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Introduction

Daniel Philpott and Timothy Samuel Shah

On March 2, 2011, Muslim militants gunned down Shahbaz Bhatti, Pakistan's Federal Minister for Minorities Affairs, just outside his home in Islamabad. A Roman Catholic, Bhatti had accepted his government post out of a calling to protect Pakistan's "oppressed, down-trodden and marginalized," in particular its religious minorities: Christians, Ahmadi Muslims, Shi'a Muslims, and others. Aware that his calling placed his life in danger, Bhatti had renounced marriage so as not to leave behind fatherless children. Not long before he was assassinated, he recorded a video in which he stated, "I believe in Jesus Christ who has given his own life for us, and I am ready to die for a cause. I'm living for my community . . . and I will die to defend their rights."

Bhatti's story is inspiring and jarring but in many respects unremarkable. It could be told as a tale of Islamist violence or of the global curtailment of religious freedom, themes that have received much attention and controversy in recent years. Somewhat more freshly and provocatively, the story could be situated in the context of the global persecution of Christians, a community that faces a disproportionate share of religious freedom rights violations and whose plight has been underreported in the mainstream media and by human rights organizations.[1]

This essay draws from limited portions of a previous essay, Daniel Philpott and Timothy Samuel Shah, "In Response to Persecution: Essays from the *Under Caesar's Sword* Project," *Review of Faith and International Affairs*, Vol. 15, No. 1, 2017, pp. 1–11. For a previous synthesis of the findings of the project, drawn from drafts of the essays in this volume, see *In Response to Persecution: Findings of the* Under Caesar's Sword *Project on Global Christian Communities*, a report that was published in April 2017 and can be located at ucs.nd.edu/report/. The *Under Caesar's Sword* project in general can be explored at ucs.nd.edu.

[1] Georgetown University's Religious Freedom Project analyzed 323 major reports published by Human Rights Watch, one of the world's most influential human rights organizations, over a three-and-a-half-year period (from 2008 to mid-2011) and found that religious persecution of any kind was the focus of only eight (about 2.5 percent) of the published reports. Fewer than half of that small number of reports focused on Christian persecution.

Even this story, though, is being told more and more. Several writers have chronicled it, prominent media outlets have run stories on it, and the US State Department came to recognize it when it declared Christians, along with other religious minorities, victims of genocide in Syria and Iraq in March 2016.[2]

Arguably what is both remarkable and underexplored is Bhatti's response to an environment of persecution – and how Christians around the world respond to persecution. This volume of essays is the product of the world's first systematic investigation of Christian responses to persecution, *Under Caesar's Sword*. Persecuted Christians are not inert, passive victims. Bhatti's life alone involved several active and deliberate responses to persecution. The essays in this volume explore the creativity, deliberation, and agency with which many persecuted Christian communities engage and respond to the repression they face – creativity and agency Bhatti's own short life epitomizes. Having dedicated his life to religious freedom, for example, Bhatti advanced legislation to reform Pakistan's draconian blasphemy laws and further the cause of religious minorities, built coalitions among religious communities, and advocated the forgiveness of his enemies.

After Bhatti's murder, his brother, Paul Bhatti, displayed further the drama of Christian responses to persecution. As he described in a speech at a conference held by the *Under Caesar's Sword* project in Rome in December 2015, earlier in his life he had fled Pakistan in the wake of attacks on Christians and had taken up practice as a surgeon in Italy, despite his brother Shahbaz's appeals to stay with his people in Pakistan.[3] When Shahbaz was killed, Paul flew back to Pakistan to attend his brother's funeral, intending thereafter to leave Pakistan forever. Astounded by the outpouring of tributes to his brother's life, including from Muslims, Paul came to see more clearly the meaning of Shahbaz's love and witness. He was moved to stay in Pakistan, where he accepted an invitation to take up his brother's ministerial seat as well as the Chairmanship of the All Pakistan Minorities Alliance, which his brother had founded. Then, through his mother's example, Paul came to forgive his

[2] John L. Allen, Jr. *The Global War on Christians: Dispatches from the Front Lines of Anti-Christian Persecution* (New York, NY: Image, 2016); Paul Marshall, Lela Gilbert, and Nina Shea, *Persecuted: The Global Assault on Christians* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2013); Rupert Shortt, *Christianophobia: A Faith under Attack* (London: Rider Books, 2012); Eliza Griswold, "Is This the End of Christianity in the Middle East?" *The New York Times Magazine*, July 22, 2015, find at www.nytimes.com/2015/07/26/magazine/is-this-the-end-of-christianity-in-the-middle-east.html?_r=0 (accessed February 3, 2017).

