

PRESERVING CHRISTIANITY IN THE PLACE
OF ITS BIRTH AND IN YOUR OWN BACKYARD



DEFYING
ISIS

JOHNNIE MOORE

PRAISE FOR *DEFYING ISIS*

Johnnie Moore has courageously focused on one of the most alarming and heartrending crises of our time. He bears witness to the war against Christianity which is being waged with horrific brutality by an evil opponent. Everyone should read this and demand their government stand up against barbarism.

—NEWT GINGRICH

FORMER SPEAKER OF THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

This is an important book written by a competent voice at a critical time. Johnnie Moore has become one of the world's leading spokespersons for Christians in the Middle East. When most of the world didn't know about our plight—much less care—he raised his voice. Johnnie has shown in action that we are family with the suffering church. He has come with us in our suffering and pain. Even more than that, he came to our rescue. I hope millions read this book, and care enough to act.

—THE REVEREND CANON DR. ANDREW WHITE

CHAPLAIN, ST. GEORGE'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

BAGHDAD, IRAQ

WWW.FRRME.ORG

In the summer of 2014, ISIS terrorists stormed into Iraq's ancient Christian center and unleashed a genocidal jihad that exiled or killed every Christian man, woman, and child and laid waste to some of Christianity's earliest churches. Half a world away, Johnnie Moore got on a plane and rushed to the region to help. In this book, he relates the stories of the survivors he met—firsthand accounts that give vivid testimony to a powerful Christian love that prevails against satanic violence straight off a Hieronymus Bosch canvass of hell. This primer also draws links between Christian martyrs of today's Middle East and those of first century Rome, and ends with a warning to a complacent West. Every Christian in America should read it, and then help the persecuted.

—NINA SHEA

DIRECTOR OF HUDSON INSTITUTE'S CENTER FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Johnnie Moore has been consistently sounding the alarm and seeking to awaken the church in the West to the existential threat that ISIS poses to Christians in the Middle East and beyond. His timely book underscores the urgency of confronting this evil.

—REP. FRANK WOLF

DISTINGUISHED SENIOR FELLOW

21ST CENTURY WILBERFORCE INITIATIVE

I thank God for Johnnie Moore and for this important book. If Christians do not wake up to this demonic evil and take action against it, God will hold us accountable. As

Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, “Silence in the face of evil is itself evil. Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act.”

—ERIC METAXAS

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *MIRACLES* AND *BONHOEFFER*

This is possibly the most important book of the year. It is not just timely and relevant—the subject makes that so—it is heartbreaking and spirit-inspiring. Written with journalistic passion, historical nuance, and Christian conviction, Moore’s book doesn’t need to elevate these modern martyrs to sainthood, he merely shines a light on the reality of their plight. In doing so, you realize they are the most tangible, gripping examples of the Gospel of Christ’s love in our day.

—DAVID DRURY

CHIEF OF STAFF

THE WESLEYAN CHURCH

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JOHNNIE MOORE



W PUBLISHING GROUP

AN IMPRINT OF THOMAS NELSON

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Published in Nashville, Tennessee, by W Publishing Group, an imprint of Thomas Nelson.

Published in association with Yates & Yates, www.yates2.com.

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ISBN 978-0-7180-3958-5 (eBook)

Library of Congress Control Number: 2015932950

ISBN 978-0-7180-3959-2

15 16 17 18 19 20 RRD 6 5 4 3 2 1

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“The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.”
—**ROMANS 16:20**

PREFACE

Just as this book was going to press, the publisher graciously allowed me to add this preface. The unrelenting stream of ISIS news compelled me to say more. The Middle East today is bursting with jihadists. They are not confined to one country, one locality, or even one organization. They can be found anywhere.

Even in the weary newsrooms that have reported one beheading after another, a new low was reached on Sunday, February 15, 2015, when ISIS warriors released a well-produced video, complete with Hollywood-style camera angles. On the shores of the Mediterranean, apparently near Tripoli, Libya, twenty-one Egyptian Coptic Christians were beheaded for their faith alone. It claimed to be prepared as “a message signed with blood to the nation of the cross.” It wasn’t just a message for the Middle East, it was a message sent to all Christians everywhere.

The faces of the men looked like anyone you’d see at your local coffee shop. They were young, rugged, some even handsome, with shocks of black wavy hair and olive skin tanned deeper by the sun. They were brothers, husbands, fathers from tight-knit families. They were sons. They had taken jobs in Libya to provide for their families back in Egypt.

