



A Pentecostal Reflection on Christianity and Extremism: Christianity and Book Burnings in the Late Antiquity

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ABSTRACT

This historiographical research sought to cognize why religious extremism has thrived globally through an enquiry into Christian book burnings in the late antiquities. The study posited that the ritual of book burning is a form of oppression and persecution exerted by intolerant religious fundamentalists in their pursuit to shape reading habits, exhume idolatry, magic, and censure philosophical ideologies that challenge a religious belief through prohibition, control, and sanctions. The discussion established that Book burnings in the twenty-first century are religious radicalism and immoderation skewed towards a myopic dimension. Christian Book burnings throughout four historical periods were graphed to deduce the implications of the ritual in the historic-socio cultural setting. The study through historical, philosophical and critical analysis of the ritual attempted to demystify religious opinions which levy sanctions on others who have deviating ideas. The study acclaimed that the use of violence to drive a religious opinion in any context must be despised. The philosophical supposition of this study was founded on these principles: If God is indeed peaceful as His followers uphold, then he will act peaceably and fairly by deterring his devotees from brutishness purportedly intended to censure, chastise and obliterate nonbelievers and their belongings: Nonetheless, if some religious group uses violence to propel their religious impulses, it is barefaced that, they have lost touch with the God of peace, or have malevolently ignored the values of the God of peace. The study contributes to knowledge by probing into a primordial Christian ritual that is detrimental to the peace and sustainability desired in the twenty-first century to serve a piecemeal notice to all religious extremists to denounce excesses.

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INTRODUCTION

Christian fundamentalists, Buddhist militants, Hindu separatists, Islamic Jihadists, and Jewish extremists are a few of the religious movements that at certain dimensions and degrees seek to push forcefully a religious ideology or deliberate and prejudiced vehemence to prevail on presumed

unbelievers. The force of religion is such that, its strong beliefs intoxicate adherents¹ and cripple their conscience which at times takes away their humanness.² A psychologist, Sigmund Freud perceives religion as a neurosis or psychosis of humankind,³ while Karl Marx, a sociologist observes religion as an instrument of class tyranny by linking it to the opium of society.⁴ Nevertheless, Agyapong an anthropologist, designates religion as anthropoids' inmost predisposition and passion to satisfy a transcendental being.⁵ The entire world was amazed at the scene of 11th September 2001, where America experienced a horrendous carnage stirred by religious extremists. Religious extremists will not succumb but carry out to any wavelength dread and knocks on those they regard as unbelievers to prove their staunchness to a religious philosophy.⁶ If religion is not psychosis, opium and an inmost bias, how best will religion be explicated?⁷

The context of this study observes an uncanny religious extremists' ritual wherewith books painstakingly authored by others are markedly burnt to appease a religious ideology' allegedly flouted. Mariya Omelicheva asserts that support for a religious ideology includes participation in various activities of the religion in a non-violent and fierce nature organized by extremist groups.⁸ The assertion of Mariya means that the use of either peace or violence to push a religious ideology is accepted in some religious groups. In southern and middle Ghana several religious groups in various places enact an overall ban on either drumming, noisemaking, or precise actions prior to or within the celebration of a religious festival.⁹ Extremists' biases and dispositions are not classified to certain classes of persons but are entrenched in religious faiths and being pushed by devotees who unsympathetically want it standardized. Religion provokes earnest commitment, feelings, piercing acts, robust discourses and study for practitioners, rivals and the irreligious.¹⁰ The vigor of religion may prejudice and influence academics, legislators, clerics and several people in diverse domains of the society, even if the ideology subscribed to breaches the status quo. Stanton avows that, in the past twenty years, U.S. governments have engaged religious leaders both at home and abroad to suppress radicalism and to educate faith practitioners to avert violent and extremist proclivities.¹¹ This study will scale the backgrounds of radicalism in some religions to expose dashes of religious extremism to understand the magnitudes of its radicalism while recommending ways to lessen the quandaries religion poses to the globe in this regard. The author seeks to analyze what may transpire on the globe

¹ Kwasi Atta Agyapong, "Religion amidst Tares and Weeds: A Pentecostal Perspective on the Hegemony of Non-Religious Movements and Scholarship on Religion in the 21st Century," *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences*, November 8, 2022, 515–38, <https://doi.org/10.38159/ehass.20223121>.

² Susilo Wibisono, Winnifred R. Louis, and Jolanda Jetten, "A Multidimensional Analysis of Religious Extremism," *Frontiers in Psychology* 10 (November 18, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02560>.

³ Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion. Civilization and Its Discontents and Other Works* (Hogarth Press, 1975).

⁴ Claire White, *An Introduction to the Cognitive Science of Religion: Connecting Evolution, Brain, Cognition and Culture* (Routledge, 2021).

⁵ Agyapong, "Religion amidst Tares and Weeds: A Pentecostal Perspective on the Hegemony of Non-Religious Movements and Scholarship on Religion in the 21st Century."

