

OBSERVATORY ON  
INTOLERANCE AND DISCRIMINATION  
AGAINST CHRISTIANS IN EUROPE

REPORT  
2019



# OBSERVATORY ON INTOLERANCE AND DISCRIMINATION AGAINST CHRISTIANS IN EUROPE

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# The Observatory's Mission

To contribute to a Europe where Christians may fully exercise their fundamental rights to freedom of religion, conscience, expression, and association, without fear of reprisals, censorship, threats, or violence.

## Who we are:

The Observatory on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians is a registered non-governmental organization in Austria and a member of the Fundamental Rights Platform of the EU-Fundamental Rights Agency.

## What we do:

- » **Research, analyze, document,** and **report** cases of intolerance and discrimination against Christians in Europe;
- » **Inform and educate** the public, lawmakers, and international institutions about the range of hostilities and marginalization Christians and Christian institutions face in Europe by providing reliable and objective data;
- » **Empower Christians** to tell their stories and freely live their faith in the public square;
- » **Advocate** for remedies; and
- » **Emphasize** the vital role religion plays in a mature and peaceful society.

The Observatory's task is to analyze the situation for Christians in Europe. We do so not in order to compare or diminish the persecution they experience in other parts of the world, but to stay vigilant in the protection of human rights.

Our work aims at encouraging victims of intolerance and discrimination to tell their stories, and to raise awareness among all people of good will that the phenomenon ought to be taken seriously and is in need of a common response.

Since 2005, we have published more than 2,600 cases of intolerance and discrimination against Christians in Europe.

## Report a case!

Have you been discriminated against because of your Christian faith?

Have you been verbally attacked when stating a Christian position?

Have you heard or read media reports about an incident negatively affecting Christians or Christian buildings, symbols, or institutions?

If so, please email us your story:

[observatory@intoleranceagainstchristians.eu](mailto:observatory@intoleranceagainstchristians.eu)



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# Introduction

In 1996, the United Nations General Assembly established November 16th as the International Day for Tolerance, noting that “tolerance is the sound foundation of any civil society and of peace.”

Two decades later, in May 2019, the General Assembly of the United Nations passed a resolution designating August 22nd as the **International Day Commemorating the Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief**.

We know violence against Christians occurs around the world. In fact, according to Open Doors, worldwide persecution of Christians worsening. Five years ago, only one country — North Korea — was ranked in the “extreme” category for its level of persecution of Christians. This year, 11 countries score high enough to fit that category. In its **World Watch List for 2019**, the annual ranking of the 50 countries where Christians face the most extreme persecution, the charity reported that 1 in 9 Christians globally experienced “high” levels of persecution during the reporting period of 1 November 2017–31 October 2018. The previous year, it was the equivalent of 1 in 12.

While Christians in Europe do not face the persecution their brothers and sisters experience in other parts of the world, **we cannot ignore the increasing incidents we see around us**. The title of the UN’s International Day speaks of “Acts of Violence,” but the resolution itself covers much more than violence, as it reaffirms the fundamental rights enshrined in international documents.

It emphasizes that **freedom of religion or belief, freedom of opinion and expression, the right to peaceful assembly and the right to freedom of association** are interdependent, interrelated and mutually reinforcing, and stresses the role that these rights can play in the fight against all forms of intolerance and of discrimination based on religion or belief.

Below are some of the main points in the declaration that demonstrate it applies to victims of intolerance, discrimination, and acts of violence:

## The UN General Assembly:

- » Reaffirmed the purposes and principles enshrined in the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of

Human Rights, in particular the right to **freedom of thought, conscience, and religion**,

- » Seriously concerned at **continuing acts of intolerance and violence** against individuals belonging to religious communities around the world,
- » Recalled that States have the primary responsibility to promote and protect human rights including the **right to exercise their religion or belief** freely,
- » Reaffirmed the positive role that the **exercise of the right to freedom of opinion and expression** and full respect for the freedom to seek, receive and impart information can play in strengthening democracy and combating religious intolerance,
- » Emphasized that **freedom of religion or belief, freedom of opinion and expression, the right to peaceful assembly and the right to freedom of association** are interdependent, interrelated and mutually reinforcing, and stressing the role that these rights can play in the fight against all forms of intolerance and of discrimination based on religion or belief.
- » Strongly deplored all acts of **violence against persons** on the basis of their religion or belief, as well as any such **acts directed against their places of worship**, homes, businesses, properties, schools, or cultural centers.

Although “some critics may regard such a day as insignificant, as yet another UN day, it is far from insignificant. This is a historic step that has great potential,” as Ewelina Ochab explains in an essay at the end of Chapter Three. The designation of the day is “just the beginning of a larger campaign that ultimately aims to put an end to violence based on religion or belief whenever and wherever it occurs.”

The two “International Days” designated by the United Nations cover the scope of the Observatory’s mission: to analyze the situation for Christians in Europe and to speak out when they suffer acts of intolerance, discrimination, and violence. We do so not in order to compare or diminish the persecution they experience in other parts of the world, but to stay vigilant in the protection of human rights.

## “Last acceptable prejudice”

In 2018, British Archbishop Paul Gallagher, the Vatican’s

Secretary for Relations with States **expressed** “concern over the growing prevalence of what Pope Francis has referred to as ‘a reductionist approach’ to — or understanding of — freedom of religion or belief. Such an approach ... **seeks to reduce religions ‘to the quiet obscurity of the individual’s conscience or to relegate them to the enclosed precincts of churches, synagogues or mosques’, revealing not only a failure to appreciate the true sense of freedom of religion or belief, but also the legitimate role of religion in the public square.**”

**Failing to understand this, “feeds into sentiments of intolerance and discrimination against Christians, what might well be termed ‘the last acceptable prejudice’ in many societies. If we truly seek a broad approach to prevent and combat intolerance and discrimination, we need to avoid a selective approach and give attention also to such manifestations of intolerance and discrimination.”**

Across Europe, Christians have been fired, sued, and even arrested for exercising their freedom of expression or conscience. Christian-run businesses have been ruined financially, Christian student groups have been silenced, and Christian symbols and celebrations have been removed from the public square.

As we have noted in the past, Christians in Europe are not simply experiencing social discrimination, prejudice, or restrictions on freedom. Christians, including clergy, have been attacked or killed for their faith. As in previous years we have continued to see threats and attacks against Christian converts from Islam. We have seen churches all over Europe vandalized, robbed, and burned, and Christian symbols destroyed.

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe’s Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) publishes an annual report on hate crimes, using official data from governments, as well as hate incidents reported by civil society organizations. In 2018, the **Observatory submitted 243 cases from 14 countries** to be included in the final report.

However, the number of hate incidents reported to the ODIHR does not always provide a complete picture of the situation for Christians in Europe. Many countries still do not collect data on crimes against Christians. Further, while we commend the ODIHR for gathering data from civil society organizations such as the Observatory, we note that incidents that qualify for inclusion in the hate

crime report constitute a small fraction of the intolerance, discrimination, and legal restrictions Christians face in some countries in Europe. We can see **hate crimes as the “visible tip of the iceberg.”**

In **Part One** of this report, entitled “Understanding the problem,” we explain the terms we use to describe the range of hostilities, marginalization, and violence experienced by Christians in Europe. We encourage the readers of this report to use similar terms in their own discourse as a concrete way to raise awareness about the intolerance and discrimination Christians in Europe face in many facets of their lives.

We provide chapters on specific topics with recent examples, explore some of the **possible motivations** behind the incidents, and we offer our **recommendations**. We have included several guest essays to provide a more in-depth look at various topics and highlight some of the recent hard-won victories.

Finally, to provide more information about the International Day Commemorating the Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief, we have also included an essay by **Ewelina Ochab**, a Polish lawyer, author and religious freedom advocate, who initiated the process leading to the UN resolution. According to Marcela Szymanski from Aid to the Church in Need, the idea started out as an International Day for Persecuted Christians, but “it had to be modified to be acceptable to the UN” so it would not only focus on Christians. And persecution was too big a word, so in the end “we went for victims of religiously-motivated violence.” At the same time, getting such a day established at all was a major victory. “We are very, very happy,” Szymanski told **Canadian Catholic News** “We still cannot believe there is a UN Day that has the word religion in it.”

In **Part Two**, we provide short descriptions of more than 325 cases of intolerance and discrimination against Christians in Europe we collected in 2018, along with links for more information.

Our work aims at encouraging victims of intolerance and discrimination to tell their stories, and to raise awareness among all people of good will that the phenomenon ought to be taken seriously and is in need of a common response.

Ellen Fantini  
Vienna, November 2019

*Photo: Kimberley Farmer.*





Part One  
Understanding  
the problem



*“Intolerance” refers to the cultural or social dimension, including hate crimes.*

*“Discrimination” refers to the legal dimension and denial of rights and access to justice.*

*“Squeeze” refers to the pressure Christians experience in all areas of life.*

*“Smash” refers violence and aggression.*

## DEFINING TERMS

“Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians” is the phrase we use to describe the ranges of hostilities and marginalization Christians and Christian institutions face in Europe.

## INTOLERANCE

The term “**intolerance**” refers to the cultural or social dimension and at its worst, includes hate crimes against Christians. Examples include:

- » Exclusion of Christians from social and public life
- » Exclusion of Christian symbols from public spaces
- » Social disadvantages for Christians
- » Incitement, insult, or defamation
- » Misrepresentation of Christians in the media through negative stereotyping
- » **Hate crimes**
  - Bias-motivated crimes against Christians
  - Vandalism of Christian sites, including churches, cemeteries, schools, and other public symbols of Christianity

## DISCRIMINATION

The term “**discrimination**” refers to the legal dimension and often follows where intolerance goes unchecked. Discriminatory laws, policies or judgments directly and indirectly jeopardize the free exercise of rights and freedoms. Examples include:

- » Interference with freedom of religion
- » Interference with freedom of expression
- » Interference with freedom of conscience
- » Interference with freedom of association and assembly
- » Interference with rights of parents
- » Interference with contractual freedom
- » Laws that negatively impact Christians, and unequal access to justice.

We find that two terms, “**squeeze**” and “**smash**” used by the Christian charity Open Doors in its annual **World Watch List** to be informative as we discuss the situation for Christians in Europe. While the World Watch List tracks and reports the most extreme persecution of Christians, the concepts are useful in analyzing the situation facing Christians in Europe.

## SQUEEZE

We witness Christians being ‘squeezed’ in many different ways in Europe: from interference with freedoms of conscience, expression, and association to denial of access to justice and legal services. The rights of Christian parents to raise their children in conformity with their faith are infringed. Christian-owned businesses are sued or forced out of business because of discriminatory ‘equality’ policies. Christian religious symbols are removed from the public square, Christians are subjected to negative stereotyping in the media, and Christian groups are excluded from university campuses.

## SMASH

“Smash” describes incidents of violence or aggression, and ranges from vandalism and desecration of Christian sites to threats and physical violence against Christians because of their faith. Many of these incidents are also known as “**hate crimes**.”

## HATE CRIME/INCIDENT

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe’s Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) defines a “**hate crime**” as an incident with two distinct elements or features: first, the act is a criminal offense, and second, that it is motivated by a bias or prejudice towards a particular group of people.

## OTHER TERMINOLOGY

At the Observatory, we do not generally use the term **persecution** when speaking of the situation for Christians in Europe. Under a broad definition, such as the one used by Open Doors, “any hostility experienced as a result of

one’s identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words, and actions toward Christians,” the term could apply in Europe.

However, given the more common, narrower, understanding of the meaning of the term, as an often systematic mistreatment usually focused on imprisonment, torture, rape, execution, or confiscation of property, we have not found it useful for the Observatory to employ this term for Christians in Europe.

## WHY ARE CHRISTIANS TARGETED?

Incidents can be motivated by:

- » Opposition to individual aspects of the Christian faith;
- » Opposition to moral positions that are intrinsically part of the Christian faith, particularly relating to marriage and life issues;
- » A negative bias against Christians, Christianity, particular Christian denominations, or religion generally.

Such opposition and bias can manifest themselves on the **social level** (such as physical attacks against individual Christians or Christian sites, negative stereotyping, and social exclusion), on the **legal level** (for instance, through discriminatory laws, a biased application of facially neutral laws, or negative court judgments), and on the **political level** (such as exclusion of Christians and Christian symbols from the public sphere, a resolution of a parliament, or governmental underreporting of crimes committed against Christians).

When Christian sites are targeted, bias motivations are not always obvious, or there may be mixed motivations behind incidents. Sometimes, since criminals rarely announce their motives, we must infer a motivation. Sometimes actions speak louder than words.

### Tolerate (verb):

1. Allow the existence, occurrence, or practice of (something that one dislikes or disagrees with) without interference.
2. Accept or endure (someone or something unpleasant or disliked) with forbearance.

### Tolerance (noun):

The ability or willingness to tolerate the existence of opinions or behaviour that one dislikes or disagrees with.

### Intolerance (noun):

Unwillingness to accept views, beliefs, or behaviour that differ from one’s own.

## INTOLERANCE & DISCRIMINATION

### 1. DISCRIMINATION/INTERFERENCE WITH FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS

#### *Freedom of religion*

##### **Christian converts from Islam**

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states: "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes **freedom to change his religion** or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance."

We have written in the past about the particular difficulties faced by Christian asylum seekers in Europe who have fled persecution in Muslim countries. From harassment, bullying, and physical violence in refugee accommodations at the hands of fellow refugees, to unfair and disparate treatment by translators and security staff, many of these converts have faced problems similar to the ones they fled.

Recently, we have observed a new, troubling phenomenon: **government officials rejecting the asylum claims of Christian converts** for a variety of ill-formed reasons, such as not understanding the nature of conversion, not understanding Christianity or religious faith generally, assuming the conversions are not genuine, and not taking seriously the consequences of deportation. For converts to Christianity from Muslim countries where conversion is illegal, access to justice in Europe is essential.

The examples below illustrate some of the obstacles for Christian asylum seekers in Sweden, the United Kingdom, and Germany. In some countries there have been efforts to improve the process, but this lack of justice for Christian asylum seekers remains problematic.

##### **Sweden**

A **study** analyzing the asylum claims from 2015-2018 of 619 Afghan converts to Christianity outlined serious shortcomings in the **Swedish Migration Board's** process. 68% of the converts were denied asylum on the

grounds that their conversions were not deemed to be "genuine," despite all of them being baptized members of 76 churches in 64 locations across Sweden. **The report noted that the Migration Board emphasized knowledge-based answers to questions and intellectual ability, rather than evidence of belief, religious practice, and involvement in church life. The authors of the report called the process "a complete lottery."**

The study said the investigations attached great importance to the intellectual ability of the converts to reason about their beliefs and conversions. The applicants, including many who were illiterate, were expected to have the ability to bring together knowledge and personal experiences, to have good knowledge of Christianity and to give an authoritative account that is detailed and resonant, as well as revealing a "sufficiently intellectual approach."

Further, the Migration Board also appeared to downplay the converts' fears about what would happen if their conversions were revealed. Authorities wrote that there was no reason to assume that Afghan authorities would discover the conversions or that there would be danger if the conversions were discovered. Converts from Afghanistan, the second most dangerous country for Christians according to Open Doors, can face death upon deportation because conversion from Islam to Christianity is deemed apostasy.

##### **United Kingdom**

One example of a problematic asylum decision was the 2018 rejection of an asylum claim from an Iranian man who converted to Christianity after discovering it was a "peaceful religion in contrast to Islam." In the rejection letter from the Home Office, passages with violent imagery from the Bible including Matthew, Revelation, and Exodus were used to argue that the claimant's claim about Christianity was "false." **"These examples are inconsistent with your claim that you converted to Christianity after discovering it is a 'peaceful religion' as opposed to Islam, which contained violence and rage,"** the letter read. The Home Office later said the letter was "not in accordance with our policy approach to claims based on religious persecution" and agreed to reconsider the application.

There were several noteworthy deportations of Christian

asylum seekers, as well, including that of Asher Samson, a Pakistani Christian who attempted to persuade the UK government to allow him to stay after being threatened with execution by Islamic extremists in his home country. He was deported to Pakistan in January 2019 where he reportedly remains in hiding.

Since then, the UK Home Office appears to have made some strides in correcting systemic problems relating to asylum claims by converts, including training by clergy and the issuance of a **new guidance** in May 2019.

### Germany

Pastor Gottfried Martens, who ministers to over 1,600 people in his church, most of whom are converts and asylum seekers from Iran and Afghanistan, has said that **whether someone is granted asylum or not is almost like a “pure gamble.”** The problem Martens sees in the administrative courts is how judges “verify” the genuineness of an asylum seeker’s conversion to Christianity. Some trust a pastor’s statement whether written or oral in court, while some ignore it and only focus on the short time they spend with the refugee in court. This fully depends on what kind of judge one gets appointed to, according to Martens, and there is no way to prepare well enough for a court date if there is no general regulation that a minister’s statement be taken into account.

Martin Lessenthin, spokesman of the board of the International Society for Human Rights (IGFM), agrees that “government agencies cannot act as ‘experts’ and determine whether a former Muslim has become a ‘believable’ Christian. A church congregation and the religious community decide whether someone is a Christian and belongs to a parish. There cannot be a ‘government examination procedure for faith’.”

According to the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) “a person seeking protection cannot be repatriated if repatriation to the country of destination constitutes a violation of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECHR) or there is a significant and concrete danger to life, limb or liberty.” Despite this, Christian converts have been deported to countries such as Iran where “apostasy” can be punished with torture and death.

In October 2019, **Open Doors Germany** completed a survey of **6,516 Christian converts** in Germany from 179 congregations from various churches across the country. It noted that fewer and fewer converts receive asylum protection — from 67.9 per cent before July 1, 2017 down to 36.3 per cent after that date. It found that the reasons

for rejection ranged from not believing the genuineness of the conversion, not taking seriously the evidence of pastors who testified on behalf of the Christians, and either not **recognizing or deliberately ignoring the particular vulnerability of converts** to persecution upon deportation.

The former CDU/CSU parliamentary party leader **Volker Kauder** called for a ban on deportation to countries where Christians are persecuted.

*The human right to religious freedom is “the most existential human right of all, because there is no freedom anywhere in the world where there is no religious freedom.”*

— Volker Kauder

### Freedom of expression

Freedom of expression is one of the fundamental rights of a democratic society. Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights provides:

- » **Everyone has the right to freedom of expression.** This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers.
- » The exercise of these freedoms, since it carries with it duties and responsibilities, may be **subject to such formalities, conditions, restrictions or penalties as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society**, in the interests of national security, territorial integrity or public safety, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, for the protection of the reputation or rights of others, for preventing the disclosure of information received in confidence, or for maintaining the authority and impartiality of the judiciary.

### Hate speech and restrictions on freedom of expression

On its face, the idea of restricting “hate speech” seems to be a worthy goal. After all, “hateful” discourse is hurtful and often counter-productive. However, a closer examination reveals that the concept itself is ill-defined and hate-speech legislation or codes of conduct often conflict with the fundamental right to freedom of expression. According to EU law, illegal hate speech “means all conduct publicly inciting to violence or hatred directed against a group of persons or a member of such a group defined by reference to race, colour, religion, descent or national or ethnic origin.”

*“Because there is no universal definition of hate speech, it’s hard to precisely identify what we might call hate speech laws. But we do know that these laws are highly subjective and are powerful tools in the hands of those who seek to shut down public debate.”*

— Paul Coleman, Executive Director, ADF International

While the “incitement to violence” aspect of the definition is largely uncontroversial, to define “hate speech” as including “incitement to hatred,” is “both circular and so vague as to mean almost anything,” according to Paul Coleman, Executive Director of ADF International and author of **Censored**. In fact, he said, “beyond the tautology that ‘hate speech’ is speech that incites hate, there is no agreement as to what hate speech actually means.”

In a **factsheet** on hate speech, the European Court of Human Rights wrote there “is no universally agreed definition.” It went on to say “identification of expressions that could be qualified as ‘hate speech’ is sometimes difficult because this kind of speech does not necessarily manifest itself through the expression of hatred or of emotions. It can also be concealed in statements which at a first glance may seem to be rational or normal.”

Recent examples of hate speech laws or policies adversely affecting Christians include ministers and priests being criminally investigated for their sermons on marriage and family, and street preachers being arrested for breaching the peace.

#### **UK street preachers & freedom of speech:**

In February 2019 **Oluwale Ilesanmi**, an elderly man preaching at the Southgate Underground Station was questioned by police when a passerby accused him of Islamophobia. He was then arrested by London police after he refused to leave the area. The police seized the man’s Bible despite his pleas not to take it. The Christian admitted describing Islam as an “aberration” but said he was simply expressing his opinion rather than preaching hate against Muslims. He was later awarded £2,500 for wrongful arrest for his humiliating and distressing treatment. He told the *Mail on Sunday*: “I believe God loves everyone, including Muslims, but I have the right to say I that I don’t agree with Islam — we are living in a Christian country, after all. “I was upset when they took away my Bible. They just threw it in the police car. They would never have done that if it had been the Koran. Whatever happened to freedom of speech?”

Other street preachers have been repeatedly arrested for public order offenses for preaching either about

homosexuality as a sin or about Islam. While the cases are generally dismissed in the end, Mike Overd (the UK’s “most arrested street preacher”) notes:

“Compared to ten years ago, I am noticing that more and more people are denying the existence of Jesus. It’s getting worse with the police and there is more aggression from the public, some of whom I know want to harm me. Look at the arrest of street preacher Olu. I don’t think we know the full extent of what street preachers are facing across the country. **A lot of preachers are threatened with arrest and it’s amazing that not more of us end up in hospital.**”

#### **Criminal investigations of Spanish clergy**

At least six Spanish priests/bishops were **criminally investigated** in the last few years for their sermons during Mass criticizing gender ideology or for having written and published a criticism of Madrid’s “Law of Integral Protection against LGBTIphobia and Discrimination for Reasons of Orientation and Sexual Identity.”

They wrote that the law “seeks to prohibit the public teaching of the Bible” and to “prohibit, even, public prayer for those people who ask for prayer for a change of orientation in their lives.” They went on to note that the law constitutes “an attack against religious liberty and liberty of conscience,” an “attack and censure against the right of parents to educate their children in accordance with their own beliefs and convictions,” and “an attack against freedom of expression, freedom of teaching, the freedom of scientists and professionals in search of the truth, and the freedom of people to orient their lives or to ask for help, including religious help, for that which they need.”

#### **Tweet as hate speech**

Caroline Farrow, a Catholic journalist in the UK, was **criminally investigated for a tweet** in March 2019. Police questioned her under the “malicious communications act” after the founder of a transgender charity accused her of “misgendering” her daughter in a tweet. Farrow said it is her religious belief that a person cannot change sex.

#### **Freedom of thought, conscience and religion**

Article 10 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights provides:

- » Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right includes freedom to

## Freedom of speech vs. Censorship Zones

By Gregory Chilson, ADF International

**F**reedom of speech is a fundamental human right from which many other rights find their logical foundation. However, it is clear in Europe, a new zeitgeist challenges European liberal orthodoxy at the legislative level in multiple countries. Unfortunately, in many cases, people of faith appear to be bearing the brunt.

In the United Kingdom, the 2014 passage of the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act introduced “Public Spaces Protection Orders” (PSPOs). They enable local authorities to criminalize behavior which they wish to prohibit, with significant flexibility in how the law is used. Recently, the legislation has been used to prohibit charities and Christian groups from offering prayer and support to women who face crisis pregnancies outside two abortion facilities in London. It has resulted with the creation of two large “censorship zones” within which certain (very broadly defined) speech — and even prayer — is prohibited.

In 2018, a [legal challenge to a PSPO by Alina Dulgheriu](#), a mother who was helped by one of these

charities, was heard at the High Court in London. Her claim was dismissed by the court which suggested that everyone is affected equally by the provisions. And yet it is clear that the law greatly burdens the work and individual freedom of Christians who work to help women experiencing crisis pregnancies. As the law stands, Christians risk criminal sanction if they pray or communicate on matters concerning abortion within these demarcated zones.

With similar zones either in effect or being proposed in cities in other countries including [Germany](#) and the [Netherlands](#), the train may have left the station.

*“My little girl is here today because of the real, practical and emotional support that I was given by a group outside a Marie Stopes centre, and I am continuing with this appeal to ensure that women in Ealing and all across the country do not have this vital support option to removed.”*

— Alina Dulgheriu

## Victory for Freedom of Expression: Felix Ngole

By Christian Legal Centre

**I**n a landmark judgment in the case of Felix Ngole, the (United Kingdom) Court of Appeal has upheld the rights of Christians to freely express their faith and overturned a High Court decision. The crucial outcome represents a major development of the law which results in Christians now having the legal right to express Biblical views on social media or elsewhere without fear for their professional careers.

