korea, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Korea, Sudan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Vietnam and Yemen.**

"In 2017, we documented over 2200 individual cases of illegal imprisonment of believers and non-believers and we carried out campaigns to get their release, some with success," according to Fautré, director of *Human Rights Without Frontiers Int'l*.

Among all denominations, Christians of all faiths were in jail in the highest number of countries: Protestants in 13 countries, Catholics and Orthodox in 2 countries.

However, members of a dozen other religious or belief communities are known to have been in jail in 2017: Jehovah's Witnesses in 6 countries; Sunnis in 4 countries; Shias, Said Nursi and Tabligh Jamaat followers in 3 countries; Ahmadis, Baha'is, Buddhists and Sufis in 2 countries; Atheists in Egypt, Falun Gong practitioners in China, and Scientologists in Russia.

"Prison terms are usually imposed on peaceful and law-abiding members of religious or belief groups on the basis of laws restricting their freedom to change religion, share one's beliefs, and practice their right to freedom of association, worship and assembly. Additionally, they may be imprisoned simply because of their religious identity", Fautré said.

According to the database, China, Iran and South Korea recorded the largest number of freedom of religion or belief prisoners.

In **China**, Falun Gong practitioners, whose movement was banned in 1999, are massively put in prison, a number of Catholic priests and bishops have also been missing, since their arrests many years ago for being faithful to the Pope instead of swearing allegiance to the Communist Party.

Evangelical and Pentecostal Protestants belonging to the mushrooming network of house churches, and Uyghur Muslims and Tibetan Buddhists, both of which are systematically suspected of separatism, are also particular targets of the regime.

In **Iran**, the Baha'is, whose movement is considered a heresy of Islam, make up the highest number of prisoners. They are followed by home-grown Evangelical and Pentecostal Christians who extensively carry out missionary activities among their fellow citizens despite the risk of imprisonment and execution. Baluchi and Kurdish Sunnis as well as Sufis are also particularly targeted.

In **South Korea**, over 300 young objectors to military service were still serving 18-month prison terms at the end of 2017. Since the Korean War, more than 19,200 Jehovah's Witnesses have reportedly been sentenced to a combined total of over 37,200 years in prison for refusing to perform military service. **Eritrea, Singapore and Tajikistan** are other countries which still imprison conscientious objectors.

"Our best wish for 2018 is that the EU converts its words into action and fully uses the EU Guidelines on Freedom of Religion or Belief to help release many FoRB prisoners of conscience," Fautré hopes.

The lists of prisoners per country can be consulted at: <http://hrwf.eu/forb-intro/forb-and-blasphemy-prisoners-list/>

(*) *Human Rights Without Frontiers Int'l* has been monitoring freedom of religion or belief as a non-religious organization since 1989. In 2017 it covered in its daily newsletter more than 70 countries where there were incidents related to freedom of religion or belief, intolerance and discrimination. See its news database at <http://hrwf.eu/newsletters/forb/>

For further information, contact

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Website: <http://www.hrwf.eu>

About anti-Muslim ideologies, anti-Muslim state policies and inter-Muslim hostilities

By Willy Fautré

HRWF (04.01.2017) – Surveys highlight that in non-Muslim majority countries Muslims often face hostility, stigmatization and discrimination from state and non-state actors. Furthermore, in Muslim-majority countries, the majority Muslim denomination is often responsible for persecution and discrimination against minority Muslim denominations.

Various ideologies underpin global or specific anti-Muslim state policies and social attitudes, including

- a nationalist ideology closely linked to a dominant religion in Myanmar, leading to pogroms, mass killings, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing;
- the Communist ideology enforcing atheism in China, leading to severe restrictions of religious freedom, arrests and imprisonment;
- religiously motivated anti-Muslim ideologies among the Christian right Evangelicals in the United States and in some European Christian majority countries
- populist, extreme-right, fascist or neo-nazi ideologies, such as in Europe and North America
- competing and conflicting theologies inside Islam, each having a different political and social governance agenda, as in Iraq or Syria..

Inter-Muslim hostilities – stemming from theological disputes and struggles for power among various violent Islamist groups – produce innumerable victims of suicide bombings, terrorist attacks, regional conflicts and wars. No global statistics are available on the number of fatalities per religion, but according to a 2011 report from the U.S. government's National Counter-Terrorism Center (NCTC), Muslims suffered between 82 and 97% of terrorism-related fatalities during the previous five years.

Terrorist and jihadist groups such as ISIS, Al-Qaeda, the Talibans, al-Shaabab and Boko Haram have killed and continue to kill dozens of Muslims every day. Their goal is to impose a totalitarian form of governance inspired by their vision and interpretation of Islam. According to the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) at the University of Maryland (United States), between 2004 and 2013, roughly half of all terrorist attacks and 60% of fatalities due to terrorist attacks took place in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan – all of which have a majority Muslim population.

Sunni communities are oppressed in Iran, a Shia majority country, while the Sunni community in Bahrain oppresses the local Shia majority, and Saudi Arabia, a Wahhabi majority country, persecutes its Shia minority.

When a state opts to recognize one form of Islam, dissidents and reformers may be deemed heretical and persecuted, as is the case in Saudi Arabia and Iran. Moreover, other currents of Islam (such as Sufis, Tablighi Jamaat and Said Nursi) may be banned, even though the groups are nonviolent and pose no problem to the security and the territorial integrity of the state. Their members may be arrested and imprisoned, as is the case in Azerbaijan, Russia, Tajikistan or Uzbekistan.

This list offers a snapshot of anti-Muslim and inter-Muslim persecution around the world.

