

Where Can Asia Bibi Go? (Part One)

by Hugh Fitzgerald



Asia Bibi, the Pakistani Christian woman who spent eight years on death row in a Pakistani jail, having been convicted of “blasphemy” on the testimony of Muslims, has at last been freed by a decision of the Pakistani Supreme Court. But her latest ordeal has only just begun, for she cannot possibly live safely in Pakistan, where massive crowds have been calling for her to be executed and where, during this past year, two high officials of the government who had criticized her prosecution were, as a consequence, murdered by Muslim fanatics.

The United Kingdom has refused to offer Bibi asylum, prompted by fears of violence by Muslims. The UK high commissioner in Islamabad is reported to have warned he could not protect his staff if asylum were granted by the UK. This led the Foreign Office, in turn, to ask the Home Office not to grant Asia

Bibi's request. And there was another fear as well. That was the concern that if Bibi were granted asylum by Her Majesty's Government, Muslims could well riot in the U.K. itself.

In a demonstration of widespread pusillanimity, no country has yet stepped forward to offer this woman asylum.

So where can Asia Bibi go? There are two places where she just might be safe.

The first is the United States, where she could be offered not just asylum, but a place in the Witness Protection Program. Between 1971 and 2013 (the latest year for which figures are available), that Program has successfully protected 8,500 people ("witnesses"), along with 9,900 family members. The American government is unlikely to be worried about possible Muslim unrest should Asia Bibi be given asylum. While Muslims in the UK make up 5% of the population, in the US they make up only 1%, where, likely as a consequence, they are better behaved. The U.S is also 40 times bigger than the U.K. Should Asia Bibi come here, there's more room to disappear in, with a government that has a ready network of safe houses, new identities, and, if need be, plastic surgery.

The second place where Asia Bibi should consider requesting asylum is the Vatican. By doing so, Asia Bibi would be putting the islamophilic Pope Francis on the spot. He who has been insisting that "authentic Islam and the proper reading of the Koran are opposed to every form of violence" would be confronted with the reality of a Christian woman who, living in a Muslim land, falsely accused by Muslim coworkers of blasphemy against Muhammad, was sentenced to death. After spending eight years of her life in prison waiting for that sentence to be carried out, she was finally acquitted by the Pakistani Supreme Court. Two high-ranking Pakistani officials who had criticized the prosecution of Asia Bibi, the Governor of Punjab Salman Taseer, and the Minority Affairs Minister Shahbaz Bhatti, were both assassinated as a result.

But how could Pope Francis, who has been endlessly critical of the West for not admitting all the migrants who want to be admitted, who has even compared those he calls "populists," who wish ill to nobody, but only want to be able to control the number and kind of migrants admitted to their own countries, to Hitler, now turn down Asia Bibi? How could he who has insisted that Christ would have welcomed with open arms all those who might have asked him for asylum, no matter what their background or views, now turn down Asia Bibi's request for asylum? Can he, who has claimed that a failure to welcome migrants is "rooted ultimately in self-centeredness and amplified by populist rhetoric," now reject Asia Bibi, a genuine martyr for her faith who refused to convert to Islam, which might have ended her suffering? If the Pope were to reject her plea for asylum, could he ever again lecture those who want to limit the migration to their own countries, and especially to limit the number of Muslim migrants because of the menacing ideology that they bring with them in their mental baggage?

If the Pope were to decide to give her refuge, as a good Christian should, he would immediately be subject to a barrage of ferocious criticism from Muslims around the world, including many death threats, which might make him start to recognize, as hitherto he has not, the violence that is so essential a part of Islam.

It's hard to know what it will take to open the Pope's mind to the meaning, and menace, of Islam. But the case of Asia Bibi just might do it. He should answer her plea by inviting her, and her family, to live in the Vatican, pop. 1000, one of the best-protected places on earth. Contrary to popular belief, the Swiss Guards are not merely ceremonial, but are carefully chosen Swiss army veterans, often in plainclothes, armed with, and highly trained in using, the latest weaponry. There are about 125 of those Guards, and the same number of Vatican Police, who together equal one-fourth of the total population

of Vatican City.

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