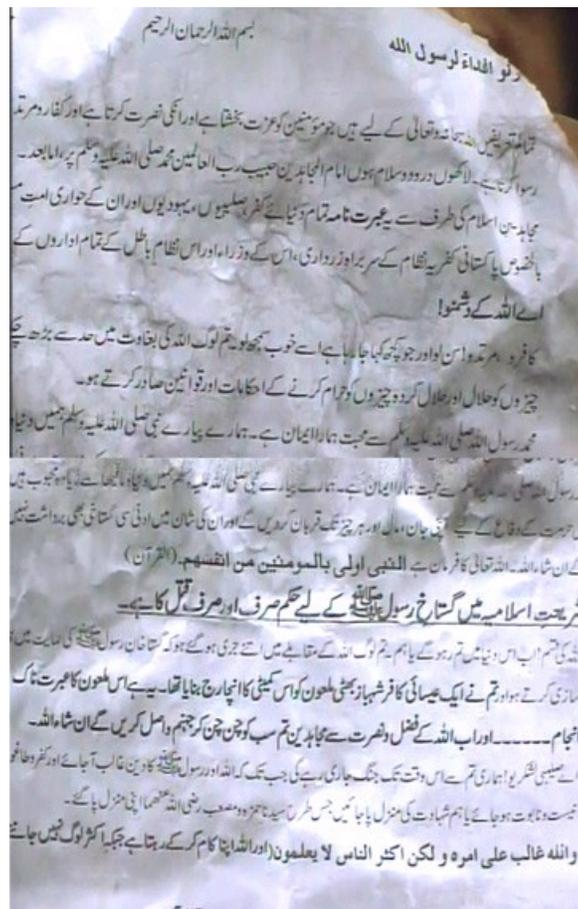




Pakistan: Christian Minister Killed

Pakistan’s only Christian cabinet member, Shahbaz Bhatti, was assassinated by gunmen on March 2, 2011. Shahbaz, a member of the ruling Pakistan People’s Party, ardently advocated reforming Pakistan’s blasphemy law, which is often used against Christians. He is the second politician killed for criticizing the blasphemy law and calling for the release of convicted Christian Asia Bibi. The governor of Punjab province, Salman Taseer, was killed on Jan. 4 after he publicly spoke out against the law.

Several armed men opened fire on Shahbaz’s car in a residential neighborhood of Islamabad. Two of the men pulled Shahbaz’s driver out of the car while the third man repeatedly fired his Kalashnikov into the vehicle. Shahbaz was killed instantly. Pakistani television carried images of his bullet-riddled car.



Pamphlet found near Shahbaz Bhatti’s murder scene.

Pamphlets attributed to Al-Qaeda and a branch of the Pakistani Taliban were distributed at the scene, warning that anyone who criticized the blasphemy law would be killed.

Last November, Shahbaz joined Governor Taseer in championing the case of Asia Bibi, a Christian woman who was convicted of blasphemy and sentenced to death. Shahbaz had been receiving death threats since the governor’s murder. He said in several interviews that he was “the highest target right now,” but he vowed to continue his work and trusted his life to God, according to Compass Direct News. “I don’t believe that bodyguards can save me after the assassination [of Taseer],” he said. “I believe in the protection from heaven.”

Shahbaz was a committed Christian. In a BBC video recorded just four months ago, Shahbaz said, “I want to share that I believe in Jesus Christ, who has given his own life for us. I know what is the meaning of cross. And I am following the cross.” He joined the Pakistan People’s Party in 2002 and was appointed the Federal Minister for Minorities in 2008, the first Christian to hold the position. According to Release International’s CEO, Andy Dipper, “Shahbaz was an uncompromising supporter of minorities in Pakistan who

face abuse and unfair treatment. He was fully aware of the risks in speaking out. Extremists have succeeded in destroying another good man.”

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