⁶ Mariya Y. Omelicheva, "The Ethnic Dimension of Religious Extremism and Terrorism in Central Asia," *International Political Science Review* 31, no. 2 (March 4, 2010): 167–86, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512110364738>.

⁷ Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*; White, *An Introduction to the Cognitive Science of Religion: Connecting Evolution, Brain, Cognition and Culture*; Agyapong, "Religion amidst Tares and Weeds: A Pentecostal Perspective on the Hegemony of Non-Religious Movements and Scholarship on Religion in the 21st Century."

⁸ Omelicheva, "The Ethnic Dimension of Religious Extremism and Terrorism in Central Asia."

⁹ Justice Anquandah Arthur, *The Politics of Religious Sound: Conflict and the Negotiation of Religious Diversity in Ghana*, vol. 86 (LIT Verlag Münster, 2018).

¹⁰ Agyapong, "Religion amidst Tares and Weeds: A Pentecostal Perspective on the Hegemony of Non-Religious Movements and Scholarship on Religion in the 21st Century."

¹¹ Zack Stanton, It's time to talk about violent Christian extremism. 2021. POLITICO.

<https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2021/02/04/qanon-christian-extremism-nationalism-violence-466034>

if book burning and censorship prevails as a religious ritual and practice; “Where they burn books, so too will they, in the end, burn human beings.”¹²

The study thus adopted a historical methodology to be able to gather evidence of past events, evaluate the evidence and interpret what the evidence reveals about the events in history so as make lucid and informed decisions based on accurate analysis. This write-up surveys from a wider context, religious book burnings with specificity on Christians’ book burnings and censorship from a Pentecostal Perspective.

Pentecostalism

A Pentecostal is a devotee to the Christian movement that underscores the unswerving individual experience of God through baptism with the Holy Spirit (glossolalia). The term Pentecostal derives from the word Pentecost: an occurrence that observed the coming down of the Holy Spirit on Believers of Christ with the speaking of tongues as recorded in the book of the Acts of the Apostles in the bible. Pentecost is also called the Feast of Weeks.¹³ Pentecostalism refers to churches that believe and emphasize the work and gifts of the Holy Spirit at experiential and doctrinal levels.¹⁴ Classical Pentecostals are labelled with the doctrine of initial evidence, a direct special experience of God through baptism with the Holy Spirit and proved by *glossolalia* (tongues speaking). They strive for openness to the power and presence of God with the demonstration of the endowments of the Holy Spirit in a believer.¹⁵

Religious Book Burnings and Censorships

Religions’ book burnings and censorship due to ideological variations have existed from antiquity and have travelled through time and space to this contemporary secular and pluralistic societies. Book burnings cut across religious divides as occurrences of book burnings are seemingly found in most religious groups across the globe as interspersed in historical data. Jeremiah of Anathoth in 600 BC wrote that the King of Babylon shall ravage Judah as narrated in the book of Jeremiah Chapter 36. Jeremiah's parchment was recited before Jehoiakim, the King of Judah, in the company of his chief officials. King Jehoiakim demolished the parchment in fire and then requested to have him arrested. An assemblage of Buddhist monks whose intents were to reactivate Buddhism in the birthplace of Buddha in India (which by that time had degenerated) decided to translate all the old Helabasa Dhamma text into Pali (the language of the Buddha’s homeland) in 5 AD. It is said in the oral tradition that, after everything was translated into Pali, the original Helabasa texts were heaped into a pile of ‘seven elephants high’ and burnt. From this point onwards, Buddhism had to be taught in the Pali language. The Hela who knew nothing of Pali were now unable to make use of all the understanding of Buddhism.¹⁶ In 168 BC, Seleucid monarch Antiochus IV, the Greek general governing Jerusalem, had Jewish law books dismantled into pieces and burnt (1 Maccabees 1:56). Josephus Flavius, the Roman historiographer, reports that in AD 50, a Roman soldier apprehended a Torah document and openly burned it. This episode nearly instigated an Israeli insurgency, and a Roman Procurator’ Cumanus pacified the public by openly hanging the book destroyer. Emperor

¹² Agyapong, “Religion amidst Tares and Weeds: A Pentecostal Perspective on the Hegemony of Non-Religious Movements and Scholarship on Religion in the 21st Century”; M A Hernandez, *Where They Burn Books, They Also Burn People*, Hispanic American Heritage Stories Series (Marcos Hernandez, 2021), <https://books.google.com.gh/books?id=IYlozgEACAAJ>.

¹³ Elizabeth A Livingstone, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (OUP Oxford, 2013).

¹⁴ Kwasi Atta Agyapong, “Will You Not Revive Us Again? (Psalm 85:6): An Evaluation of Revival In The Context Of Evangelical-Pentecostal Movements.,” *Pentecostalism, Charismaticism and Neo-Prophetic Movements Journal*, May 20, 2021, 11–22, <https://doi.org/10.38159/pecanep.2021221>.

¹⁵ Agyapong, “Will You Not Revive Us Again? (Psalm 85:6): An Evaluation of Revival In The Context Of Evangelical-Pentecostal Movements.”