This is the first Court of Appeal judgment regarding freedom of expression of Biblical views which sets limits on the rights of professional regulators to limit free speech on social media; the judgment will be an authoritative statement of the law which is likely to be relied upon in hundreds of current and future cases.

### **A major development in the law**

Felix Ngole was expelled in 2016 from his course at the University of Sheffield where he was studying to become a social worker after quoting Bible verses on Facebook that were deemed critical of homosexuality.

In 2015, he had entered into a discussion on Facebook over the imprisonment of Kim Davis, the Kentucky marriage registrar who was jailed for refusing to issue marriage licences to same-sex couples. In a robust online debate, views were exchanged on same-sex marriage, many openly discursive of the Christian faith. Devout Christian, Ngole, quoted Bible verses affirming the traditional Christian opposition to same-sex-marriage and of the sinful nature of homosexual activity.

Some months later, Felix Ngole was anonymously



reported to the University of Sheffield; and subsequently was disciplined in a Fitness to Practice hearing. He was informed that he had brought the profession into disrepute and was dismissed from the course, losing his career.

### **It was the university that lacked insight**

The university refused any compromise, arguing that Felix Ngole 'lacked insight' into the effect of his posts. The expression of his Christian views was found to be unacceptable by the university; and, in effect, he was required to stay silent on pain of losing his career. Felix Ngole felt he could not surrender his faith.

The University of Sheffield held that he was not permitted to express the Christian viewpoint on same-sex marriage or homosexual activity in any public forum, even including a church. He could never express his viewpoint in a work situation even if directly asked.

The Court of Appeal held rather that it was the University that was lacking insight and not Felix Ngole.

### **Felix had never acted in a discriminatory fashion**

The Court of Appeal condemned the position of the University whereby people would live in fear if private expressions of views were overheard; and could be reported by anonymous complainants. The Court of Appeal held that: "The mere expression of religious views about sin does not necessarily connote discrimination." It was also recognized that Felix Ngole had never been shown to have acted in a discriminatory fashion.

Felix Ngole was represented by the leading religious rights barrister, Paul Diamond, who argued against the misuse of professional disciplinary processes to silence speech you disagree with. This case will have significant implications not just for Christian free speech, but in relation to all free speech. For example, comments made by people on social media (often many years ago) have been arbitrarily used to penalize viewpoints that people dislike or disagree with a silencing effect on free speech.

### **"My personal loss is gain for future Christians"**

Felix Ngole said: "*This is great news, not only for me and my family, but for everyone who cares about freedom of speech, especially for those working in or studying for caring professions. As Christians we are called to serve others and to care for everyone, yet publicly and privately we must also be free to express our beliefs and what the Bible says without fear of losing our livelihoods.*

*"I am thankful to the judges for recognising that I did not discriminate against anyone and that it was not I who was*

*entrenched, lacking insight or disproportionate in my approach to the issue, but the University of Sheffield.*

*"I have suffered tremendously as a result of how I was treated by the University of Sheffield and I feel that four years of my life have been taken away from me. Despite all this, I feel overwhelming joy that what I have lost will be so much gain to Christians today and in the future as a result of this important ruling for freedom.*

*"I would also like to thank the Christian Legal Centre and Paul Diamond for supporting me."*

### **A message of freedom**

Andrea Williams, chief executive of the Christian Legal Centre, said: "*This is a watershed case for Christians and a resounding victory for freedom of speech.*

*"We are delighted that the Court of Appeal has seen the importance of this case and made a ruling that accords with common sense. It is shocking that the University sought to censor discussion of the Bible in this way, and we hope this sends out a message of freedom across all universities and professions that Christians and others should be allowed to express their views without fear of censorship or discipline.*

*"Felix Ngole is a hero, and he and his courageous family have taken a stand for freedom in this case so that we and future generations of Christians do not have to. His case has always been one of the most disturbing and important cases the Christian Legal Centre has faced and if the judges had not made this ruling, the ramifications for Christian professionals across society would have been significant.*

*"Due to Felix's sacrifice, Christians and others now know that it is their legal right to express Biblical views on social media or elsewhere without fear for their professional careers. This is a major development of the law and must be upheld and respected in current and future Christian freedom cases.*

*"Despite this victory, this is not the end of Felix's fight for justice. He must now go back to a University of Sheffield panel who will judge, in light of this outcome, his fitness to practice as a social worker. Full justice must be served and the university held to account so that this kind and compassionate man can finally work in a job that reflects his education and his ability, professionally and as a person. Our communities and the most vulnerable in our society need more Christian professionals like Felix, not fewer."*

*This was originally published on July 3, 2019, by [Christian Concern](#) and is re-printed with permission.*

change religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or in private, to manifest religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice and observance.

- » The right to conscientious objection is recognised, in accordance with the national laws governing the exercise of this right.

Freedom of conscience allows a believer to live according to the demands of his faith. To limit or deny an individual the right to exercise his freedom of conscience, even if it conflicts with other rights, strips this guarantee of meaning.

*“The notion that a Christian can practice their faith on Sundays but must forget it on Monday is not real freedom of religion and certainly not freedom of conscience.”*

— David Scoffield QC, attorney for Ashers Baking Company.

In 2016, Members of the European Parliament issued a “Declaration on the Importance of Strengthening the Fundamental Right to Freedom of Conscience.” In it, they noted that “several EU Member States do not fully guarantee freedom of conscience including the right to conscientious objection. In such countries, staying true to deeply held moral beliefs may lead to dismissal from employment, severe financial penalties, bankruptcy, loss of reputation due to negative media coverage, permanent unemployment and social discrimination.”

We have seen that this remains a problem in many European countries.

### Conscientious objection in the medical profession

In **France**, a pharmacist’s right to conscientious objection not explicitly protected, unlike the legislation governing other medical professionals. The **case of Bruno Pichon**, the French pharmacist who was subject to professional discipline for refusing to sell the contraceptive intrauterine device (IUD) was filed with the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in 2018.

*“Worn out by these ordeals and unable to practice his profession with peace of mind in accordance with his moral convictions,” Bruno Pichon sold his pharmacy and is no longer a registered pharmacist. He turned to the ECHR because he is “thinking primarily of young colleagues who are forced to leave their chosen profession, and of all those practising pharmacists who want to follow their convictions but have no right to do so.”*

Also filed with the ECHR is the case of Ellinor Grimmark, the **Swedish midwife** who was discriminated against when hospitals refused to hire her based on her refusal to participate in abortions, based on conscientious objection. She lost her case in the Swedish Labor Court in 2017. The effect of the lack of conscientious protection for midwives in Sweden is that the profession is effectively closed to Christians who object to abortion.

Abortion legislation that was passed in **Ireland** in 2018, provides that doctors, nurses, and midwives who have a conscientious objection to abortion must refer their patients to another provider who will perform the abortion. Hundreds of doctors have objected, noting that the obligation to refer effectively strips them of their right to act in accordance with their conscience. The Catholic Bishops of Ireland said, “this requirement may have the appearance of respecting freedom of conscience but, in reality, it requires a healthcare professional to cooperate in what he or she sincerely believes is doing harm to one patient and taking the life of another.”

### A few victories: the baker and the printer

In its 2018 judgment in the case of **Ashers Baking**, the Supreme Court of the **United Kingdom** concluded that the Christian baker who refused to decorate a cake with the message “Support Gay Marriage” did not deny the customer his cake because he is gay, but rather because the cake he wanted bore a message the baker did not wish to write. The reason for the refusal, according to the court, was “the message not the man.”

However, in August 2019, lawyers for the man who sued Ashers announced that they were taking the case to the European Court of Human Rights. The firm will argue that the bakery was guilty of discrimination, as well as argue “there is **no such a thing as a ‘Christian business’**” and therefore should not be given legal recognition by a court.

The **chilling effect** of the protracted litigation against the bakery, despite its eventual UK victory, is likely to be that other bakeries will either just agree to make a cake with a message they disapprove of, or to stop making custom cakes altogether. Further, there is **nothing in the court’s judgment that protects the right to refuse to bake a custom cake for a same-sex wedding ceremony.**

In **Poland**, the Supreme Court ruled against a **printer** who refused to create a roll-up banner for an LGBT business group because he did not want to “promote” the gay rights movement, citing his Catholic religious beliefs. In its 2018 judgment, the court held that although there may

be legally justifiable reasons to refuse services based on religious objections, in this case they did not apply.

However, in June 2019, the Constitutional Tribunal ruled that the **law the printer was convicted under was unconstitutional**, because punishment for refusing to provide services on the grounds of beliefs interfered with the service providers' rights to act according to their conscience.

### **The rights of parents**

"Everyone has the right to respect for his private and family life, his home, and communications," according to European law. Further, States shall respect "the right of parents to ensure the education and teaching of their children in conformity with their religious, philosophical and pedagogical convictions." However, in some countries in Europe, we have seen lack of respect for families and state interference with the rights of parents.

### **Parents object to indoctrination**

The "**relationships and sex education**" (RSE) guidance in the **United Kingdom** requires schools to teach primary and secondary school children about LGBT relationships and may not permit parents to opt-out. Parents of primary school children are permitted to withdraw their children from the sex education component of RSE, but the relationships component are mandatory. Parents, including Muslims, have objected that they should be able to direct the moral formation of their children.

Kristie Higgs, a Christian school worker in Gloucestershire, UK, was **dismissed for gross misconduct** after she shared two posts on her Facebook page in October 2018 that raised concerns about RSE at another school in the same village — her child's Church of England primary school.

And in June 2018, the headteacher of a primary school in South East London **required all pupils to take part in a Pride parade** within the school. Despite numerous complaints from parents, they were informed that no 'opt outs' would be allowed.

## **2. INTOLERANCE**

Intolerance against Christians is not simply people or institutions voicing dislike or disagreement about practices or beliefs; it is an attempt to make the public expression of those practices or beliefs difficult or impossible.

## **Marginalization and exclusion of ideas and individuals**

### **Universities: non-accreditation and no-platforming**

#### **Germany**

A 2018 study indicated that the climate at **Germany's** universities has become increasingly anti-religious. The German Student Mission (SMD) collected and documented dozens of cases of discrimination against student-run religious groups, including Christian groups, across Germany. From Berlin to Darmstadt to Regensburg, there were **30 cases of non-accreditation of Christian groups at universities**. The discrimination included denying the groups the use of campus facilities, prohibitions on flyers, and denial of accreditation by student councils. For Christian groups, accreditation has been denied both because "religion has no place on campus" and objections to the groups' moral stances on controversial topics. Further, in many universities, "prayer rooms" — including chapels for Christians — have been closed due to concerns about Islamist activists attending Friday prayers at the universities.

#### **United Kingdom**

Student union association policies which required the union to give "**no funding, facilitation, or platform**" to any **pro-life group** in several universities across the **United Kingdom** were implemented to prevent such groups from becoming officially recognized or receiving funding.

However, in February 2019, a government guidance to universities warned that consistently no-platforming people could have a **chilling effect** on free speech on university campuses and should not take place. It went on to say that while student unions are free to choose whether or not to invite individual speakers, placing blanket bans on groups that hold a particular political view is likely to breach English and Welsh free speech laws. Aberdeen University successfully challenged such a policy in May 2019, but only after threatening litigation.

In **Scotland**, a Catholic priest in Glasgow was removed as university chaplain after hosting a rosary of reparation for the city's gay pride parade.

#### **Politics**

In June 2018, just days before the parliamentary vote on the election of a judge to the state constitutional court in **Germany**, the CDU, Greens, FDP and SSW withdrew their nomination of Hamburg lawyer and law professor Christian Winterhoff due to his Christian conservative views on the sexual education of children.

# Norway's Barnevernet and The Future of Parental Rights

By Robert Clarke, Director of European Advocacy for ADF International

In September 2019, it was **reported** that the Norwegian authorities took permanent custody of three American children from their Christian parents. Natalya Shutakova, a US citizen, and her husband, Lithuanian citizen Zigintas Aleksandravicius, are allowed to visit their children only three times per year. Sadly, this is not particularly shocking to those who have been working to protect parental rights in Europe.

It seems remarkable that this can be happening in a country that positions itself as a human rights champion. Through its Agency for Development Cooperation, Norway devotes more than \$400 million per year to its priority areas, including the protection of human rights. It is therefore ironic that, despite its public efforts to protect human rights, a human rights violation it would have rather kept hidden has been exposed to the world.

## The snatching of the Bodnariu children

In some ways, the story starts in 2015 with the very public removal of the five Bodnariu children — then aged nine to only three months — from their parents by the Barnevernet, Norway's child welfare agency. The first they knew of it was when two black cars approached their farm. A social worker told them that their daughters had been taken directly from school into emergency state care and that the parents should come to the police station to answer questions. At this point, their two older sons were also taken.

The very next day, the black cars appeared again. They were there for the baby. There was an allegation of corporal punishment (illegal in Norway) but, more concerningly, the parents' crime seemed to be seeking to raise the children in line with their Christian faith.

There was, for example, a concern about the way the parents thought that God punishes sin — a willful mischaracterization of the Christian belief in forgiveness and salvation. According to the family, this formed part of the concerns initially raised with Barnevernet by the principal at the daughters' school. The idea that such a core Christian belief was even partial grounds for Barnevernet to swoop in and wrest children from the school gates prompted protests outside dozens of

Norwegian embassies around the world from Barcelona to Washington.

This outcry also encouraged others to speak up. At ADF International, we were almost overwhelmed with the number of people who spoke to us of similar cases. After investigating, we became convinced that the Bodnariu case was symptomatic of serious issues with the way in which the Barnevernet was functioning.

Until this point, at the international level, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) had routinely rejected cases against Norway relating to Barnevernet, and that route of challenge looked closed. We needed to dig deep into what was happening and to ask the tough questions. We provided information to a number of European parliamentarians who sit as part of the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly. The Assembly took up the issue and compiled a detailed **report**. The rapporteur travelled to Norway and met with senior officials and members of the Norwegian Parliament. In the end, the report was presented to the Parliamentary Assembly, which voted to adopt it.

## Another case comes to the fore

Around the same time that this report was underway, the ECHR decided to accept a raft of cases filed against Norway challenging these practices. While the Bodnariu case continued to make headlines, another case was heard first. In the Lower Chamber, the ECHR ruled against Ms. Trude Strand Lobben, but the Grand Chamber agreed to review the case, setting the stage for a showdown. This case concerned a young mother who went to the authorities for help when she was pregnant. They offered her a place in a supported family unit. A number of weeks after the birth of her son, she expressed a desire to leave. That set in motion a chain of events that would result in her son being taken away, her contact time reduced to eight hours per year, and, ultimately, her son being given up for adoption.

The ECHR hearing was held in Strasbourg in October 2018. On one side of the courtroom sat Ms. Strand Lobben and her lawyer. The inequality of arms on full display, the Norwegian government was represented in court by none other than its Attorney General supported

by eight advisers. Ms. Strand Lobben waited almost a year for the ruling.

In September 2019, she was vindicated by the Grand Chamber, which **ruled** that Norway had made no effort to reunite her family, as it is obliged to do. The ruling referenced the Report that had been adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly just four months before the hearing in this case. The decision marks only the third time the Grand Chamber has found Norway in violation of the European Convention — a conclusion with which thirteen of the seventeen judges agreed. The tragedy is that this “victory” at the ECHR comes over ten years after Ms. Strand Lobben’s son was taken from her. The decision does not have the effect of reuniting mother and son, and neither the judgment nor the small sum of compensation awarded could atone for the damage done to this family.

### Norway on trial

The facts of this case generally follow a now well-established — and tragic — pattern. A child is removed based on one specific concern. The parents then robustly challenge the authorities. What should be understood as a reflection of their love for their child is then used against them as demonstrating an unwillingness to work with the authorities. That is used as grounds to prolong the separation, with the original specific concern fading into the background. Eventually, enough time passes that the authorities claim the child is now well-settled and should remain permanently with the foster family. We have seen this pattern repeat time and time again.

Thankfully, the Grand Chamber intervened. And it is not just the European Court of Human Rights that has taken note. Recently, Norway was subject to a four-year review of its human rights record at the United Nations in Geneva. Several states and NGOs raised concerns and made recommendations about the way in which Barnevernet has been operating. Norway, battered by the winds of international condemnation, accepted every single recommendation made to protect children from arbitrary removal by Barnevernet and to ensure proper protection for the family.

But accepting recommendations is not enough. It needs to be followed by concrete actions that result in better protection for families. While anyone would agree that there are some cases in which the state should intervene to protect children, this needs to be rare, and based on clear evidence that a child will suffer real harm. And even after a child has been removed, the duty of the state —

as the ECHR made clear — is to work vigorously toward bringing the family back together.

### Parental rights under fire

Although these revelations concern Norway, it does not stand completely alone when it comes to harmful practices that undermine parents and the family. In Germany, the longstanding prohibition on homeschooling (backed by criminal penalties in some regions) was upheld in early 2019 by the ECHR. In the case of the Wunderlich family, four children were snatched from their home by more than thirty police officers in a dawn raid. They were kept for three weeks and subjected to education assessments. They performed at normal levels but were only allowed to return home after their parents promised to send them to school. This treatment, **decided** the ECHR, was “not implemented in a way which was particularly harsh or exceptional.”

Meanwhile, in Sweden, homeschooling is, in theory, allowed. However, permission must be sought, which is only granted under “extraordinary circumstances.” In practice, this means almost never. That was the decision of the Swedish Child and Education Board in the case of the Petersen family. The mother and father, dual American and Swedish citizens, had educated their seven-year-old daughter at home during a three-month trip. The results were excellent and, on her return to school, it was clear she was performing at a level well above her classmates. Wanting to continue educating their daughter in this way, they sought and were refused the necessary permission.

The only way they were able to pursue the educational choice they believed to be in their daughter’s best interest was to sell almost everything they owned and relocate to the United States. That is clearly not an option available to most, and so ADF welcomed the news that the United Nations Human Rights Committee agreed to hear this complaint. And in October 2019, in Scotland, the government finally announced that its beleaguered “Named Person” scheme would be dropped. Under the scheme, every child would have been given a state-appointed guardian to oversee his or her well-being.

The scheme was challenged all the way to the UK Supreme Court which, in Summer 2016, ruled that the scheme violated article 8 of the European Convention. In a telling passage, the justices **wrote**, “Different upbringings produce different people. The first thing that a totalitarian regime tries to do is to get at the children, to distance them from the subversive, varied influences of their

families, and indoctrinate them in their rulers' view of the world. Within limits, families must be left to bring up their children in their own way."

For more than two years after this judgment, the Scottish government clung to its flagship initiative, suggesting this "snoopers charter" could be amended to become lawful. They finally gave up. And yet British parents cannot rest for long as, separately, Parliament has passed regulations introducing compulsory "relationships and sex education" in English schools from September 2020. Parents can withdraw their children from the sex education aspect until just before they turn 16 but have no right to opt them out of relationships education at any age.

## The battle continues

Parents around the world know the profound responsibility and privilege it is to have and to raise children. And governments know the immense power of families and communities as a check on the excesses of the state. As the Universal Declaration of Human Rights puts it, the family is the "fundamental group unit" of society. Those who undermine it attack the foundation of our societies and the source of great richness and diversity.

The most generous interpretation of these attacks is that some of the policies, ostensibly aimed at protecting children, are well-intentioned, but misguided. Yet we must also be on guard for those for whom the temptation of power affords the opportunity to force their utopian vision on a future generation by sidelining parents and, ultimately, deconstructing the family.

*This essay originally appeared on October 21, 2019, at [Public Discourse](#): The Journal of the Witherspoon Institute and is reprinted with permission.*

Foreign Minister Timo Soini of [Finland](#) faced a no-confidence vote brought against him in 2018 over the Catholic politician's attendance at pro-life vigil while on an official trip to Canada in May. Members of the Finnish Parliament voted 100-60 against the motion, but Soini said in an interview after the vote: "In general, I'm worried that Christianity is being squeezed ... There is a tendency to squeeze Christianity out of the public square."

The [Belgian Minister of Culture](#) called for a ban on religious broadcasting in August 2018 after verses from Paul's letter to the Ephesians were broadcast on Flemish TV from a Catholic Mass in the town of Grimbergen. A lay reader quoted Ephesians 5 22-33: "Women, be submissive to your husband as the husband to the Lord. For the man

One of the strands running through many of these threats is the legal test often used in child welfare proceedings. That test says that actions must be judged against what is in the "best interests of the child." While that may sound attractive — who, after all, would want to act against a child's best interests? — this nice-sounding phrase provides no real guidance to courts asked to settle a dispute between parties who both claim to be acting in the best interests of a child. The divergent parties could be the parents; but we also often see the parents on one side, and the state on the other. That was the case for the Bodnariu parents, the parents of Charlie Gard, and for Ms. Strand Lobben. In her case, the judgment referenced this standard 122 times.

If we are to restore the place of parents, and to protect the family, we must revisit this standard. The consequences for those involved in child welfare proceedings can be more serious and long-lasting than even those involved in criminal proceedings. The standards involved must be no less exacting. Intervention must always be a last resort, and only based on verified evidence that a child is in real danger of serious harm. Moreover, in circumstances where separation occurs, parental appeals must be dealt with expeditiously, given the way in which the status quo can quickly become ossified.

Back in Norway, things are far from over. Natalya Shutakova and Zigintas Aleksandravicius have vowed to appeal, and the Bodnariu case, filed in December 2016, is waiting for its day in court. It seems likely that it will mark another bad day for Norway, but a much-needed good day for parents and families across Europe and beyond.

is the head of the woman as Christ is the head of the church." He told the newspaper Het Nieuwsbald: "The fact that [these outdated, women-unfriendly statements] come from an old book is not an argument for letting them go to our people. This is not of this time, and that it is broadcast on the VRT for the whole of Flanders is already completely crazy."

## Online censorship and interference

In the lead-up to the 2018 Irish abortion referendum election, [Google](#) announced that it would "[pause](#)" [all advertising related to the election](#). The ban applied to all sites associated with the Google brand, including YouTube, and followed [Facebook's](#) decision to ban any ads from advertisers outside of Ireland relating to the

referendum. Opponents of the referendum, Pro-Life Campaign, Save the 8th, and the Iona Institute issued a joint statement condemning the tech giant's decision as "shutting down a free and fair debate" and that it was "scandalous, and is an attempt to rig the referendum." While Google and Facebook's decisions look neutral on the surface, the Repeal side already had overwhelming support in traditional broadcast and print media in Ireland, while the less well-funded campaigns to retain the Eighth Amendment relied on social media.

In March 2018, Facebook suspended the account of **German Catholic historian Michael Hesemann** for 30 days for violating its "Community Standards" ("Content posted by you does not conform to our community standards. We remove posts that target individuals based on race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity or disability"). Hesemann published a post commenting on the negative influence of Islam in the history of Europe and, specifically, in Germany.

In 2019, the Dublin-based Iona Institute for Religion and Society launched a pro-life ad campaign, which included billboard signs depicting an **unborn child in the womb**. Iona extended that campaign to Facebook and paid a promotion fee to bring it to a wider audience. Facebook **blurred the image in the ads behind a warning and said that the image comes under the heading of "graphic" or "violent" content**. After complaints, Facebook reversed the decision, saying it was mistakenly categorized as "sensitive content."

However, Facebook did not remove or interfere with the following:

- » A page which appears to celebrate, and perhaps encourage, church arson by using the anarchistic slogan "The only church that illuminates is the one that burns" ("La única iglesia que ilumina es la que arde"). The Facebook page's profile picture is a burning church. Other photos posted on the page include cartoons mocking Christianity and the Catholic Church.
- » A post by Aida Ginestar Pau, town councilor for sport and culture of the Spanish city Alzira that spoke about the Catholic Church, saying — in what could be seen as incitement to violence — "but are there still churches that have not burned all??"
- » A post by **BBC Scotland** of a short film entitled "Homophobia in 2018, Time for Love" on its Facebook page which depicts a priest holding a cheese cracker in a parody of the Host, and giving it to a woman who makes the sign of the cross, with a voice-over saying, **"tastes like cardboard and smells like hate."** The

Archdiocese of St. Andrew's and Edinburgh criticized the video for suggesting that Christianity fosters public hatred toward homosexuals. Recent government figures on crimes with religious aggravations showed that 57% of these are now directed to Catholics, an increase of 14%.