They should still be alive, but they aren’t. Their blood has polluted the Mediterranean and their twenty-one severed heads have been thrown to the wayside.

Then there was Kayla, a prep school graduate who logged hours of volunteer work in her hometown of Prescott, Arizona. Kayla had a quick laugh, a huge heart, and a focus on the world. She graduated college with a political science degree in 2009. As classmates polished their resumes, she packed her bags. Graduates her age looked for a way to start their career. Kayla started hers spending most of the next two years in India and Israel, volunteering in hope of relieving the suffering of other people. When she did return home, she went to work at an AIDS clinic and an area women’s shelter.

After a year at home, Kayla spent another year in France to learn the language. Then, Kayla saw an opportunity to go to Turkey to ease the suffering of refugees from the surrounding war-ravaged region. Like any twenty-something, Kayla skyped with her boyfriend. She wrote letters to family and friends. She laughed and posed for pictures. She seized every opportunity to help. That’s what led Kayla to Syria on August 3, 2013, to see how she could assist Doctors Without Borders. The next day, extremists kidnapped her.

For the next eighteen months, Kayla’s family received occasional communication that she was alive. Then, on February 10, 2015, Kayla’s grieving family released a statement confirming their daughter had been executed. In the last letter they received, Kayla wrote, “I remember Mom always telling me that all in all, in the end, the only one you really have is God. I have come to a place in experience where, in every sense of the word, I have surrendered myself to our Creator because literally there was no

one else.”

It is with Kayla’s concluding words that I start this book:

“I have a lot of fight left inside of me. I am not breaking down and I will not give in no matter how long it takes. . . . Do not fear for me, continue to pray, as will I, and by God’s will, we will be together soon.”

INTRODUCTION

The dictionary defines *martyr* as “a person who is killed because of their religious or other beliefs.” In the sixteenth century, a Christian “book of martyrs” was famously compiled by John Foxe to insure that subsequent generations of Christians would never forget the tragic stories of those who had given life and limb for the cause of Christ. Foxe begins his classic with these words:

“(The) Church has endured and held its testimony of Christ through every attack brought against it. Its passage through the storms caused by violent anger and hate has been glorious to see, and much of its history is written in this book so that the wonderful works of God might be to Christ’s glory and that the knowledge of the experiences of the Church’s martyrs might have a beneficial effect upon its readers and strengthen their Christian faith.”¹

Foxe’s book has been passed down through generations of Christians. Millions have read and told its stories, and told them as legends from a bygone era. We have celebrated their faith and heroism, and thanked God that we didn’t live in an era where our faith might cause us to be thrown to lions, crucified, beheaded, sold as slaves, impaled on stakes, or buried alive.

Yet, as a shame to our modern world, this barbarism persists; history is replaying itself in places like Iraq and in Syria, and we’re witnessing a new *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs* being written every single day at the hands of terrorists who intend on giving both Christians, and everyone else, one option: *convert or die*.

This is not an imagined or exaggerated crisis, but a very real one.

It’s apparent in the news headlines. It’s present in our nightmares, in the unexpected questions of our children, and in the franticness with which the most powerful leaders in the world are scrambling to address the guerilla nature of a jihadist war that waxes on at the hands of a stateless enemy—whose psychopathic supporters exist in New York, Paris, and Toronto, as they do in Al-Raqqa and Mosul.

The threat facing us is the threat of a thousand kinds of Nazis spread throughout the entire globe without a single vein of conscience restraining their evil. The terror of it all is that these arbiters of hate aren’t confined to a Third Reich. They are dispersed in every corner of the world, quietly “sleeping” in their cells, awaiting the order or opportunity to shed innocent blood to strike terror in us all.

Every drop of innocent blood prompts their celebration to the world’s horror, and every ounce of fear fuels their unbridled evil.

Perhaps at the hands of the strong and good in our world these terrorists will eventually realize—as previous generations of terrorists have—that “love is . . . more powerful than death.”²

But, between now and then, their hate will rage wildly across the globe,

particularly targeting Christians.

They will not win their fight to eradicate the world of Christianity, nor will they win their war with the West, but they might very well win their fight to eradicate the Middle East of it. Through it all have arisen stories of men, women, and children who have given everything for their faith, even their lives, and stories of those who when facing inevitable death lifted their eyes to their God in hope that good will eventually triumph over this evil. The terror they endured jarring the world from its lethargy.

Here I will tell some of their stories so that the world will have the opportunity to remember those who stared down the hell of ISIS with the love of Jesus. I'll also attempt to guide us as to what we can do to combat this threat across the world and in our own backyard.