¹⁶ Brannon Parker, “Ancient Book-Burnings: Theravadin Monks Burn Buddha’s Words in Pyre ‘Seven Elephants High.’ History and Culture,” *Buddhist Helabasa Texts - History & Culture*, 2021, <https://brannonparker.com/tag/buddhist-helabasa-texts/>.

Diocletian in AD 303-311, contrary to the custom of pagan lenience, instructed a sanctioned maltreatment of Christians and the burning of their literature. In 650 AD, Uthmān ibn ‘Affān, the third Caliph of Islam after Muhammad, recognized an authorized variety of the Quran and commanded the burning of all other versions.¹⁷

Yad L'Achim, an Orthodox Jewish counter-missionary organization that was at that period a recipient of funding from the Israeli Ministry of Religion on March 23, 1980, officially burnt hundreds of reproductions of the New Testament openly in Jerusalem in protest of the Christians belief.¹⁸ In 1987, a Foundation called Nasir-i Khusraw was set up in Kabul- Afghanistan as a result of the concerted hard work of numerous public societies, scholarships, leading academicians, and memberships of the Ismaili community. This project comprised videos and literature publishing services, a museum and a library. The library remained a mastermind in its wide variety of 55,000 books, accessible to all researchers and students, in the dialects of Arabic, English, and Pashto. In accumulation, its Persian assortment was unmatched – comprising an enormously infrequent 12th-century document of Firdawsi's epic work of genius, The Book of Kings (Shāhnāma). The Ismaili assemblage of the library contained scholarly works for a very long time but with the removal of the Soviet forces from Afghanistan in the late 1980s and the reinforcement of the Taliban forces, the library collection was transferred to the valley of Kayan. That notwithstanding, on August 12, 1998, the Taliban battalions who parade as the Deobandi of Islamic fundamentalist and a Jihadist political movement plundered the media, the gallery, the video amenities, and the public library, extinguishing some books in the fire and dumping the others into a close river. All the books were destroyed, comprising a Quran reserved for more than one thousand years.¹⁹

In 2001, Islamic extremists pressured the Ministry of Culture in Egypt to set on fire six thousand books of homoerotic poetry by Abu Nuwas. Pastor Marc Grizzard, the leader of the Amazing Grace Baptist Church of Canton, North Carolina, planned to burn books burning during Halloween in 2009. The Church, clinging to only the King James Version of the Bible, believed that other versions of the Bible are heretical, and measured both the literature of Christian authors and ministers such as Billy Graham and T.D. Jakes and most melodic genres are sacrilegious expressions. Nevertheless, the coming together of protesters, and a state ecological safety law against public burning, occasioned the church to retreat into the church edifice to ritualistically rip apart and scrapheap the media into a trash can (documented on video and shown on the People for the American Way's Right Wing Watch blog). Nonetheless, the church maintained that the book-burning exercise was successful.

A Baptist Church in North Carolina held a "Halloween book burning" to cleanse the territory of Satan's workings, which included all versions of the Bible apart from King James, prevalent books by many religious writers and even country music. The website for the Amazing Grace Baptist Church in North Carolina avows that they have a biblical injunction to burn the books. The webpage of the church quotes, Acts 19:18-20: *“And those who accepted Christ, came to confess and exposed their activities. Many of them also used curious arts, carried their books, and burned them in the presence of all men. Afterward, they totaled the price of the burnt books, and found it was fifty thousand bits of silver. So greatly did the word of God grow and triumphed.”*

The North Carolina Church also asserts that the Good News Bible, the New International Version Bible, the Green Bible, and the Message Bible, as well as at least seven other versions of the Bible, are Satan's Bibles, according to the website. Attendees will also burn Satan's popular books

¹⁷ T Quinn, *What Do You Do With a Chocolate Jesus?: An Irreverent History of Christianity* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2010), <https://books.google.com.gh/books?id=qgUuQwAACAAJ>.

¹⁸ Israel Shahak and Norton Mezvinsky, *Jewish Fundamentalism in Israel* (Pluto Press London, 2004), 23.

¹⁹ Shafique N. Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages* (Oxford University Press; New York, 2007), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195311730.001.0001>.

such as the literature of heretics comprising the Pope, Mother Teresa, Billy Graham and Rick Warren.²⁰

The New York Reuters reports on September 10, 2010, that when the U.S observed the anniversary of the September 11th attacks with memorial observances, some Christian fundamentalists annulled their scheme and protested by burning the Koran. There were also reports of such abuses in separate incidences across the region. For example, there were at least two incidents of Koran destruction in Lower Manhattan. Additionally, two evangelical ministers not associated with any conventional church burned two reproductions of the Koran in Tennessee. One man in protest of the 9/11 incident ripped pages from the Koran and set them ablaze. In other instances, a man slashed pages from a copy of the Koran and made discourteous gesticulations with it. Spectators were dazed at the sight.²¹