[3] See Bhatti's speech at the conference, "Under Caesar's Sword: An International Conference on Christian Response to Persecution," Rome, Italy, December 10–12, 2015, view portion at 15:00–24:00 minutes, find at www.youtube.com/watch?v=uPwsjYaooRU&index=12&list=PLjZMaI-hJUlRXq5eM-Oj_mLlpLN1gcx-t (accessed February 3, 2017).

brother's killers, concluding that forgiveness and love are the ultimate response to injustice and persecution.

The Bhatti brothers' responses to the denial of their religious freedom are only a portion of the responses to Christian persecution that the fifteen researchers commissioned by the *Under Caesar's Sword* project discovered in over twenty-five countries around the world. In conducting qualitative field research in countries spanning from Libya to Indonesia as well as in the West, these leading scholars of global Christianity found that in diverse settings of repression, Christians variously flee, take up arms, provide social services, undertake protest, document human rights abuses, accept martyrdom, and pursue many other strategies. The project's purpose is to categorize, analyze, and draw out the implications of these responses in hopes that a better understanding of them would provide insight and encouragement to persecuted communities and to all who would be in solidarity with them.

This introductory essay proceeds with a profile of global Christian persecution. It follows with an analysis of the research of the *Under Caesar's Sword* scholars, extracting nine findings. The overarching conclusion of the study is that Christian responses to persecution evince a *creative pragmatism* constituted by short-term efforts to ensure security, accrue strength through associational ties with other organizations and actors, and sometimes mount strategic opposition to the government. The pragmatic, improvisational character of these efforts does not negate their also being creative, courageous, nimble, and anchored in a long-term theological conviction that a future day of freedom will come. The conclusion of the essay elaborates on this central finding.

WHY CHRISTIANS?

Why a focus on Christians? Is this a parochial choice that unjustly excludes other religions? No, the focus is warranted. The curtailment of religious freedom in general has become one of the largest human rights tragedies in the world. The Pew Research Center estimated that 74 percent of the world's population was living in countries with high or very high restrictions on religion in 2014.[4] The curtailment of religious freedom as well as religious discrimination have increased over the past quarter century. In political scientist Jonathan Fox's careful study of religious discrimination – a category that includes twenty-nine forms of restrictions, including ones that curtail religious freedom and also ones that involve persecution – he shows that almost every

[4] Pew Research Center, "Trends in Global Restrictions on Religion," June 23, 2016, pp. 4–5.

category of religious discrimination increased between 1990 and 2008 across major regions of the globe and major world religions.[5] Christians suffer the denial of religious freedom and heavy discrimination more than the members of any other religion. The International Society of Human Rights, a secular NGO based in Frankfurt, estimated in 2009 that Christians were the victims of 80 percent of all acts of religious discrimination in the world.[6] Between 2007 and 2014, Christians were harassed in more countries than any other religious group, the Pew Research Center shows.[7] Fox also confirms that Christians around the world experience more discrimination than other minorities.[8]

Christians are far from being the only members of a religious community to experience the repression of their religious freedom. The denial of the religious freedom of any person or religious community, anywhere, anytime, is the denial of a fundamental human right that merits the world's attention, condemnation, and vigorous response. Even the West, whose countries proclaim religious freedom in their laws and ideals, has seen a spike in assaults on Muslims and Jews, as well as a rise in laws that limit religious freedom from a secular direction.[9] Christians, of course, have also stood at times throughout history on the delivering end of persecution, particularly in episodes spanning the fourth through the seventeenth centuries.

