

Wake Up, America: Advice from a Pakistani Christian

My friend Amir is a marked man. I can't even use his real name because Muslim extremists in his native Pakistan want to kill him.

Last month while Muslims were burning churches and murdering Americans in the Middle East to protest a low-budget film about Islam, I spent a few days with Amir, who attends Bible college in the United States. Raised a Presbyterian, Amir's belief in Jesus puts him in the minority in Pakistan.

Amir has seen anti-Christian violence erupt in his country many times. When he was a boy, a classmate boasted of starting a fire that burned an entire Christian town. In 2010 terror hit the city of Faisalabad when two pastors were accused of blaspheming Muhammad. Assassins shot and killed both pastors while police watched.

In August of this year a Christian girl in Pakistan was arrested and accused of desecrating a copy of the Quran—a capital offense under Islamic law. Later, after a Muslim cleric was arrested on charges of framing the girl, local Muslims continued to call for her death—along with anyone who defended her. One Muslim from the girl's village was quoted by reporters as saying: "Pour petrol and burn these Christians!"

I interviewed my friend Amir to gain insight into how Americans should view this growing conflict. He put things into perspective with these three points:

1. Realize that God is moving in powerful ways in Islamic countries. Despite the violence we hear about daily, all the news is not negative. Muslims are coming to know Jesus—often because of supernatural demonstrations of the Holy Spirit. Amir's family witnessed a miracle in 2005 when his younger

sister was healed of total blindness. They began attending a Pentecostal church and now have helped plant three congregations.

Reports of church growth, conversions and evangelism campaigns are not aired on network television, but they are widespread—in Iran, Pakistan, Turkey and other Islamic nations. “It is true that a lot of Muslims want to learn about Christianity,” Amir says.

2. The best way to win a Muslim to Christ is through love and kindness. Amir cringes when he hears how Florida pastor Terry Jones publicly burns copies of the Quran and blasts Islamic doctrines. “This is not the way to reach Muslims,” Amir says. “We must talk to them nicely. The majority of Muslims coming to Jesus today are coming because of miracles, supernatural visitations of Jesus and conversations with Christians who offer literature that is loving and non-threatening.”

Amir points out that intentional efforts to discredit the Quran or speak against Muhammad create a backlash that hurts Middle Eastern Christians. He notes that the recently released film *Innocence of Muslims* triggered violent outbreaks in Pakistan last week that resulted in the burning of two churches in Mardan and one in Karachi. “That movie is not a way to reach Muslims because it will close doors for missionary work in Islamic countries,” Amir adds.

3. Americans should take a stand to protect the rights of Christians in the Middle East. Last week Middle Eastern delegates to the United Nations demanded that world leaders enact “blasphemy laws” to stop any form of speech that is critical of Islam. Pakistan has had such a law since the mid-1990s, and it is often used to persecute both Christians and Hindus.

In 2008 in the Pakistani city of Gojra, at least 14 Christians were killed and 180 houses were burned when Muslims accused

Christians of desecrating the Quran. Investigators later proved that no desecration occurred. Says Amir: "The blasphemy law is a sword to the Christians in my country. It is more than a curse. It is bondage. And if this becomes international policy it will be very destructive to the Christian community in Egypt, Iran and other nations."

And let's not assume this problem exists only on the other side of the world. Last week in Dearborn, Mich., Islamic leaders rallied in the streets to demand passage of anti-blasphemy laws in the United States. They want to criminalize all speech that is deemed offensive to Muslims. Amir believes Americans must protect the right to freedom of expression—even as we use caution in the way we share our faith with followers of Islam.

Amir begs the Christian community in the West to remember that we have many brothers and sisters living in the middle of the powder keg that is the Middle East. Let's live in solidarity with them. They need our prayers. But they are also looking to us for courage—to preserve religious freedom at home and to promote it abroad.

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