Traditionalist Catholicism was branded by their strong stance in their beliefs, practices, traditions, customs, devotions, liturgical forms, and presentations of Catholic instructions prior to the Second Vatican Council from 1962 to 1965.²² The traditionalists were worshippers, who championed and advocated for the strict adherence and maintenance of traditions, especially to resist change. Traditionalist Catholic seminarians expunged the works they considered heretical in a theological library in 2017 in Boone – North Carolina. The books were thus set ablaze. However, the worshippers who were uncomfortable with the extreme conduct of the home-grown clerical bureaucrats, celebrated Catholic mass in a vehicle-repair workshop as a substitute for the designated church edifice to protest against the book burnings.²³

One of the most current book burnings occurred on 2nd February 2022, the Global Vision Bible Church's pastor, Greg Locke in Tennessee directed a book burning scene streamed live on Facebook. Locke demanded that it was an honor and justice served by his church' to set ablaze cultic resources that they think are a peril to their religious rights, freedoms, and belief patterns. Locke wrote and posted on Instagram that whatsoever is connected to the Masonic Lodge needs to be wrecked. This article thus questions; what would be the fate of the globe, should every religion resolve to attack contrary ideologies in this manner?

Global Historical Christian Book Burnings and Censorship in the Late Antiquity

Late antiquity was the period of change from traditional ancient times to the Middle Ages. It was a period spanning the late third century to the seventh century and a period of rapid change and transformation. Late Antiquity, encompassed the Late Roman, Early Medieval, and Early Byzantine periods (3rd - 7th centuries CE). Late antiquity is cognized as among the utmost noteworthy periods of human history. In the West, Late Antiquity saw the steady fading of traditional culture, government and religion.²⁴ The practice of book burning was recognized and executed through late antiquity. Despite the existence of additional methods of obliteration, such as by throwing them into water bodies and tearing them apart, book-burning was the supreme operative technique of destroying books. Book burning was also for cleansing when books containing contents classified as unsafe or rebellious were destroyed.

This article reflects and scrutinizes book-burning and censorship of scholarly works in Late Antiquity, claiming that the demonization of writings is contrary to the Christian world understanding.

²⁰ Kathleen Miller, "North Carolina Church to Burn 'Satan's Books,' Including Works of Mother Teresa," Raw Story, October 14, 2009, <https://www.rawstory.com/2009/10/n-c-church-to-burn-satans-books-including-works-of-mother-theresa/>.

²¹ Basil Katz and Edith Honan, "Tensions over Koran Spark Isolated Incidents on 9/11," Reuters, September 11, 2010, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-muslims-idUKTRE68709M20100911>.

²² William J Collinge, *Historical Dictionary of Catholicism* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2021).

²³ Peter Feuerherd, "In Came Latin, Incense and Burned Books, out Went Half the Parishioners," National Catholic Reporter, January 27, 2021, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/came-latin-incense-and-burned-books-out-went-half-parishioners>.

²⁴ Ralph W Mathisen, *Violent Behavior and the Construction of Barbarian Identity in Late Antiquity* (na, 2006).

The practice further had a negative bearing on the transmission of literature to the next generation and demonstrates sheer extremism which is suicidal to the survival of a secular and pluralistic society.²⁵ The assumption is that a trivial segment, presumed to be lower than one percent of ancient literature exists today. The part of Christian establishments in the vigorous clampdown and obliteration of literature in Late Antiquity has received astoundingly minimal continued attention from scholars. As to which categories and book types were probable to be besieged, the writer acmes that, accumulating to the supposed heterodox, magic, horoscopes, and hostile-Christian books, other less visibly sorts of books were susceptible to obliteration, censorship, or suppression through the ban of copying texts or documents.²⁶ Texts from philosophical backgrounds, texts which were to serve as a foundation for modern philosophy and science were generally annihilated and immensely becoming a loss to this contemporary generation. The blunders of a precise generation of people will have rippling effects on subsequent generations and that is the scar of the late antiquity's book burnings and censorship on the 21st century.

The initial chronicled instance of Christianity in book burning is the Apostle Paul in Ephesus in the mid-first century. The occurrence launches the connection between book-burning, healing, and contest with demons. In the Acts of the Apostles, Paul did wonders in Ephesus, healing people through exorcism rather more successfully than other Jewish exorcists. Then as many as believed in his teachings surrendered, confessed, and exposed their evil works. Those with curious arts (*ta perierga*) carried their books and they were burned before all men. Many versions of the bible give *ta perierga* as "magical arts" rather than the more literal "curious arts".²⁷ Additionally, the people who owned the books freely brought out their magical books to be burnt and were not forced to surrender them or burnt them by force. In Late Antiquity, the books of a priest called Arius and his devotees, after the first Council of Nicaea in 325 C.E., were burnt for unorthodoxy by the Church leadership. The Council through Constantine, Honorius, and Theodosius approved the verdict that "the Trinity should be accepted by all and any contrary teachings should be termed a heresy."²⁸ In AD 364, a Christian Emperor in Rome named Jovian ordered that the Library in Antioch be burnt after it had been stocked by an assistant to his non-Christian predecessor, Emperor Julian.²⁹ Elaine Pagels, an American Historian of religion claimed that Athanasius commanded monks within the Coptic Orthodox Church in Alexandria in his capacity as bishop of Alexandria in 367 to extinguish all intolerable writings in Egypt, the list of writings to be protected included the New Testament (Athanasius, 367AD). The theologian Priscillian of Ávila in AD 383 was amongst the foremost persons killed by related Christians who branded him as a heretic, while his works of literature were censored and burned. Nestorius, the Archbishop of Constantinople had opinions of the Virgin Mary which was well-thought-out as heretical. A decree by Byzantine Emperor Theodosius II got Nestorius exiled, and his books were burned wherever they were found in 435 AD.³⁰ The tracings of Christian events of book burnings in late antiquity is a clear indictment as most texts which could have served as foundations for knowledge within that transitional period were censored and obliterated.