And on **Etsy**, an unknown buyer purchased **"nine real Catholic hosts, consecrated by a priest"** from a Germany-based seller for \$11.58. The seller, who called himself "AL" and his business "Pentagora," said the hosts were "to abuse for classic black fairs or black magic purposes." In response to a petition with over 10,000 signatures demanding the online marketplace ban the sales of consecrated hosts, the **company admitted that such a sale was in violation of their policies**.

### 3. SMASH: HATE CRIMES AGAINST CHRISTIANS

The Observatory collects and reports data on hate crimes against Christians in order to demonstrate that intolerance goes beyond social marginalization.

Many of the Observatory's documented incidents involve vandalism or other destruction of Christian properties — primarily churches. While it is often difficult to discern the motivation or the identity of the perpetrators behind the incidents, the context often can be an indicator — such as when incidents occur near Christian holidays or if there is destruction, but no theft.

We are aware that not all vandalism is, in fact, motivated by a bias against Christians. Similarly, most cases of theft are simply theft, and not "hate" motivated. Sometimes a break-in or theft is simply motivated by money. But often there are mixed motives involved, for example theft may be motivated by financial gain, but when the theft is from the donation box in a church, there may be a biased motivation, as well. By choosing to prey on churches, vandals and thieves show a profound lack of respect, if not hatred, for places of worship.

However, it is important to **put the incidents in the context of the church communities' perceptions**. Whether windows were smashed because hooligans saw a church as an easy target or whether they were smashed because a person hates churches is, in many ways, irrelevant to the church community.

When churches are targeted, communities feel violated and worry whether the incidents will escalate into something

worse. Further, churches are forced to spend scarce resources on repairs and security. When a person walks into an unlocked church and destroys property, whether to steal from an alms box or to smash a statue, the church is forced to decide whether it should keep its doors open outside worship times. For many Christians the act of going into a church — to pray or light a candle or just to marvel at its beauty — is part of their worship and an expression of their faith. Church closures interfere with that.

## Desecration and vandalism of churches and Christian sites

Acts of vandalism and desecration take place more frequently than many would expect — and are increasing in many countries in Europe. In 2019, the Observatory published a [newsletter](#) documenting ten incidents in France in the first eleven days of February. The newsletter generated great interest and international news outlets contacted us to try to better understand what was happening and why these stories were not regularly reported in the mainstream media.

Also in February 2019, the French Interior Ministry announced the official annual [crime statistics](#) for 2018, which included 1063 “anti-Christian acts,” slightly more than the previous year. According to the government’s own figures, in the ten years from 2008 to 2018, there was an [increase of about 250% in attacks](#) on Christian sites.

The numbers tell us something, but not enough, about the phenomenon. And unfortunately, the lack of information can lead to speculation about who and what is behind these incidents. This prompted one French politician to submit a [question to the Ministry of the Interior](#) to demand more specific information about how the number of incidents of desecration of churches and cemeteries are calculated, noting that they had been steadily rising since the government began collecting such data in 2008. She further asked what the government planned to do to more effectively combat such incidents.

Two months later, the April fire that nearly destroyed the Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris prompted further interest in the situation in France. Journalists from both religious and secular media outlets asked the Observatory to provide some context as to what group or groups might be behind the incidents. Of course, the cause of the Notre-Dame fire remains under investigation and the majority of incidents of desecration and vandalism the Observatory records are committed by unknown perpetrators, so one can only speak of trends.

Churches and Christian cemeteries and symbols can be “lightening rods” for different groups. For Islamists, they represent the Christian West; for anarchists, they are symbols of authority; for radical feminists, they represent the patriarchy. Finally, for other vandals, churches and other Christian sites are simply easy targets.

But churches in France were not the only ones to suffer vandalism and desecration. Across Europe, churches, cemeteries, and public Christian symbols were targeted in the last year. A comprehensive list may be found in Part Two, but the following are other examples from the last year:

### Spain

The chapel of the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid was attacked with incendiary devices thrown through a window. In addition to trying to destroy the chapel, the perpetrators left the anarchist slogan “The only church that illuminates is the one that burns” on the walls. On the 2019 International Women’s Day, at least a dozen churches were defaced with pro-abortion and anti-Catholic graffiti such as “Iglesia = muerte” (Church = death), “Muerte al patriarcado” (“Death to the patriarchy”), and “Pecadora y orgullosa” (“Sinner and proud”). The vandals identified themselves as feminists who were part of the “8M” women’s strike, young communists, or anarchists. Locks on some of the churches were sealed with silicone to prevent the faithful from entering.

### Germany

An unidentified person climbed the facade of Saxony’s oldest church, smashed a 4-meter stained glass window, and entered. Once inside, the vandal severely damaged the carved late Gothic altar and pulpit with a sword. A chandelier was shattered onto the ground and a candlestick was damaged. Disastrous damage was avoided after altar candles, deliberately left burning in the wooden tower, went out before causing a fire.

Unknown perpetrators broke in a church window with stones and invaded the interior of the church of the Heiligen Dreifaltigkeit. Several sacred objects, including statues of saints, were smashed. The Jesus figure was removed from the crucifix and burned. The intruders also urinated in the aisle and on several pews.

And an arson attack at St. Jodok church in Ravensburg caused at least €2 million in damage.

### Sweden

The Alhem Church in Skellefteå was sprayed with black graffiti, including “Jihad” and “Dead” with a Nazarene symbol for Christians.



## Switzerland

A 12.5-meter-high replica of Rio de Janeiro's famed Christ the Redeemer statue was vandalized just hours after it was installed on a boulevard in Fribourg by a 24-year-old Syrian asylum seeker.

## Italy

A church was vandalized with excrement. At another church, an arsonist set fire to the door using flammable liquid. In Rovereto, a Molotov cocktail was thrown at a church and graffiti was painted on the walls.

## Poland

Four rosary chapels in the Calvary of Panevnicka in Katowice were desecrated by vandals who painted Satanic slogans and pentagrams on the doors and walls, as well as obscene drawings of male genitalia on the statues of holy figures.

## Hate crimes against Christians

When hate crimes are committed against individuals, an anti-Christian motive is often quite clear — either through words that were said, or the context in which the attack took place. These incidents range from threats to violence; from throwing bottles and stones at peaceful demonstrators to beatings to murders. Examples from 2018 include:

### United Kingdom

Fifteen churches received handwritten letters threatening petrol bomb attacks and mass stabbings. One handwritten letter read: "Stop all your services straight away / If you don't your church will be petrol bombed while in service. Continue behind closed doors, your congregation members will be stabbed one by one. Blood on your hands. (You have been warned)."

### Sweden

A Christian Afghani asylum seeker was attacked after attending a worship service at a Pentecostal church. The victim had previously received death threats at his refugee accommodation due to his conversion to Christianity from Islam.

### Switzerland

A 21-year-old Afghan man was arrested in Bern after he threatened to blow up the Heiliggeistkirche (Church of the Holy Spirit) near the main train station. Witnesses reported unusual behavior to the police. Upon arrival, police found the man in possession of "suspicious objects" which were later neutralized. The church was

evacuated and the area around the church was sealed off for hours.

## France

A 38-year old man was arrested after he burst into the Cathédrale Saint-Vincent de Chalons-sur-Saône during the Mass and threatened to blow everything up with a grenade and gestured toward his satchel. He also grabbed a Mass book and shouted, "it is the Koran that should be read!" Due to 27 previous convictions, including violent offenses, the court ruled that Ahmed X would be held in jail until his trial.

A man caused panic in the Paris metro when he threatened the passengers with a knife, screaming "I am a Muslim and I target all Catholics!" Police arrested the 23-year-old Egyptian and took him into custody.

## Greece

In the middle of the night, a group of about 30-40 fellow refugees attacked two Christian families along with another Christian man after they returned from a bible-reading in a refugee camp. According to International Christian Consulate, "the attackers poured petrol over the cabin where they were meeting and threatened to set it alight. They beat up the men and held knives to the throats of the two women and children, while telling them, 'This is a Muslim camp. You have to leave'."

Following the incident, an aid worker says there should be more protection for religious minorities among refugees as they are "extremely vulnerable."

## Spain

National police arrested two members of an extreme left group for assaulting a group of young people because they "did not like the T-shirts they wore," namely the shirts of the Catholic University San Antonio de Murcia. The victims were first insulted, then threatened, and were finally attacked. One of the victims received stitches, suffering an ocular hemorrhage. The 19 and 28-year-old perpetrators from Spain and Brazil were identified by photographs and were already known to the police for their membership in ultra-left groups.

## Netherlands

Prosecutors in the Hague indicated that Malek F, a Syrian asylum seeker charged with three counts of attempted murder after stabbings in the city, was specifically searching for "Christian and Jewish kuffars" (Arabic for non-believers). In a recorded conversation with his mother from prison, he said they were similar to "animals or retarded people" and that he was a "soldier of Allah."

# Chapter Three

## RESPONSES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Intolerance and discrimination against Christians — the squeeze and smash — affect all of us in Europe, including non-Christians. It concerns everyone, and only through increased awareness and appropriate responses at all levels of society, will the situation improve.
- We offer the following recommendations as positive steps toward respect for human rights in general and in particular for freedom of religion or belief:

### WE ASK ALL PEOPLE OF GOOD WILL:

- To respect and tolerate Christianity, Christians, and Christian moral positions in private and in public.
- Not to tolerate hate incidents against Christians, just as hate incidents against others are not tolerated.
- As employers, to reasonably accommodate the Christian beliefs of your staff, especially with regard to Sunday observance, the wearing of religious symbols and the expressions of faith and values, in the workplace or in private, as well as to accommodate conscientious objections.
- As a member of a political lobby group which disapproves of Christian values or the Christian faith, employ the same standards with Christians which you would like to see employed with yourself; to be tolerant and fair; and to employ only democratic means in achieving your goals.

### WE RECOMMEND TO NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS:

- To ensure the exercise of freedom of religion, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, and the right to conscientious objection.
- To refrain from introducing laws, including hate speech codes, that discriminate directly or indirectly against Christians or interfere with freedom of religion or freedom of expression.
- To recognize and condemn intolerance and discrimination against Christians and ensure the right of Christians to participate fully in public life.
- To collect disaggregated data with the specific aim of monitoring hate crimes against Christians and against religious properties and compile national reports on hate crimes.
- To develop and implement national action plans to prevent and respond to hate crimes.
- With regard to Christian refugees and asylum seekers:
  - To institute national bans on deportation of Christian converts to countries where apostasy is punishable by imprisonment or death.

- To improve training and guidance to government officials charged with adjudicating asylum claims involving religious conversion and persecution.
- To declare the systematic targeting and killing of Christians and other religious minorities in Iraq and Syria genocide.
- To recognize the special status of Christian and other religious minority refugees and asylum seekers.
- Train and educate police, social welfare office staff, and accommodation security on the topic of religiously-motivated conflict among refugees.

### **WE RECOMMEND TO THE EUROPEAN UNION:**

- Not to adopt non-discrimination legislation that significantly limits freedom of expression, association, and religion.
- To recognize the special status of Christian and other religious minority refugees and asylum seekers.
- To examine European Union legislation with regard to direct or indirect discrimination against Christians.
- To the Fundamental Rights Agency: to continue make freedom of religion, expression, and conscience a priority of their work.

### **WE RECOMMEND TO INTERNATIONAL GOVERNMENTAL HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTIONS:**

- To report on intolerance and discrimination against Christians and recommend appropriate action to member states.
- To encourage governments to monitor the situation of Christians carefully and to collect disaggregated data on hate incidents and crimes, including vandalism, against Christians.
- To examine their own documents and recommendations with regard to indirect discrimination against Christians.
- To develop and strengthen capacity building activities for the protection of religious properties.

### **TO JOURNALISTS, OPINION LEADERS, AND ARTISTS:**

- Journalists should take care not to perpetuate marginalization or negative stereotyping of Christians in their reporting.
- Opinion leaders must be aware of their responsibility in shaping a tolerant public discourse and should refrain from negative stereotyping of Christians or Christianity.
- Artists should be respectful of religious sites and symbols, bearing in mind that the object of their art might be most holy to religious believers.

# An Important Step to Combat Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief

By Ewelina U. Ochab

On May 28, 2019, Poland, supported by several other states including a core group consisting of Brazil, Canada, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Nigeria, Pakistan and the United States, tabled a UN General Assembly resolution establishing the UN International Day Commemorating the Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief on August 22. The resolution was adopted by consensus.

While some critics may regard such a day as insignificant, as yet another UN day, it is far from insignificant. This is a historic step that has great potential. Until now, there has been no UN-led day focused exclusively on religiously motivated violence (or any other aspects of freedom of religion or belief). While several states mark October 27 as the International Freedom of Religion or Belief Day, that is not a universally recognized annual day, and it has no equivalent within the UN system. Furthermore, the day is intended to provide a springboard towards an action plan that addresses the growing issue of violence based on religion or belief. The establishment of such a day is not the end goal in itself. It is just the beginning of a larger campaign that ultimately aims to put an end to violence based on religion or belief whenever and wherever it occurs.

Looking back at recent years, violence based on religion or belief is an ever-growing problem that surpasses the threshold of the legal definition of crimes against humanity, war crimes and even genocide. The Daesh genocide against religious minorities in Syria and Iraq and the Burmese government's genocide against Rohingya Muslims in Rakhine state are examples of atrocities that have taken place in recent years. However, apart from those two examples of genocidal atrocities, there are several more examples of religious persecution (whether because of belonging to a particular religious group or because of not adhering to a particular religion or no religion at all) that have not yet made the headlines. More needs to be done to ensure that such atrocities never happen again.

The UN International Day Commemorating the Victims

of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief will be marked on August 22. The date for the commemoration was intentionally chosen to be neutral (not associated with any specific event of violence based on religion or belief), but that may have undermined the observance of the day. Indeed, generally, UN days are picked to signify an important theme-related event. One of the proposed dates was August 3, to mark the day when Daesh attacked Sinjar, killing many men, abducting thousands of women and girls for forced labor and sex slavery and boys to become child soldiers, and marked the beginning of the genocidal campaign against Yazidis, Christians and other religious minorities in the region. This one day has changed the lives of thousands of people forever.

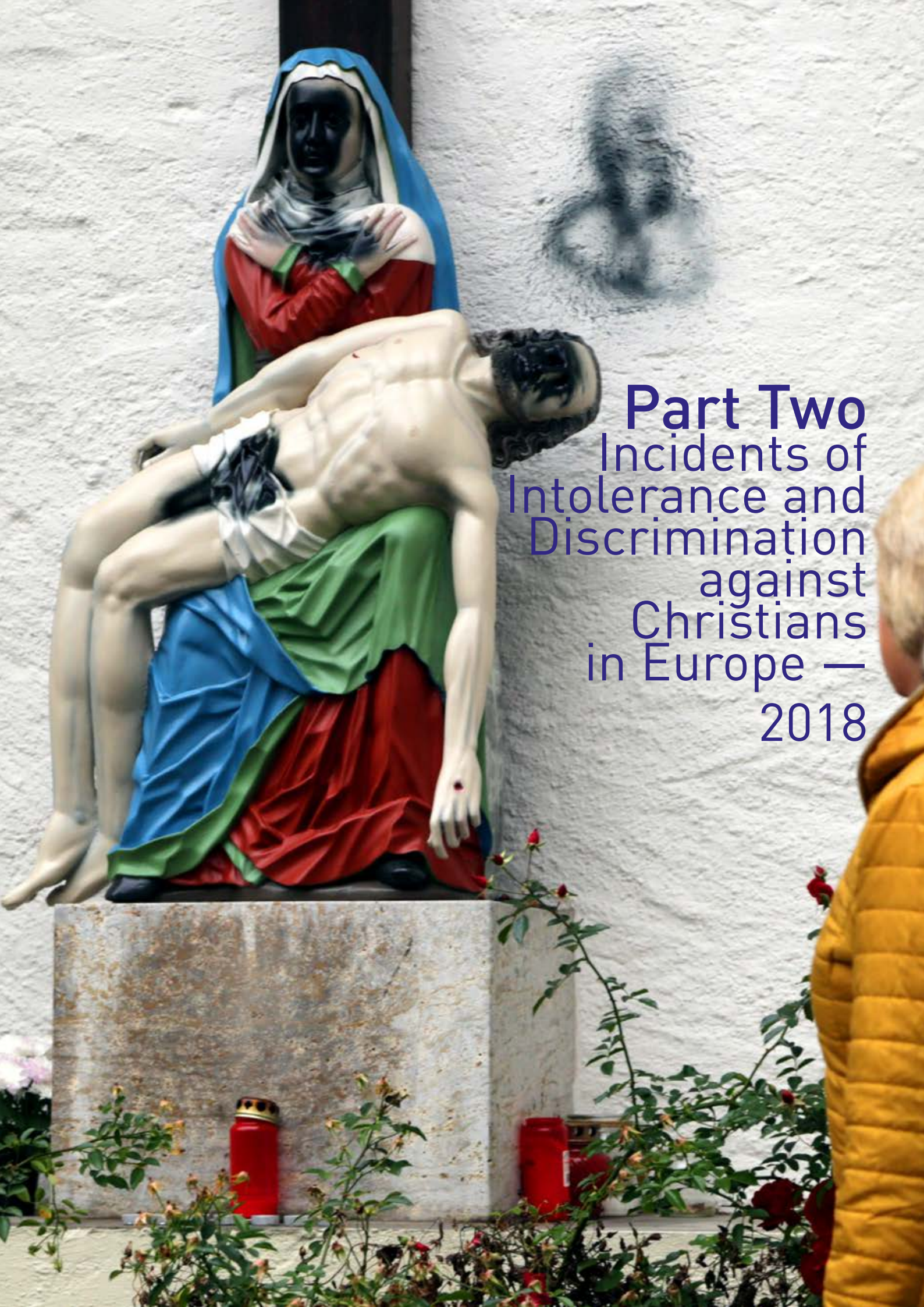
Furthermore, contrary to the initial proposal, the focus of the day is limited in scope to violence based on religion or belief rather than the broader concept of religious persecution that may include "intentional and severe deprivation of fundamental rights" (highly likely because of religious persecution not being univocally defined and some definitions being very broad). Nonetheless, the focus on acts of violence is positive in that it sends a clear message that no act of violence is acceptable, whether a single incident or acts of violence that are systematic and perpetrated on a mass scale.

Despite some missed opportunities to strengthen the impact of the day, it is crucial now to focus on steps that can be taken to ensure that the day becomes a meaningful one and to equip the UN, states and all members of society with strong weapons to ensure that the issue of violence based on religion or belief has no future.

Poland and other states have to be commended for recognizing the issue of violence based on religion or belief as a contemporary issue that can no longer be neglected and for uniting all nations in this endeavor. We owe this to past and present victims and survivors of violence based on religion or belief. We owe it to the generations that come after us.

*This essay originally appeared on May 29, 2019, in [Forbes](#) and is reprinted here with permission.*

*Photo: Reiner Lehmann.*



**Part Two**  
Incidents of  
Intolerance and  
Discrimination  
against  
Christians  
in Europe —  
2018



We regularly monitor media, newsletters, and regional observatories and religious freedom organizations across Europe to collect our data. We also receive information on incidents submitted by concerned people via our website's "Report a Case" tool.

In 2018, we documented more than 300 incidents. In 2017, we documented over 275 and in 2016, over 250. We note an increase in incidents of vandalism, particularly intentionally-set fires, in churches in Europe. While we have documented fewer incidents of violence against Christian asylum seekers in refugee accommodations than in previous years, it is important to note that this is likely due to those accommodations being closed.

We present incidents by country, providing a short summary of the facts. Click on the case title for detailed information about the incident on our [website](#).

## AUSTRIA

### Graffiti Threat on Vorarlberg Wall

**April 19, 2018:** Unknown perpetrators vandalized a stone retaining wall in Rankweil with pink paint. Over ten meters, they sprayed the words "Deth (sic) to all Christians!" as well as a pentagram symbol. The retaining wall on Thomas-Lehrer-Weges leads to the Basilica of Rankweil, the pilgrimage church of Our Lady of the Visitation.

### Two Fires Set in Neunkirchen Parish

**June 27, 2018:** An unknown person set fire to the tablecloth on the altar of the "Allerseelen" chapel in the church in Neunkirchen, but it went out on its own. The incident was suspected to have happened just after the church opened as the priest noticed it upon arrival and immediately reported it to the police. Two days later, a similar fire was set.

### Parish Church in Gutau Vandalized

**September 7, 2018:** Unknown perpetrators vandalized the facade of the parish church in Gutau with red and black paint.

### Perpetrator Confesses to Arson of Evangelical Church

**September 15, 2018:** A 58 year old man confessed

to setting a fire that heavily damaged the Johanneskirche am Lendkanal in Klagenfurt. The altar cross, a gift of British soldiers and of great sentimental value, was missing after the fire but later found near the church.

### Monks Brutally Attacked during Robbery

**December 27, 2018:** Six monks were attacked, gagged, and bound during the course of a robbery at the monastery of Maria Immaculata in Vienna. Several of the victims were seriously injured and police began a large-scale investigation.

### Two Telephone Bomb Threats against Vienna Cathedral in a Week

**December 29, 2018:** St. Stephen's Cathedral had to be evacuated twice in one week after anonymous telephone bomb threats by were received.

## BELGIUM

### Antwerp Church Vandalized

**January 14, 2018:** The Church of St. James (Sint-Jacobskerk) in Antwerp was vandalized sometime during the night between January 14th to January 15th. The church is frequented by the Chaldean brothers in Belgium.

### Vandalism and Theft at Warmifontaine Church

**April 6, 2018:** Unidentified perpetrators looted the church of Saint-Martin in Warmifontaine, breaking open the tabernacle with a crowbar, and stealing ciboria containing consecrated Hosts, chalices, and hand-carved statues.

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## Statue of Christ Shattered

**April 7, 2018:** On the morning of April 7th, the sacristan of the church in Poulseur discovered it had been vandalized. A statue of a crucified Jesus Christ had been taken down from a hook and shattered into pieces. The extensive damage to the statue suggested that the perpetrators climbed onto the choir screen and threw it down to the ground from above. Other vessels with flowers were also knocked down and broken.

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## Bishop of Liège Threatened and Robbed at Home

**August 15, 2018:** During the night between the 14th to the 15th of August, thieves broke into the bishop's home through a toilet window on the ground floor. They assaulted both Bishop Jean-Pierre Delville, as well as his godson who was also present in the house. They demanded cash, believing that the money collected from the churches was kept there. Having no cash in the house, the bishop and his godson had to resort to the money the godson had kept saved up for a trip abroad. They further asked for gold and valuable paintings, a Picasso in particular. The bishop gave them three chalices and pointed them towards four pieces of art from the 17th century that decorated the council chamber. After threatening to kill them, they locked the bishop and his godson in a bathroom, where they were found the next morning.

## Police Investigate Vandalism of Brussels Church

**August 25, 2018:** The walls of Saint-Antoine de Padoue Church in the district of Forest in Brussels was sprayed with obscene graffiti during the summer holidays between mid-July and mid-August 2018. The house opposite was also vandalized. As of late August, the graffiti remained on the buildings, as the municipality was required to wait for authorization from the police before it could proceed with clean-up.

## Belgian Minister of Culture calls for Ban on Religious Broadcasting after Bible Reading

**August 26, 2018:** Verses from Paul's letter to the Ephesians were broadcast on radio and Flemish TV station VRT from a Catholic Mass in the town of Grimbergen. A lay reader quoted Ephesians 5 22-33: "Women, be submissive to your husband as the husband to the Lord. For the man is the head of the woman as Christ is the head of the church." This sparked a row

over whether religious broadcasting should be stopped and caused the Belgian Minister of Culture, Sven Gatz to tweet "No outdated, woman-unfriendly statements ... please. What if, for example, an imam would have said this?" He told the newspaper Het Nieuwsbald "The fact that they come from an old book is not an argument for letting them go to our people. This is not of this time, and that it is broadcast on the VRT for the whole of Flanders is already completely crazy."

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## BULGARIA

### Pentecostal Church in Rouse Threatened by Municipality Councilors and Media

**April 17, 2018:** The municipality of Rouse announced it would expel the Third Evangelical Pentecostal Church claiming that it illegally occupies a municipal building. The announcement was made by councilors from the right wing party, International Macedonian Revolutionary Organization. After an inspection launched by the local authorities, it was decided that the place where worship services are held three times a week, would be closed.

