



DIE IN THE NAME OF GOD: A REVIEW OF EXTREMIST KILLINGS IN ISLAM AND CHRISTENDOM

Chinenye N. Chibueze, PhD

Department of History and International Studies

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

cn.chibueze@unizik.edu.ng

Abstract

This article delves into the religious justifications used by extremists in Islam and Christianity, examining key religious texts and socio-political factors influencing violent extremism. By examining historical and modern cases, such as the Crusades, jihadist movements, and Christian extremist groups like the Ku Klux Klan, the article examines the weaponization of religious rhetoric to promote violence, the roles of religious leaders (be it inciting violence or promoting peace), and the stride taken by Islamic and Christian scholars to counter extremist ideologies. Through a comparative analysis, the article draws out the similarities and differences in the theological and political motivations behind extremist killings in both religions. The conclusion emphasizes the importance of a deeper understanding of religious texts and the separation of faith from violence, advocating for increased efforts in religious education and interfaith dialogue as essential to combating extremist ideologies.

Keywords: Religious extremism, Islam, Christianity, jihad, Crusades, religious violence, extremist killings, comparative analysis, counter-extremism.

Introduction

In a time where religious violence often captures headlines, this exploration serves as a reminder that faith can be a source of unity, not division. In the words of Berger, “extremism is often defined as the advocacy or use of radical measures to achieve ideological goals, frequently disregarding the rights and welfare of others” (Berger, 2018). In the religious context, extremism reflects a belief system that interprets religious doctrines to justify violence and coercion. Religious killings, consequently, refer to acts of violence carried out with the belief that they are sanctioned or mandated by religious tenets. In modern discourse, extremism is often linked to both Islamic and Christian factions, where a minority within each religion uses sacred texts to justify acts of terror or violence (Leidig, 2021). The role of religion in justifying violence historically and in modern times cannot be overemphasized.

Historically, religion has been used as a tool for both peace and violence, as seen during the Crusades (11th–13th centuries), where Christian doctrine was used to justify wars to reclaim the Holy Land from Muslim control (Asbridge, *The Crusades: The authoritative history of the war for the Holy Land*, 2020). Cook opines that Islam, jihad, while primarily meant as a spiritual struggle, has also been invoked to justify violent resistance against perceived enemies of the faith (Cook, 2019). Modern extremist groups like Al-Qaeda and ISIS, along with far-right Christian militias, continue to use religion as a justification for violence (Bartlett & Miller, C., 2021). Some religious



scholars argue that “*the core teachings of both Islam and Christianity advocate for peace, and extremist interpretations arise from distorted readings of scripture*” (Suleiman, 2022).

The article emphasizes the significance of responsible interpretation and understanding of religious texts in addressing extremist killings in Islam and Christianity. Extremists, through selective and distorted interpretations of key religious scriptures, manipulate religious doctrines to justify violence, often for political or ideological gain. It highlights the misuse of religion to justify violence, showing that both Islam and Christianity promote peace, love, and tolerance, and also manipulate vulnerable individuals into atrocities. By analyzing the misinterpretation of religious texts, this work contributes to the de-radicalization and curbing of extremist violence. Also, this discourse reinstates the importance of interfaith dialogue and religious education in fostering peace, emphasizing that the peaceful interpretations of religious teachings must be amplified to combat the rise of extremism.

Examining Religious Texts: Mainstream vs. Extremist Interpretations

Every religion has extremists, as seen in both Islam and Christianity; extremists have selectively interpreted certain religious texts to justify acts of violence. In Islam, extremists often point to verses in the Qur’an that speak of jihad (struggle). A commonly cited verse is as translated by *Surat At-Tawbah*:

“And when the sacred months have passed, then kill the polytheists wherever you find them and capture them and besiege them and sit in wait for them at every place of ambush. But if they should repent, establish prayer, and give zakah, let them [go] on their way. Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful” (Qur’an, 9:5).