Widening further the universal import of the analyses herein is their great potential for illuminating how other religious communities can respond effectively and faithfully to the forms of persecution that they, too, face. Many of the dilemmas that Christian communities confront and the strategies that they employ are ones that parallel – and may perhaps illuminate – those of other religious communities. Not only do the present essays contain lessons for other religious communities, but they might also promote dialogue and cooperation across faith communities in combating persecution. One of the salient findings of the research – one that we will call a "strategy of association" – is

5 Jonathan Fox, *The Unfree Exercise of Religion: A World Survey of Discrimination Against Religious Minorities* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. 190.

6 Cited in John L. Allen, Jr., *The Global War on Christians: Dispatches from the Front Lines of Anti-Christian Persecution* (New York, NY: Image, 2016), p. 33.

7 Pew Research Center, "Trends in Global Restrictions on Religion," p. 20.

8 Fox, *The Unfree Exercise of Religion*, p. 198.

9 See, for instance, Laura Pitter, "Hate Crimes Against Muslims in US Continue to Rise in 2016," Human Rights Watch, May 11, 2017, find at www.hrw.org/news/2017/05/11/hate-crimes-against-muslims-us-continue-rise-2016; Jonathan Soch, "Anti-Semitism on the Rise: Study Finds 2014 Was Worst Year for Attacks Since 2009," *The Washington Times*, April 15, 2015, find at www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/apr/15/anti-semitism-on-rise-study-finds-2014-was-worst-y/; Daniel Philpott, "Polite Persecution," *First Things*, April 2017, find at www.firstthings.com/article/2017/04/polite-persecution.

that Christian communities often respond to repression by forging ties with members of other religious communities, even those communities that are engaged in their persecution. Other religious communities likewise can be found reaching out to Christians in sympathy and cooperation.

VARIETIES OF CHRISTIAN PERSECUTION

Despite persistent attention in the media and the popular imagination on brutal forms of persecution in Muslim-majority countries such as Iran or totalitarian regimes such as China, the global persecution of Christians assumes an extremely wide variety of forms and levels and takes aim at an immense range of targets. The swords of many different kinds of Caesars – including "little Caesars" with no formal political authority at all – hang over a wide diversity of Christian communities all over the world, including evangelical house-church communities, Pentecostal student groups, and Orthodox and Catholic churches. Moreover, these Caesars brandish very different kinds of swords with very different kinds of objectives, ranging from the annoyance and harassment of Christians to their outright extermination. The regimes in which persecution occurs are also highly diverse. They include authoritarian regimes and failed states but also well-established democracies such as Indonesia, India, and Sri Lanka, whose open and competitive electoral systems have sometimes incentivized groups to target Christian minorities in order to attract the political support of non-Christian majorities.

An analysis by Paul Marshall suggests that Christian persecution across the world occurs mainly in five different kinds of contexts,[10] and these contexts strongly determine both the form and severity of anti-Christian repression: (1) Communist regimes (e.g., China, Vietnam, Laos, North Korea, and Cuba); (2) authoritarian and national security states; (3) countries influenced by religious nationalism, particularly but not exclusively in South Asia (e.g., India, Sri Lanka, and Russia); (4) Muslim-majority countries, both those with Islamist regimes and those with secularist regimes; and (5) Western countries influenced by secularism or what legal scholar Steve D. Smith calls "secular egalitarianism."[11] While restrictions and hostilities in the West are milder than in the other types of regimes, they are growing and merit exploration – Pope

[10] Paul Marshall, "Patterns and Purposes of Contemporary Anti-Christian Persecution," in Allen Hertzke and Timothy Samuel Shah, eds., *Christianity and Freedom: Vol. 2, Contemporary Perspectives* (New York, NY, and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 58–86.

[11] Steven D. Smith, *The Rise and Decline of American Religious Freedom* (Cambridge, MA; London, England: Harvard University Press, 2014), particularly pp. 153–6.

Francis has called them "polite persecution," as they are also called by Paul Marshall in Chapter 14 of this collection.