### Bulgarian Catholics and Protestants Unite to Oppose Proposed Religious Law

**May 13, 2018:** Catholic and Protestant communities in Bulgaria unified their efforts to prevent the adoption of two legislative proposals put before the parliamentary assembly in May 2018. The first, sponsored by the conservative GERB, the Bulgarian Socialist Party, and the ethnic Turkish Movement for Rights and Freedoms, would permit state subsidies only for major religious denominations. The second, tabled by the United Patriots, would require greater oversight of religious activities and financing. On December 26th, its last working day of 2018, the Bulgarian Parliament passed amendments to Religious Denominations Act, but without the restrictions feared by Protestants and other minority faiths. "Almost all of the provisions that were protested against were dropped. Whether due to the piled up international pressure, or because of the eight evangelical street protests, or maybe due to the thousands of prayers spoken against the amendments — the lawmakers dropped every single restrictive provision of the original version."

### Assault on Priest and Attempted Robbery at Bulgarian Monastery

**September 18, 2018:** Six masked men entered the



medieval Rozhen Monastery on September 18th. They assaulted and tied up the priest who was present and began digging into the wall behind the iconostasis in the monastery church with picks and spades. After about 30 minutes, they left the monastery without taking anything except the priest's mobile phone. The priest was reportedly unharmed but shaken by the incident. Security camera footage led to the arrest of some of the perpetrators.

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## CZECH REPUBLIC

### President of Czech Republic Sides with Communist Party on Taxation of Church Restitution

**September 6, 2018:** The President of the Czech Republic, Milos Zeman, wavered from his neutral position and backed the communists and government coalition parties' plan to tax outstanding restitution payments to churches and religious communities whose property had been confiscated during the communist regime.

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## FINLAND

### Finnish Foreign Minister Faced No-Confidence Vote over Pro-Life Views

**September 21, 2018:** Members of the Finnish Parliament voted 100–60 against a motion of no confidence brought against Catholic Foreign Minister Timo Soini on September 21st. Four opposition parties, the Green League, Left Alliance, Social Democrats and Swedish People's Party, brought a motion of no confidence over Soini's attendance at pro-life vigil while on an official trip to Canada in May. Soini defended his opposition to abortion in his blog, saying "how odd it is that someone would have to defend the right to defend life." He noted that he has stood against the culture of death for the last 30 years, all of them as an active politician. "It shouldn't come as a surprise to anyone that I hold this position," he said. "And I'm not ashamed of it, nor will I ever be. I defend the holiness of life in all circumstances. I have done so throughout my life. This same conviction has followed me through my political career and will stay with me for the rest of my life."

*In an interview for Commentary magazine hours after his colleagues voted to allow him to keep his post, he said "In general, I'm worried that Christianity is being squeezed ... There is a tendency to squeeze Christianity out of the public square."*

### Historic Church Destroyed by Arson: Suspect Arrested

**September 23, 2018:** Only ruins were left of the Kiihtelysvaara Lutheran Church after a 29 year-old set fire to one of Finland's oldest wooden church (1770) in Joensuu.

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## FRANCE

### Church Visit Disrupted by a Man yelling "Allah Akbar"

**January 10, 2018:** During a visit of a class from the Dauphiné high school to the church le collégiale Saint-Barnard in Romans-sur-Isère, a 34-year-old man allegedly reproached the female students for how they were dressed, before shouting "Allah Akbar." He also damaged the facade of the church. The man was later arrested.

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## Baptismal Font Stolen from Flavignac Church

**January 14, 2018:** Church trustees discovered that a baptismal font was missing and presumed stolen on January 14th. The copper font, dating from 1922, object, had been located near the entrance of the church of Flavignac. Church trustees thought it was being repaired, but later discovered that had been stolen.

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### Donation Box Stolen from Church in Mantes-la-Jolie

**January 21, 2018:** Shortly before starting Mass on January 21st, the priest of Saint-Jean-Baptiste church in Mantes-la-Jolie discovered that one or more individuals broke a window and two doors in order to steal the church donation box.

### Paris March for Life Crowds Underreported by Media

**January 21, 2018:** French media largely ignored the March for Life, and those who reported about it underestimated the number of participants, saying there were "more than a thousand" marchers. Police estimated 8,500 participants, while organizers reported that over 40,000 people marched.

## Alpes-Maritimes: Mission Cross Vandalized in Grasse

**February 18, 2018:** Municipal services workers discovered that the "Mission Cross" in Grasse had been vandalized during the night of February 18th. The nearly 500 kg wrought iron cross was bent and the pedestal was deliberately moved into the roadway. The cross, dating from 1894, had been completely renovated by Jean-Marie Rouvier, of the Compagnons du Patrimoine en Pays de Grasse, in June 2016. Mayor Jérôme Viaud condemned the vandalism and launched a police investigation.

## "Jesus Magazine" Mocked by French Daily Host

**February 20, 2018:** On the daily television program *Le Quotidien*, host Yann Barthès mocked the publication of a magazine called "Jesus" and comedian Vincent Dedienne joined in by singing "I have holes in my hands and in my feet." Eric Célérier, founder of the website *Top Chrétien*, publicly denounced this by noting that mocking Jews is anti-Semitism and punishable by law. Mocking Muslims is Islamophobia. But strangely, it seems that making fun of Christians and Jesus is ... humor."

## Church Desecrated in Erdeven

**February 21, 2018:** The tabernacle was desecrated in the church of Saint-Pierre-et-Saint-Paul in Erdeven (Morbihan).

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## Ten Churches in the French Regions of Loire-Atlantique and Morbihan Desecrated

**February 21, 2018:** Ten churches, four in the Morbihan and six in Loire-Atlantique, suffered theft or degradation beginning in mid-February. The two suspects were arrested on March 1st by the gendarmerie of Saint-Nazaire after they both confessed to the crimes. During searches at their home, several objects of worship were found. According to the gendarmerie, some of the loot, which amounted to several thousand euros, had already been sold. The damage caused in the affected churches included desecrated tabernacles, statues, and monstrances.

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## Strasbourg Cathedral Tagged

**February 22, 2018:** A facade and the double door of Strasbourg Cathedral were tagged during the night

between February 20th and 21st with the anarchist message "Neither god nor master" ("Ni Dieu, Ni Maître").

## Arson at Saint-Gildas Church in Auray

**March 4, 2018:** On the afternoon of March 4th, a parishioner discovered thick smoke inside the church of Saint-Gildas. She observed two young women running from the church and immediately contacted the authorities. Firefighters discovered 10 separate fires had been set inside.

## Statue of Virgin Mary in Champagnat Stolen

**March 7, 2018:** The statue of Virgin Mary in an oratory in Champagnat was torn from its base and stolen on the eve of International Women's Day. An explanatory note was left by the vandals, saying that Mary did not want to remain behind an iron gate, surrounded by plastic flowers and peeling paint, but wished to "withdraw to meditate on the state of the sacred feminine" and that she would return.

## Niort: Teenager Stabbed in Notre-Dame Church

**March 8, 2018:** A 15-year-old boy praying at the church of Notre-Dame in Niort was assaulted around 6:30 pm on March 8th. Two hooded men ordered him to undress. When he refused, they stabbed him in the leg with a knife. The injured teen was transported to the Niort hospital by firefighters. No further information about the assailants was provided by media reports.

## "Allahu Akbar" Shouted in a Crowded Evangelical Church

**March 11, 2018:** A man burst into the crowded Evangelical Church of Wittenheim in Alsace during the Sunday service and shouted "Allahu Akbar" while mimicking the use of a weapon, frightening the congregation. The man was detained by authorities.

## Police Discovered Hundreds of Works of Art Stolen from Churches

**March 15, 2019:** Investigators found 100 works of art, from paintings and statues to ciboria and candlesticks, with a value estimated at €100,000 in an apartment in Pas-de-Calais. Following September robbery complaints from two churches in Likques and Sainghin-en-Weppes, a coordinated investigation resulted in the arrest of three art students, two men and a woman, who admitted having stolen the works of art from various churches in Hauts-de-France, as well as in Belgium, over a two-year period.

### **Blood Poured in Front of Martinique Church**

**March 15, 2019:** A witness discovered blood poured on the stairs and door of the église de Bellevue in Fort-de-France on the morning of March 15th.

### **Vandalism in a Cemetery in Ardèche**

**March 17, 2018:** Locals discovered that 18 graves in the Saint-Romain-d'Ay cemetery had been vandalized, with crosses broken. Complaints were filed and the police began an investigation.

### **Demonstration Against Immigration Law in the Basilica of Saint-Denis**

**March 18, 2018:** Far-left activists and undocumented migrants demonstrated inside the Basilica of Saint-Denis on March 18th to protest the French government's new asylum law before being forcibly removed by police, resulting in the evening Mass being cancelled.

### **Man Shouted "Allahu Akbar" in the Cathedral of Cambrai**

**March 25, 2018:** Shortly before the Palm Sunday Mass in the cathedral Notre-Dame-de-Grâce, an unidentified man shouted "Allahu Akbar" into the microphone. The man ran away before being apprehended. Notably, the incident happened two days after an ISIS-inspired terrorist attack in southern France.

### **Notre-Dame-du-Bourg in Digne-les-Bains Tagged**

**March 26, 2018:** A man was arrested on March 28th for painting satanic symbols ("666") on the cathedral, as well as tags on other buildings in the town.

### **No Prison for Men Who Entered Convent Demanding Nuns Convert to Islam**

**March 28, 2018:** The two men who entered a Carmelite convent in November 2017 and demanded the nuns to convert to Islam or they would go to hell and wrote exhortations to conversion and "Allahu Akbar" in the guestbook were released by a Verdun court on March 28th. The court, citing "diminished mental responsibility at the time of the incident" because the intruders had been suffering from "psychiatric disorders," freed the men after a trial. "There is no link between your actions and terrorism. The terms and expressions used, while they had the effect of disturbing the sisters, are not specific to radical discourse nor were they intended to frighten," the president of the court told the defendants.

### **Brittany: Tomb of Abbot Perrot Tagged**

**March 31, 2018:** The tomb of Abbot Jean-Marie Perrot, founder of the Breton Catholic movement

Bleun-Brug who was murdered by communists in 1943, was toppled and then sprayed with "anti-fascist" graffiti. The incidents coincided with the annual Easter Monday commemoration of the Abbot's death.

*Locals reacted with anger and dismay: "How could one dare to attack the tomb of a priest?" and "This is clearly a provocation."*

### **Lighting Stolen from the Cross of the Holy Spirit**

**April 1, 2018:** On Easter Sunday, inhabitants of La Treille discovered that the solar panels, battery, and 70 LED lights which illuminated the La Croix Saint Esprit had been stolen. Unknown thieves had to climb 400 meters of rocky terrain to reach the cross. Losses amounted to €1,400. The cross was installed less than a year before and was described as a reassuring "night light" for the 800 inhabitants of the valley.

### **Deliberate Act of Desecration in Féney Church**

**April 2, 2018:** On Easter Monday, the church of Domois in Féney was desecrated and ransacked. Intruders shattered doors, broke objects, scattered candles, flowers, tablecloths, and religious symbols, church furniture and other items were destroyed. Tabernacles were opened and consecrated hosts were trampled and scattered.

### **Relic Stolen from Saint-Étienne de Toul**

**April 5, 2018:** A student working as a summer guide for the Toul Cathedral, Saint-Étienne, discovered that pieces of the relic belonging to the first bishop of Toul, St. Gerard, was missing. The relic is about twenty centimeters long and was pulled out from its holster.

### **Saint-Michel Church in Holque Vandalized**

**April 7, 2018:** Saint-Michel Church in Holque, a small French commune in northern France was vandalized with graffiti.

### **Intentional Fires in Saint-Gervais-Saint-Prottais in Langon**

**April 8, 2018:** A passerby saw flames coming from the church and rushed in to extinguish the fire. Firefighters arrived quickly and were able to prevent the fire from causing extensive damage. Fires had been set in two different places: one at the candlesticks where the altar of the Virgin is situated, and the other at the entrance where leaflets and informational flyers are displayed.

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## Tabernacle in Loire Church Vandalized

**April 13, 2018:** The tabernacle in the church of Saint-Jean-Saint-Maurice-sur-Loire, 15 kilometers from Roanne, was vandalized. The intruders perhaps expected they would find ciboria and chalices by breaking the marble door of the tabernacle, but long ago liturgical objects of high value were moved to a more secure place.

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### Church Bell Tower Tagged with Obscene Graffiti

**April 20, 2018:** Locals discovered obscene graffiti on the bell tower of church of Saint-Vorles in Châtillon-sur-Seine.

### Church in Guadeloupe Vandalized

**April 25, 2018:** One or more individuals allegedly broke into L'Eglise Immaculée Conception in Abymes, a village in Guadeloupe in the French Caribbean and vandalized the interior.

### Destruction of Statue of the Virgin Mary in Loudun

**April 27, 2018:** At the church of Saint-Pierre in Loudun (Vienne) one or more individuals overturned a statue of the Virgin Mary placed on a pedestal. Pieces of the head of the Virgin were broken and the vase placed beside it was smashed on the ground. Leaflets to write prayer intentions were scattered on the ground. The priest lodged a complaint with the gendarmerie.

### Man Arrested for Threatening to Blow Up Cathedral

**April 28, 2018:** A 38-year old man was arrested after he burst into the Cathédrale Saint-Vincent de Chalon-sur-Saône during the Mass on April 28th and threatened to blow everything up with a grenade and gestured toward his satchel. He also grabbed a Mass book and shouted, "it is the Koran that should be read!" Parishioners promptly called the police and Ahmed X was soon placed in custody. Highly intoxicated, he remained in jail for two days before appearing in court to face charges. Due to 27 previous convictions, including violent offenses, the court ruled that he would be held in jail until his trial at the end of May. He is considered a recidivist under French law and could face enhanced penalties if convicted in this case.

*The priest said that although everyone remained calm during the violent outburst, they could not help but recall the murder of Father Jacques Hamel in Saint-Etienne du Rouvray.*

### Priest Assaulted during Mass

**May 11, 2018:** A man entered l'église de la Source à Saint Denis on the French island of Réunion during the celebration of the Mass, walked straight to the altar, and slapped Father Pascal Mussard. Many parishioners rushed to intervene. Police arrived soon after and handcuffed the man. After it was discovered that the perpetrator was "imbalanced" and had fled from a hospital hours earlier, the priest declined to file a complaint.

### Saint André Church in Grenoble Looted

**May 13, 2018:** Four boxes use to collect donations for the poor and for upkeep of the church were discovered looted in the Saint André church in Grenoble on May 13th. According to the parish priest, the perpetrators emptied the donation boxes and forced the drawers. Losses were estimated at around €600.

### Fire Set in a Lyon Chapel

**May 16, 2018:** A fire was discovered in la Chapelle Saint-Croix in the 6th arrondissement of Lyon in the afternoon of May 16th. It appeared that a fire set in the chapel's confessional started the blaze and three fire trucks were deployed to extinguish the fire.

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## Statue of Our Lady of Lourdes Vandalized

**May 18, 2018:** Statue of Our Lady of Lourdes situated in the Grotto in Sainte-Gemmes-d'Andigné was broken in half during the night of May 18th to 19th. An investigation was launched immediately and two 17-year-olds confessed to the act of throwing rocks at the statue until it was broken in two. On June 6th they will be heard in the court. Damages amounted to €1,000.

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### Cemetery Vandalized in Indre-et-Loire

**May 19, 2018:** Between thirty and forty graves in the cemetery of La Riche were vandalized early in the evening of May 19th. Damage included smashed crucifixes. The mayor of La Riche called the act "pure

vandalism,” as no tags or other signs were left by the perpetrators. Families visiting the cemetery on the Pentecost weekend were distressed upon learning of the damage to their loved ones’ graves.

### **Anarcho-Satanist Graffiti at the Basilica of Chaumont**

**June 11, 2018:** On the morning of June 11th, an unknown person sprayed Anarcho-Satanist graffiti on the facade of the Basilica of Saint-Jean-Baptiste de Chaumont (Haute-Marne). Along with the traditional anarchist “A” symbol, the word Satan accompanied by a heart was discovered.

### **Theft and Vandalism in the Chapel of Saint-Valery-sur-Somme**

**June 12, 2018:** A painting of the chapel of Saint-Valery-sur-Somme was stolen during the night of June 8th by an unknown person. In addition to the robbery, the grid that protected the chapel was broken and various decorative objects and religious art were damaged.

### **Theft and Vandalism in the Church of Bellecombe-Tarendol**

**June 13, 2018:** During the night of June 13th, between 10 pm and 7 am, unknown individuals forced the door of the Bellecombe-Tarendol church, breaking the lock. Once inside, they caused minor damage and stole a golden chalice. In addition, they sprayed the interior of the building with a fire extinguisher to conceal their tracks.

### **Paint Thrown against Saint-Étienne Church in Mulhouse**

**June 15, 2018:** An unknown person stained the main entrance of the Protestant church of Saint-Étienne in Mulhouse, France with white paint on June 15th in the afternoon.

### **Arson in Church in Plappeville**

**June 21, 2018:** The church of Sainte-Brigide de Plappeville (Moselle) suffered an arson attack on June 21st at 5:40 pm. Firefighters reported two fires inside the church. After being arrested in the vicinity, two young men admitted entering the building by breaking some of the windows and setting fire to the altar cloth and the cabinet in which the books were kept.

### **Two Statues Destroyed at Church in Perrecy-les-Forges**

**June 24, 2018:** Parishioners discovered two broken statues in the church of Saint-Pierre-et-Saint-Benoît on Sunday morning, the 24th of June 2018. The statue of St. Paul had been destroyed and another had been

decapitated. In addition to that, benches had been overturned, a door had been forced open, and a door lock had been broken.

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## **Church Suffers Repeated Thefts and Vandalism**

**June 26, 2018:** From the beginning of March until the end of June 2018, the alms box of church of Saint-Thomas-de-Cônac was repeatedly broken and emptied by unknown thieves. Despite new measures to prevent further thefts in the alms box, the perpetrators continued to attempt to get the money. In the end, after having installed a safe on the ground, the constant thefts were replaced with acts of vandalism: candles lit and broken on the floor, trash and papers thrown around, holy water spilled, and indecent comments written in the guestbook. The parish community considered whether it would be more appropriate to close the church to the public, except for during liturgical celebrations.

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### **Theft and Vandalism for Weeks in French Cemetery**

**June 26, 2018:** For several weeks, the Vallongue cemetery in the city of Bandol, was repeatedly vandalized and various objects were stolen. Relatives observed with dismay as plants, ceramics, religious figurines, and other decorative objects were disappearing.

### **“Satan Punishes Homophobes” on Wall of Toulouse Chapel**

**June 30, 2018:** Graffiti was discovered on the walls of the Saint-Roch-du-Férétra chapel in Toulouse. Slogans included “Church on fire,” “Dirty priest,” and “Satan punishes homophobes.”

### **Statue Vandalized and Satanic Inscriptions Left in Church**

**July 3, 2018:** A priest discovered that statues in the nave of the church of Saint Jean-Baptiste de Bourgoïn-Jallieu had been vandalized and that satanic inscriptions were left defacing a prayer book.

### **Village and Church Tagged with Graffiti**

**July 5, 2018:** Sometime during the night of July 5th,

buildings in the small town of Saint-Alban-d'Ay were targeted with vandalism with anarchist and communist slogans in red and black paint. The church façade was sprayed with offensive slogans and the interior was ransacked.

### **Degradations at the Church of la Collégiale Saint-Barnard**

**July 5, 2018:** Damage was discovered in the historic Collegiate Church of Saint-Barnard in the old center of Romans-sur-Isère: the cover of the baptismal font had been broken and found on the ground, and the finger of a statue of Saint John the Baptist was also broken.

### **Suspicious Fire at Chêne de la Vierge**

**July 11, 2018:** A fire destroyed the Chêne de la Vierge (the "Oak to the Virgin"), a popular place of pilgrimage and devotion, on July 11th. The tree, which had been covered with statues, crosses, rosaries, and small shrines to the Virgin Mary was ravaged by a fire. The fire was reported to be suspicious because there had been no reports of lightning in the area, and this tree was the only one in the forest to have been burned. The incident caused great upset in the area. "It's a disaster, a heartbreaker," said one resident. Another said, "Two months ago, we had gone there to leave virgins and crosses which had belonged to the parents of our niece. They were everywhere on the tree. We had trouble finding a place. There were always people praying there ... And now, there is nothing. All these memories are gone."

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## **Man with Knife on Metro Screamed "I target all Catholics"**

**July 14, 2018:** A man caused panic in the Paris metro on July 14th when he threatened the passengers with a knife, screaming "I am a Muslim and I target all Catholics." The police took the 23-year-old Egyptian "Emad F." into custody.

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### **Church Vandalized in Bouloire**

**July 15, 2019:** On the morning of July 15th, the church of Saint-Georges in Bouloire, was discovered vandalized. Father Thomas Leclair reported, "Sunday morning we discovered a missal in the holy water, in

addition the wooden column on which the trunk for of the sale of the candles was fixed had been broken (surely to steal the trunk), devotional candles were broken, and a liturgical cloth was found partially burned in the hole made in the column. A complaint was lodged with the gendarmerie. Identical acts had been recorded in November 2016 and the town hall had not wished to lodge a complaint."

### **Crucifix in Mountain Hut Vandalized**

**July 19, 2018:** A hiker in Wihr-au-Val in Alsace discovered an act of vandalism in the Krizle wooden hut located at an altitude of 688 m, at the crossroads of five hiking trails. The hiker reported that the carved wooden crucifix with a metal Christ had been desecrated, with the arms and legs broken off.

### **Statue of Virgin and Child Vandalized in Sulniac, Morbihan**

**July 20, 2018:** The gate protecting the oratory containing a statue of the Virgin and Child was torn off and the statue was toppled, causing damage.

### **Robbery of Saint-Pierre d'Equainville**

**July 21, 2018:** During the night between the 20th and the 21st of July, the church of Saint-Pierre d'Equainville, in the parish of Beuzeville, was robbed. The offenders entered by the sacristy door and stole everything that was of value: liturgical objects and candle holders. They rummaged through containers and scattered unconsecrated Hosts in the sacristy. Finally, they broke the tabernacle and stole the ciborium filled with consecrated Hosts.

### **Fire in Church; "Allahu Akbar" Sprayed on Walls**

**July 25, 2018:** A fire was set in the church Saint-Pierre du Matrioi in Orléans. Sheet music was burned, furniture was damaged, and smears of graffiti were found on several walls, including one reading "Allahu Akbar." The fire brigade was able to intervene early enough to prevent further spread of the fire, thus preserving the support structure of the church. The police indicated that the fire was intentionally set.

### **Four Fires Set in Saint-Pierre de Neuilly**

**August 5, 2018:** Four fires were started in the parish church Saint-Pierre in Neuilly-sur-Seine at about 2:30 in the afternoon. Passersby smelled smoke and found fires at four different locations near the entrance. They rushed to extinguish the flames with water to keep the fire from spreading. Fourteen firemen with three engines were called to the site. The perpetrators had started the fires by setting flames to flyers and a prayer

book. They had also left a piece of paper on a candle at the foot of a statue.

### **Christ Statue Defaced**

**August 9, 2018:** A public statue of Christ in Thonon-les-Bains was vandalized, with its face completely covered with black paint.

### **Sacristy Broken into and Robbed in Carville**

**August 9, 2018:** The sacristy of the church of Carville (Calvados) was robbed and various objects were stolen including candle sticks. The wooden door to the sacristy was broken.

### **Statue of Virgin Mary and Child Decapitated on the Island of Noirmoutier**

**August 19, 2018:** During the night of Saturday 18th to Sunday 19th of August, the 3.5 meter public statue of the Virgin Mary and Child was decapitated. Residents were shocked and searched the nearby forest for the missing heads but found nothing. Parishioners were dismayed, as the statue has stood in the community since 1949. The priest, who called the incident violent and shocking, filed a police complaint.

### **Statue Wearing Cross Vandalized**

**August 24, 2018:** A small statue of a woman wearing a cross around her neck carved into a stone wall dating back to the 13th century was intentionally defaced. Workers building a bridge discovered the damage, the same day the mayor had ordered protection for the site. The face was completely disfigured and the bust and the cross necklace were marred.

### **Statue of Virgin Mary Destroyed at the Grotto of Maupas**

**August 24, 2018:** The acts of vandalism were discovered by a visitor who regularly goes to the grotto of Maupas (a replica of the grotto of Lourdes) to light candles. The face of the statue of the Virgin Mary was completely destroyed. The news spread quickly in the village and left many people dismayed and upset.