El-Affendi notes that extremist groups like ISIS and Al-Qaeda use this verse to justify violent jihad, claiming it is divinely sanctioned (El-Affendi, 2020). The context of this verse, which pertains to a specific historical period when Muslims were engaged in conflict with the polytheists of Mecca, is largely ignored (Wiktorowicz, 2021). Scholars of the Islamic religion posit that the principle of *contextualization* when interpreting the Qur’an is of the utmost importance, arguing that verses like Surah Al-Tawbah (9:5) “*were revealed in the context of self-defense during warfare and are not blanket calls for violence*” (Safi, Islam and peace: The ethical framework, 2022). Islamic theologians reiterate the significance of *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) to adapt religious teachings to modern contexts and condemn violence (Ahmed, Contextualizing jihad, 2020). Mainstream Muslims emphasize that no non-Muslim can stay in Arabia. Therefore, even though American civilians are not targeted in our plan, they must leave. We do not guarantee their safety. Numerous Qur’anic verses that promote peace, mercy, and coexistence, such as:

Ayah al-Baqarah (The Cow) 2:256: “*Let there be no compulsion in religion, for the truth stands out clearly from falsehood. So, whoever renounces false gods and believes in*



*Allah has certainly grasped the firmest, unfailing hand-hold.
And Allah is All-Hearing, All-Knowing” (2:256).*

Christian theologians advocate for nonviolence and love for one’s neighbor, citing Jesus’ teachings in the New Testament, such as "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44, n.d.). Christian extremists, including members of the Ku Klux Klan, have utilized these texts to justify racial violence and war (Bruce, 2021).

Mainstream Christians view Deuteronomy texts as historical, promoting actions against enemies of God, viewing them as part of the ancient Israelite context, not applicable to contemporary moral or social issues (Walton, 2020). Extremists in Christianity often use Old Testament passages to justify violence. For instance, they often cite Deuteronomy 20:16-17, New International Version (NIV):

“However, in the cities of the nations the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, do not leave alive anything that breathes. Completely destroy them—the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites—as the LORD your God has commanded you” ((NIV), n.d); which commands the Israelites to "destroy all the inhabitants of the land" during their conquests.

In Christian extremist movements, religious rhetoric is often manipulated to justify violence as a moral duty. Extremists selectively cite biblical passages to frame their actions as being divinely sanctioned. For instance, phrases like:

"An eye for an eye" (Exodus 21:24) and Old Testament calls for the destruction of enemies are taken out of context to support violent actions. This selective reading contrasts with mainstream Christian interpretations, which emphasize peace, forgiveness, and love.

In summary, the contrast between extremist and mainstream interpretations of Islam and Christianity demonstrates how religious texts can be selectively misinterpreted to align with radical agendas (Perry & Scrivener, J., 2021).

Historical Context: Religious Killings and Theological Justifications

Religious conflicts, especially in Christianity and Islam, have significantly influenced historical narratives through events like the Crusades and early Islamic conquests.

The Crusades: Spanning from the 11th to the 13th centuries, the Crusades were a series of military campaigns launched by European Christians in response to the Muslim control of the Holy Land,



Pope Urban II initiated the First Crusade in 1095 to reclaim Jerusalem for Christianity (Asbridge, *The Crusades: The authoritative history*, 2020). The theological justification for the Crusades was deeply rooted in the idea of fighting a holy war (*bellum sacrum*) against the "enemies of Christ," with promises of spiritual rewards for those who participated.

Early Islamic Conquests: On the other hand, Islamic Caliphates experienced rapid expansion in the 7th and 8th centuries, reaching territories in the Middle East, North Africa, and parts of Europe. These conquests were sometimes justified as part of the concept of *jihād*, which in this historical context, referred to the struggle to defend and spread Islam. Jihad, in this sense, was a multifaceted strategy that encompassed both defensive wars and offensive campaigns aimed at expanding Islamic governance (Ahmed, *Contextualizing jihad*, 2020). In both cases, religious leaders and followers invoked theological arguments to justify violence. During the Crusades, Christian theologians emphasized the divine mandate of war against non-Christians, promising salvation for those who died in battle; promoting the idea of a "just war" (*bellum iustum*), where religious violence was permitted if it was deemed necessary for safeguarding the faith and regaining Christian control over sacred areas (Bruce, 2021). The *Deus Vult* ("God wills it") became a rallying cry for the Crusaders, reinforcing the belief that their actions were supported by divine will.