Note, however, that these analytical categories are far from being mutually exclusive. For example, Kathleen Collins in this volume observes that Central Asian states are no longer Communist but retain an infrastructure of religious repression that is in basic respects a remnant of their harshly Soviet past. And the persecution of minority Christian groups in some authoritarian states, such as Russia, is motivated partly by a form of religious nationalism. Some repressive Islamist regimes approximate religious nationalism as well insofar as they fuse ethnic and national identities with Islam and declare their countries Islamic states or homelands (e.g., Pakistan and Malaysia).

In most of these states, Christians are minorities, sometimes tiny minorities. This is not always the case, however. Christians are perfectly susceptible to persecution in countries where they are a majority – sometimes at the hands of a secularist regime like Cuba, as Paul Freston describes in his chapter, sometimes at the hands of nonstate actors, as in Columbia, Mexico, and Kenya. Russia is a complex case where minority Catholics and Protestants face discrimination and repression at the hands of a government acting partly on behalf of the majority Orthodox faith.[12] Previous periods in history afford manifold additional instances of the systematic repression of Christian-majority populations, sometimes en masse: the Soviet Union (1917–91); Communist states in Eastern Europe during the Cold War; other Cold War Communist states like Mozambique; the Latin American military dictatorships of the 1960s to 1980s (described in Freston's chapter); Mexico, where repression was most severe in the 1920s but continued up through the 1990s; France in the years following its revolution and then under the Third Republic; and other anti-clerical republican regimes.

Complexity arises similarly from the many different shapes and sizes of the "sword" of persecution. In a number of contexts, the machinery of state power brings down the full weight of Caesar's sword in the form of direct and appalling violence: police and security services, sometimes directed by bureaus of religious affairs, forcibly break up church services and Bible studies, and imprison and torture pastors, evangelists, and rank-and-file church members for engaging in ordinary religious activities. In some of the same contexts but

[12] Russia's curtailments of religious freedom have only become worse as of late. In 2017, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom designated Russia a "Country of Particular Concern," the designation that it reserves for the world's worst religious-freedom violators. See www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2017.USCIRFAnnualReport.pdf (accessed May 25, 2017).

in others as well, the sword of persecution assumes subtler and less violent forms. Alexis de Tocqueville limpidly observed that nineteenth-century white Americans dispossessed and subjugated native peoples "with wonderful ease, quietly, legally, philanthropically," adding that "[i]t is impossible to destroy men with more respect to the laws of humanity."[13] In the very different context of our twenty-first century world, it is striking how much state-sponsored persecution of Christians is conducted with comparable legality, regularity, and bureaucratic propriety. As Roger Finke, Dane R. Mataic, and Jonathan Fox observe, a growing number of regimes deliberately impose registration requirements so severe and time-consuming that the otherwise simple business of instituting a Christian organization, buying property for Christian purposes, or building a Christian house of worship becomes effectively impossible.[14]

On the other hand, much Christian persecution arises from nonstate actors – the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria as described by Kent Hill, Islamist militias in Indonesia's Maluku islands as depicted by Robert Hefner, the Buddhist militants in Sri Lanka that Chad Bauman and James Ponniah discuss, or the paramilitary groups in Colombia that Paul Freston examines in his chapter. Persecution by such groups is often horrific in its violence. At the same time, as sociologists Brian Grim and Roger Finke show, there is often a correlation, and in many instances close causal interaction, between government restriction and social hostilities directed against Christians.[15] In many cases, for example, the organization of violent persecution by nonstate actors "from below" depends on the direct support (in financing or active encouragement) or indirect help (in providing an environment of impunity) of government institutions and state officials working "from above."[16]

Remarkably diverse, too, are *the reasons* that motivate so many state and nonstate Caesars to inflict so many different kinds of persecution on Christians. Perhaps the most common and widespread reason for Christian persecution – both in its more severe and in more mild forms – is the characteristic Christian insistence on being different and independent from comprehensive political

[13] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, translated by George Lawrence and edited by J.P. Mayer (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1988 [1835, 1840]), p. 339.

[14] Roger Finke, Dane R. Mataic, and Jonathan Fox, "Assessing the Impact of Religious Registration," unpublished paper presented to the US State Department – Office of International Religious Freedom, February 2016.