### **Terrorist Threats against Reims Cathedral; Man Sentenced to Prison**

**August 28, 2018:** On the night of the 21st of July 2018 after the light show "Rêve de Couleurs," on the facade of the cathedral, a man shouted "Allahu Akbar! Long live Daesh! I will butcher you!" at all the people he met in front of the cathedral. He further threatened: "I'm going to attack! I'm going to blow up the cathedral!" A passerby who tried to interfere was slapped. The perpetrator was identified as 19-year-old Tony Brébant from Reims who

had recently converted to Islam. He was sentenced to fourteen months in prison on the 28th of August 2018.

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## **Catholic Bookstore Vandalized by Anarchists**

**September 3, 2018:** The Notre-Dame-de-France Catholic bookstore was vandalized with the word "FACHOS" ("fascists"), an anarchist A symbol, a communist symbol, and other symbols onto the windows and façade of the bookstore.

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### **Summit Cross Vandalized**

**September 22, 2018:** The summit cross on Garlaban hill, loved by the Aubanais people and symbol of the city, was covered with red paint.

### **Abortion-Specific Conscience Clause Targeted by French Socialists**

**September 27, 2018:** An attack on the freedom of conscience of doctors and medical staff was launched on the 27th of September in the French parliament by socialist senators, including former Minister of Families Laurence Rossignol. They proposed to remove the specific conscience clause for doctors covering abortions, because it is already covered by the Public Health Code. The clause under attack explicitly states that "A doctor [other health personnel] can never be forced to do a voluntary interruption of pregnancy." Whereas the more general Public Health Code states "Regardless of the circumstances, the continuity of patient care must be assured. Barring emergencies or cases where he would be failing to do his altruistic duty, a doctor has the right to refuse care for personal or professional reasons. If he refuses to fulfill his mission, he must notify the patient and transfer to the physician indicated by the patient, the appropriate information for continuing the patient's care."

*The Archbishop of Paris, Bishop Michel Aupetit, who is also a former doctor said that "any state that touches freedom of conscience is called a dictatorship."*

### **Elderly Priest Injured by Two Young Men**

**October 1, 2018:** On September 26, 2018, an 81-year-old priest was assaulted by two homeless men he sheltered in his home in Denain. The priest was awakened by noise in the early morning hours and discovered the men trying to steal his television. The men, who the priest had been sheltering and feeding for a few days, attacked him,

threatened him with a kitchen knife, and tied him to his bed. After he shouted, the perpetrators fled but were soon identified and captured by the police. On October 1st, they were each sentenced to 18 months imprisonment.

### Rifle Fire Damaged Stained Glass Windows of Church

**October 8, 2018:** Mayor René Beausoleil announced at a city council meeting that he had filed a complaint with the gendarmerie after “23 impacts of rifle fire” damaged several stained glass windows in the church of Saint-Laurent in Montfaucon-d’Argonne. The damage was estimated at €16,700.

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## Church in Yvelines Desecrated

**October 16, 2018:** Police were called to the church of Sainte-Julitte de Saint-Cyr-l’Ecole after feces, urine, and a cigarette butt were discovered at the foot of the altar. The priest said it might be necessary to install cameras in order to keep the church open during the day because although the church is open to all, it must be respected by all.

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### Burglars in Church Vandalized Sacristy

**October 21, 2018:** Unidentified perpetrators broke into Saint-Antoine-l’Ermite church, forced open the tabernacle, and threw the ciborium containing consecrated hosts on the ground. The sacristy was vandalized, but the intruders failed to open the safe.

### Vandalism in the Church of Sainte Croix

**November 7, 2018:** A press release of the parish of Port de Bordeaux reported that there were “more than 40 chairs smashed to pieces, tables and displays thrown over” in the 11th century church of Sainte Croix. Debout France — a local federation — published information about this incident on its Twitter expressing regret saying: “vandalism ... is more and more frequent within our church.”

*Alain Juppé, Mayor of Bordeaux, did not comment on the incident. Media commentators noted, “the silence is deafening on the side of Bordeaux City Hall, public authorities, and so-called “anti-racist” associations ... such an act towards a synagogue or a mosque would have caused a whirlwind in the media!”*

### Statue of Saint Anne Decapitated in Ille-et-Vilaine

**December 1, 2018:** A statuette of St. Anne with the Virgin Mary in a niche above a first floor window of a private home was removed and beheaded by an unknown vandal during the night of December 1st. The head was left in front of the doorway of the home.

### French Mayor Fights State Over Nativity Scene

**December 4, 2018:** For the second year in a row, Mayor Robert Ménard, former journalist for Reporters Without Borders, installed a nativity scene in the courtyard of the town hall of Béziers. The French government filed a complaint for its removal in the administrative court, claiming the installation violated the law of 1905 on the separation of Church and State. The State filed and won such a complaint in December 2017.

*Ménard commented, “The State has no other emergency than the crib of Béziers, like the ‘yellow vests’ protests, for example?”*

### Strasbourg Christmas Market Shooting Declared Terrorism

**December 11, 2018:** Prosecutors announced that the attack on a busy Strasbourg Christmas market was an act of terrorism, committed by an Islamist extremist who had previously pledged alliance to ISIL. During the attack, the suspect shouted “Allahu Akbar.” Security experts said that the Christmas market was likely targeted both because it was crowded and its connection to Christianity and Christian symbolism. In response to the deadly attack, other Christmas markets across France implemented extra security measures. The December 11th attack by 29-year-old Chérif Chekatt left five people dead and about a dozen people injured. Chekatt, who was on a French terrorist watchlist since 2015 due to his religious radicalization in prison, was killed in a shoot-out with police after an extensive manhunt.

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## GERMANY

### Arson in Saxony Church

**January 21, 2018:** A passerby discovered smoke was rising from the funeral chapel in Annaberg-Buchholz on January 21, 2018. The police and fire departments were called. The police suspected arson and initiated forensic investigations.

### Universities in Germany Excluding Christian Groups

**January 28, 2018:** The German Student Mission



(SMD) collected and documented dozens of cases of discrimination against student-run religious groups, including Christian groups. Discrimination has included denying the groups the use of campus facilities, prohibitions on flyers, and denial of accreditation by student councils. For Christian groups, accreditation has been denied both because "religion has no place on campus" and objections to the groups' moral stances on controversial topics.

### **Beloved Priest Murdered in Francophone Parish in Berlin**

**February 22, 2018:** Father Alain-Florent Gandoulou, the head of the Catholic French-Speaking community, was murdered in his office around midnight. Police responded to a call from witnesses reporting a loud argument in French in the parish office in Berlin-Charlottenburg. They said 54-year-old Fr. Gandoulou, originally from the Congo, sustained fatal injuries after being beaten with a metal cross and stabbed in the head with an umbrella tip. The following day, a 26-year-old man from Cameroon was arrested in connection with the murder and was detained in a psychiatric ward. Media in the Congo called the murder a politically motivated "assassination." In November 2018, the defendant confessed to the murder, but blamed it on "hearing voices urging him to confront the priest." In January 2019, the district court acquitted him due to an acute psychotic disorder and ordered him placed indefinitely at a psychiatric hospital.

### **Fire in St. Martin Church in Ravensburg**

**March 10, 2018:** A small fire in a church was reported in Schlier, only a few kilometers from Ravensburg, on the same day as a devastating fire in the St. Jodok Church. An electrician discovered that a partition had been burned next to the altar in the Catholic church of St. Martin. It was reported that matches were found on the ground near the church exit. By the time the incident was discovered, the fire had already extinguished itself and had not spread further. Later in the day, the historic church of St. Jodok was the victim of a major fire. Officials investigated whether the two incidents were connected and did not rule out arson.

### **Fire in Ravensburg Church; Damage Around €2 Million**

**March 10, 2018:** Police and firefighters responded to a massive fire in the 14th-century St. Jodok Church. Firefighters were able to save valuable pieces of art, but the organ was completely destroyed. Initial damage estimates were at least €2 million, as the church had been completely renovated in 2010. Earlier in the day,

a fire was set in St. Martin's church in Schlier, only a few kilometers from Ravensburg. Police received an anonymous message after the incident reading, "More churches will burn." The arsonist was arrested on March 21st and convicted in September 2018, receiving a seven-year prison sentence.

### **Catholic Historian's Facebook Account Suspended Due to Post about Islam**

**March 19, 2018:** Facebook suspended the account of Catholic historian Michael Hesemann for 30 days after he published a post commenting on the negative influence of Islam in the history of Europe and, specifically, in Germany. In an open letter to the social network, Hesemann argued that the suspension violated his right to freedom of expression guaranteed by the German constitution. He went on to explain that his post was in response to an interview in the newspaper Bild in which Interior Minister Horst Seehofer was quoted as saying "Islam is NOT part of Germany," contradicting Chancellor Merkel's statements claiming the opposite. He went on to say that he wrote the commentary as a historian who works at a Catholic university.

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## **Desecration and Robbery in Bremen Convent**

**March 22, 2018:** An unidentified man forced open the tabernacle in the chapel of the convent of Bridgettines in Bremen to take the consecrated Hosts with the liturgical objects that were inside, as well as the relics of the founder of the Order, St. Bridget of Sweden.

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### **Small Fire in Church in Bavaria**

**March 27, 2018:** An unknown person lit a glove filled with matches on a bench in the small church of St. Moritz in the tiny municipality of Mantel. Due to the glove's plastic material, the fire spread to a bench cushion and caused damage to the bench.

### **Church in Vicht Ransacked; Fire Extinguisher Emptied**

**April 4, 2018:** Vandals devastated the interior of the parish church of St. John the Baptist in the village of Vicht (Stolberg District) The vice president of the parish council discovered that the Easter eggs sitting in a basket at the foot of the altar had been thrown throughout the entire church and smashed against

the baptismal font, the container of holy water had been partially emptied, and all of altar candles had been burnt, scorching the altar cloth. Finally, the fire extinguisher, normally mounted behind a curtain in the church tower, a place that few knew, was emptied into the church, leaving all of the benches covered in white foam.

### **Fires Set at Three German Churches in Ostholstein District**

**April 4, 2018:** From April 1st to April 4th, fires were set in front of the wooden entrance doors of three churches in Heiligenhafen by unknown perpetrators.

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## **German Public Broadcaster Replaces Jesus Christ with Easter Bunny**

**April 6, 2018:** A German satire TV show recreated the Passion of Jesus Christ with a crucified Easter plush bunny in lieu of Jesus. Photomontages included the toy animal, among other things, on the cross and sitting among the Apostles for the Last Supper. The Christian Media Association KEP immediately filed a complaint to the broadcaster saying that it made “the central religious content of Christianity literally a joke.”

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### **Unknown Perpetrators Vandalized Church in Straubing**

**April 10, 2018:** Vandals threw a figure of a saint from the altar, ripped out a microphone, threw a candle to the ground, spilled holy water, and destroyed an umbrella in the church of St. Stephan, in the Alburg district of Straubing. They also smoked in the confessional, filling the interior with ashes and extinguishing the butts against the wooden door. The damage to the property was estimated at €3,000.

### **Vandals Destroy Crossroads Crucifix**

**April 15, 2018:** For the fourth time in the last four years, someone destroyed the crucifix at the Kuckhof crossroads in Allerheiligen. In the most recent incident, the cross was demolished from its base and there was no trace of the figure of Jesus.

### **Christ Figure on Crucifix Destroyed**

**April 15, 2018:** Unknown persons severely damaged

the Christ figure on the Rottmann-Wegekreuz am Reckelsberg in Kirchhellen.

### **Crosses and Graves Damaged in Steinbach Cemetery**

**April 21, 2018:** Unknown vandals caused damage estimated at several thousand euros over the Easter weekend in a cemetery in Fernwald-Steinbach. At least twelve graves were targeted, with wooden crosses and planted flowers damaged.

### **Significant Damage Caused to Two Churches in Chemnitz; Organist Threatened**

**April 21, 2018:** A 24-year-old Pakistani man was arrested on April 21st after a police investigation of significant damage in the Markuskirche in Chemnitz. The asylum seeker allegedly entered the night before and broke candlesticks, destroyed various bronze objects and several candles, and damaged the altar and the pulpit cover. A window was also destroyed and there was damage both in the sanctuary and the basement of the church. Damage was estimated to exceed €10,000. Two days later, on April 23rd, he was again arrested after throwing stones at the windows of the Petrikerkirche church, causing about €3,000 in damage.

### **Fourth Vandalism Attack on Church in Five Months**

**April 22, 2018:** An unknown person smashed the stained glass windows of St.-Nikolaus-Kirche in Alpen-Veen between April 19th and 22nd. This is the fourth vandalism attack in less than half a year.

### **Devastation in Saxony's Oldest Town Church**

**April 22, 2018:** An unidentified person climbed the facade of the Kilianskirche in Bad Lausick, smashed a 4-meter stained glass window, and entered the church. Once inside, the vandal severely damaged the carved late Gothic altar and pulpit with a sword. A chandelier was shattered onto the ground and a candlestick was damaged. Disastrous damage was avoided after altar candles, deliberately left burning in the wooden tower, went out before causing a fire.

### **Fire outside Church in Salzkotten**

**April 24, 2018:** A passerby discovered a burning wastepaper bin at the side entrance of the Marienkirche. Together with another witness, they managed to put out the fire before serious damage occurred. The container was destroyed and matches were found nearby. At the end of March, visitors to the church had discovered and extinguished a prayer book burning inside the church.

### **Thieves Break Offertory Box in Menden Church**

**April 25, 2018:** Unknown people used to a lever to pry open the money box for candle offerings in St. Maria Magdalena (Bösperde) church. The box was damaged and the money it contained was stolen.

### **Repeated Vandalism at Recklinghausen Parish**

**April 25, 2018:** The parish of St. Peter in Recklinghausen has been the victim of repeated acts of vandalism, including people frequently urinating in the church, donation boxes being broken, mulled wine being poured into the holy water, and candles being used by drug addicts to heat their drugs.

### **Arson Attempt in Kirchheim**

**April 26, 2018:** Police investigated a fire and an arson attempt at the St. Martinus parish church.

### **Church Windows Destroyed in Gronau**

**April 29, 2018:** An unknown person intentionally destroyed four windows of the Evangelical Church on Bernhardstraße.

### **Six Cases of Vandalism in Bamberg Churches**

**May 4, 2018:** Police investigated at least six separate acts of vandalism in five churches in Bamberg in a short period. The property damage was estimated at more than €20,000. On May 2nd, unknown people knocked the figure of Saint Joseph from its pedestal in the Convent of Heiliggrab, seriously damaging it. The next day at the convent, a large wooden crucifix was thrown to the ground. Also on May 3rd, two large figures of saints were overturned in St. Ottokirche. Other Bamberg churches affected by recent vandalism included the Erlöserkirche, Martinskirche, and the church of St. Kunigund. The parish priest for two of the churches said "the heavy figures and cross were knocked over with brute force.

*I wonder who has such rage against the church and the Christian faith. It has created immense material and spiritual damage." Because of the incidents, the two churches were closed outside Mass times. "It's sad. The churches are always open so that people can come and pray briefly. Now we've taken that away from the people," said the priest.*

### **Stained Glass Window Broken in Cölbe Church**

**May 5, 2018:** Sometime between April 29th and May 5th, unknown vandals threw stones at the Catholic church on Gartenstraße in Cölbe, breaking one of the large stained

glass windows adorning the building. Damage was estimated to exceed €1,000.

### **Fire Inside Büdesheim Church**

**May 27, 2018:** Unidentified people entered the church of Büdesheim between 12:00 and 7:00 pm and set fire to a sign hanging in the building.

### **Windows Broken in Jena Church**

**May 29, 2018:** The Stadtkirche Sankt Michael was subjected to two vandalism attacks in two days. On the night of May 27th, someone threw stones and broke two of the church's stained glass windows. Two days later, someone broke another window in the back of the church.

### **Window Broken in Church of Hahnenbach**

**June 2, 2018:** Unknown people broke a window of the Evangelical church in Hahnenbach during the early hours of June 2nd. Later, they forced the back door of the building.

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## **Man Wielded Knife in Berlin Cathedral**

**June 3, 2018:** When a 53-year-old Austrian man became aggressive and started wielding a knife in the Berlin Cathedral, police were called to intervene. The staff of the cathedral, which is also a popular tourist spot, were able to lead all visitors to safety. About a hundred people were in the cathedral at the time.

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### **Fire Set in Kirchweiler Church**

**June 16, 2018:** A parishioner found the remains of a fire already extinguished on the carpet of the church of St. Petrus. Material damage affected the carpet, a cloth, and a speaker wire.

### **Vandals Hit a Church in Radevormwald**

**June 22, 2018:** Unknown people entered the church of St. Marien and disturbed various items, burned church newspapers in the baptismal font, and destroyed the Easter candle.

### **Fire in Chapel in Kolbermoor**

**June 25, 2018:** Unknown perpetrators set fire to a dry flower arrangement that decorated a monument to the fallen in a chapel of the Heilig Dreifaltigkeit church.

## **Coalition Withdraws CDU Candidate for Constitutional Court Due to Criticism of Sex Ed**

**June 29, 2018:** Just days before the parliamentary vote on the election of a judge to the state constitutional court, the CDU, Greens, FDP and SSW withdrew their nomination of Hamburg lawyer and law professor Christian Winterhoff due to his conservative views on the sexual education of children. In 2016, Professor Winterhoff wrote a legal opinion for the Echte Toleranz (Real Tolerance) association in which he argued that a sexual education curriculum with the aim of educating students to accept any kind of sexual behavior was unconstitutional indoctrination. He made the same argument at a 2017 symposium on sexual education sponsored by the group "Demo für All". The Green MP Rasmus Andresen declared that Winterhoff was no longer, "under any circumstances" eligible to be a constitutional court judge because a person in that position should not have been "the mouthpiece of enemies of the people and rights."

## **Repeated Vandalism at Church in Forst**

**June 29, 2018:** St Nikolai, the main church in Forst, was repeatedly vandalized during several weeks in June 2018. The facade on the side of the church was chipped at until the perpetrators were able to pull away the paint coating. Countless graffiti and a hole in the wall were also found. In addition, 18 glass windows which are located in the doors to the tower entrance were smashed.

## **300 Year Old Sandstone Crucifix Damaged and Stolen**

**July 10, 2018:** Sometime between July 8th and 10th unknown perpetrators smashed the "Hansenkreuz" with an object heavy enough to break the cross from its base and stole the sandstone crucifix, leaving only fragments behind. The Hansenkreuz had been standing at a crossroads in Dierscheid in the forest area of Kellerberg for 300 years.

## **Fire and Vandalism at Village Church**

**July 14, 2018:** Unknown vandals set a small fire and destroyed several items in the village church in Rigersdorf, prompting local volunteer fire departments to respond with six fire engines.

## **Theft of Crucifix from Altar**

**July 19, 2018:** The crucifix standing in the middle of the altar of St. Michael's Church in Lüneburg was stolen by unknown persons during the public visiting time of the church between 3 pm and 5 pm. There was a damage of several thousand euros.

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## **Churches Close due to Vandalism**

**August 17, 2018:** Three churches were closed in Euskirchen due to repeated vandalism. As a provisional measure, the Herz-Jesu-Kirche, the Martinskirche and the Kirche St. Matthias would only be opened for Mass. The altar of St. Martin's church was smeared with dog excrement and urine was found in the stoup for holy water. Parishioners were outraged and stunned by the closure of the churches.

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## **Fire Set in Mühlheim Church**

**August 23, 2018:** The chaplain of the church in Mühlheim discovered that unknown perpetrators had moved an umbrella stand into the vestibule of the church and set a fire in it.

## **Stones Thrown at Lutheran Church**

**August 29, 2018:** Witnesses called the police to report six teenagers throwing stones against the facade and windows of the building of the St. Simeon Lutheran church in Kreuzberg, Berlin. The group fled the scene crying "Allahu Akbar!" According to the police the building was damaged. It was not the first time this church has been subjected to such acts. The church is a so-called "Refugee Church" as it has opened its doors to refugees and runs multiple projects to assist them. The police opened an investigation, assigning the department dedicated to politically motivated crimes.

## **Repeated Vandalism in Ansbach Churches**

**August 31, 2019:** Between August 17th and 30th, 2018 there were several incidents of vandalism in the Kirche St. Ludwig. Confessionals and offering boxes were damaged in the amount of €700. A church in Eyb was also vandalized between the 20th and the 30th of August. A window was smashed and several meters of copper sheets (window panels, gutters), valued at about €2,000, were stolen. The material damage was about €300.

## **Burglars Hit Church in Lörrach**

**September 9, 2018:** Unknown perpetrators tried to pry open several doors at the Protestant Church in Lörrach, finally accessed the church building through an unlocked door. Inside they broke into the sacristy and a storage

room, pried open two doors on the upper floor and ransacked several rooms.

### Unknown Vandals Damage Way of the Cross in Morbach

**September 14, 2018:** Unknown vandals damaged elements of a Way of the Cross leading to the Fatima Chapel in Bischofsdhron sometime between the 12th and 14th of September. They perpetrators pushed three of the thirteen sandstone crosses from their bases and tilted back into the adjacent embankment. The crosses themselves were unharmed, but the bases were heavily damaged.

### Fires Set in Kobern Church

**September 16, 2018:** The sacristan of St. Lubentius in Kobern discovered that several small fires had been intentionally set in the church. She observed that the altar cloth had been burned at the altar of the Virgin Mary, damaging both the cloth and the altar. A second altar and cloth, as well as the bible on the lectern, were similarly burned.

### Arson in Heroldsbach Church

**September 16, 2018:** A witness noticed smoke coming from the St. Michael church in Heroldsbach and contacted the authorities. Police discovered burning scraps of paper and initial estimates amounted to at least €2,500 in damage. After a criminal investigation, officials concluded that the fire had been intentionally set and asked for assistance from any potential witnesses.

### War Memorial Damaged at Catholic Church

**September 18, 2018:** Police began an investigation of vandalism at the war memorial at a Catholic church in Bischofsdhron, a few days after a Way of the Cross was damaged nearby. Several stone slabs were knocked out of their foundations.

### Church Vandalized with Satanic Slogans

**September 29, 2018:** The evangelical Schlosskirche in Winnenden was hit with graffiti between the 29th and 30th of October. The entire west side exterior of the 14th century church was sprayed with slogans like "Satan 666," "666 an die Macht" (666 to the power) and "stay high." The pastor said a special process would be required to remove the paint from the sandstone walls.

### Bremen Cathedral Tagged with Hammer & Sickle; "Anti-Imperialism" Graffiti

**October 4, 2018:** Unknown vandals sprayed "Tot dem deutschen Imperialismus" (Death to German

imperialism") and a hammer and sickle symbol in red paint on the Bremen Cathedral. The Otto von Bismarck monument was also hit with red tags. Bremen police began an investigation.

### Huge Metal Cross Torn Down

**October 7, 2018:** Vandals tore down a 30 kilo metal memorial cross from the cemetery next to the pilgrimage church in Marienbaum. The pastor of the church expressed the shock of the community and called it an attack on the cemetery and those who mourn there:

*"The wickedness with which this memorial was desecrated leaves us speechless."*

### Dog Excrement Left at Church Altar

**October 8, 2018:** Unknown perpetrators entered a church in Eichendorf, opened a holy water container, and moved several crosses from the wall onto the floor. In addition, dog waste was deposited on the altar carpet.

### Second Church Arson in a Month in Heroldsbach

**October 21, 2018:** For the second time in a month, a fire was set in the St. Michael church in Heroldsbach. A witness noticed the fire around 5:45 pm on the 21st of October and called the authorities. The fire brigade was able to quickly extinguish the fire and prevent further damage. An intentional fire had been set in the same church on September 16th.

### Three Windows of Village Church Destroyed

**October 30, 2018:** Unknown perpetrators smashed three stained glass windows with stones between the 28th and 30th of October.

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## Shocking Graffiti on Pietà

**November 1, 2018:** During the night before All Saints Day, the Pietà in front of the parish church St. Georg in Freising was defaced with black graffiti and vulgar sexual images. Just two weeks earlier, church painter Florian Böck had finished restoring the statue of the Mary, Mother of Sorrows (Mater Dolorosa), holding the corpse of Jesus Christ taken from the cross. Böck expressed his anger: "We really need to ask ourselves, who could do something like this?" and said it would be a long process to clean the statue.

