

## Cultural relativism an unnecessary cross to bear

[Jennifer Oriel](#), The Australian, August 8, 2016

Columnist

The Pope has embraced jihad denialism at the historical moment that jihadists have declared war on Christianity. His recent denial that jihadism is rooted in Islamist theology, his selective criticism of Western secure border policy and his belief that the celebration of European Christianity amounts to colonialism have many Catholics wondering whether he is capable of protecting the church in a time of crisis.

The jihadist murder of Jacques Hamel marked the end of innocence in the 21st-century Christian West. It is the first time Islamic State jihadists have entered a Western church to kill a priest. Following the attack, the Pope said the world was at war, but he denied its roots were religious. Instead, he ascribed jihadism to a battle over resources and money.

Empirical evidence suggests the Pope is wrong — gravely so. The murder of Hamel was inspired by Islamism, motivated by hatred of Christians, enacted by jihadists and claimed by Islamic State. In its propaganda mag Dabiq, Islamic State vowed that Christians “will not have safety, even in your dreams, until you embrace Islam. We will conquer your Rome, break your crosses, and enslave your women.” Normandy’s Saint-Etienne-du-Rouvray church was one of several Catholic churches found on an Islamic State hit list. L’Express magazine reported that one of the Rouen jihadists, Adel Kermiche, explained in advance his plan to attack Christians as they prayed: “You take a knife, you go into a church. Bam!” What part of jihadism does the Pope not understand?

The jihadists smiled after slitting Hamel’s throat and desecrating the altar before turning on nuns and parishioners. Consistent with jihadist trial by ideology, they investigated the nuns for Koranic compliance. After one nun, Helene Decaux, attested to reading several surahs and offered respect for the Koran, the Islamists denied Christ, stating: “Jesus cannot be God and a man.”

Islamists are monotheistic and deny the triune God of Christianity to the degree that some Islamic countries codify the submission of Christians by prescribing them second-class citizen status under sharia law. However, Pope Francis appears unable or unwilling to grasp the connection between political Islam, anti-Christian oppression and jihadism.

In a press conference, a journalist asked why he hadn’t referred to Islamic terrorism or fundamentalism when speaking about the jihadist killing of Hamel. In his reply, the Pope indulged in base cultural relativism by comparing the system of transnational jihadism with individual instances of domestic violence.

The latest issue of Dabiq offers a timely corrective to the Pope’s loose grasp on the reality of jihadism. Titled “Break the Cross”, its cover depicts a jihadist desecrating a church by destroying the cross on its steeple. Its authors urge Muslims to subjugate Christians and kill those who refuse to submit. Subjugation takes the form of cultural genocide. In the caliphate, Christians are banned from building or rebuilding churches, wearing the cross and openly practising their faith. They are required to “make room for Muslims and stand for them when they want to sit”. And they are forced to pay Muslims a hate tax, jizya, simply for being Christian. As the jihadists state, the purpose of the tax is to elevate Muslims over Christians and Jews.

Despite the increasing frequency of Islamist terror attacks on Western citizens, political and religious leaders commonly lapse into what I would describe as jihadist denialism. The constitution of jihadist denialism is: the creation of a false distinction between Islamic scripture and Islamist terrorism; a

form of cultural relativism that holds Christians and Jews equally responsible for modern terrorism as jihadists; a sole focus on the militant expression of jihadism while ignoring its political form; and the omission that codified inequality is a political fact of many Islamic states under sharia law. Jihadist denialists often omit the influence of Christianity in the formation of the secular state, the idea of free will and free choice, the abolition of slavery, the recognition of formal equality and universal human rights.

Jihadist denialism minimises both the deleterious effect of political Islam and the positive legacy of Christianity. It is a dual fallacy.

The confusion that besets Western political and religious leaders when faced with jihadism is a luxury that persecuted Christians in Islamic nations cannot afford. Several organisations such as Open Doors and the Pew Research Centre have produced research showing Christians are the most persecuted religious group worldwide. The primary persecutors of Christians are Islamist and communist regimes. There is no equivalent persecution of Muslims in the Christian-majority nations of the West.

Reverend Majed el-Shafie is a refugee who fled the Islamic world after being imprisoned and tortured by the Egyptian government for converting from Islam to Christianity. In the wake of Hamel's murder, el-Shafie explained its cause to British newspaper SundayExpress with a clarity that appears to have eluded the Pope: "I believe Christians are a main target just like we used to be. This has been happening to Christians in the Middle East for hundreds of years." Islamic State is simply the latest iteration of jihadism whose global organisations include al-Qa'ida, Hezbollah and Hamas. As el-Shafie stresses: "The problem is the ideology of the extremists."

The principal aim of jihadists is to impose a global caliphate governed by sharia law. To achieve it, they must destroy liberal democracy, Judeo-Christianity and all of the West's attendant freedoms.

Our response to jihadism should not be appeasement born of denial and fear, but the courage to think free thoughts, speak freely and pray to the god of our belief, or observe no god at all. If the West is to survive the 21st-century war with Islamist terror, we must adopt a zero-tolerance policy towards jihadists and their ideology. That means supporting persecuted Christians by doing what jihadists loathe: rebuilding the churches they destroy, supporting the communities they persecute, giving shelter to Christian refugees, letting the church bells ring out and wearing the cross with honour.