I've written these words because I've learned to love this browbeaten part of the world with the deepest part of me, and I've found endless hope in its beautiful people—Muslim, Christian, Yazidi, Mandaean, Turkmen, and Kakai—whose lives have been swept up in conflicts they didn't choose and wars they couldn't stop.

I once didn't know their stories, and was embarrassingly uneducated on all that Christians, in particular, have contributed to a region of the world that I thought was entirely Islamic. Thankfully, I was educated by Muslim friends in the Middle East on all that their Christian neighbors have done in the region for two thousand years. All of that contribution now threatened by people who manipulate religion as a means to behead journalists, sell children as sex slaves, burn prisoners of war alive, throw people off buildings, and leave no debauchery to imagination in their attempt to forcibly convert—or kill—anyone that stands in their way.

The stories of those who have defied them with courage and faith will inspire us, and they will shame us for doing so little, so late, in this time of such great need.

They will also warn us to awaken to this threat slithering its way through the dark corners of our broken world, for *the ambition of these maniacs is to do here what they've done there.*

They aim to make the West the killing fields that they have made the Middle East, and to ensure that no one who disbelieves in their perverted ideology will have the opportunity to preach their own.

Their faith is not an Islamic one, but a satanic one.

The threat of ISIS is a threat to the livelihood of every sensible person on the planet, and in its crosshairs is the faith of the world's two billion Christians and nearly all of its Muslims, Jews, Hindus, and Buddhists.

If they have their way, you won't live another day.

There's nothing in the world truer than that.

That's why you should read this book.

PART ONE



WHAT ISIS IS DOING

1

**BURN THEIR CHURCHES AND KILL
THEIR PASTORS**

It was midnight in Damascus, 2:00 p.m. in my hometown in California, when I received an e-mail with only two words in its subject line: “Awaiting death.”

The sender of the message was in Syria, and while I had heard of him, I had never met him. Yet, somehow, I felt eerily close to him. He was a faithful Christian pastor who hadn’t a vein of violence in his body. But what he did have was love for those he’d served for so long—a love that waged on despite the hatred encompassing his city.

There once were many pastors like him in Syria. That country’s Christian communities had thrived since Paul himself preached in Damascus after his conversion on the road to that ancient city. In fact, it was in Syria that the word “Christian” was first used at all.

Within the Middle East, Syria was once as famous for its two million Christians as it was for anything else. They were pillars of society, living and thriving as neighbors to Muslims whom they served without prejudice. Their mysterious hillside monasteries had maintained the same intrigue they had when they were first constructed, many more than a thousand years ago.

Syria was so Christian, in fact, that a certain group of Syrian Christians had preserved Aramaic—the very dialect that Jesus had spoken. They spoke it in their communities and people traveled from the world over to their villages just for the opportunity to hear the Lord’s Prayer prayed exactly as it had been heard from Jesus’ lips to his apostles’ ears, two thousand years ago.

Until our very modern times, Syria, along with Iraq and Egypt, were the seats of thriving Christian communities that had been a light to the world before Western Christianity was a glimmer in anyone’s eye. As I wrote in an op-ed in February of 2014:

Christianity began in the East, not the West . . . the apostle Paul—who was on the road to Damascus when he encountered Christ—would have told the story of his conversion while heading to “Syria.” . . . and to this day there are as many Christian holy sites in that nation as anywhere else in the world.¹

The pastor that e-mailed me that evening now lived in a very different Syria. He lived in a Syria ripped to shreds by war; a Syria whose ancient Christian populations lay decimated in its wreckage and blood.

He wrote me that night from a city—once famous for its thousands of Christians—now made famous for the brutality of its conflict. He wrote me from a city whose streets were lined with dead bodies, whose buildings had been reduced to rubble, and whose future was as bleak as any place on the planet.

He was one of the last surviving Christians, and to this day I have no idea whether he survived.

He simply couldn't let himself leave when everyone else had fled, or died, in the war. This city was his home. There were still people there to care for, and he was God's shepherd to those people. And as we've all been taught from lessons that go all the way back to biblical times, shepherds struggle with the thought of leaving a single sheep behind.

If one sheep lies wounded, a shepherd is conditioned to fight with all his might for that one—and this shepherd stood in a blood bath of meticulous and intentional destruction by the very incarnation of hell itself born in the brutality of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS—also sometimes referred to as ISIL, the Islamic State, or, in Arabic, as DAESH).

