

TWO FACES OF CHRISTIAN PERSECUTION

As 2025 comes to a close, it is sad to note that Christians are being persecuted in many countries, the extent of which is deeply troubling. There are two faces to this crisis: some of it is violent in nature; some of it is more invidious. All of it is being done by extremists: religious fanatics and secular fanatics.

No one saw this being played out in detail better than Pope Benedict XVI. Faith and reason are critical components to the good society, he counseled, but when either is taken to extremes, it bears ugly fruit. He properly saw Muslim fanaticism as the greatest threat stemming from those whose faith perspective became unhinged from reason; he saw European secular fanaticism as the greatest threat emanating from those whose embrace of reason became unhinged from faith.

The data make it clear that Benedict got it just right.

Pope Leo XIV is correct to note that Muslims are also being slaughtered in Nigeria. But according to the Observatory for Religious Freedom in Africa, of the 30,000 civilians killed in a four-year period, roughly 6,000 were Muslims and 17,000 were Christians. At least 7,000 Christians have been killed in 2025—an average of 35 a day—and 19,000 churches have been destroyed. It is radical Muslims in the north who are killing Christians in the southern part of the nation, the lion's share of whom are Catholics.

The other face of Christian persecution is taking place in Europe. We are witnessing what Pope Francis called "polite persecution." Typically, it is "disguised as culture, disguised as modernity, disguised as progress." It centers on thought control. "God made us free," he said, "but this kind

of persecution takes away freedom.” It is the devil, he said, who is the sponsor of “polite persecution.”

What Francis observed is happening in Europe.

The Observatory on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians in Europe (OIDAC Europe) recently released a report noting more than 2,200 anti-Christian hate crimes throughout Europe in 2024. France, the United Kingdom, Germany, Spain and Austria have the worst record. The crimes run the gamut from killings and arson to conscience violations and parental rights abuses.

Who’s committing these offenses? Radical Muslims lead the way, followed by radical left-wing ideologues. No demographic group is more wary of exercising their religious rights than Catholic priests. This is due in no small way to leftwing media portrayals of them. In fact, in the OIDAC survey, 90 percent of respondents said they perceive a consistent media bias against Catholic priests and bishops. Regrettably, 81 percent of priests said they *did not* report anti-Catholic incidents to the authorities.

It is not radical Muslims who are stocking the command centers in Europe. No, it is radical secularists. To be exact, it is the political and cultural elites who are drunk on secular extremism, and it is they who are the masters of “polite persecution.” Here are some examples.

- In France, a Catholic media outlet was fined for reporting that abortion was a “cause of death”
- In Scotland, a Christian midwifery student was suspended from her school after she shared her conscientious objection to abortion in a private Facebook forum
- Scotland has become so extreme that it is warning Christians about restrictions in their homes. If their pro-life activities can be seen or heard from outside, they risk violating the law

- In England, an army veteran was found guilty for silently praying within a designated “buffer zone,” 50 meters from an abortion clinic. He did not speak or engage with anyone
- In Spain, over 20 persons have faced prosecution since 2022 for peacefully praying near abortion clinics
- In Spain, a Christian father who took his child to church, over the objections of the child’s secular mother, was told to stop. He was also told he had no right to read the Bible to his child
- In the Netherlands, Christians have been detained for peacefully distributing pro-life literature outside abortion clinics
- In Finland, a court convicted an elderly Christian couple of “assault” after they prayed with a man about his struggles with sexuality
- In Germany, a crucifix was removed from a state secondary school because he was declared “compulsory, recurring, and unavoidable”
- In Italy, the town mayor of Manduria banned all “on-foot” funeral processions, including traditional funeral bands

There are examples of “soft totalitarianism” in the United States, as well, but on this score, the Europeans win first prize.