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### **Offensive Graffiti and Vandalism in Church**

**November 2, 2018:** Unknown perpetrators sprayed three walls and a prayer bench with offensive graffiti in the St. Benedikt-Kirche in Herbern. The local police spokesperson referred to the act as “antisocial behavior” and suspected “marauding teenagers” committed the vandalism sometime between 11 am and 5 pm on November 2nd.

### **Reichertshausen Parish Church Vandalized**

**November 2, 2018:** Police reported that two teenagers were suspected of having caused at least €3,000 in damage to the Reichertshausen parish church St. Stephanus between August 31st and September 13th. Many statues were damaged: the wing of a dove (representing the Holy Spirit) was broken, the statue of John the Baptist was damaged, and the head of a statue on the altar was broken off. A foul smelling and foamy liquid was poured into the holy water. The sacristan who discovered all of this damage also found remainders of ashes and crumbs, spilled beverages, a burned prayer book, and the note “F... dich Gott” (“F... you God”) in a book for prayer requests.

### **Church Window Smashed**

**November 4, 2018:** Unknown perpetrators smashed in a window at the St. Walburgis Church in Menzelen-Ost by throwing an object into a leaded glass window.

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## **Arson in Church; Heavy Damage to Renovated Organ**

**November 7, 2018:** Police determined that a fire set to an organ in the St. Franziskus Church in Gummersbach was intentional. The damage done to the organ was estimated to be in the six-figure range. Due to the rapid intervention of the fire department, greater damage was prevented. “Perhaps the whole church could have gone up in flames if the fire had not been discovered so quickly,” noted Father Christoph Bersch.

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### **Minden Evangelical Church Vandalized**

**November 11, 2018:** The Evangelical church of St. Simeonis was vandalized during the night when unknown persons sprayed the southern church door and a wall with graffiti. In 2017, a precious 19th century window was destroyed.

### **Thousands of Euros in Damage Caused by Rocks Thrown at Church Windows**

**November 13, 2018:** On four afternoons in a row, unknown perpetrators threw rocks at the stained glass windows of the church of St. Stephanus in Grevenbroich-Elsen. “In total there are 27 holes up to a diameter of ten centimeters and cracks [in the windows],” according to Gerd Reibel, Deputy Chairman of the Church Council. “We estimate the total amount of the damage to be between €3,000 and €4,000,” he said.

### **Miniature Model of Church Destroyed and Offertory Box Looted**

**November 15, 2018:** A wooden model of the small parish church in Bräunlingen was returned to its place next to the church altar after the damage caused by vandals had been repaired. A few days later, it was hit again by vandalism. The bottom plate of the model was forcibly torn open, the wood was shattered in the back, and part of the electronics were exposed. The offertory box on which the small church stands was looted, leaving only a few coins. Additionally, the smaller of the two church towers, which was completely replaced in the past repair, was damaged again.

### **Arson in Funeral Chapel**

**November 21, 2018:** Unknown persons set fire to two benches in the altar room of the funeral chapel in Treysa. The benches in the interior of the church were set on fire with paper waste and presumably fire accelerators. The fire caused considerable soot damage, but the building remained intact.

### **After Repeated Vandalism Church Decides to Remain Locked**

**November 24, 2018:** The Stadtkirche St. Georg in Neustadt was the target of vandalism during the night of the 24th of November. The Christmas tree and the loudspeaker system and cable covers on the wall were heavily damaged from having been kicked. In addition, the church was soiled with spilled red wine and cigarette butts. A week before, intruders caused damage in the church, as well. Although an automatic locking system was installed, due to the vandalism, the church council decided to keep the church locked during the day.

### **Church Cellar Deliberately Flooded by Vandals**

**December 2, 2018:** During an advent concert in the parish church of Claußnitz, unknown people turned on a faucet in the boiler room and flooded the cellar with it. “The boiler was totally under water,” said Pastor Christian Schmidt. When the damage was discovered,

the fire brigade and police were alerted. Two firefighters pumped the approximately 60 centimeters high water out of the basement.

### Fire and Vandalism in Trier Abbey and Church

**December 18, 2018:** Intruders entered the Benedictine abbey of St. Matthias through a window during the night and ransacked several rooms and the adjacent church, breaking sacred objects, overturning furniture, and setting fire to songbooks and other papers. Police estimated the damage to be in the thousands of euros.

*When Brother Athanasius opened the church of St. Matthias around 5 o'clock in the early morning of December 19th, he discovered devastation: all the candles in the sanctuary, the Easter candle, the tomb of Saint Matthias, and the sacristy had all been torn from their holders and broken on the floor. The large glass vase with the white roses in honor of the patron saint was broken next to the large sandstone figure. The heavy oak lectern is overturned. Almost everything that could be knocked over was thrown to the ground.*

*The smell of smoke rose from one of the six Nordmann fir trees that were to be set up and decorated in the church that day: the needles were covered with wax, and charred remains of a songbook was found between the burnt branches. It appeared that the intruders had attempted to set the tree on fire, but failed because the Christmas tree was freshly cut and still wet from the rain.*

*Two stacks of prayer books, several benches, and the bulletin boards where the parish announces its appointments were also burnt. "We were very fortunate that no great fire broke out," said Brother Matthias. The discovery of the damage "was a shock."*

### Man Arrested for Destruction in Church

**December 22, 2018:** A 19-year-old man was arrested after causing severe damage to the Apostelkirche in Kaiserslautern. The accused destroyed three glass windows and sprayed the contents of a fire extinguisher in the church. When the police attempted to calm the man, he threatened the officers.

### Burglaries in Two Churches in Freren Cause Heavy Property Damage

**December 28, 2018:** Unknown perpetrators broke into a Catholic church and an Evangelical church in Freren, stealing small amounts of money from donation boxes, but causing about €9,000 in damage.

## GREECE

### Attack on Seven Iranian Christians in Greek Refugee Camp

**June 24, 2018:** On June 24th, in the middle of the night, a group of about 30-40 refugees attacked two Christian families along with another Christian man after they returned from a bible-reading. According to International Christian Consulate, "the attackers poured petrol over the cabin where they were meeting and threatened to set it alight. They beat up the men and held knives to the throats of the two women and children, while telling them, 'This is a Muslim camp. You have to leave'."

*Following the incident, an aid worker says there should be more protection for religious minorities among refugees as they are "extremely vulnerable." Religious minorities currently comprise approximately 2-4% of the total refugee population arriving on Europe's shores, according to Yochana Darling, British founder of the International Christian Consulate (ICC), which supports Christian refugees in the camps in Greece.*

*Often they have fled violence and persecution in their home countries, only to discover that once in the camps, or other refugee accommodation, they are still being targeted because of their faith, Darling explained in an interview with World Watch Monitor.*

*"All the other minority groups are considered to be in need of protection, but religious minorities are by and large off peoples' radars ... There is a need for more awareness ... and there should be recognition of problems that [they] face in the camps, especially converts," she said.*

*Darling has been working with Christian refugees in Greece for the last two years and says the camps are "microcosms of the Middle East, so all the same ethnic and religious tensions exist and, in many ways, are intensified in the camps. Violence is a regular occurrence."*

*Research conducted by the ICC shows that "88% of all Christian refugees have experienced or witnessed faith-based persecution and discrimination at the hands of extremist Islamists in their home countries, en-route to Europe, and, significantly, continue to do so in Europe's refugee accommodation."*

### Cross Torn Down in Lesbos

**October 7, 2018:** A huge cement cross erected over a beach in honor of people who have drowned there was torn down by unknown perpetrators during the night of

October 7th. The NGO “Coexistence and Communication in the Aegean” had previously called the cross “offensive” to non-Christian migrants, a symbol of “racism and intolerance,” and claimed that it had been placed above the beach to prevent refugees and migrants from swimming there. Local residents reacted with dismay and discussed re-building it.

### **Anarchist Group Targeted Church with Explosive Device in Athens**

**December 28, 2018:** A police officer and the church caretaker were injured when a small explosive device went off outside the Church of St. Dionysios in the Kolonaki neighborhood of Athens shortly before the Divine Liturgy was scheduled to begin. On January 19, 2019, the anarchist group “the Iconoclastic Sect” claimed responsibility for the attack.

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## **IRELAND**

### **Sinn Féin Politician Suspended for Voting against Abortion Referendum**

**March 21, 2018:** Member of the Irish Parliament, Carol Nolan TD was suspended from the left-wing Irish political party Sinn Féin for a period of three months after voting against a bill which would allow a referendum on the Eighth Amendment which effectively bans abortion. Nolan said, “I voted according to my conscience and did not vote in favour of the legislation put before me as it was greatly at odds with my strong pro-life values.”

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### **Google Halts Advertising on Irish Abortion Referendum**

**May 9, 2018:** Google announced that it would “pause” all advertising related to the Irish abortion referendum. The ban applied to all sites associated with the Google brand, including YouTube, and followed Facebook’s decision to ban any ads from advertisers outside of Ireland relating to the referendum. While the decision appeared to be neutral, the Repeal side had overwhelming support from traditional media and the less well-funded campaigns to retain the 8th Amendment relied heavily on social media.

### **At Least Five Pakistani Priests Denied Visas for World Meeting of Families in Ireland**

**August 19, 2018:** Christians from Pakistan and Iraq were denied visas to attend the 2018 World Meeting of Families in Dublin, including at least 5 priests, due to “insufficient connections” to the event. A priest from Karachi received a letter rejecting his application in which the officer said there was “no evidence of a valid reason to travel to Ireland” and that the Catholic priest lacked “sufficient connection” to the World Meeting or to the Pope to justify attendance.

*Father Anthony Abrax of Karachi said his visa rejection had confused him, as some of the reasons given were inconsistent with evidence he had provided.*

*“The reasons given are very funny,” he said. “The Irish visa office say that they are worried that I will not return to Karachi and that I have not travelled before. I am a priest in Karachi so of course I will return, and I have travelled around the world for similar events. It is a great shame I will not be there for the Pope.”*

### **Anti-Abortion GPs Argued Against Being Forced to Refer Patients**

**October 3, 2018:** A draft of abortion legislation provided that doctors, nurses, and midwives who have a conscientious objection to abortion must refer their patients to another provider who will perform the abortion. The National Association of GPs (NAGP) voted to “advocate for conscientious objection, without obligation to refer” and for an “opt-in” system, where medical professionals register their willingness to perform the procedure, rather than an “opt-out system.”

### **Repeated Acts of Vandalism Forces Church to Limit Opening Hours**

**October 11, 2018:** Three incidents within two weeks hit the Church of Ireland Christchurch in Bunrana, County Donegal. As well as the burning of Mass leaflets, a Bible was written on, cigarettes were stubbed out on the carpet, eggs were thrown, and flowers were strewn on the floor. The church, which was open throughout the day, was used as a place of prayer by many people. However, the decision was made to close the church outside service times until security was reviewed.

### **Over 100 Windows Smashed at Tullamore Church**

**October 31, 2018:** Between the 29th and 31st of October, unknown perpetrators broke 104 windows at St. Catherine’s Church in Tullamore. The police investigated and did not exclude a targeted crime. Parishioners expected up to €70,000 would be needed to repair the windows and enhance security.



# ITALY

## Decapitated Statue of the Madonna in Sant'Angelo Lodigiano

**March 10, 2018:** The statue of the Virgin Mary was found decapitated near the oratory of San Rocco at the church of Maria Madre della Chiesa in Sant'Angelo. The statue's head was discovered later, a hundred meters away.

## Madonna dell'Arco di San Callisto in Trastevere Vandalized

**March 19, 2018:** The 13th century fresco of the Madonna dell'Arco di San Callisto in Trastevere was tagged with a graffiti artist's signature. Locals were outraged to discover a white signature across the beloved image. A suspect was arrested in early April.

## Sacred Heart Painting in Chiesa Nuova Stolen

**April 4, 2018:** A painting was discovered stolen out of its frame in Santa Maria Church. The painting was 19th century copy of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, signed by Pietro Gagliardi. Although the painting was not of significant value, the theft served as a reminder to the parish to increase security.

## Oil Poured Down Church Steps

**April 7, 2018:** Unidentified vandals poured frying oil down the grand stone steps in front of the church of San Giovanni Evangelista in Modica.

## 15th Century Tomb of Fra Angelico Attacked in the Center of Rome

**April 8, 2018:** The marble tomb of the Italian Renaissance painter Fra Angelico was vandalized in the church of S. Maria sopra Minerva in the center of Rome, one of the most famous churches of the Italian capital. Vandals chipped off several parts of the marble tomb, carved by the fifteenth-century sculptor Isaia da Pisa.

## Fire Set Behind Altar; Excrement Left in Confessional

**April 12, 2018:** An intentionally-set fire burned a curtain and part of a chair behind the altar of the church of San Giuseppe in the town of Torre del Lago Puccini. Feces was later discovered in the confessional.

## Repeated Vandalism of Church and Convent in Rimini

**April 22, 2018:** The convent and church of Sorelle Povere di S. Chiara (Poor Clares) in the Piazzetta of San Bernardino in Rimini was the victim of repeated

vandalism. On April 22nd, the glass door of the church was smashed for the fourth time in a few months.

## Red Paint Poured on Caresana Church Door

**April 23, 2018:** The door of the small church of San Giorgio in Caresana was stained with blood red paint by unknown people.

## Church Vandalized in Protest against Gas Pipeline

**April 25, 2018:** Unknown people attacked the church of Santa Lucia in Lecce by throwing eggs at the church and painting the windows and walls with black paint. Graffiti on the outer walls of the church included "No peace for Tap's accomplices." ("Nessuna pace per i complici di Tap"). The acronym "Tap" refers to the Trans Adriatic Pipeline.

## Vandal Broke Statue of Saint Anthony of Padua in Bellariva

**April 28, 2018:** The Franciscan friars in charge of the church of the Cuore Immacolato di Maria in Bellariva discovered that someone had broken the fingers of the statue of Saint Anthony of Padua while friars prayed in a chapel.

*The Archbishop of Lecce, Monsignor Michele Seccia, noted the hypocrisy of the attack:*

*"Oppose and protest against those who wish to deface the environment and nature, patrimony of all, for their economic interests and then lash out against a church, which is a collective asset, a point of reference for the whole area, a meeting that belongs to the community; it's not only a contradiction and true hypocrisy, but the worst way to defend your case."*

*He continued, "Vandalism and violence are certainly not the most appropriate framework for a debate, albeit lively and particularly felt by our people."*

## Church Vandalized in Lombardy

**May 11, 2018:** Residents in Solbiate Olona discovered that young people had been repeatedly entering the Chiesa del Sacro Cuore and covering the floor with wax melted from votive candles. The church is loved by members of the community who take responsibility for keeping it clean.

## Desecration and Theft in the Church of San Giacomo di Monselice

**May 14, 2018:** Witnesses discovered that the tabernacle had been desecrated and two ciboria containing consecrated hosts had been stolen from the church of

San Giacomo de Monselice. This was the 3rd robbery in the Padua diocese in five months.

### **Constant Vandalism in Sicilian Church**

**May 25, 2018:** On May 25th, unknown persons entered the Chiesa Gesù Amore Misericordioso church in Canicattì, causing damage, breaking furniture, and staining the building with paint. Reports called this the “umpteenth time” the church had been vandalized because of repeated incidents.

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## **Arson in Parish’s Sports Facilities; Graffiti Threatening Parish Priest**

**May 26, 2018:** Around six o’clock in the morning, unknown people set fire to the rooms of the secretariat in the sports center of the Maria Madre della Chiesa parish in Casazza, a Brescia neighborhood, completely destroying its interior. In addition, next to one of the rooms affected by the fire, curses and serious insults against the parish priest were written with a blue marker.

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### **Arson Attempt in Sicilian Church**

**June 3, 2018:** A man poured gasoline at the entrance to the church of San Giuliano in the Sicilian city of Messina and tried to set fire to the building. Firefighters extinguished the flames that had been partially isolated. The structure of the church was not damaged. Police arrested the alleged perpetrator shortly after in the vicinity of the property.

### **Obscene Graffiti on Facade of Barletta Church**

**June 6, 2018:** The Greek church of Santa Maria degli Angeli was stained with various graffiti, including many obscene images and phrases, by unknown vandals.

### **Theft in Sant’Antonio Church in Manduria on its Feast’s Eve**

**June 12, 2018:** Thieves entered the church of Sant’Antonio in Manduria on June 12th between 11 am and 2 pm and stole an amplifier and part of the sound system from the sacristy, taking advantage of the confusion in the preparation for the patron’s local feast the next day.

### **Madonna of Piazza Europa Burnt**

**June 23, 2018:** During the night, someone set fire to

the Madonna in the Piazza Europa in Marino, near Rome, leaving it blackened with soot. Residents expressed outrage, as the statue is a symbol of the community.

### **Madonna Image Vandalized in Legano**

**June 23, 2018:** Unknown individuals used red spray paint to vandalize one of the bas-relief images of the Virgin Mary in the votive chapel on corner of one of the walls of the parish of Santa Teresa del Bambin Gesù.

### **Door Set on Fire and Graffiti in Primary School Church: “I smell Christians”**

**July 2, 2018:** An unknown vandal set fire to the entrance door to the church of the nursery/primary school institute Paul VI in Castel Gandolfo and wrote graffiti reading “I smell Christians” in Norwegian.

### **Church Door Set on Fire and Public Cross Topped**

**July 6, 2018:** The door of the church Madonna della Cona in Piazza Battisti in Castel Gandolfo was set on fire during the night and the cross which stood in the square was toppled. Although the church has been deconsecrated, city authorities expressed concern about a series of destructive acts directed at Christian churches and symbols in the area.

### **Confessionals Burnt in Cathedral, Fire Set at Base of San Pio da Pietralcina Statue, and Door of Nativity Church Burnt in Frascati**

**July 8, 2018:** A 58-year old man set fire in one of the four confessionals of St. Peter’s Cathedral in Frascati, near Rome, by igniting the padded seat. The perpetrator was caught due to the footage of 12 surveillance cameras in the cathedral. The man was described as “deranged” and was known for vandalizing places of worship in the past. He was arrested by the local police for arson and damaging a place of worship. Additionally, a fire was set at the base of the bronze statue of San Pio da Pietralcina in Frascati, causing damage to the feet and the door of the nativity church at Villa Muti was burnt. At least one media source reported that the same perpetrator who set fire to confessionals in St. Peter’s was responsible for these incidents, as well.

### **Parish Priest Closed Church after Finding Urine in Holy Water**

**July 9, 2019:** After discovering urine in the holy water in the Chiesa Santa Croce (better known as “Chiesa dei Morti” or “church of the dead”) in Canneto Sull’Oglio, the parish priest decided to close the church for a few days. The church is a sacred place for the local community, as the walls of the church have been

covered with photos, plaques, and headstones of deceased loved ones since 1630.

### Series of Sacred Figures Destroyed in Andria

**July 21, 2018:** A man was arrested after being caught in the act of destroying the glass of the votive chapel of Cristo Redentore. He was also accused of vandalizing a statue of the Virgin Mary and another sacred figure "Madonna of Altomare," as well as breaking the head, arms, and legs of a public statue of the crucifixion of Jesus.

*Luigi Mansi, Bishop of Andria said, "The way in which the statue has been destroyed causes in me and in all the priests immense sadness: the head has been torn off, broken legs and arms; only one piece of the body remained attached to the cross."*

### Desecration and Vandalism in Chiesa di San Clemente in Latera

**July 21, 2018:** Vandals entered the San Clemente church and threw holy water to the ground, scattered the cloth and liturgical object from the altar, and left feces underneath the altar table.

### Stones Stolen from Statue in Cathedral

**July 25, 2018:** Unknown thieves, likely taking advantage of renovation works, removed a protective case and stole stones from the pastoral cross on the ancient wooden statue of San Geminiano in the Duomo of Modena. While the stones have very little monetary value, they have tremendous historical value and the statue is sacred to the community because San Geminiano is the patron saint of Modena. The theft was called sacrilegious and offensive to the religious feelings of the church and the entire city.

### Repeated Vandalism at Ancient Church in Scicli

**July 30, 2018:** For the third summer in a row, unknown vandals broke into the ancient Chiesa del Calvario and destroyed objects. This year, they broke the hands of a 16th century statue of the Madonna and destroyed a second statue. The parish priest said the Catholic community was "horrified by vandalism towards statues of the Madonna, as well as the disfigurement of the heritage of the religious site."

### Theft from Freto Church

**July 30, 2018:** Just a few days after a theft from the cathedral in Modena, two people, taking advantage of a deactivated alarm in the small church in Freto (Modena), stole a marble baptismal font. Although the theft was captured on surveillance cameras, the identity of the

thieves was unclear. This was not the first theft from the isolated church and the nearby cemetery.

## Jewelry Dedicated to the Virgin Mary Stolen from Church

**August 5, 2018:** The Church of Corlo di Formigine was robbed when thieves took advantage of the village celebration of the feast of la Madonna della Neve to steal golden chains, bracelets, and rings that had been donated by the faithful as a pledge to the Virgin Mary over the years. The jewelry was kept inside the reliquary which protects the fresco of the Virgin Mary and had been displayed in the church for the occasion of the festival.

### Arson Attack on Church in Rosolini

**August 11, 2018:** During the night from the 10th to 11th of August, a fire was set in the back of the church of Santa Caterina da Siena. The flames penetrated into the church warehouse where plastic caps which were collected for the charity project "Stappiao la speranza" were stored. More than 1,000 kilos of the caps went up in smoke resulting in serious damage to the church. The funds resulting from the project were to be sent to the twin parish Butembo Beni in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The incident left the church perplexed and the Mayor and Prime Minister expressed their solidarity.

### Tourist Information for Church Destroyed in Barletta

**August 16, 2018:** Tourist information that explains the history of the Greek church of Santa Maria degli Angeli was knocked down and torn from the sidewalk. The church has repeatedly been subjected to acts of vandalism.

### Church Facade Defaced with "W l'Islam"

**August 18, 2018:** The newly renovated wall of the Chiesa del Santissimo Rosario in the center of Avellino was defaced with "W l'Islam" in black paint.

### Mayor Offered Reward to Catch Church Vandals

**August 25, 2018:** After tourists used black and red spray paint to deface the white wall of the 14th century church Madonna del Soccorso on the island of Ischia, the town's mayor offered a reward to €500 for

anyone who provided useful information to find those responsible for the vandalism.

### **Image of Madonna Defaced**

**August 26, 2018:** The face of the Madonna in a 17th-century painting was smeared with black paint in the small church of Madonna Addolorata di Lopi in the municipality of Castiglione del Lago. The same paint was also used to spray the small squares of the Via Crucis and blasphemous words were written on the walls of the church. The damage done to the painting of the Madonna cannot be repaired.

### **Door of Church Set on Fire in Santa Maria di Licodia**

**September 7, 2018:** The door of the church of Madonna del Carmelo was set on fire during the early morning hours. When residents became aware of the fire, they extinguished it and contacted the authorities. The police investigated and found that the fire was started by lighting paper and plastic. Fortunately, the flames did not spread into the inside of the church.

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## **Fire in the Church of Santa Maria della Roccella**

**September 9, 2018:** Police began an arson investigation after a fire broke out in a basement of the cloister of the Church of Santa Maria della Roccella. The flames affected some unused materials and various forms of waste that had piled up in a basement of the cloister. The fire brigade intervened and found four LPG tanks near the fire which they removed and secured promptly.

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### **Iron Door of Church Set On Fire with Flammable Liquids**

**September 20, 2018:** A fire was set with flammable liquids at the iron entrance door of the church of Santa Domenica in Isola Capo Rizzuto on September 20th, causing the blackening of the door and the adjacent wall.

### **Second Suspected Arson within 8 Days; Montesilvano Church Destroyed**

**September 26, 2018:** Unknown perpetrators set the Santi Innocenti Martiri di Montesilvano church on fire on September 26th. This was the second fire at the church within a week and was committed while investigations

into the first fire were underway by the carabinieri and the fire brigade. The entire central nave was enveloped by the fire that traveled along the entire right side to the sacristy and the meeting room. Even the roof collapsed, making the supporting structure completely unusable, according to reports. "There are people who, despite our willingness to meet them, even publicly said they did not want the church. With today's gesture, the work was completed as if they wanted to finish what they had not been able to do last week," said Father Rinaldo, the parish priest.

