Why Are These Christians Dying?

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This Easter, the world should spare a thought for the world's Christians. In Western Europe, this time of year is increasingly secularised, but in large parts of the rest of the world, people are being massacred relentlessly because of a faith on which much of the developed world was founded but now ignores.

A single day this week epitomises the trend. On Maundy Thursday last week, radio adverts in Britain advertised the Easter retail sales. One advert said that after "Good Friday," shoppers could be sure of a "Great Saturday." Elsewhere, as in Kenya, Maundy Thursday will hereafter have a very different tone.

On Thursday, a group of jihadists from the al-Qaeda-linked terrorist group, al-Shabaab, went onto the campus of Garissa College University in Kenya, and students began to run for their lives. The gunmen who entered the campus did a selection of their targets by religion. As they went from room to room and dorm to dorm, they asked the students their faith. According to reports on BBC, those who could answer the questions about Islam the terrorists posed, and were therefore Muslim, were allowed to go free. Those who could not, and were therefore Christian, were killed. The vice-chair of the student union, who witnessed the atrocity, described plainly what he saw, "If you were a Christian, you were shot on the spot."

The tactics and the religious separation of survivors and victims recall other atrocities in recent history. But in Kenya, it particularly brings to mind the 2013 Westgate shopping mall massacre in Nairobi, when 67 people were killed in cold blood. Again, Muslims were allowed to go free, while Christians were slaughtered. Kenyan authorities believe the same mastermind -- Mohammed Mohamud -- is behind both attacks.

The death toll on Thursday was even higher than in Nairobi. The authorities say that as many as 148 people -- mostly students, along with two security guards -- were killed at their place of study.

Although the world may once again have briefly turned its attention to Kenya, it is turning its back on the victims of this violence. In the same way that the President of the United States does not want to admit the religious impetus that leads to "random folks" being shot dead in a kosher supermarket in Paris, the entire Western world is reluctant to admit the reason why Christians are at the front line of this global conflict. When Boko Haram kidnapped 300 schoolgirls in Northern Nigeria last year, almost none of the world's press -- and none of the Western world's leaders -- identified the simple fact that these schoolgirls were kidnapped because they were Christian.

Likewise, when ISIS paraded 21 men along the shoreline of Libya in February and cut off their heads, allowing their blood to stain the Mediterranean Sea, most of the world's press and almost all of the world's leaders -- including the leader of the free world -- referred to the victims as "Egyptian." But what singled these men out, and singled them out in the eyes of ISIS, was *not* that they were Egyptian, but that they were "Copts" --- that they were Christians. What would the President of the United States say if the blacks lynched in America's old South were referred to as "random folks" or "Americans"?

It is unlikely that the world will hear this emphasised in the wake of the latest Kenya massacre. Al-Shabaab of course has no problem emphasising the fact. This week, its spokesman boasted clearly about the religious motivations of the Garissa attack, even while the atrocity was still ongoing, "There are many dead bodies of Christians inside the building," he said. "We are also holding many Christians alive."

Certain patterns can now be widely recognized in these early days of the worldwide war against the totalitarian demands of Islamic fundamentalism. Some, such as the bloodlust of our enemies, are easy to discern. But other patterns seem to be harder to recognize or admit because they are patterns for which we, rather than they, are responsible -- such as our motivations for tolerating, and even enabling, this behavior.

For instance, who can explain why the West is so reluctant to admit the motivation of the killers? Can anyone explain why the West gives fanciful excuses for what they are doing, despite their perfectly clear explanations for what they are doing? When the victims are Jews, we do not want them to be Jews -- just "random folks." When the victims are Christians, we do not want them to be Christians -- just "Egyptians."

All the time there are "other things" that we do want to be the case. So for instance, in the wake of the attacks in Copenhagen in February, there was a scaling up of security at most Jewish sites across Europe. Little of this was focussed on by the media. But when one small-scale initiative took place in Norway that involved a few Muslims, among others, forming a human chain to stand symbolically around a synagogue for a couple of hours, that story garnered headlines and news coverage around the world. This is not to say that such initiatives are not good and are not appreciated. But they are tiny, tiny flecks of light given an amazing amount of coverage, and deemed to have a vast and seismic influence.

Muslims *targeting* Christians and Jews because they are Christians and Jews means, "don't focus on the motivations of the Muslims." Muslims *defending* Christians or Jews means, "desperately focus on the motivations of the Muslims."

Sadly, we are, essentially, kidding only ourselves. It is possible that our political leaders think they must not admit to the religious motivations and psychopathy of the jihadists, because otherwise it will cause some terrible backlash against Muslims as a whole. But this seems a great misjudgement. Not just because such a response is deeply unlikely in the developed world, but because many members of the public can today see perfectly plainly for themselves what is happening. People on the front-line, in Kenya, Libya, Egypt, South Sudan, Nigeria, Syria, Iraq and a whole host of other countries, where people are being killed because they are Christians, see it more clearly than anyone.

There are few easy answers to all of this. But one small step in the right direction would be to try to face up to the problem, and to do what we can for the victims. My own suggestion would be that instead of going shopping this "Great" Saturday or Sunday, that people, whether religious or secular, at least spare some time this Easter to think about -- and do anything they can to help -- the beleaguered Christian communities worldwide. It is one of the greatest tragedies imaginable that two thousand years after the Passion they are commemorating this week, Christians are still being killed for their faith. The only thing that makes this tragedy even greater is that the world does not want to admit why these Christians are dying.