[15] Brian J. Grim and Roger Finke, *The Price of Freedom Denied: Religious Persecution and Conflict in the 21st Century* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

[16] This is one important finding of the voluminous research of Paul Brass on religious violence in India. See, for example, Paul R. Brass, *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India* (Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press, 2003).

control or cultural hegemony. In trying to understand why the conduct and indeed existence of the early Christians appeared to Roman magistrates in such a "serious and criminal light," eighteenth-century historian Edward Gibbon – who could hardly be accused of excessive sympathy for the early church – concluded that what most provoked Roman persecution was Christianity's "independent spirit, which boldly acknowledged an authority superior to that of the magistrate."[17] Today, too, the simple refusal on the part of many Christians in various contexts to "fit in" and buckle under, and their determination to construct their own "autonomous spiritual space," to quote sociologist David Martin, goes a long way toward explaining Christian persecution in numerous contexts, including Communist China and Vietnam, Central Asia, South Asia, Russia, and an increasingly secular West.[18] According to Paul Marshall, because Christianity denies that the powers that be are the ultimate arbiter of human life in any given context, it tends to resist attempts to impose a single supreme authority in state, society, or culture (though the kinds and means of resistance vary considerably, as we shall see). In Marshall's analysis, therefore, a significant factor in contemporary global patterns of anti-Christian hostility is Christianity's virtually intrinsic association with pluralism and freedom.[19]

Other factors vary across a wide range, some pertaining to genuine aspects of Christian theology and conduct, and others involving politicized and largely manufactured perceptions of Christian communities and their intentions. In numerous contexts outside the West, governments and majority religious communities perceive the very existence of a Christian minority as a pro-Western

[17] Edward Gibbon, *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (London: Printed for W. Strahan, 1776), Vol. I, Chapter XVI: "Conduct Towards the Christians, From Nero to Constantine," Part 1.

[18] David Martin, *Tongues of Fire: The Explosion of Protestantism in Latin America* (Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell, 1990), p. 7.

[19] Marshall, "Patterns and Purposes," pp. 58–86. In fact, despite a post-Enlightenment image of Christians as inclined to be toadies to the powers that be, robust and spontaneous assertions of social and political independence have been a recurring feature of Christian communities in a remarkably wide range of historical and cultural contexts, from the obstinacy and independence of the early Christians noted by Edward Gibbon to many more recent examples. Sujatha Fernandes uncovered one striking instance in British India in 1928: "Laurie Hammond, the governor of Assam, then a province of British colonial rule, reported that the Christian Kuki tribals of the eastern district of Manipur had *refused to carry out forced labor in construction, declaring that they were no longer subjects of the British state, but had become Christians*" [emphasis ours]. Fernandes goes on to note that "[e]vangelical missionary activity provided the basis on which oppositional identities could be constructed," in Sujatha Fernandes, "Ethnicity, Civil Society, and the Church: The Politics of Evangelical Christianity in Northeast India," in David Lumsdaine, ed., *Evangelical Christianity and Democracy in Asia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 136.

Trojan Horse. From northern Nigeria to China, from Iraq to north India to Indonesia, some groups and governments sincerely believe that Christians are agents of the West's strategic, political, religious, or cultural interests; others deliberately exaggerate and propagate this notion to advance their own political or religious agendas.[20] On the strength of this narrative, anti-Christian persecution is not an act of belligerence but a necessary means of political and cultural self-defense against Christian aggression. Partly because of long and painful histories of Western exploitation and colonial domination, in which Christianity often played a role, this narrative of the Christian fifth column enjoys significant resonance and no small degree of influence in numerous contexts, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa and in South and Southeast Asia.[21]

Reinforcing this narrative of dangerous Christian aggression is the fact that many Christian communities engage in confrontational forms of evangelism that genuinely – and loudly – challenge the adherence of indigenous individuals and communities to long-dominant theologies as well as cultural beliefs and practices. The Christian communities that most frequently engage in these assertive forms of evangelism are evangelical and Pentecostal churches that are experiencing rapid and widespread growth in the Global South. Todd Johnson's global surveys of Christian persecution, as well as regional research by Chad Bauman and James Ponniah in South Asia and by Kathleen Collins in Central Asia, suggest that evangelical and Pentecostal churches often bear the brunt of political and social persecution, due in no small part to their more public and assertive strategies of evangelism.[22]