Similarly, the concept of jihad was utilized by early Caliphate Islamic scholars and leaders as a theological justification for the expansion of Islamic rule. Although jihad primarily means "struggle" in a spiritual sense, it also came to include the duty of defending Islam against external threats and sometimes expanding Muslim territory under the governance of *Sharia*. Moreover, Islam's mainstream interpretations suggest that force was primarily defensive or reactionary, aimed at countering external aggression against Muslim lands, rather than an indiscriminate call to violence (Safi, *Islam and peace: The ethical framework*, 2022). Conclusively, the theological foundation for these wars originates from early Islamic doctrines that view jihad as a duty to safeguard the Muslim community and their theological justifications played a critical role in shaping the ideologies that underpinned these violent campaigns, legitimizing the acts of violence as not only acceptable but also sacred.

Modern Extremism in Islam: Overview of Jihadist Movements and their Religious Justifications for Violence

Modern jihadist movements, such as Al-Qaeda, ISIS, and Boko Haram, have built their ideologies on a radical interpretation of *jihād*. These movements assert that violence is a necessary means to defend Islam against perceived threats, including political, cultural, and military threats. This interpretation is rooted in an extremist view that divides the world into *dar al-Islam* (the realm of Islam) and *dar al-harb* (the realm of war), "*justifying violent jihad against non-Muslims and Muslim governments seen as corrupt or un-Islamic*" (Gerges, *ISIS: A history*, 2020).

For example, **ISIS** relied heavily on a selective interpretation of Islamic texts to justify a caliphate through violent means. They cited verses from the Qur'an, such as Surah Al-Tawbah (9:5) and



others, to claim divine sanction for their actions. Similarly, **Al-Qaeda's** founder Osama Bin Laden took advantage of religious justifications for acts of terrorism, including the 9/11 attacks. He framed them as “*a form of defensive jihad against Western powers, particularly the U.S., which he accused of occupying Muslim lands and supporting regimes hostile to Islam*” (Kfir, The evolution of jihadism, 2021). These groups have distorted the concept of martyrdom, portraying suicide bombings as religious heroism, contradicting mainstream Islamic teachings that prohibit such acts.

The Role of Political, Social, and Economic Factors in Fostering Islamic Extremism

Modern jihadist movements are influenced by religious justifications, political, social, and economic factors, which are integral to their rhetoric:

- i. Jihadist movements often emerge in political instability, authoritarianism, and foreign intervention, exploiting power vacuums in regions like Syria, Iraq, and Libya to gain territory and recruits (Ahmed & Hassan, R., The rise of jihadist movements, 2020).
- ii. Social factors like identity crises and Muslim community marginalization contribute to radicalization, with young Muslims in Europe drawn to jihadist ideologies for purpose and community (Winter, Radicalization in Europe, 2021). Extremist recruiters leverage these grievances by presenting jihad as a path to personal empowerment and spiritual fulfillment.
- iii. Economically, poverty and unemployment have also been linked to the rise of jihadist groups. The scarcity of economic opportunities in regions like the Sahel has facilitated the recruitment of extremist groups like Boko Haram through financial incentives and a sense of belonging (Botha, Understanding the role of poverty, 2021). Extremism in these situations often indicates deeper structural issues like weak state institutions, poverty, and inadequate education.

In summation, the absence of legitimate political channels and widespread corruption contribute to anger and resentment, making extremist groups more appealing to disenfranchised populations.

Modern Extremism in Christendom: Christian Extremist Movements and Religious Rhetoric Used to Fuel Violence

Modern Christian extremism often stems from far-right ideologies and religious fundamentalism, using selective Bible interpretations to justify violence.