The absolute horror in his voice screamed off the page, as I read what he had written in an e-mail using his cell phone sent during the middle of a terrifying night:

I am here in my room sitting in darkness because we now only receive one hour of electricity per day. It's around midnight. I'm waiting here with others in my building as we play hide and seek with death.

As I write, another two mortars just fell on the building in front of us, another on the building to the right, and another one on the building on the next street over.

So far, we have been spared.

But are we next?

When will it be our turn?

Should I just stay in my bed so that I'll die in peace, or should I go to the ground floor of the building so that I might be able to escape?

But how long should I stay here?

Should I try and sleep or is it better to stay awake to feel the moment when Death comes riding on one of these mortars?

Wow!

Just now, it finally hit us.

Shaking this big building I am living in.

The windows pushed out violently, and I can hear horrifying screams from everywhere, all around me. Yet, except for the flash of light, there are no lights.

I can't even see what's going on.

I can only hear it.

I think I've decided it's better to stay in my room and await death.

Another mortar just hit . . .

I'm just going to be quiet.

What happened to that pastor that night was not an accident. He didn't get caught in the cross fire unintentionally. He was a casualty of a war that was meant to take his life.

The goal of ISIS from the very beginning has been to ethnically cleanse their land, and eventually the world, of Christians. Their hatred doesn't end with Christians, they also intend on wiping out all moderate Sunni Muslims, Shiites, and every member of ancient religious minority sects like the Yazidis. Their hate knows no bounds and their mission has been relentlessly and successfully pursued.

But make no mistake, they take particular joy in killing Christians.

CHURCHES ARE NOT places where people ought to bleed to death because of bullet wounds. Mothers ought not be sold into sexual slavery, along with their nine-year-old daughters. And Christians—and their priests and pastors—ought not be threatened, robbed, harassed, kidnapped, crucified, tortured, or even beheaded because they simply cared for the poor of their community in the name of Jesus.

Yet, on any given day in Iraq over the last ten years, these horrors have played themselves out thousands of times. Just when no one believed things could get any worse, our world has watched as the barbarism of ISIS has made its fatal march across an already-battered Iraq. ISIS has brought an incarnation of hell itself into monasteries and churches, the homes of peace-loving believers, and on the streets of ancient cities where the severed heads of all those who've stood in their way are routinely on display.

ISIS has arrived in our modern time with a premodern cruelty that our world has mostly forgotten. At its very core is an unrelenting hatred for Christianity, and other religious minorities, that seeks their total extinction whether they live in Iraq, Syria, or in the United States. They also hate those who actually follow the Islam that ISIS professes guides them, and have killed more Muslims than anyone else.

They will stop at nothing and would willingly sacrifice their own lives to take the lives of all who do not submit to their ideology. If you live in any metropolitan city in the world, you can rest assured that they aren't far away. They are there, quietly biding their time, awaiting their opportunity to shed innocent blood.

They represent an affront to every sensible thing in our modern world, and they will leave our world a place of unrestrained horror if they have their way.

Just ask those who were worshipping at the Our Lady of Salvation church in Baghdad on October 31. On this particular morning, the number of dead totaled fifty-eight, with blood so far-flung that it had stained the ceiling. Islamic radicals who were dressed as security guards had taken the entire church hostage. When they locked the doors, the bloodletting began.

One elderly woman watched as her seventy-year-old husband gasped for his last breath. Another woman rocked between wailing and silence as she stood in the church's crypt next to her daughter who was both newly married and newly pregnant, and now newly dead.

Two of those who had been killed were priests.

Jane Arraf, the courageous reporter who rushed into the havoc told Public Radio International, "There are so many to be buried, the graveyard manager tells the families that they only have five minutes each."²

One of those she met in the chaos put it simply: “There is no future for Christians in Iraq.”³

He may have been right.

The men, women, and children there were targeted on that day for one single reason: their Christian faith. And who were those who claimed responsibility?

The Islamic State of Iraq under its newly appointed leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi . . . that’s who.

