

Quran Burning Leads to Violence Against Churches

Nearly two dozen have died, including seven UN workers, and nearly 150 are wounded as a result of the demonstrations across Afghanistan that began April 1.

The murders took place in Mazar-i-Sharif after extremists overran the United Nations compound there as the frenzy began to take hold.

The protests were driven by anger at a self-named Christian leader who supervised the burning of a Quran in front of about 50 people at a church in Florida on March 20 following a mock trial. Todd Nettleton with Voice of the Martyrs says, "A small church in Florida held what they called a 'trial' for the Quran. They ended up finding it guilty of whatever charges, and they lit the Quran on fire."

What's worse, "They actually streamed this 'service' live on the Internet for the world to see and posted the video apparently on their church Web site. The Islamic world responded with anger and outrage." Not surprisingly, this pastor has also been the target of more than 300 death threats, and the Taliban responded with a \$2.4 million bounty on his head.

There's an increasing concern about how quickly related violence is spreading. For example, Nettleton says, "If you're angry at something that a Christian pastor has done, you strike back against any American, and you strike back against a Christian. Christians become a target. Churches become a target. It really just spirals from there."

And this has already proven true: "There are churches in Pakistan that were attacked with stones and fire. We're seeing a lot of anger around the Muslim world that is coming back

against Americans, against people of other countries, and against Christians.”

Mobs formed in Wah Cantt, and the attacks raised questions about the already shaky security for believers in Pakistan. The unrest follows the recent assassinations of Punjab Governor Salman Taseer and Minorities Minister Shahbaz Bhatti. Both men were known for their outspoken views on the blasphemy law and for their sympathy of the Christian plight.

Watchdog and advocacy groups like Voice of the Martyrs keep the persecuted church in front of those who are resourced to respond. Nettleton says there are a lot of things to pray for in this scenario. “I think we can pray for Muslims to take a hard look at their take a hard look at the Quran, at what it says, and hopefully to be influenced by the difference that the Gospel can make.”

The actions of an American at the helm of the Dove Outreach Center in Florida are not ones that speak of the love of Christ. However, it is one way to counter the anger that fuels the violence. It presents an opportunity for Christians to step forward and say, ‘The way we act like Christ is by loving our enemies. It’s by offering forgiveness to those who persecute us. It presents an opportunity for a real practical example of what Christ’s love can look like.