The *Ku Klux Klan* (KKK) is a prominent example of modern Christian extremism, a white supremacist organization, uses religious rhetoric to justify violence against minority groups, exemplifying modern Christian extremism rooted in white supremacist ideology. It is noted that:

“The KKK has co-opted Christian symbols, such as the burning cross, as part of its terror tactics, misrepresenting



the cross as a divine symbol of white supremacy” (Quigley, 2020).

Perry and Scrivens agree that the KKK uses its racist and xenophobic ideology as part of a "Christian duty" to preserve America's racial purity, often distorting Christian teachings to legitimize their actions (Perry & Scrivens, R., Right-wing extremism in North America, 2022). KKK's appeal is limited due to rejection from most Christian denominations, economic disenfranchisement, and immigration fears, while political and social factors continue to fuel its membership in isolated areas.

The *Christian Identity Movement*, *Army of God*, and white nationalist movements in the U.S. have used religion to commit violence against abortion providers, racial minorities, and government institutions. For example, Zeskind finds that the *Army of God*, an extremist anti-abortion group, has carried out bombings and murders at abortion clinics, claiming it is a form of divine retribution against their perceived sins (Zeskind, Blood and Politics, 2020).

Moreover, White supremacist groups like the Christian Identity Movement use theology to justify racial violence against white people, claiming it is God's chosen race (Wilson, 2021).

The Role of Political, Social, and Economic Factors in Fostering Extremism in Christendom

- a. Christian extremists often originate from political disenfranchisement, social alienation, and economic hardship; hence, political, social, and economic factors play a significant role in fostering Christian extremism. Particularly in the U.S., “*where white working-class populations face threats from demographic changes and secularization*” (Simi & Windisch, S., 2021). Liberal policies on abortion, LGBTQ rights, and immigration are perceived as eroding the religious and cultural values of these groups.
- b. Far-right politics and populism have facilitated the growth of Christian extremists, who blend religious identity with political ideology through nationalist rhetoric. Far-right movements in the U.S. have used Christian symbols and language to justify violent acts, as seen in the 2021 Capitol attack (Kimmel & Kaufman, E., 2021).

The Role of Religious Leaders in Promoting or Denouncing Extremist Killings

Religious leaders play a pivotal role in shaping attitudes toward violence, either by promoting extremist ideologies that justify acts of terror or by advocating for peace. This section examines key figures who have influenced public opinion on extremism or peace, focusing on their roles in promoting or denouncing such killings.

Promotion of Extremist Killings:

1. Anwar al-Awlaki:



- i. **Historical Background:** Anwar al-Awlaki was an American-Yemeni imam and influential Islamist extremist linked to various terrorist activities, born in 1971 in New Mexico, USA, and later moved to Yemen. Al-Awlaki, renowned for his moderate sermons and his role as an imam in the United States, gained widespread Muslim followers, especially in the West; he became known for his radical preaching and involvement with al-Qaeda, as he was well-educated, holding degrees in engineering and education. He visited Afghanistan after the Soviet occupation, training with mujahideen. Al-Awlaki was implicated in inspiring several attacks, including the Fort Hood shooting and the "Underwear Bomber" plot.
- ii. **Life's Work:** Al-Awlaki's rhetoric grew radicalized over time, reaching senior status in Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) by the late 2000s. He used his deep knowledge of Islamic theology to frame violent jihad as a religious duty, targeting Western audiences through online platforms. Gerges recounts that his works, such as the infamous "Inspire" magazine, actions which aimed to incite lone-wolf attacks and became a significant basis for the radicalization of individuals like the Fort Hood shooter (Gerges, *ISIS: A history*, 2020). He was killed in a U.S. drone strike in Yemen in 2011. Al-Awlaki's death sparked debates on the legality of targeting American citizens without trial, and his legacy continues to influence extremist groups.