About anti-Christian ideologies, anti-Christian state repression and anti-Christian hostility

By Willy Fautré

HRWF (02.01.2017) - According to a recent Pew Center Research report, Christians, who numbered 2.3 billion in the world in 2015, were harassed by governments or social groups in a total of 128 countries – more countries than any other religious group.

Christians of all faiths around the world are currently victims of state repression, discrimination and/or (violent) social hostility for being Christians and/or practicing their fundamental right to religious freedom: freedom to have and to keep their religion; freedom of expression about issues related to religion, freedom of association, worship and assembly; freedom to have missionary activities and to convert. Various ideologies are underpinning anti-Christian state policies and social attitudes. They lead to diverse violations of human rights and religious freedom committed

- in the name of various forms of Communist ideologies enforcing atheism, such as in China, Eritrea, Laos, North Korea, Vietnam...
- in the name of Islam in Muslim majority countries where it is the official religion of the state or the primary source of the Constitution and the legislation, such as in Afghanistan, Algeria, Bangladesh, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Libya, Maldives, Mauritania, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Yemen ...
- in the name of Islam in Muslim majority countries where there is no official state religion, such as Indonesia, Nigeria, Syria, Turkey...
- in the name of Hinduism, including in (nominally) secular state, such as in India and in Nepal
- in the name of secularism/*laïcité*, anarchist ideologies or Islam in liberal democracies where anti-Christian social hostility is expressed through hate speech, acts of vandalism of places of worship and community buildings, physical attacks, etc. which are often under-reported or ignored by public powers and the media.

State repression against Christians can include the death penalty (Pakistan), various forms of physical punishment (Saudi Arabia), prison terms (China), exorbitant fines (Central Asia) and discriminatory restrictions to their rights.

Social hostility by individuals or collectively organized non-state actors can include a wide range of religiously or ideologically motivated acts: discrimination, insults, hate speech and hate crimes, derogatory statements by public officials, acts of vandalism targeting places of worship and community buildings, physical attacks, torture, killings, extra-

judicial executions, communal violence, pogroms, ethnic cleansing, crimes against humanity and genocide.

This is a picture of anti-Christian persecution around the world.

About the Islamic totalitarianism

By Willy Fautré

HRWF (01.01.2017) - An ideology that wants to radically change the existing nature of a state into a theocracy to be dominated by one religious worldview

An ideology that wants to change the structure of a diverse civil society into a society to be dominated by one religious worldview

An ideology that wants the daily life and the behavior of each individual to be dominated by one religious worldview

is a totalitarian ideology, as was the Communist ideology inspired by the political philosophy of Marx and Engels.

Islamic totalitarianism is a totalitarian ideology inspired by the Quran but it is not a religion.

It divides and fragments the Muslim communities around the world.

The primary "collateral victims" of the fight for power of Islamic totalitarianism are Muslims, who in many countries adhere to an historically peaceful Islam.

Christians are a second category of "collateral victims" of Islamic totalitarianism in Muslim majority countries.

Diverse civil populations in countries where Islam is not professed by a majority are the third category of "collateral victims" of Islamic totalitarianism.

The Islamic totalitarian virus infecting the software of the *ummah* must not infect humankind. An antidote must be administered.

Combating Islamist totalitarianism with ideas, with words and in practice is legitimate. It is obligatory. It is the self-defence of states, of non-Muslim societies and minorities, and of individuals.

Combating groups and individuals, such as the Muslim Brotherhood and Islamic universities such as al-Azhar, which promulgate Islamic totalitarian ideologies is a must.

This is not Islamophobia. It is a fight for human dignity for all, for equality for all and for human rights for all.

Twenty-three Catholic missionaries were killed in the world in 2017

ZENIT (29.12.2017) - <http://bit.ly/2qdx7a5> - Twenty-three Catholic missionaries were killed in the world in 2017: 13 priests, one Religious, one nun, and eight laymen reported the Vatican Agency *Fides*, on Thursday, December 28, 2017. (*)

For the eighth consecutive year, the highest number was recorded in America, where 11 Catholics on mission were killed (eight priests, one Religious, and two laymen), followed by Africa with 10 victims (four priests, one nun, and five laymen), and by Asia where one priest and one layman were killed.

According to data published by *Fides*, from 2000 to 2016, 424 Catholics on mission were killed in the world, of which five were Bishops.

The Agency explained that "numerous pastoral workers were killed during robbery attempts in contexts of economic and cultural poverty, of moral and environmental degradation, where violence and abuses are regarded as a rule of conduct."

For *Fides*, this list is "only the tip of the iceberg," because the list of pastoral workers or of "simple Catholics" who were "assaulted, beaten, robbed, threatened" is much longer, as well as that "of Catholic structures at the service of the whole population, which were assaulted, vandalized or pillaged."

To the provisional lists drawn up annually by *Fides*, "the long list must always be added of those of whom there has been no news for a long time or whose name is unknown, who – in the four corners of the planet – suffer and pay with their life for their faith in Jesus Christ."

The murderers of priests or Religious "are rarely identified or condemned," deplored *Fides*, which gave the example of the murder of Spanish missionary Vicente Canas, killed in Brazil in 1987. During the first trial in 2006, the accused were acquitted for lack of evidence; a new trial led to the condemnation of the sponsor, sole survivor of the accused.

Fides also explained that its annual list "doesn't concern only the missionaries *ad gentes*, in the strict sense of the term, but attempts to register all the pastoral workers who died in a violent way, not explicitly "out of hatred for the faith." "For this reason, we prefer not to use the term 'martyrs,' except in its etymological sense of "witnesses," so as not to anticipate the judgment that the Church might give eventually on some among them."

(*) <http://www.fides.org/en/news/63464>