Historical Glimpses of Christian Book Burnings and Censorship in the Middle Ages (500 AD-1450 AD)

The Christian Crusaders after driving the Muslims out of Toledo, Spain in 1085, struggled and contemplated on what devout rite they must observe, the foreign Roman rites or the Classical

²⁵ Dirk Rohmann, *Christianity, Book-Burning and Censorship in Late Antiquity: Studies in Text Transmission* (de Gruyter, 2016).

²⁶ Rohmann, *Christianity, Book-Burning and Censorship in Late Antiquity: Studies in Text Transmission*.

²⁷ Rohmann, *Christianity, Book-Burning and Censorship in Late Antiquity: Studies in Text Transmission*.

²⁸ Michael Von Albrecht, *A History of Roman Literature: From Livius Andronicus to Boethius: With Special Regard to Its Influence on World Literature*, vol. 165 (Brill, 1997), 1774.

²⁹ Quinn, *What Do You Do With a Chocolate Jesus?: An Irreverent History of Christianity*.

³⁰ Quinn, *What Do You Do With a Chocolate Jesus?: An Irreverent History of Christianity*.

Mozarabic rites? The contention received an answer by a trial with fire. Thus, literature from each of the rites were put into the flames of which the Mozarabic book won.

The regional synod at Soissons in 1121 AD in France, banned the teachings of Peter Abelard, a well-known onward and rational theologian. He was commanded to burn his own book, *Theologia*, because of his unconventional ideas that differed from the existing Christian tradition. In 1382 John Wycliffe, an Oxford theologian, and his contemporaries, first translated the Bible from Latin into English. The Church was against the idea of Scripture being available in supposed informal languages at the time. Consequently, in 1410, Wycliffe's bible translations were burned by the Archbishop of Prague, Zbyněk Zajíc Házmburka, in the court of his citadel at Lesser Town in Prague. John Hus in 1415, spoke in contradiction of the Church's vending of indulgences, and he was also a supporter of Wycliffe's work. Hus was expelled and condemned to be burnt at the stake. A version of the story says that his books were burnt. Another says that on the way to his extinction, his books were set ablaze.

Christian Book Burnings and Censorship in the Early Modern Era (1450 AD- 1750 AD)

The Spanish Inquisition of the 1490s, under the cross-examiner Tomás de Torquemada, burnt a vast quantity of Jewish Bibles and other Hebrew books (alongside supposed heretics books). Also, the Bishop of Toledo, Ximénez de Cisneros, burned 5000 Arabic texts at the public square in Granada. Girolamo Savonarola (an ascetic Italian Dominican friar from Ferrara and a preacher actively involved in the Renaissance), in 1497/8, initiated the Bonfire of the Vanities, cheerleading the obliteration or burning of all that hurt his religious moods, comprising musical instruments, fashion accessories and classic artworks and paintings. He was later excommunicated and executed. John Calvin, the great Protestant reformer in 1522, set ablaze many copies of the Servetus Bible because he didn't approve of it. In 1525, William Tyndale translated the Bible from the novel Hebrew and Greek into English. His translations were accused of holding many mistakes and misinformation, and they were burned after he was strangled and burned at the stake. The King James Bible is founded on his work and all other English translations up through the modern era are premised on Tyndale's translation.³¹ At Mani of Yucatan in Mexico, consecrated books of the Maya were thrown into a fire in 1562 by Fray Diego de Landa (1524-1579), the interim bishop of the Yucatan to drive demons from the hearts of natives. All Mayan writings and paintings alleged to be idolatry were burned which unfortunately were the only printed records of the indigenous Yucatec communities.³²

In 1624, the Pope well-ordered the setting ablaze of Martin Luther's translation of the Bible into German, which was published by Gutenberg. Luther also burned the papal bull as the church attacked him. In the U.S.A, the first recognized book-burning in 1650 was a brochure by William Pynchon of colonist Massachusetts. The book was lifted by the Puritan authorities who sentenced and set it ablaze in Boston by the community executioner.

The author clarifies that, when contrary ideologies or philosophies are ostracized and annihilated, the only truth found becomes the standard for the day and that poses a serious threat to the society because the standard also may lack proper or holistic thoughtfulness in certain dimensions, depths, or veracity in its entirety and such were the effects of book burnings in the early modern era.