*The mayor said: "A second fire at the church of SS Innocenti Martiri in 8 days is an act of unprecedented gravity which affects the whole community of Montesilvano and which requires a strong response to protect the security of the Montesilvanesi, first identifying the person responsible for this vile gesture."*

*"On Sunday morning, together with the other members of the Giunta, we gathered around the parish community, as well as Fr Rinaldo ... participating in the outdoor Mass. On that occasion we gave full availability and maximum support to help rebuild the Church. Perhaps this could have stimulated the foolish mind of the pyromaniac, fomenting his idea of completely destroying the Church and precluding any possibility of rebuilding it."*

### **Obscene Vandalism on Salerno Church**

**October 31, 2018:** Vandals sprayed a phallic symbol in foam next to the Madonna on the bronze door of the church of Santa Maria a Mare a Mercatello. The priest, who called the act disrespectful and offensive, reported that this was not the first instance of vandalism, as the churchyard is a frequent target of vandals. Both the priest and the parishioners were upset and discussed closing the churchyard and installing security cameras in the area.

### **Historic Forest Church Heavily Damaged by Vandalism**

**November 6, 2018:** Several stained glass windows of the Lama Church in Badia Tedalda were broken by rocks and the door was smashed by an axe. The damage was estimated at several thousand euros.

### **"The Mafia never loses": Ancient Church Vandalized with Graffiti**

**November 25, 2018:** "The Mafia never loses" ("La mafia non perde mai") and other graffiti were discovered by the volunteers of the "San Cataldo Baia

della Legalità” association in an ancient church by the bay in Terrasini.

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## NETHERLANDS

### Christians Assaulted for Protesting Sexually Explicit Ads

**March 11, 2018:** Catholic protesters holding a prayer rally were physically harassed, spat on, and assaulted by LGBT activists while denouncing retailer Suitsupply’s advertising campaign featuring men groping and kissing each other.

*One young man was attacked by a masked woman who put glitter on his head and rubbed it in his eyes. She was led away by police while another woman shouted “hate speech is not free speech” in English. Some reported being groped by other counter-demonstrators. Another counter-demonstrator, who had hidden her face with a handkerchief and sunglasses chanted “God is gay” and “Hail Satan.”*

### Prosecutors Said Hague Stabbing Targeted Christians and Jews

**May 5, 2018:** Information from the prosecutor’s office indicated that Malek F., a Syrian asylum seeker charged with 3 counts of attempted murder for stabbings in The Hague on May 5, 2018, was specifically searching for “Christian and Jewish kuffars,” Arabic for non-believers. In a recorded conversation with his mother from prison, he said they were similar to “animals or retarded people” and that he was a “soldier of Allah.”

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## POLAND

### Statue of Virgin Mary Damaged by Paint and Stones

**January 6, 2018:** Unknown vandals poured black paint and used stones to damage the statue of the Virgin Mary in the forest shrine in Gdynia. Police began an investigation and parishioners of Wawrzyńca prayed for the “conversion of the hearts and minds” of the perpetrators.

### Vulgar Graffiti Sprayed on Brzeszcze Church

**February 4, 2018:** CCTV recorded a man and a woman spraying the door of a church with vulgar messages in English.

### Destruction of Historic Crucifix

**May 21, 2018:** Two men were arrested for chopping the arm off and damaging the torso of an 18th century crucified Christ figure with a machete in front of the St. Dominic church in Nysa.

### Polish Supreme Court Ruled against Printer; Tribunal Reversed in 2019

**June 14, 2018:** Poland’s Supreme Court ruled against a printer who refused to create a roll-up banner for an LGBT business group because he did not want to “promote” the gay rights movement, citing his Catholic religious beliefs. The Court held that although there may be legally justifiable reasons to refuse services based on religious objections, in this case they did not apply. However, in June 2019, the Constitutional Tribunal ruled that the law the printer was convicted under was unconstitutional, because punishment for refusing to provide services on the grounds of beliefs interfered with the service providers’ rights to act according to their conscience.

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## Activist Graffiti found on Church Properties

**July 3, 2018:** Graffiti was found on several church buildings in the wake of a discussion on stricter abortion legislation by the Polish parliament. The spray-painted slogans included “Behold my body, behold my blood, buzz off”; “women-murderers” and “We remember Rwanda.” The three damaged buildings included the curial offices of the Archdiocese of Warsaw, the rectory of the Church of St. John the Baptist, and the curial offices of the Diocese of Warsaw-Praga.

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### Confessionals and a Stoup Vandalized with Ink in Płońsk

**July 9, 2018:** Police arrested a 59-year-old man after CCTV cameras caught him pouring ink in two confessionals and a stoup in the parish of Michała Archaniota.

### Graffiti on Pillar of Warsaw Church

**July 12, 2018:** The pillar of the All Saints Church (Kościół Wszystkich Świętych) was vandalized with graffiti sometime between July 12th and 13th. The same church had been vandalized about two weeks earlier.

## Man Vandalized Churches, then Fired Gun at Witness

**July 30, 2018:** A man was observed vandalizing two churches in Krakow with paint by a passerby. When the passerby tried to intervene, the man fled the scene. The man then returned with a gas pistol which he shot at the witness, but the witness was able to overpower the attacker and called the police. The man was charged with possession of an illegal weapon, as well as damage to the churches.

## Figure of Virgin Mary Damaged in Important Marian Shrine

**August 3, 2018:** The statue of the Virgin Mary in the small Shrine of Our Lady — the Teacher of Young People in Warsaw-Sierkierki was destroyed by vandals sometime between August 2nd and 3rd. The perpetrators opened the glass case which protects the statue and damaged the statue. The shrine is important because of the Marian apparitions that appeared in the Sierkierki region between 1943 and 1949. Police began an investigation and the parish held a reparation Mass for the vandalism and prayed for the conversion of the perpetrators.

## 22 Statues on the Avenue of Saints Destroyed

**November 25, 2018:** Just three weeks after the new "Avenue of Saints" in front of the Matki Bożej Śnieżnej Church in Zarzecze was unveiled, 22 of the 23 statues were broken by vandals. Only the figure of St. Paul was unharmed. The figures in the Avenue of Saints were dedicated on November 11th on the 100th anniversary of regaining independence by Poland "as an expression of gratitude and an invitation to the saints to our future and our nation," said parish priest Jan Rokosz.

# SLOVENIA

## Demand for Apology after President of National Assembly Mentions God

**July 3, 2018:** A left-wing member of the National Assembly, Franc Trček, demanded an apology from Matej Tonin, the President of the National Assembly, for concluding a speech with the words "Bog živi Slovenijo," which can roughly be translated to "God bless Slovenia." Trček argued that the words violated the constitution of Slovenia which requires a separation of church and state. Tonin responded that he had no intention of apologizing and that the constitution also protects freedom of speech.

# SPAIN

## Newspaper Publishes Journalist's Vulgar Tirade Against Catholics

**February 10, 2018:** The on-line journal Público published a writer's insult-and-expletive laden criticism of Catholics, priests, and a Catholic confraternity following a court judgment against a young man for posting an image mocking Jesus Christ on Instagram.

## City Hall Renovation Eliminates Christian Mosaic

**February 20, 2018:** Under the pretext of the restoration of the city hall's headquarters, the government of the town of San Fernando in Cadiz decided to remove the mosaic of the Sacred Heart of Jesus that had adorned the main facade of the building since 1941.

## Government Sponsored Festival whose Poster Depicted Church in Flames

**February 22, 2018:** The Lugo City Hall, governed by PSOE, sponsored a music festival in February 2018 whose promotional poster depicts Christian church in flames. The three-day festival called "A Candeloria" was organized for the 15th consecutive year. All participating musical bands shared in common "combative music" with "corrosive lyrics about the system and its institutions."

## Local Government to Demolish Cross

**March 1, 2018:** The tripartite government of the Castellón municipality of Vall d'Uixó formed by PSOE (Spanish Socialist Workers' Party), Izquierda Unida (United Left) and Compomís (Coalició Compromís) announced the demolition of the cross in the small Plaza de la Paz (Freedom's Square). The removal was driven by the law of Historical Memory. However, the cross of Vall d'Uixó no longer contains any symbol that refers to the Civil War or the Franco regime.

## Activist says "Burn the Episcopal Conference"

**March 6, 2018:** On March 6 during the television program Més 324 on the public broadcasting network Catalonia TV3, former CUP politician and activist Bel Olid encouraged participation in the March 8 feminist strike by saying: "Hem de cremar la conferència episcopal per masclista i patriarcal!" (We must burn the Episcopal Conference for machismo and patriarchy!).

## Molotov Cocktail Found in Church Days after Threatening Graffiti Sprayed on Facade

**March 6, 2018:** On March 6th, a Molotov cocktail was

found placed on the ledge of a window in the apse of the central parish San Miguel in Córdoba. The paper wick in the bottle had had been lit, but fortunately did not combust with the explosive materials inside.

### **Vandalism Against Seville Church**

**March 8, 2018:** The church of the former convent of Santa Maria de la Paz in Seville, current canonical headquarters of the Catholic brotherhood of la Hermandad de la Sagrada Mortaja was vandalized by unknown perpetrators with graffiti that read: "Ni Dios ni Amo" (Neither God nor Master).

### **At Least Five Madrid Churches Vandalized during International Women's Day Strike**

**March 8, 2019:** On March 8th, International Women's Day, the church of Espíritu Santo, the church of San Cristóbal, the Hermitage of San Isidro, the military church of San Andrés, and the church of San Jorge in La Coruña were all defaced with pro-abortion and anti-Catholic graffiti. The vandals identified themselves as feminists who were part of the "8M" women's strike, young communists, or anarchists. Locks on some of the churches were sealed with silicone to prevent the faithful from entering.

### **Four Crosses Shattered around 16th Century Church**

**March 10, 2018:** Four of the twelve 45 cm stone crosses atop the wall surrounding the Cantabrian church of San Jorge de Penagos, were destroyed during the night of March 10th. The bulletin board of the parish was torn and a window of the sacristy was broken. The sign pointing to the parish house, 2km away from the church, was also damaged.

### **Woman Fined for Projecting Cross on Church Facade**

**March 18, 2018:** A woman in the community of Callosa de Segura was sanctioned €100 per day for projecting the image of a cross on the wall of the church of San Martin. After the city council decided, in spite of the objection of Christian groups, to remove the outer cross from the church, neighbor Teresa Agulló installed a projector on her balcony to shine a silhouette of a cross on the facade of the church. The police fined her €100 each day for "invading the public space" and the city council ordered spotlights to shine on the church to prevent the illuminated cross from being seen from the street.

### **Leftist Party Opposed Easter Activities at Schools**

**March 19, 2018:** The political party Equo Andalucía

demanded that the Junta de Andalucía (Regional Government of Andalusia) exercise extreme vigilance to prevent public schools from organizing and celebrating Easter processions for children during Holy Week. Party leaders reminded the government that they had registered complaints about children's processions the previous year.

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## **Provocative Play Advertised in Front of Catholic Schools**

**March 21, 2018:** The City Council of Madrid placed an advertising poster for a publicly-funded theatrical performance entitled "The place where the whores pray" (El lugar donde rezan las putas) directly in front of two Catholic schools. The play, performed at the public Teatro Español, was described by promoters as exploring "theater in times of rage."

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### **Seville Parents Halt School Procession during Holy Week**

**March 23, 2018:** The parents of a two-year old student objected to the school participating in the Viernes de Dolores (Friday of Sorrows) procession. The Escuela Infantil Sagrada Familia organized the procession from the school to the neighborhood parish on March 23rd as part of the traditional celebrations of the Holy Week. The school council approved the voluntary event, but the Andalusian educational authority cancelled it after the parents complained.

### **Eggs Thrown at Priest's House after Homily**

**March 31, 2018:** Eggs were thrown at the door of a priest's home on Holy Saturday, March 31st, a day after he was criticized by LGBTI groups for a homily in which he questioned whether 'gender ideology' was a biased view of the nature of men and women, and whether it had a scientific basis. The sermon was delivered during the Good Friday procession. La Asociación WADO del colectivo LGTBI de Castilla-La Mancha immediately criticized the priest, calling him ignorant and offered "training" to educate him. The following day, eggs were thrown at his house.

### **List of Churches Removed from Granada's Website**

**April 10, 2018:** The municipal government removed the list of churches and parishes that appeared on the City of Granada's on-line resource guide after an IU (United

Left) councilman demanded their removal five days earlier. The twenty churches, all Catholic, appeared in a section with the title "Places of Worship." The deputy mayor responsible for communication announced that since the churches do not offer any municipal, public or administrative services, the entire "Places of Worship" section was deleted.

### **Theft in Torás Church**

**April 11, 2018:** A band of thieves entered the church of Santa Quiteria during the night of April 11th, opened the tabernacle and stole a golden chalice containing consecrated Hosts, the most precious item for its religious value. They also destroyed donation boxes and took all the money.

### **Aggression and Threats against Members of Association with Christian Values**

**May 3, 2018:** Pedro Mejías, delegate of HazteOír in Cádiz, an association of Christian values for the defense of the rights of the family and of life, was the victim of a violent attack on May 3rd at a bar in Cádiz before a public event.

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## **Spain Fined UK Christian Television Broadcaster**

**June 14, 2018:** The National Commission of Markets and Competition (CNMC) fined Revelation TV, which is based in the UK but broadcasts in Spain, €6,000 after an individual complained to the state agency about comments made by an evangelical pastor during a morning program in September 2017. The CNMC deemed the pastor's comments "homophobic" when he expressed his opinion about transgender issues and whether Christians should move their children from schools when another student identifies as transgender.

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### **Gang Robbed Nine Churches in Two Months**

**June 21, 2018:** An organized gang stole from at least nine churches on the island of Tenerife. The last incident occurred in the town of La Camella in the early hours of June 21, 2018. The perpetrators broke into the church, damaging the entrance door, and stole sacred objects and valuables worth at least €3,000. They were discovered by nuns who had been sleeping in rooms next door and had woken up when they heard a loud noise. The perpetrators fled the church and the incident

was reported to the police. Local media suspected the robbery was carried out by the same gang that had attacked at least nine religious buildings on the island, including the church of San Mateo in Punta del Hidalgo, where they stole valuables worth €10,000.

### **Arson Attempt at Elche Basilica**

**June 30, 2018:** An unknown person attempted to set fire to the Basilica of Santa Maria in Elche while Mass was being celebrated inside. By using paraffin from a chandelier, the perpetrator set a fire between two wooden doors. Fortunately a parishioner noticed the smoke and the flames could be smothered in time.

### **Vandalism and Desecration at Madrid Church**

**July 9, 2018:** The church of San Bartolomeo in the municipality of Fresnedillas de la Oliva was robbed and desecrated. The intruders tore the tabernacle off the wall and threw it to the ground, left sacred objects scattered on the floor and stole the money from the offering boxes. The sacristy and the catechism rooms were ransacked. The ciborium containing consecrated hosts was overturned and the contents were scattered on the floor. The incident was reported to the police and the Archbishop of Madrid scheduled a Reparation Mass.

### **Romanesque Church Vandalized**

**July 11, 2018:** The facade of the San Millán church in the city center of Segovia was sprayed with green paint by unknown vandals.

### **Vandals Ransacked Church; Apologized to Priest**

**July 23, 2018:** In the early hours of July 23rd, two young men broke into the town church of Adrados and destroyed everything they could, causing extensive damage — up to €30,000. Shelves, books, and even the altar were tipped over, and paintings and figures were badly damaged. The Diocese of León filed a complaint with the Civil Guard, which immediately opened an investigation that focused on several young people who were in the mountain town that night. The perpetrators were identified and they "asked for forgiveness although they are aware of the consequences that resulted from their prank," according to the parish priest.

### **Elda Hospital Chapel Desecrated**

**July 28, 2018:** Vandals broke open the tabernacle of the chapel of the Virgen de la Salud Hospital in Elda (Alicante) and stole the ciborium with the consecrated hosts. The ciborium was later found in the parking lot and the consecrated hosts were scattered around the entrance area of the hospital. Some were found lying



on the sidewalk and trampled. The parishes in the area held acts of reparation for the desecration and to pray for the conversion of perpetrators. The police began an investigation.

### **“KISS” Graffiti on Facade of Santiago de Compostela Cathedral**

**August 6, 2018:** A 12th century sculpture on the facade of the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela was painted to make the statue look like a member of American rock band KISS. The name “KISS” was also written across the body of the statue. The marble statue was restored the same afternoon and the police started looking for the perpetrator who, if found guilty, could face a fine of between €6,000 and €150,000.

### **Leftists Attack Group for Wearing Catholic University T-Shirts**

**August 14, 2018:** On August 18th, national police arrested two members of an extreme left group for assaulting a group of young people because they did not like the T-shirts they wore, namely the shirts of the Catholic University San Antonio de Murcia. The incident occurred in one of the pubs in area of the university a few days earlier. The victims were first insulted, then threatened, and were finally attacked. One of the victims received stitches, suffering an ocular hemorrhage. The 19 and 28-year-old perpetrators from Spain and Brazil were identified by photographs and were already known to the police for their membership in ultra-left groups. They were charged with crimes against fundamental rights (hate crimes).

### **Robbery at Church of Mondéjar**

**August 20, 2018:** In the early hours of the 20th of August there was a robbery at the church Santa María Magdalena of Mondéjar. The parish priest discovered the theft when he went to the church the next morning to prepare for Mass. The thieves had entered the church through a side door after breaking the lock. They broke three other door locks until they were able to enter the sacristy. They left the sacristy looted and stole more than €400, as well as three large sacred artworks of bronze. The artifacts date back to the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century. The civil guard was notified and investigated.

### **Spanish TV Cuts Holy Mass Broadcasts**

**August 30, 2018:** RTVE, the Spanish national public radio and television service, announced it would stop airing a weekly Sunday Mass, ending a tradition of almost 40 years. Although it is the most-watched program on the channel, the decision was explained by the government, which presented the proposal in March 2017, as

necessary to become a “neutral” public television station that does not favor any belief or religion.

### **Graffiti on Valencia Church**

**September 1, 2018:** The facade and windows of the church of Nuestra Señora de la Asunción in la Plaza de Benimaclet were smeared with paint and graffiti and on the sidewalk in front of the church, the anarchist slogan “NI DIOS; NI PATRIA; NI AMOS” was written in paint. Local politicians expressed their regret, saying it was “dirty” and “damaged one of our most emblematic monuments.” They also added that they are tired of “uncivil and intolerant people.” A councilman in the city of Valencia, Alberto Mendoza, publicly denounced this act of vandalism and called for more security cameras to be installed.

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## **Anarchist Graffiti on Monument to the Virgen del Rocío**

**September 5, 2018:** Sometime in the early morning hours of September 5th, vandals sprayed the anarchist “A” on the well-known Huelva monument. After city workers were unable to remove the paint using water, the monument’s sculptor himself, Elías Rodríguez Picón, arrived to remove the paint. Local residents and officials expressed their outrage over the incident. Police began an investigation and reviewed security camera footage to identify the perpetrators of vandalism.

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### **Spanish Mayor Disguised Himself as Priest to Perform Civil Wedding**

**September 23, 2018:** The mayor of Ayna (Albacete), Emiliano Rodríguez, disguised himself as a priest to perform a civil wedding ceremony in the town of Castilla-La Mancha. He wore a cassock with a large cross hanging around his neck and carried a small book like a bible in his hands. While the socialist mayor claimed it was a private event not intended to offend anyone, the stunt was widely criticized. The parish priest of Albacete wrote on social media, “As a priest I protest vigorously. Please respect my faith.” (Como sacerdote protesto enérgicamente. Por favor, respete mi Fe).

### **Diocese of Osma-Soria Reported Two Churches Damaged and Robbed in 15 Days**

**October 2, 2018:** The church of San Esteban in the town

of Masegoso was vandalized, but nothing was stolen. In Soria on September 22nd, thieves entered the hermitage of the Virgin of Ulagares and stole the money donated by the faithful, as well as religious objects of low value and some construction tools. The civil guard began an investigation.

### **Fire Set at Gran Canaria Church**

**October 13, 2018:** The National Police of Gran Canaria arrested a 52-year-old man who intentionally set fire to several parts of the wooden door of the parish church of San Bartolomé de Tirajana.

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## **Repeated Incidents of Vandalism at Santiago de Compostela Church**

**October 24, 2018:** At night, the church of Santa Susana in Santiago de Compostela is reportedly frequented by young people who use the dimly lit corners of the church as urinals. Additionally nearly all the windows have been smashed in and graffiti covers the exterior of the church.

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### **Church Door Set on Fire**

**November 9, 2018:** On the 9th of November the door of the parish church in Llamas de la Ribera was set on fire, causing severe damage. Police arrested the perpetrator.

### **Theft and Desecration of Madrid Church**

**November 13, 2018:** Intruders broke into the church of Nuestra Señora de Madrid, desecrated the tabernacle, stole a ciborium, a small monstrance, and other objects from the parish office. The Cardinal Archbishop of Madrid, Carlos Osoro, expressed his pain, his prayers, and his condemnation for this desecration to the whole parish community and held an act of reparation in the church.

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## **SWEDEN**

### **Statue of Virgin Mary Beheaded in Växjö**

**January 19, 2018:** An unknown perpetrator chopped the head and hands off the statue of the Virgin Mary which stood outside St. Michael's Catholic Church in Växjö.

### **Christian Convert Attacked Outside Pentecostal Church**

**February 11, 2018:** A Christian Afghani asylum seeker was attacked after attending a worship service at a Pentecostal church in Karlstad. The incident happened outside the church and was committed by two perpetrators who "came up and knocked something against the man's throat," said Dan Kihlström chairman of Christian congregation. He found the victim lying in pain on the ground with signs of injuries on the neck. The victim was immediately brought to hospital for treatment. A newspaper reported that the same person received death threats previously in his asylum home because of his conversion to Christianity from Islam.

### **Swedish Social Democrats Sought to Ban all Religious Schools**

**March 13, 2018:** The governing party announced the proposal on March 13, 2018, citing concerns about "systematic gender segregation and opinions that do not belong in Swedish schools" and saying, "Religious influence has no home in Swedish schools." Although no examples of problems in Christian schools were cited, they would be included in the plan. Jewish schools would be exempted by law.

### **Jihad Graffiti on Church in Sweden**

**May 7, 2018:** "Jihad" was painted on the outside wall of the church Sankt Olov in Skellefteå by unknown vandals. A representative of Skellefteå's pastorate commented on News Today that "it is obviously regrettable that we cannot have our properties in peace." The Swedish national television SVT initially published a photograph of the affected church. Later they chose to eliminate it, indicating that the image was "too sensitive" to show.

### **Fire Set to Syrian Orthodox Church in Norrköping**

**August 6, 2018:** St. Mary's Syrian Orthodox Church in Norrköping began to burn just after 2 am. When rescue services arrived at the scene, there were open flames across the facade of the wooden church. 30 firemen from seven stations were able to get the fire under control. Police concluded that the fire was the result of arson when a fire dog found a flammable liquid on the scene, which technicians confirmed.

### **"Jihad" and "Dead" Graffiti Sprayed on Church**

**September 3, 2018:** In the morning of September 3rd, church staff discovered that the Alhem Church in Skellefteå had been sprayed with black graffiti, including "Jihad" and "Dead" with a Nazarene symbol for Christians. The police stated in a statement that

they took this form of hateful attacks against churches very seriously, and that they do not equate them with regular hip-hop graffiti and so-called “tags.” Despite the obvious importance of the incident, Sweden’s Radio P4 downplayed the incident and omitted information about the case. The Swedish Church Communications Officer PO Sjödin, in interview with the Public Service channel, did not want to indicate which church suffered or what message was sprayed. Sjödin said that within the church, an active decision had been made not to comment and instead chose to “lie low.” The Church tried, at first, to not comment or mention the case at all. Only after pressure from locals, the Church of Sweden and the radio decided, to report about the incident.

### **Explosion at Banquet Hall of Syrian Orthodox Church in Södertälje**

**September 19, 2018:** Police completed a forensic investigation of an explosion in an events hall owned by the St. Afrem Syrian Orthodox Church. The hall, rented from the church for events such as parties and wedding receptions, was empty at the time of the explosion. Police said the explosion was the result of a homemade incendiary device.

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## SWITZERLAND

### **Afghan Convert ‘Could Face Death’ if Deported from Switzerland**

**January 18, 2018:** ADF International filed an expert brief with the European Court of Human Rights in support of an Afghan citizen who faced deportation from Switzerland. A.A. (anonymized for security reasons) converted from Islam to Christianity and sought asylum, which the Swiss government denied. If returned to Afghanistan, he could face severe social and formal persecution, with punishments ranging from lengthy imprisonment to death. On November 6, 2019, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that Switzerland had not properly assessed the risk of persecution faced by A.A. if deported to Afghanistan, saying he would be “forced to live in a lie” if returned.