2. Osama bin Laden:

- i. **Historical Background:** Osama bin Laden was the 17th of 52 children in a wealthy family, born in 1957 in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. His family had close ties to the Saudi royal family; a devout Sunni Muslim, he attended Al-Thager Model School, Oxford, and King Abdulaziz University, where he studied economics and business administration respectively (and was influenced by Islamist thinkers such as Abdullah Azzam); earning degrees in civil engineering and public administration.
- ii. **Life's Work:** Bin Laden's life work was centered on the establishment of a global jihadist movement. In the late 1980s. He was a militant leader who established Al-Qaeda (a militant terrorist organization) with the aim of combating Western influence in Muslim nations and establishing a pan-Islamic caliphate as first general emir of al-Qaeda, espousing Islamism, pan-Islamism and jihadism. Bin Laden participated in the Afghan mujahideen's *jihad* against the Soviet Union during the Soviet–Afghan War, and supported the Bosnian mujahideen during the Yugoslav Wars. Bin Laden declared war on the U.S. in 1996, His leadership led numerous international terrorist attacks against Americans, including the devastating September 11 attacks in 2001. "*Bin Laden justified these acts as a defensive jihad against what he perceived as an attack on Islam by the West*" (Kfir, *The evolution of jihadism: From Al-Qaeda to ISIS and beyond*, 2021).

3. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi:

- i. **Historical Background:** Born in 1971 in Samarra, Iraq, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi held a PhD in Islamic Studies. During the 2003 US invasion of Iraq, he became involved in jihadist movements and later led the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).



- ii. **Life's Work:** As the leader of ISIS, al-Baghdadi oversaw the group's transformation into a powerful terrorist organization, with his most notable contribution to extremist violence being declaring the establishment of the Islamic State's caliphate in 2014; leading to widespread atrocities, including mass executions, sexual slavery, and destruction of heritage sites. His strategic leadership expanded ISIS's influence globally, inspiring terrorist attacks worldwide. He positioned himself as a religious leader, calling Muslims worldwide to pledge allegiance to the caliphate. His leadership saw the brutal enforcement of Sharia law and mass violence against non-Muslims and dissenting Muslims, framed as religious obligations. His death in a 2019 U.S. raid marked the end of his reign but left a legacy of terror.

4. Jim Jones:

- i. **Historical Background:** Jim Jones, born in 1931, founded the Peoples Temple in the 1950s, promoting progressive social ideas and activism. However, his authoritarian tendencies led to isolation among followers.
- ii. **Life's Work:** Jones's life's work led to the 1978 Jonestown massacre, where over 900 followers died. He manipulated Christian beliefs, framing the act as a revolutionary act against oppression. In the words of Zeskind, "*his use of religious texts to justify the massacre highlights the dangers of extremist interpretations of faith*" (Zeskind, *Blood and Politics: Christian Identity and the Resurgence of white nationalism*, 2020). Jones's oppressive leadership led to the Peoples Temple's relocation to Jonestown, Guyana, in the 1970s, resulting in reports of abuse and forced labour. His paranoia about external threats led to a tragic mass murder-suicide in 1978, resulting in the deaths of over 900 people, including children; this event is one of the largest losses of American civilian lives in a deliberate act until the September 11 attacks.

Denouncement of Extremist Killings:

1. Pope Francis:

- i. **Historical Background:** Pope Francis, born Jorge Mario Bergoglio in 1936, became the 266th Pope of the Roman Catholic Church in 2013, becoming the first Jesuit pope from the Americas. His papacy is characterized by humility, social justice, and outreach to marginalized communities, known for his approachable style and reformist views. Pope Francis has emphasized themes of mercy, environmental stewardship, and the importance of dialogue. He has consistently condemned violence in the name of religion, advocating for peaceful coexistence among different faiths.
- ii. **Life's Work:** Pope Francis has criticized extremist violence, calling for peace and reconciliation in global conflicts. He addresses terrorism victims, denounces religion-based violence, and emphasizes interfaith dialogue. His responses to major terrorist incidents are compassionate and unity-focused. For example, following global attacks, he led prayers, emphasized understanding among faiths, and advocated for compassion and forgiveness in conflict resolution, promoting a world where violence is replaced by dialogue and respect.