Christian Book Burnings and Censorship in the Modern Era (1750 AD -Present)

The burning of books by Christians has persisted from ancient times through to this modern era. Christians who partook in these book burnings observances saw them as a public show of commitment and religiousness. Moreso, they saw them as a direct hostage to demonic activities.³³ In 1873, the Comstock Law banned the distribution or conveyance of indecent, lustful, or immodest resources

³¹ Heather Teysko, "Tudor Minute October 6, 1536: Execution of William Tyndale," Englandcast, October 6, 2022, <https://www.Englandcast.com/2022/10/execution-william-tyndale/>.

³² George Fery, "Burning the Maya Books: The 1562 Tragedy at Mani," Popular Archaeology, October 23, 2020, <https://popular-archaeology.com/article/burning-the-maya-books-the-1562-tragedy-at-mani/>.

³³ Cassidy Captain, "Book-Burning: As Christian As It Gets," Only Sky, August 28, 2018, <https://onlysky.media/ccassidy/book-burning-as-christian-as-it-gets/>.

(comprising books on birth control and human composition) through the conquest of Anthony Comstock—a US posting superintendent, politician, and advocate of Victorian morality. 15 tons of literature, photographs and printing platters were wrecked during his career. Religious leadership, along with parents and teachers in 1948 administered the condemnation and burning of about 2000 comic books by children in Spencer, New York, Binghamton and West Virginia. The Legislator McCarthy Joseph in 1953 put pressure on the State-run Department to destroy materials of debated people, Communists and fellow travelers in their public library. In 1981, The New Living Bible was burned in Gastonia, North Carolina on the entitlement that it remained “a distorted explanation of the King James version” of the Bible. Also, the Congregation of the Full Gospel Assembly in Grande Cache in the 90s in Alberta, Canada, scorched literature observed as hostile toward the will of God. In the year 2000, Harry Potter’s books received staged burnings by churches in Charleston, South Carolina, New Mexico, Alamogordo, Iowa and Cedar Rapids because they captured witchcraft and magic.

Christian Laws against Astrologers and Magicians before the Fourth Century and Implications

Enchantment was commonly and broadly practiced during the antique period, as shown in the papyri and other archival materials like ancient amulets, and tablets. Magic was tied to the rituals, beliefs in the gods and the religious practices of the Roman world. Magic was devoted to acts of marvel-healing, predictive, astrology, and prediction.

Pliny the historian and Elder regarded magic as deceit and distinct from medicine, religion, and research as early as the first century. The magic worked because it was apt to beckon demons.³⁴ Finally, under Christianity, all magic was prohibited by both secular and canon law.³⁵ The use of magic and the practice of astrology was expressly condemned and forbidden and was legally prohibited in the Roman Law spearheaded by the Church.³⁶ The author makes a hypothesis that, whenever major religious faith becomes dominant, there is a tendency to legislate in favor of the majority which is an affront to the peace and sustainability of societies. The Sharia law guides the personal religious practices of Muslims, but whether it should be imposed by the majority on others remain an intense debate.³⁷ Generally, when the majority religious’ practices are imposed on the minority, critics assert that as criminal punishments or placing undue restrictions on freedom while the former sing praise to chastise unbelievers of unbelief.³⁸ Was the Christian legislation against magicians relevant, and how would such radical tendencies affect the socio-cultural values of a pluralistic society?

Reflecting Pentecostally on Christian Book Burnings and Censorship

The researcher from an emic perspective as it relates to the subject being studied led to the adoption of an approach based on reflexivity, to be aware of individual and academic perspectives as it relates to others. The author reflects from a Pentecostal background, yet is fully conscious of the inkling that academics is dialogical in nature. Tweed asserts that historical or ethnographical study requires reflexivity in the study of religions.³⁹ The reflections will firstly asylum the essence of the Pentecostal’s Great Commission and its implications on the peace of the nation vis a vis extremism. Additionally, does the God of the religions sanction these extreme passages of the believers and lastly, what are the Implications and effects of the Christian book burning and censorship.

³⁴ Rohmann, *Christianity, Book-Burning and Censorship in Late Antiquity: Studies in Text Transmission*.

³⁵ Clyde Pharr, “The Interdiction of Magic in Roman Law,” in *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* (JSTOR, 1932), 269–95.

³⁶ Pharr, “The Interdiction of Magic in Roman Law.”

³⁷ K Robinson, “Understanding Sharia: The Intersection of Islam and the Law. Council on Foreign Relations,” 2021.

³⁸ Robinson, “Understanding Sharia: The Intersection of Islam and the Law. Council on Foreign Relations.”

³⁹ Thomas A Tweed, “Between the Living and the Dead: Fieldwork, History, and the Interpreter’s Position,” *Personal Knowledge and Beyond*, 2002, 63–74.

The Essence of the Pentecostal's Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) and its Implications – Is Conversion Conducted through Coercion, Collaboration, or Consent?