In terms of magnitude, direction, and geographic breadth, then, global Christian persecution is grim. Christian persecution takes place across a geographic band of enormous length and breadth – more or less coextensive with what journalist Eliza Griswold has described as the world's "tenth parallel" of

[20] For instance, a seemingly genuine fear of Christianity as a Western Trojan Horse drove the ferocious waves of anti-Christian persecution in Japan in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries – waves of persecution that formed the premise of Shusakō Endō's historical novel of 1966, *Silence*. See, for example, Michael Cooper, *Rodrigues the Interpreter: An Early Jesuit in Japan and China* (New York, NY: Weatherhill, 1974), p. 160.

[21] For discussion of the historical and ongoing influence of the narrative of the Christian "fifth column" in South and Southeast Asia, see Zainal Abidin Bagir and Robert Hefner, "Christianity and Religious Freedom in Indonesia since 1998," and Chad M. Bauman and James Ponniah, "Christianity and Freedom in India: Colonialism, Communalism, Caste, and Violence," both chapters in Hertzke and Shah, eds., *Christianity and Freedom: Vol. 2* (New York, NY, and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), at pp. 191–221 and 222–53, respectively.

[22] Later in the chapter we provide further discussion of whether and why evangelical Protestants, including Pentecostals, experience somewhat greater levels of persecution in various contexts.

religious conflict – that stretches from Libya, plunges southward to northern Nigeria, moves eastward to Egypt and the rest of the Middle East, expands north to Russia and south to Sri Lanka, and then proceeds eastward to China, Indonesia, and North Korea.[23] Based on systematic demographic analysis, Todd Johnson estimates that some 500 million Christians – more than 20 percent of Christians on earth – live in countries where they are vulnerable to severe persecution, with virtually all of them in this geographic band. By 2020, Johnson predicts, this figure will rise to 600 million, or nearly a quarter (23.5 percent) of the world's Christian population.[24] And, as we noted above, Christian persecution is large not only in terms of the absolute numbers of people affected but also in terms of its share of the overall quantum of religion-related persecution and discrimination in the world today.

However, while large numbers of Christians are persecuted, and while Christian persecution constitutes a large share of global religious persecution, it is equally true that the vast majority of Christians in the world today do not live in contexts of systematic or severe anti-Christian persecution. In other words, the undeniably significant phenomenon of Christian persecution must be set within the context of Christianity's large size and wide geographic distribution, encompassing experiences of widely varied levels of religious repression. These two sentences are saying the same thing. Replace with: The vast majority of the world's Christians, about 80 percent, live in the regions of Western Europe, North America, and South America, in which there is relative religious freedom and a relative absence of severe and systematic religious persecution. In contrast, according to the Pew Research Center, roughly three-quarters of the world's total population of 7.2 billion – about 74 percent – were living in countries with high or very high restrictions or hostilities in 2014.[25] On the basis of these numbers and proportions, then, a much smaller share of the world's Christians lives in countries subject to severe persecution (about 20 percent) than the share of the world's people that lives in countries subject to such persecution (about 74 percent). The implication is clear and stark. The vast majority of the world's Christians – who are Western both in that they trace their roots to the ecclesial communities of Western Christianity and inhabit the

[23] Eliza Griswold, in *The Tenth Parallel: Dispatches from the Fault Line between Christianity and Islam* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010).

[24] Todd M. Johnson, "Persecution in the Context of Religious and Christian Demography, 1970–2020," in Hertzke and Shah, eds., *Christianity and Freedom: Vol. 2*, p. 52.

[25] Pew Research Center, "Trends in Global Restrictions on Religion," June 23, 2016, find at www.pewforum.org/2016/06/23/trends-in-global-restrictions-on-religion/ (accessed November 22, 2016).