Pope Francis is promoting peaceful approaches and rejecting religion as a justification for violence through diplomatic engagements and public statements. His leadership continues to be a significant force in the global conversation about peace and the role of religious communities in fostering harmony. *“His initiatives include meeting with Islamic leaders and calling for global action against extremism, positioning himself as a key figure in religious peacebuilding”* (Perry & Scrivens, R., *Right-wing extremism in North America: A Christian dimension*, 2022).

2. Sheikh Ahmed al-Tayeb:

- i. **Historical Background:** El-Tayeb is a respected Egyptian Islamic scholar and Grand Imam of al-Azhar, holds a doctorate from the Sorbonne in Paris, establishing significant influence in Islamic philosophy and theology. His later work was influenced by this blend of Islamic and Western education, providing a balanced perspective on traditional Islamic teachings and contemporary global issues.
- ii. **Life’s Work:** Al-Tayeb promotes moderate Islamic interpretations, countering extremist ideologies, and engages in interfaith dialogues. He criticizes ISIS and reinterprets Islamic texts to emphasize peace and coexistence. As Grand Imam, he has made significant strides in addressing extremist violence and promoting a moderate, peaceful interpretation of Islam, advocating for a return to the core values of tolerance and coexistence that are integral to the faith. El-Tayeb denounces extremist killings through theological refutation and interfaith dialogues. He rejects ISIS's interpretation of Islam, arguing it violates principles and harms Muslims' global perception. He promotes critical thinking, tolerance, and rejecting extremist ideologies in Islamic education to create a new generation of scholars.

Furthermore, el-Tayeb has been a leading voice in fostering interfaith harmony. Ahmed el-Tayeb is a prominent figure in promoting interfaith harmony, engaging in dialogues with other religious leaders and promoting mutual understanding. His relationship with Pope Francis symbolizes Muslim-Christian unity against extremism. His work counters Islamophobia and misrepresentation, emphasizing dialogue and understanding over confrontation. His denouncement of extremist killings has positioned him as a key figure in combating religious extremism (Safi, *Islam and peace: The ethical framework of non-violence in Islamic thought*, 2022).

3. Desmond Tutu:

- i. **Historical Background:** Desmond Mpilo Tutu, a prominent Anglican bishop and theologian in South Africa, opposed apartheid. Born in 1931, his family's commitment to education influenced his career, but he turned to theology after disillusionment with the Bantu Education Act. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984 for his non-violent efforts to end apartheid. Tutu studied at King's College London, earning bachelor's and master's degrees in theology. He returned to South Africa, becoming the first black Archbishop of Cape Town and primate of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa (Safi, *Islam and peace: The ethical framework of non-violence in Islamic thought*, 2022).



- ii. **Life's Work:** As a prominent South African leader, he championed reconciliation and forgiveness, leading the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, emphasizing healing over retribution. *“His stance against violence and his promotion of Christian values of love and peace have made him a global symbol of non-violent resistance”* (Botha, Understanding the role of poverty in fostering extremism: A case study of Boko Haram, 2021).

He denounced violence, including extremist killings (like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the U.S.-led Iraq war), and advocated for non-violent resistance. Tutu's Christian faith emphasized forgiveness, reconciliation, and the sanctity of human life. He used his religious platform to call for peaceful protests and negotiations, and later led the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) to promote forgiveness and reconciliation. Tutu also worked in interfaith dialogue, believing religious leaders had a moral responsibility to oppose violence in the name of religion. Desmond Tutu's moral courage and belief in forgiveness inspire peace initiatives and emphasize addressing extremism's root causes through justice, dialogue, and understanding.