Evangelical-Pentecostal Christians claims of a commission received to share the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ to all the nations of the world as in Matthew 28:18-20 of the scriptures. The goal of the commission is to win people from other faiths and beliefs to the Christian faith. Nevertheless, there possibly might emerge tension or distress when the commission to reach others deny personal freedom or cause destruction to lives and properties because they are nonbelievers. A critical examination of the commission to Christians frowns on preaching to win others at the detriment of personal freedom or through radicalism. The great commission from a Pentecostal outlook must not be through coercion or threats but rather through collaboration or consent.

The four (4) diverse underpinnings of Evangelical as well as Pentecostals according to Bebbington are: Conversionism - the opinion that life needs to be transformed, Activism -the demonstration of the gospel in life's journey (effort), Biblicism – absolute trust and esteem for the bible and Crucicentrism- importance on the death of Christ on the cross. The foundations and structure of Pentecostalism as a result are not founded on projecting radicalism or compulsion.⁴⁰ The above discussions situate the great commission of Pentecostal Christians specifically and all Christians, in general, to adhere to collaboration and consensus rather than coercion in carrying out the mandate to share the gospel. The author seeks to reaffirm the need for religious persons to vocalize faith but avoid radicalism because it contravenes the core principles of human dignity as well as godly virtues.

The Peace of the Nation's Vis-a-vis Extremism

A critical enquiry into the concept of peace from interreligious (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) discourses is relevant for contemporary times if peace is to prevail on the continent.⁴¹ The effects of the present violent conflicts waged, pursued, and justified by religious ideas prevail in contemporary religious contexts, and this situation threatens religion's commitment to the peace and security of the nations.⁴² The peace of the nations is hosted by the citizenry who superintend and scrutinize policies and principles that govern their institutions of which religion is part. Why would some religious groups permit ideologies that destroy the social fabric of peace in societies? Extremism of any sort or from any dimension flouts the essentials of peace and must not be considered.

Does the God of Religion Sanction these Extreme Passages?

No major religion may be exempted from complicity in violent conflicts or extremism in variant dimensions throughout history, yet religions' main aim is to connect humans to a transcendental being who thinks well of humans and is eager to give peace and salvation.⁴³ The figure of God as portrayed by most of the major religions of the world is a God who brings peace and glad tidings to mankind. Why then do most of the major religions engage in radicalism and extremism at various wavelengths? What will make the God of peace sanction or direct His subjects to burn the books of others, kill or flog others for alleged blasphemous utterances? The killing of Deborah Samuel a student at Shagari College of Education in Sokoto-Nigeria was acclaimed by some clerics of a religion,⁴⁴ making it weird what religion really stands for, whether for peace or war, salvation, or for destruction. The recent upsurge of violence instigated by religious militant groups against others with dissimilar views are all spearheaded by people who assume, they are on a just cause to help the God they worship to triumph or make progress on the globe. The author seeks to understand why an assumed just and peaceful God will sanction unfair and unpeaceful terror on those who disavow a religious stance.

⁴⁰ Agyapong, "Will You Not Revive Us Again? (Psalm 85:6): An Evaluation of Revival In The Context Of Evangelical-Pentecostal Movements."

⁴¹ Georges Tamer, *The Concept of Peace in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, ed. Georges Tamer (De Gruyter, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110682021>.

⁴² Stanton, It's time to talk about violent Christian extremism. POLITICO.

⁴³ Andrew Singleton, "Religion, Culture & Society: A Global Approach," *Religion, Culture & Society*, 2014, 1–272.

⁴⁴ Priscilla Dennis, "Deborah Samuel's Parents Break Silence, Make Shocking Revelations," Daily Post, May 15, 2022, <https://dailypost.ng/2022/05/15/blasphemy-deborah-samuels-parents-break-silence-make-shocking-revelations/>.

The philosophical and logical supposition of the author hinges on these principles: If God is indeed peaceful as His followers declare, then he will act peacefully and fairly by not flouting and encouraging his subjects to use violence to bring others under his rulership. The inference then is that, if some religious practitioners use violence to propagate their religious ideologies, it is barefaced that, they are not in touch with the God who is assumed to be peaceful, or they might have willfully flouted the prescriptions of the God of peace.

Implications and Effects of the Christian Book Burning and Censorship.

Book burnings have led to the obliteration of some native peoples' secular and religious symbols, especially those connected to their past. Many archaeological artifacts which could serve as the bedrock for the developments and progression of cultures, philosophy and science have been completely wiped off in their entirety, setting history and culture on an anti-clockwise route. Most historical landmarks have been blatantly and irreversibly destroyed due to religious ideological variations which is an unalterable indictment on religion. Insurrection and opposition are mostly the aftermaths of destroying the valuables belonging to others, thereby promoting instability and revolt in communities.