### **Bomb Scare in Bern Church**

**March 2, 2018:** A 21-year-old Afghan man was arrested in Bern after he threatened to blow up the Heiliggeistkirche near the main train station. Witnesses reported unusual behavior to the police. Upon arrival, police found the man in possession of “suspicious objects” which were later neutralized. The church was evacuated and the area around the church was sealed off for hours.

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## **Statue of Christ the Redeemer in Fribourg Vandalized**

**April 17, 2018:** A few hours after it was installed on Boulevard de Pérolles on April 17th, replica of Rio de Janeiro’s famed Christ the Redeemer statue was vandalized by a 24-year-old Syrian asylum seeker.

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### **Church Ransacked in Pfäfers**

**April 19, 2018:** An “emotionally disturbed” man set fire to fabrics and damaged liturgical objects, statues, and the organ in a St. Gallen church, causing more than ten thousand francs of damage.

### **Obscene Graffiti on Swiss Church**

**May 4, 2018:** Unknown people painted a series of graffiti from the Wetzikerstrasse street to the Protestant church of Bäretswil. Some obscene drawings were sprayed with black silver paint at the church, along with the number 187 — the code of the US police for homicide cases — and also the words “F#ck you” and the acronym “Acab” (All Cops Are Bastards). The police of the canton of Zurich wrote in a statement that the damage to property caused by the vandals was estimated at around 10,000 francs.

### **Statues of Saints and the Virgin Mary Smashed, Decapitated, and Stolen in Ticino**

**October 10, 2018:** From Easter until October there were eight attacks against statues of female saints and the Virgin Mary in the southern canton of Ticino.

### **Anti-Discrimination Law Expanded in Switzerland**

**November 28, 2018:** The Swiss Ständerat (Council of States) passed a law on November 28th adding discrimination based on sexual orientation to the existing criminal law prohibiting discrimination based on race, ethnicity, or religion. A broader version of the legislation, which included “gender identity” was passed by the Nationalrat (National Council) in October. Critics of the law noted that it could restrict freedom of expression and conscience, particularly for those who hold a traditional view of sexuality and marriage. Those who violate the law could face a prison sentence of up to three years.

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## UNITED KINGDOM

### **Fifteen UK Churches Received Threatening Letters**

**January 22, 2018:** West Midlands police investigated

handwritten letters threatening petrol bomb attacks and mass stabbings sent to fifteen churches in the UK from November 2017 to January 2018.

### **Five UK Retailers Accused of Insulting Christianity in Five Months**

**January 22, 2018:** Five major UK retailers were accused of using advertising or packaging offensive to Christians in as many months. Ocado, an online supermarket, Fortnum & Mason, a luxury goods retailer, the bakery chain Gregg's, Domino's pizza, and Lidl all faced criticism for insulting Christians or Christianity.

### **Manchester Voted to Ban Pro-Life Protests outside Clinics**

**January 24, 2018:** Manchester voted to ban pro-life protests and prayer vigils outside clinics. Councillors in the city agreed on January 24th to "take all necessary actions within its powers" to stop what it said was the harassment by protesters against women using the clinics. After this vote, protests would not be banned, but the city would investigate whether a Public Space Protection Order (PSPo) was warranted.

### **Teacher Fired for Sharing Biblical Views Loses Discrimination Lawsuit**

**February 2, 2018:** Following a one-day trial, an Employment Tribunal dismissed a discrimination claim by a Christian teacher who was fired for answering students' questions about her Christian beliefs. When asked by a student her views on homosexuality, she replied by saying that as a Christian, she "personally" believed the Bible says that homosexual activity was against God's will, but that God still loves every person regardless of what they did, or who they were. The Tribunal gave its judgment ruling that Powell was dismissed "because she allowed herself to be drawn into a discussion where she expressed personal religious views... allowed it to escalate and get out of control," the judge said. "She was not dismissed, to any material extent, for her Christian religion or beliefs."

### **Council Votes in Favor of Buffer Zone around Abortion Clinic**

**February 7, 2018:** In a vote to create so-called "buffer zone" around an abortion clinic in the UK, the Richmond Council voted in favor of a Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPo) around a clinic run by the British Pregnancy Advisory Service. The PSPo would make it a crime to hold prayer vigils near the clinic.

### **Great Yarmouth Church Desecrated Days Before Easter**

**March 27, 2018:** A man walked into St. Mary's Catholic

Church, set a couple of small fires and attempted to burn the icon taken off the church's altar. The perpetrator left a Satanic image in the icon's place. The act was recorded by CCTV cameras and police arrested a suspect days later.

### **Man Arrested for Graffiti on Churches, Gravestones, and Peace Pagoda**

**April 2, 2018:** After graffiti appeared on the church of Mary Magdalene in Willen and the churchyard of St. Peter and St. Paul in Newport Pagnell, among other sites in the Milton Keynes area from February 21st and April 2nd, police arrested a 34-year-old man in connection with the incidents. Graffiti painted in red included messages such as "Allah reigns" on a church, "kill all white scum" on the famous Willen Peace Pagoda, and "evil white failures" and "rape and replace" on a memorial in a graveyard.

### **BBC Scotland Posts Video Mocking Catholics**

**April 9, 2018:** The Bishop of Paisley criticized BBC Scotland for encouraging anti-Catholic prejudice. It posted a short film entitled 'Homophobia in 2018, Time for Love' on its Facebook page which depicts a priest holding a Mini Cheddar in a parody of the Host, and giving it to a woman who makes the sign of the cross, with a voice-over saying, "tastes like cardboard and smells like hate." Bishop Keenan described the content as "beyond the pale, and unworthy of the BBC as a public service broadcaster." The Archdiocese of St. Andrew's and Edinburgh also criticized the video for suggesting that Christianity fosters public hatred toward homosexuals. It was also said that "recent government figures on crimes with religious aggravations showed that 57% of these are now directed to Catholics, an increase of 14%."

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## **UK Council Bans Pro-Life Vigils outside Abortion Clinic**

**April 10, 2018:** A London local council voted unanimously on April 10th to ban pro-life vigils outside an abortion center that have been taking place without incident for 23 years. The Ealing council voted to use a Public Space Protection Order (PSPo) to stop pro-life advocates from praying outside the Ealing Marie Stopes abortion clinic and offering help to women as they enter or exit the building. Pro-lifers must now stay 100 meters away from the abortion center. It would be the first "buffer zone" in the United Kingdom.

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## Window Damaged at Northern Ireland Church; Investigated as Hate Crime

**April 17, 2018:** Shortly after 10 o'clock on the night of April 17th, the First Presbyterian Church in Newry, Northern Ireland suffered a vandalism attack in which one of its stained glass windows was damaged. The window had been repaired just weeks before this incident after vandals had damaged it earlier in the year.

## Thefts and Damage Resulted in Restricted Visiting Times in Stonehouse Church

**April 19, 2018:** Unknown vandals entered the kitchen of St. Cyr's church in Stonehouse, breaking and damaging a serving hatch and stealing a fire extinguisher. As a result of a series of petty thefts, church managers made the decision to close the building when it is not being used for religious services or other social gatherings.

## More Abortion Clinic "Buffer Zones" Considered by Councils

**April 23, 2018:** After the Ealing local council voted to ban prayer vigils and protests outside an abortion clinic by issuing a Public Space Protection Order (PSPPO) earlier in April, at least eight councils in the United Kingdom considered implementing abortion clinic "buffer zones."

## Political Anti-Abortion Graffiti Painted on Two Northern Ireland Catholic Churches

**April 23, 2018:** Carrickmore Chapel in County Tyrone and St. Patrick's Cathedral in County Armagh, both in Northern Ireland, were targeted by vandals. The graffiti specifically mentioned Sinn Fein and its advocacy for repeal of the 8th amendment, ahead of the referendum on the issue in the Republic of Ireland. Police investigated reports of criminal damage to both churches.

## British MPs Demand "Buffer Zones" Outside Abortion Facilities

**June 1, 2018:** One hundred sixty-one members of the British Parliament demanded that Home Secretary Sajid Javid act on a proposal to introduce exclusion or "buffer zones" around abortion facilities, which would ban pro-life prayer, protest, and counseling of women conflicted about abortion.

## Bibles Removed from Hospital Rooms

**June 3, 2018:** The Royal Infirmary of Dumfries and Galloway had ordered 344 New Testament Bibles from the Gideons for each of the hospital rooms and social areas. However, after a complaint, the hospital decided to remove them saying that Christianity should not be given "preferential treatment."

## Food Delivery Driver Ripped Cross from Wall of Christian Home

**April 11, 2018:** A Greek Orthodox Christian noticed that the Palm Sunday cross which had been hanging outside her front door for many years had been ripped off and was scattered in pieces on her doormat. After reviewing security cameras, the family discovered that a food delivery driver had torn the cross down just before delivering food to the home. The homeowner reported the incident as hate crime and police began an investigation.

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## Asylum-Seeking Christian Family Fears Death in Face of Deportation

**June 11, 2018:** The Home Office repeatedly rejected the asylum applications of a Christian family, who had been living in the UK for six years, largely because officials do not believe they would be at risk in Pakistan. Maqsood Bakhsh fled Pakistan in 2012 with his wife Parveen and their sons Somer and Areeb, then aged nine and seven, after Islamic extremists threatened to kill him because of their religious beliefs.

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## Isle of Man Cathedral Vandalized

**June 21, 2018:** Police condemned a continuous wave of vandalism against the Peel Cathedral on the Isle of Man. A spokesman for the police said that vandals sprayed graffiti in different places around the cathedral over several days. A week earlier, a prominent sculpture was broken, and the lawn and other objects were damaged.

## 1 in 10 Gay Christians Report Discrimination by other LGBT People

**June 28, 2018:** A report by the LGBT-rights organization Stonewall found that nearly 1 in 10 gay Christians have experienced bullying from other LGBT people because of their faith.

## High Court Upholds "Buffer Zones" around Abortion Clinic; Appeal Filed

**July 2, 2018:** The High Court of England and Wales upheld a "buffer zone" imposed by Ealing Council, West London, around a Marie Stopes abortion clinic. High Court Judge Mark Turner said that Ealing Council in London was justified in creating a 328-foot exclusion zone to prevent any pro-life gathering or speech,

including prayer, within 100 meters of the clinic. Two women plan to appeal to the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom.

### **Graffiti Sprayed on Town Church**

**July 6, 2018:** Vandals sprayed “YNWA”, “truth”, and “greed” on the historic St. Nicholas Church in Guisborough. The reverend called it “disrespectful” and said people were upset about the damage. She said that although youths had been congregating in the area for some time, and leaving garbage in the churchyard, this was first time they caused damage to the building.

### **Priest Assaulted and Spat on during ‘Orange Walk’**

**July 7, 2018:** Catholic priest Tom White was spat on twice as he greeting parishioners outside St. Alphonsus’ Church in Glasgow after Mass at the same time that an ‘Orange Walk,’ a procession by a Protestant fraternal order, passed by. He was also hit with a baton and verbally abused. A spokesperson for the Grand Orange Lodge of Scotland has said that no one from the parade was involved. Police Scotland, who had been guarding the church but were called away before the parade passed by, began a hate crime investigation.

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## **Government Fired Doctor for View that Gender is Determined by Biology**

**July 8, 2018:** Dr. David Mackereth was deemed “unfit” to work as an assessor at the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) over his refusal to use transgender patient’s preferred pronouns because of his view that gender is defined by biology and that God made humans male and female. The Equality Act identifies those undergo or who propose to undergo gender reassignment as part of a protected class. Failure to use preferred pronouns is interpreted as unlawful discrimination.

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### **Bus Company Pulls Adverts for Franklin Graham Event**

**July 12, 2018:** Bus ads promoting the September 2018 Franklin Graham “Lancashire Festival of Hope” at Winter Gardens Blackpool were pulled in response to criticism from LGBT communities. Graham, like many evangelicals, preaches the biblical definition of marriage as being between one man and one woman.

### **Long Marston Church Window Vandalized**

**July 15, 2018:** Unknown vandals threw concrete through the window of St. James the Great Church causing £500 worth of damage.

### **Theft from Church Crypt in Hythe, Kent**

**July 16, 2018:** Thieves broke a lock and stole 21 ancient skulls from the ossuary crypt of St. Leonard’s Church in Kent sometime between July 15th and 16th. The church, known as the “church with the bones” houses the largest bone collection in the UK, including 700 year old remains of the people who died in the Battle of Hastings.

### **University Fired Priest after Rosary of Reparation for Glasgow Pride Parade**

**July 19, 2018:** A Catholic priest in Glasgow was removed as a university chaplain after hosting a rosary of reparation for the city’s gay pride parade. The July 16th rosary service was held in response to a gay pride event in the city on July 14th. After complaints from LGBT groups, University principal Pamela Gillies announced that “Following due consultation, Father Mark Morris will not return to his chaplaincy role at the university in September.”

### **“Offensive” Christian Symbols being Hidden at Funerals in Scotland**

**July 27, 2018:** The Scottish Inspector of Crematoria, Robert Swanson, said in his annual report that demands for the removal of Bibles and crosses by humanists and other minorities are on the rise. The Humanist Society of Scotland has said failure to remove Christian symbols leaves their members “open to discrimination” under the Equality Act.

### **Catholic Politician’s Home Targeted with Vandalism**

**August 1, 2018:** Conservative MP Jacob Rees-Mogg’s Somerset home was vandalized with graffiti, condoms were hung on a small cross in the garden, and a sex toy covered with a condom was stuck on a car. While the politician has been controversial for his support for Brexit, media reports indicate that police suspect the sexual items were meant to target Rees-Mogg’s Catholic faith and opposition to birth control.

### **No Syrian Christian Refugees Admitted in First Quarter 2018**

**August 10, 2018:** Not a single Christian was among the 1,112 Syrian refugees resettled in the UK in the first three months of 2018. In response to a Freedom of Information request from Barnabas Fund, the UK Home Office released figures on Syrian refugees resettled

in the UK for the first quarter of 2018. The UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) recommended 1,358 Syrian refugees for resettlement in the UK of which only 4 were Christians, representing a tiny fraction of just 0.29%. No Yazidis at all were recommended by the UN. The Home Office agreed to resettle 1,112 of these (82%), all of whom were Muslims, and approved no Christians.

*In a letter to the Home Secretary, Lord Alton of Liverpool wrote, 'It is widely accepted that Christians, who constituted around 10 per cent of Syria's pre-war population, were specifically targeted by jihadi rebels and continue to be at risk. Yet out of more than 1,000 Syrian refugees resettled in the UK this year there was not a single Christian. As last year's statistics [only 11 Christians accepted out of 7,060 refugees from Syria] more than amply demonstrate, this is not a statistical blip. It shows a pattern of discrimination that the Government has a legal duty to take concrete steps to address.'*

#### **Man Arrested for Vandalism at Guernsey Church**

**August 10, 2018:** An 18-year-old man was arrested for vandalizing St. John's Church in St. Peter Port on Guernsey. The church had been smeared with graffiti and notes with "obscene" messages of "religious hate" were left. The incident left the vicar and churchgoers upset. The police began an investigation.

#### **Man Arrested for Defacing Church**

**August 15, 2018:** A man was arrested after spraying graffiti on several buildings in Andover including St. Mary's Church where the anarchist symbol was painted on the church door and the number 666 was left in red on the steps outside.

#### **Vue Cinemas Breached Contract by Refusing to Screen "Voices of the Silenced" Film**

**August 15, 2018:** After Vue Cinemas cancelled the screening of the film "Voices of the Silenced" at the last minute in February, the film's producers launched a legal challenge against Vue. In August, Vue agreed to pay a nominal amount for breaching the contract. A spokesperson from Vue has said, however, that they stand by their decision of not screening the movie as it was "in direct conflict with its values." "Voices of the Silenced" is a film by Christian organization Core Issues Trust about people who have voluntarily left behind same-sex attraction practices.

#### **Church CCTV Damaged by Vandals**

**August 17, 2108:** Vandals damaged a CCTV camera from St. Mark's Parish Church in Raploch just one day

after it was installed. The church had been subject to repeated acts of vandalism and a couple of CCTV cameras were installed in order to deter anti-social behavior. While one camera was damaged, the other cameras were already doing their job as they identified those responsible for the incident, enabling the police to trace them and take action.

#### **Church in Badwell Ash Damaged by Pellets**

**August 18, 2018:** During the night between the 17th the 18th of August an unknown perpetrator used a BB or pellet air rifle to smash the windows of St. Mary's Church in the village of Badwell Ash.

#### **Man Arrested for Fires at Methodist Church and Sikh Temple**

**August 29, 2018:** A 49-year-old man was charged on suspicion of arson in connection with two fires that were set in Edinburgh in the early hours of the 28th of August. One fire was set with a petrol bomb at 5 am at the Sikh temple Guru Nanak Gurdwara in Sheriff Brae, which is situated in the building of a former church, and the other was set at 7 am at the Methodist Church in Junction Place.

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## **Police: "Disgusting Attack" on Manchester Cathedral was Hate Crime**

**September 6, 2018:** Officers treated the spraying of abusive graffiti onto the wall of the landmark late on September 6th as a "religiously aggravated attack." The language used was "too offensive to be published," according to media reports. The Chief Inspector of Greater Manchester Police said: "This is a religiously aggravated attack, which has not only caused damage to a building but has caused upset to those who attend [the Emergency Services Festival which would take place the following day]."

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#### **Chester Cathedral Damaged by Intruder**

**September 6, 2018:** A man was arrested after four stained-glass windows were smashed and other property was damaged at Chester Cathedral. The incident occurred just after midnight on September 4th and money was stolen from the premises. The damage caused to the cathedral is likely to exceed £10,000. The

Cathedral's acting dean said the damage to the four stained-glass windows which date back to 1920 was very upsetting, in particular, the damage caused to a window depicting St. Werburgh, the Patron Saint of Chester.

### **Christian Sued Scouts after being Ousted over Islam Complaint; Settled Case**

**September 9, 2018:** A man from Bristol whose membership to the Scout Association was cancelled took legal action, claiming he has been discriminated against on account of his Christian faith. Mr. Walker wrote to the Scout Association's official magazine in 2017 to warn the organization was also increasing promoting political correctness and interfaith issues above Christian values. He was sent a letter four days later by the local District Commander, informing him he was no longer a member of the organization. In September 2018, Walker received a payment of £1,500 from the Scouts in an out-of-court settlement and, in turn, he withdrew his discrimination claim.

### **Pro-Life Charity Banned from Three UK Universities**

**September 14, 2018:** Student Unions in Manchester, Warwick, and Liverpool rejected the Life charity's application to appear at their Freshers' Fairs. The Warwick Students' Union rejected Life because its members "voted to adopt a pro-choice stance." Manchester said the Fair was an inappropriate platform, while Liverpool said the charity would not offer "impartial advice" to students. Life said its displays inform students that help is available if they get pregnant. The charity filed a complaint to the Office for Students (OfS) citing discrimination and restrictions on freedom of speech. It noted that the Chair of OfS had earlier promoted the protection of freedom of speech.

### **Thousands of Pounds in Damage to Church Windows in Kenilworth**

**September 18, 2018:** An "identified suspect" damaged several windows with rocks at the St. Barnabas Church in Kenilworth on the 18th of September, causing thousands of pounds in damage.

### **Church the Victim of Theft and Vandalism**

**October 19, 2018:** Several incidents of theft and vandalism took place at the Church of St. Thomas and St. John in Radcliffe. Lead from the roof and railings from the disabled access ramp were stolen and the stonework on the ramp was hammered. Ropes installed to replace the railings were then cut. Garbage and waste was repeatedly dumped on the church property.

## **Scottish Campaign calls Believers 'Bigots'**

**October 22, 2018:** An anti-hate crime campaign One Scotland, launched in September 2018 by the Scottish police and government, includes a poster directed toward religious believers which reads (in part), "Dear Bigots, you can't spread your religious hatred here. End of sermon. Yours, Scotland." Other posters in the campaign were directed toward 'transphobes' and 'homophobes.' Critics of the campaign noted that it singles out religious believers and calls them bigots without any qualification, and it is based on a political ideology which discriminates against those who hold traditional views.

### **Christian Group Ordered to Pay for Extra Security at Oxford Event**

**October 29, 2019:** Oxford students voted to ban Christian Concern from hosting its Wilberforce Academy residential conference at Lady Margaret Hall, calling the group a "real threat to the physical and mental safety of students." The college, however, said it would permit the group to use its facilities provided that it paid for extra security. A college spokesperson said that Christian Concern's "opposition to abortion, Islam and LGBTQ+" rights would lead to protests so it needed to pay "additional security costs."

### **Vandalism at Wallyford Church**

**November 11, 2018:** East Lothian (Scotland) Police investigated a case of vandalism at the Wallyford Livingroom Church. Vandals smashed a window by throwing stones.

### **British Government Denied Asia Bibi Asylum for Fear of Community Unrest**

**November 9, 2018:** Asia Bibi, who spent eight years on death row in Pakistan, was released from prison after the Supreme Court of Pakistan overturned her sentence for "insulting the Prophet Mohammed." Her acquittal led to unrest and riots among Pakistan's Muslim hardliners, prompting the government to try to prevent her from leaving the country. Her husband, Ashiq Masih, pleaded to the UK government: "I am requesting the Prime Minister of the UK help us and as far as possible grant us freedom." The British government reportedly rejected



this request for fear of civil unrest. The chairman of the British Pakistani Christian Association Wilson Chowdhry said: "I've been led to believe that the UK government had concerns that her moving to the UK would cause security concerns and unrest among certain sections of the community and would also be a security threat to British embassies abroad which might be targeted by Islamist terrorists."

### **War Memorial and Church Defaced in Scotland**

**November 17, 2018:** A church and war memorial were hit by vandals sometime on the 17th of November in Coatbridge. The graffiti included Republican slogans like "RIRA" (Real Irish Republican Army). The incident happened just a week after Armistice Day — the day the Allies and Germany signed the peace treaty ending the First World War.

### **Parents Threaten Action against School that Required Children to Participate in Gay Pride Parade**

**November 20, 2018:** In November, several parents of children who were required to participate in a June "Proud to be me" pride parade at the Heavers Farm Primary School in South East London threatened legal action. Despite numerous complaints from parents, they were informed that no opt-outs would be allowed. Parents, including Izoduwa Adhedo, reported that they were treated dismissively and victimized following their complaints. "I wasn't even trying to stop the Pride event. I just wanted my child to receive an education, rather than indoctrination," Adhedo said.

### **Pro-Lifers Banned as Glasgow University Group**

**November 22, 2018:** The group "Glasgow Students for Life" were banned from becoming an official group by the Student Representative Council (SRC) at Glasgow University. As a result, the student group would not have access to funding, meeting rooms, or a stall at the freshers fair. The president of the SRC said the decision had been made because the aims of the society did not align with the values of the council. "Given the SRC's campaigning on a number of related social issues over the years, including support for the recent Repeal the 8th campaign in Ireland, it would be contrary to our ethos to endorse a society which calls for limited rights for women."

### **Historic Cornwall Church the Target of Arson**

**November 24, 2018:** Firefighters were called to St.

Mary's Church in Penzance at around 4 am in the early hours of November 24th by the key holder and his wife after the alarm sounded. A bin had been placed in front of the church door and set on fire. Witnesses reported that the fire nearly spread into the interior of the church. Police were given the CCTV footage and began an investigation. Damage was estimated at up to £10,000.

## **Pro-Life Student Group Banned at Aberdeen University**

**November 27, 2018:** The Aberdeen University Students' Association (Ausa) prevented the affiliation of the Aberdeen Life Ethics Society, a pro-life student group. This means that the group would not be recognized as an official club of the University and thus would not be eligible to receive any funding for their events. The Ausa has an explicit pro-choice policy supporting "free, safe and legal access to abortion." The Life Ethics Society challenged the ban and accused the Ausa of censorship.

### **Shopping Mall Refused to Display Nativity but Advertised Christmas Market**

**December 12, 2018:** The Thistles Shopping Centre in Stirling, Scotland refused requests from the Legion of St. Mary's Association to display a nativity scene in the mall, saying they "pride themselves on religious neutrality." Despite this official position, the mall heavily advertised a "Christmas Market."

## **European Institutions**

### **Court of Justice of the European Union Redefines "Spouses"**

**June 5, 2018:** The Court of Justice of the European Union issued a judgment in the case of Coman and others ruling that all EU Member States, including those that define marriage as the union of one man and one woman, must recognize same-sex marriage contracted abroad, regarding the right of residence.





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