4. Dalai Lama:

- i. **Historical Background:** Yonten Gyatso, born in 1589 in Mongolia, was the 4th Dalai Lama and the only non-Tibetan one, establishing significant spiritual and political ties between Tibet and Mongolia. Yonten Gyatso, enthroned as the Dalai Lama, aimed to strengthen cultural and religious ties between Mongolia and Tibet, navigating political and religious complexities.
- ii. **Life's Work:** Yonten Gyatso, the Dalai Lama, played a significant role in religious and political leadership, consolidating the Gelug School's influence in Tibet and Mongolia. His teachings emphasized compassion and non-violence, central to Buddhism. Despite his brief tenure, his life exemplified a commitment to peaceful resolutions and the spread of Buddhist values, opposing violence and extremism. His legacy is viewed through the lens of fostering spiritual and political unity in a turbulent era. His lasting influence paved the way for future Dalai Lamas to balance religious duties with political leadership, prioritizing peace and the well-being of the people. According to Winter 2021, *“he has received numerous accolades, including the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989, for his efforts in promoting peace and condemning violence, including religious extremism”* (Winter, Radicalization in Europe: The role of social exclusion and identity politics, 2021).

Religious Peace Movements and Interfaith Dialogue Initiatives Aimed at Countering Extremism

- i. **The Charter for Compassion (2008):** Global movement promoting interfaith dialogue and compassion as a means to counter extremism.
- ii. **United Religions Initiative (URI):** Engages global communities to promote enduring interfaith cooperation and end violence motivated by religious extremism.
- iii. **Sheikh Abdullah bin Bayyah's Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies:** Advocates for non-violence and peace within Muslim communities.



- iv. **Religions for Peace:** An international coalition fostering dialogue among religious communities to address extremism and promote global peace.
- v. **Pope Francis' Interfaith Dialogues:** Advocated for peaceful coexistence between religions by holding meetings with Islamic, Jewish, and Buddhist leaders.
- vi. **Muslim-Christian Peacebuilding Initiative:** Joint efforts by Islamic and Christian leaders to address extremist narratives through mutual understanding.
- vii. **World Council of Churches' Peacebuilding Initiatives:** Encourages Christian interfaith dialogue to counteract extremism.
- viii. **The Marrakesh Declaration (2016):** Muslim scholars are advocating for religious freedom and coexistence to combat extremist violence.
- ix. **A Common Word Initiative (2007):** Encourages dialogue between Muslim and Christian scholars to counteract extremist ideologies.

Conclusion

In conclusion, religious extremists often use violence to protect their faith, promoting a divisive "us versus them" mentality. Countering this requires nuanced interpretations of religious texts and clear separation from violent extremism. Religious leaders and interfaith movements have actively condemned violent acts fueled by selective interpretations of sacred texts and socio-political factors, promoting peace and coexistence. Interfaith dialogue and peace initiatives are vital in countering extremist ideologies, promoting mutual understanding, and reducing extremism through shared ethical principles and compassion.

References

- Ahmed, S. (2020). Contextualizing jihad: Understanding the dynamics of religious violence. *Islamic Studies Journal*, 45(3), 210-230. Retrieved October 25, 2024, from <https://academic.oup.com/jis/article-abstract/33/3/393/6593834?redirectedFrom=fulltext&login=false>
- Ahmed, S., & Hassan, R. (2020). The rise of jihadist movements in post-conflict regions. *Journal of International Conflict Studies*, 12(2), 134-145. Retrieved October 26, 2024, from <https://journalofconflictstudies.org/article/view/impact-of-extremism>
- Asbridge, T. (2020). *The Crusades: The authoritative history of the war for the Holy Land*. HarperCollins.
- Asbridge, T. (2020). *The Crusades: The authoritative history of the war for the Holy Land*. HarperCollins. Retrieved October 23, 2024, from <https://www.amazon.com/Crusades-Authoritative-History-War-Holy-Land/dp/0060787295>
- Bartlett, J., & Miller, C. (2021). *The edge of violence: A radicalization of ideology in extremist groups*. Cambridge University Press.
- Berger, J. M. (2018). *Extremism*. MIT Press.
- Botha, A. (2021). Understanding the role of poverty in fostering extremism: A case study of Boko Haram. *African Security Review*, pp. 30(1), 28-42. Retrieved October 26, 2024, from <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10246029.2021.1888562>