SUMMARY

In summary, do the religions' salvation of the souls of men include destroying the properties and toils of others, burning books, killing alleged persons who do not accept religious dogmas, and stoning those who allegedly blaspheme one's religious philosophy? If that is what religion stands for, then it becomes difficult to affirm, if religion is worthwhile and relevant for the twenty-first century where plurality, relativism and secularism have mounted up and have universally gained grounds. The Pentecostal reflection on book burnings and censorship revealed that, book burnings and censorship are not a Christian spectacle as Jesus Christ, the founder and leader of Christianity never burned books neither did any patriarchs of the faith in scripture condone or carry out book burning and censorship as a practice. Christians should as a result denounce that practice in any dimension as it equates to religious extremism which does not appeal to the twenty-first century and is a clear indictment on the effective spread of the Gospel that Christians preach. Heinrich Heine, in 1821 avowed and has been affirmed by Hernandez in the Hispanic American Heritage stories that, "Where they burn books, so too will they, in the end, burn human beings."⁴⁵ The author reasons that Heine's assertion has come to pass as religious extremists of the twenty-first century have and continue to kill and burn human beings with impunity and this is how come Deborah Samuel was killed for alleged religious blasphemy in 2022.⁴⁶ The study findings affirm Agyapong's assertion that the crux and worth of a religion are found in the role of its devotees in the societies. Run-down of such burdens and consciousness of becoming relevant to society, religion becomes dishonest rites void of applicability and worth.⁴⁷

RECOMMENDATIONS

Promoting religious ideologies in their holistic form without physical violence and attack is the way to go in the twenty-first century. The Modern secular drifts that adhere to philosophies that intend to stifle religion through secularistic opinions are likewise an extremist leaning. All religious ideologies that threaten human lives must be checked appropriately as a pluralistic society does not warrant such unscrupulous radicalization. Religious leaders/clerics must give critical attention to the modus

⁴⁵ Hernandez, *Where They Burn Books, They Also Burn People*.

⁴⁶ Nurudeen Lawal, "Deborah's Killing: What Islamic Clerics Told Governor Tambuwal about Blasphemy and How It Can Be Averted," Legit, May 17, 2022, <https://www.legit.ng/nigeria/1470054-deborahs-killing-what-islamic-clerics-told-governor-tambuwal-blasphemy-how-it-can-be-averted/>.

⁴⁷ Agyapong, "Will You Not Revive Us Again? (Psalm 85:6): An Evaluation of Revival In The Context Of Evangelical-Pentecostal Movements."

operands to reassess and evaluate elements of their beliefs that endanger or threatens human lives and properties.

Universal laws must be enacted where people who take laws into their own hands on the grounds of religious beliefs and violate alleged unbelievers be checked and corrected. Religious tolerance as well as respecting the rights of all those who are unreligious must be protected. National institutions must not be seen as pushing certain beliefs at the expense of other groups, as that has a way of making them indignant. In as much as societies have lost and cannot retrieve many literary genres and relevant classical philosophical works due to Christian book burnings, the actions should be regarded as an indictment of religious beliefs, which should serve as a lesson to religious fundamentalists, with regards to destroying things and persons in pursuit of a religious ideology.

Most of the people and books ostracized and censored have in the long run salvaged Christianity in divergent dimensions. Examples are John Wycliffe's bible translations, Peter Abelard's notion of God and the trinity and William Tyndale's Bible translation. The Great Bible which is the first authorized English Bible in 1539 and The King James Bible are based on Tyndale's work. Additionally, Tyndale's work formed the basis of all other English translations up through the modern era.⁴⁸ Variations should be seen as the spice of life, and antagonistic tendencies must pave for tolerance despite divergent opinions. Looking at issues and opinions from similar outlooks is great, yet divergent perspectives are a worthwhile pearl that encourages critical analysis and further probing. The jam-packed exercise of everyone's religious rights as commonly asserted by religious extremists will lead to chaos and confusion.

CONCLUSION

This article has examined how Christian leadership, theologians and ideologies suppressed antique manuscripts and related concepts at a time of fundamental revolution in the late classical world. The key theory of the study plotted why religious extremism has flourished globally through an enquiry into Christian book burnings and censorship in the late antiquities to inform religious extremists in the 21st century from a Pentecostal perspective. The work from a Pentecostal outlook examined Global historical Christian book burnings and censorship in Late Antiquity. Christian Book Burnings in the middle ages, Early Modern Era and Modern Era were surveyed to understand the Christian Laws that promulgated the Book Burnings and Censorship. Pentecostal Reflections on the Book burnings and censorship in the following dimensions were measured: The essence of the Great Commission of Christians and its implications on extremism, the peace of the nation vis-a-vis extremism and does the God of the religious groups sanction the extreme passages? The deliberations and reflections posits that, extremism in Christianity precisely and other Religious groups in general seems visible and is still escalating around the globe with its negative impact on humans and the entire society. Religion, which promises salvation and peace is creating chaos and is now known as an enigma parading itself as a nuisance because it describes in its sum, a paradox compared to what it stands for. The God who wants to save humanity as stressed by religious schedules, is alleged to have instructed radical proclivities which have the inclination of terminating life and property.

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⁴⁸ Teysko, "Tudor Minute October 6, 1536: Execution of William Tyndale."

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