But this was not in 2014 or 2015 as ISIS marched from village to city massacring the innocent along the way. The October 31–church massacre in Baghdad was in 2010, a full four years before ISIS captured one contiguous piece of Iraqi and Syrian land the size of the United Kingdom.⁴ This was years before the ISIS guerilla war had recruited as many as two hundred thousand serial killers⁵ with the intent of hunting Christians, Yazidis, and others, and slaughtering them with less care than butchers give to sheep. This was a half-decade before ISIS was collecting between 1.6 and 3.5 million dollars a day selling oil on the black market, allowing them to pay their mercenary fighters salaries that doubled the average income for most people in the region.⁶

Yet, this much-publicized attack in 2010 wasn’t even the beginning. As Nina Shea of the Hudson Institute notes, between 2003 and the arrival of ISIS, the Iraqi Christians were subjected to a myriad of “deliberate church bombings and assaults, as well as assassinations, an epidemic of kidnappings, and other attacks against clergy and laity alike. In recent years, particularly since 2004, a million of Iraq’s Christians have been driven out of the country by such atrocities. This can be rightly called targeted religious cleansing, and it is a crime against humanity.”⁷

In Baghdad alone, since 2003, forty of the city’s sixty-five churches have been bombed. In all, more than one hundred churches across Iraq, many of them ancient churches where Christians have worshipped continually for centuries, have been attacked, bombed, or destroyed entirely. Presently, every church in the country that is still operating has constructed a wall around the building. The walls are “blast walls” so that the effect of car bombs can be diminished because it’s no longer a matter of “if” but a matter of “when” they’ll be attacked.

For many years there were warning signs everywhere that these radicals had one intended goal: wiping out Christianity entirely from the region of its birth. The world stood quietly by while Iraq’s population of 1.5 million Christians was picked off one by one. Now, at best, only 10 percent remain, and they remain living lives of quiet desperation.

The ISIS plan is becoming reality as the dreams of two-thousand-year-old Christian communities lie in rubble between the Tigris and Euphrates. The place where God first made man is the place where evil men are attempting to use the name of God to destroy mankind.

Yet, after a decade of warnings and an unrestrained escalation of threats, the remaining Christians still hold their faith dear, refusing to convert, and therefore choosing to die.

The few that have survived waste away in refugee camps—having traded their secure livelihoods for makeshift tents. They have been forced to exchange their homes

for a ramshackle existence. Their faith cost them everything, and yet, they adorn their decrepit dwellings with a cross—raised high into the sky and lined with lights to make sure the terrorists know they still hold on to it all.

While their reality seems so entirely separate from our own, and while it might seem unimaginable, the fact is that the same ideology that has nearly destroyed them is incubating in our country and in every country in the world.

Their reality could be our reality more quickly than any of us realize.

The threat of ISIS isn't just a threat to our Christian brothers and sisters in Iraq and Syria. It is a threat to every one of us on planet earth. It's already rearing its fierce head, and if they cannot find a way to enslave us, they will find a way to make us live in perpetual fear. It's only a matter of time. If something significant doesn't change very quickly, the churches and Christian communities in the West will become ground zero in their attempt to rid the world of those who will not embrace their deformed ideology.

It only takes one ISIS sympathizer to turn your church, school, business, or community into the frontlines of their global jihad.

THE ISIS PLAN to rid the world of Christians isn't clandestine. It's not a carefully guarded secret confined to quiet meetings behind closed doors. It's not even a dream to be realized only when the Islamic State has consumed the entire world. On the contrary, ISIS is so dedicated to perpetrating a Christian holocaust that they talk about it boldly and often.

In fact, in October 2014, the cover photo of the magazine published by ISIS was a picture of St. Peter's Square in the Vatican. With utter and complete audacity, ISIS had superimposed their chilling black jihadist flag on the ancient Egyptian obelisk that adorns the center of St. Peter's Square. Their cover article promised to "break the crosses" and "trade and sell the women" of the Christians. In every public appearance or written statement by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi—the infamous leader of ISIS—he mentions specifically that they intend to march all the way to Rome. It is noteworthy that he didn't select New York City, Paris, or London. The plan at the heart of the ISIS threat is to plant their radicalism into the heart of St. Peter's Square, and to raise their black flag over one of the cities that most symbolizes Christianity.⁸

They would revel in the opportunity to have the Pope endure the same fate as St. Peter himself, and then behead every priest and parishioner in a grotesque display of power and terror. They would love to put the severed heads of those working in the Vatican atop Bernini's sculptures lining St. Peter's Square. They would turn St. Peter's Square into a river of "infidel" blood and its Basilica into a mosque, after raiding the Vatican's museum and archives.

They would crush her ancient statues, burn her priceless art, and turn the Sistine Chapel into a market for sex slaves, or a prison for those awaiting execution. The executions would take place prominently, publicly in St. Peter's square. The leader of ISIS would take the Papal apartment as his home with the entire world as his goal.

This isn't a far-fetched dream they aim to realize. This is a rock-solid goal they are pursuing at this very moment, and they believe entirely that they are capable of