



Written by [James Heiser](#) on December 24, 2010

Iraqi Christians Cancel Christmas Celebrations

The plight of the Church has been largely ignored by the Western nations which spearheaded the invasion of Iraq in 2003; many American Christians may be unaware that their Iraqi brethren are facing a wave of persecution which threatens to drive out the Church through a campaign of terror.

The persecution of Iraqi Christians reached a new level with the [October 31 massacre](#) at a church in Baghdad. The siege at the Church of our Lady of Salvation left 58 dead and 78 wounded, the most brutal incident of anti-Christian violence since the 2003 invasion. As the Associated Press reported on November 1:



Pope Benedict XVI denounced the militants' assault as "ferocious," the White House condemned it as "senseless" and Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki said it harkened back to the days of sectarian warfare between Muslim sects.

Christians who cowered for hours inside the stone building that used to be their peaceful sanctuary wondered why they were yet again the target of violence.

"They are criminals and more than criminals. What type of man kills people at prayer? What have we done to receive this?" said Aida Jameel, a 65-year-old Christian woman who was shot in her leg.

The campaign underway in the Obama administration to present a sanitized version of Islam is laid bare as a fiction which becomes less plausible every day. A President who can praise [Indonesian "toleration"](#) even though 700 churches have been attacked in Indonesia since 1998 is sufficient evidence that his administration is manifestly incapable of confronting the bloody reality of Islamic jihad.

Now that two successive American presidents have declared victory in Iraq, the persecution of the Church targets a remnant whose only defense may be wholesale emigration.

According to an Associate Press story (["Iraqi Churches Cancel Christmas Festivities"](#)), Iraqi Christians understand the significance of their current plight:

On Tuesday, al Qaeda insurgents threatened more attacks on Iraq's beleaguered Christians, many of whom have fled their homes or the country since the church attack. A council representing Christian denominations across Iraq advised its followers to cancel public celebrations of Christmas out of concern for their lives and as a show of mourning for the victims.

"Nobody can ignore the threats of al Qaeda against Iraqi Christians," said Chaldean Archbishop Louis Sako in Kirkuk. "We cannot find a single source of joy that makes us celebrate. The situation of the Christians is bleak."

Church officials in Baghdad, as well as in the northern cities of Kirkuk and Mosul and the



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southern city of Basra, said they will not put up Christmas decorations or celebrate midnight Mass. They urged worshippers not to decorate their homes. Even an appearance by Santa Claus was called off.

Prior to the 2003 invasion, al Qaeda was not a threat to Iraqi Christians because the terrorist organization was not operating in Iraq, as President Bush admitted in an ABC News interview over two years ago. Now, with all remaining American troops scheduled to withdraw from Iraq by the end of next year, a dwindling Christian population dare no longer celebrate one of its most important festivals for fear of bloody persecution at the hands of their Muslim neighbors.

For many of those Christians driven from their homeland by Islamic terrorists, the future means making their home in neighboring nations, or even traveling to the United States. According to the AP report:

Even before the Oct. 31 church attack, thousands of Christians were fleeing Iraq. They make up more than a third of the 53,700 Iraqis resettled in the United States since 2007, according to State Department statistics.

For those of the Christian remnant who choose to remain in their homeland, the Christmas scenery often looks like a war zone:

In Baghdad's Karradah neighborhood, where many of the city's remaining Christians live, churches were guarded by security forces Wednesday and surrounded by razor wire. Shop owners said few people were buying the Christmas trees and Santa Claus toys on sale.

Ikhlas Bahnam, a Christian in the neighborhood, vowed to go to Mass on Christmas Day, despite what she called the government's failure to protect her small minority. But she won't be visiting friends during the holiday season because all of them have fled the city.

"We did not put any decorations inside or outside our house this year," Bahnam said. "We see no reason to celebrate."

In Mosul, 225 miles (360 kilometers) northwest of Baghdad, the Rev. Faiz Wadee, a Syrian Orthodox priest, said there will be no public Christmas celebrations there.

And Christians in Iraq's second-largest city of Basra have also called off all celebrations, said Saad Matti, a Christian legislator on the Basra provincial council.

"There will be only a small Mass in one church in Basra without any signs of joy or decoration and under the protection of Iraqi security forces," he said. "We are fully aware of al Qaeda threats."

As Christians enjoying the ease and opulence which are taken for granted in the West gather for their Christmas observances, one hopes that their prayers will be for their persecuted brethren. The Savior's birth at Bethlehem was met by King Herod's slaughter of the Holy Innocents, and many churches observe the Festival of St. Stephen on the day after Christmas — a most apropos moment to remember that the days of the martyrs are not a time of the distant past.

Photo of Iraqi Christian: AP Images



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