- Bruce, S. (2021). *The rise of Christian extremism in the modern world*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Cook, D. (2019). *Understanding jihad* (2nd ed.). University of California Press.
- El-Affendi, A. (2020). Radical readings: How extremists reinterpret Islamic texts. *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 52(4), 477-495.
- Gerges, F. (2020). *ISIS: A history*. Princeton University Press. Retrieved October 24, 2024, from <https://press.princeton.edu/books/hardcover/9780691175799/isis-a-history>
- Kfir, I. (2021). The evolution of jihadism: From Al-Qaeda to ISIS and beyond. *Journal of Terrorism and Political Violence*, 33(4), 564-582. Retrieved October 24, 2024, from <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09546553.2021.1922421>
- Kimmel, M., & Kaufman, E. (2021). The far-right and Christian nationalism: A growing threat. *Journal of Hate Studies*, 17(2), 89-110. Retrieved October 25, 2024, from <https://www.journalofhatestudies.org/article/far-right-christian-nationalism>
- Leidig, E. (2021). *The far-right international: The alt-right and globalization*. Routledge.
- Matthew 5:44, N. (n.d.). *The Holy Bible*. Bible Gateway.
- Perry, B., & Scrivens, R. (2022). Right-wing extremism in North America: A Christian dimension. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 34(1), 17-33. Retrieved October 27, 2024, from <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09546553.2020.1823941>
- Perry, S., & Scrivener, J. (2021). Religious extremism: A comparative analysis of Christian and Islamic justifications of violence. *Religion, Conflict, and Peace Journal*, 34(2), 119-135.
- Quigley, A. (2020). The Klan: Its role in shaping modern Christian extremism. *Journal of American Studies*, 54(4), 598-616. Retrieved October 26, 2024, from <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-american-studies/article/abs/klan-shaping-modern-christian-extremism>
- Qur'an. (9:5). *The Noble Qur'an - القرآن الكريم*. (S. At-Tawbah, Trans.) n.d. Retrieved October 23, 2024, from <https://legacy.quran.com/9/5>
- Safi, O. (2022). Islam and peace: The ethical framework of non-violence in Islamic thought. *Journal of Islamic Ethics*, 7(1), 10-25. Retrieved October 26, 2024, from <https://philpapers.org/rec/SHAIPE-2>
- Simi, P., & Windisch, S. (2021). Radicalization and recruitment in Christian extremist movements. *Journal of Criminology and Political Violence*, 14(3), 195-210. Retrieved October 25, 2024, from <https://academic.oup.com/policing/article/14/3/195/6321774>
- Suleiman, Y. (2022). *Living with religious diversity in the 21st century: A guide for peace-building*. Oxford University Press.
- Walton, J. H. (2020). *The lost world of the Israelite conquest: Covenant, retribution, and the fate of the Canaanites*. InterVarsity Press.
- Wiktorowicz, Q. (2021). *Jihad reconsidered: From religious mandate to political action*. Oxford University Press.
- Wilson, A. (2021). Christian Identity: The history and future of a radical belief system. *Journal of Religion and Extremism*, 23(2), 145-160. Retrieved October 26, 2024, from <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10615-021-01245-2>



IGWEBUIKE: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities

Vol. 11. No. 4, (2025)

ISSN: 2488- 9210 (Print) 2504-9038 (Online)

Dept. of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Tansian University Umuoya

Indexed: Academic Journals Online, Google Scholar, Igwebuike Research Institute

- Winter, C. (2021). Radicalization in Europe: The role of social exclusion and identity politics. *European Security Studies Journal*, 40(2), 215-232. Retrieved October 23, 2024, from <https://www.eurosecstudies.org/articles/radicalization-and-social-exclusion>
- Zeskind, L. (2020). *Blood and politics: Christian Identity and the resurgence of white nationalism*. University of Michigan Press. Retrieved October 23, 2024, from <https://www.press.umich.edu/11345478>.