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# **Christian Minorities: Our Trust Betrayed**

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On Sunday, suicide bombers targeted worshippers leaving their church in Peshawar and killed at least 60, including women and children and two Muslim policemen guarding the church. A couple of weeks ago, the sleepy village of Ma'loulah in Syria was attacked by a gang of armed terrorists. Several of its inhabitants were killed, its historic monasteries and churches were pillaged, and the crosses were removed. In a world full of violence, why is this news?

The bombed church is a historic structure attesting to the long and peaceful relationships between Muslims and Christians in Pakistan which predates even the establishment of that country. Ma'loulah is one of the last places on earth that speak Aramaic, the language of Jesus. Its interfaith population has lived for over a thousand years peacefully together. These terrorists whether in Peshawar or Ma'loulah have committed atrocious crimes under the color of our religion. We Muslims cannot stand in silent witness of their acts.

Have these terrorists not heard of the Prophet's undertaking in a letter, called " 'Ihdat Tour Sinai," addressed to the Christians, East and West, to hold their monasteries, churches, clergy, monks, crosses and icons safe? Did they not read his orders that Muslims "defend them" as if they were according to the Prophet "my own congregation"? "To use the good word" with them, and "show them humble mercy?" and "not erect obstacles between Christianity and those who take a liking to it within our communities"?

Did they not read in that letter that "anyone who violates this undertaking would have violated God's covenant, and taken his faith lightly, and so would have deserved to be cursed." Did they not read that this undertaking is effective until the Day of Judgment? How will those who were responsible for the Peshawar and Ma'loulah crimes, and for the attacks on Egyptian Copts and their places of worship, explain their actions on Judgment Day? Do they believe in a Judgment Day?

How will they explain the cold-blooded killings of innocent Syrian and Iraqi children whose villages do not espouse a particular Islamic sect? Have they not heard of the basic Islamic mantra that "it is a sign of God's mercy that Imams differ in their views (Ikhtilafu'l a'immah rahmaton lil Ummah)?

There are reports that the armed terrorists of Ma'loulah cursed Jesus and Mary. Did they not read in the Quran that Jesus was sent as a Miraculous Sign (ayah) and Mercy to all people? (Mary: 21). Did they not read in the Quran about the miracle of Jesus who spoke in the cradle: "God has

made me blessed... So Peace be on me the day I was born, the day that I die, and the day I am resurrected”? (Mary: 33) Did they miss the long chapter in the Quran called “Mariam” (Mary)? And that the angels’ informed Mary that “God has chosen you, and purified you, and chosen you above the women of all nations”? (Imran:42)

What book are these terrorists reading, if they are indeed reading? It surely is not the Quran! Enough violence in the name of faith, any faith! Faith is about Peace, Mercy and Justice, not murder and violence.

A spokesman for the terrorist group in Peshawar is reported to have stated that “until and unless drone strikes are stopped, we will continue to strike wherever we find an opportunity against non-Muslims.” This is an unfortunate link based on the view that American recent wars in Muslim countries are simply another wave of the Crusader wars, this time a global one.

Understanding the damage done to the psyche of the region by the Crusader Wars, Patriarch Gregorios III Laham explained, “We are not the remnants of Crusaders. Indeed, they never entered Ma’loulah. We are the original inhabitants of Syria.” The “Crusader wars,” he said were a misnomer and inflicted pain on Eastern Christians as much as they did on Muslims. The Crusader wars were about the West’s (“al-Ifrang’s”) political and economic interests, not about the “Cross.” The cross, he noted, has a peaceful meaning of victory through sacrifice. If the West invades the East today, it will be repeating a vicious historical cycle of violence. So, the Patriarch rejected foreign intervention, as did the Pope who called for a day of fasting and prayer. The Patriarch wants the Syrians to solve their problems among themselves through dialogue.

I agree. Violence breeds more violence. While Pakistanis, Syrians, Egyptians, and other nations around the world attempt to resolve their differences, we have our own work to do. As Muslim leaders, we are called to provide a viable and visionary alternative to violence, that reinvigorates the civilizational heritage of Islam and reintroduces its language of tolerance, kindness and dialogue. As a starter, we must stand shoulder to shoulder with the Christians of Peshawar and Ma’loulah, the Copts of Egypt, the Assyrians of Iraq and the Christians of the East and West to renew the Prophetic undertaking. We must resolve to fight this scourge through active education around the world of what it really means to be a Muslim.

To be a Muslim is to build civilizations rather than destroy them, like Avicenna, Averroes and Jaber Ibn Hayyan (the father of Algebra). It is to stand up for Justice before an oppressive ruler, like Zainab the granddaughter of the Prophet. It is to protect freedom of conscience, for the Quran tells us: “there is no compulsion in religion.” It is to promote peaceful and vibrant interfaith living in our world in the service of the Good. “To each of you God has prescribed a Law and an Open Way. If God has so willed he would have made you a single people... so strive in a race in all virtues” (5:48).

This must then be our Jihad, and I ask others of all faiths around the world to support and join us. We all deserve a peaceful world. Our children deserve a happy childhood, and our societies deserve peace and tranquility with dignity in this ever-shrinking global village we call home.