

Faith

Persecution of Christians a Global Epidemic

BY TROY ANDERSON

WHEN RELIGIOUS-FREEDOM advocate Johnnie Moore first heard about the mass beheadings and crucifixions of Christians in the Middle East, he was skeptical.

He'd heard of an alarming increase in the persecution of believers. But the reports coming out of ISIS-held regions in Iraq and Syria strained credulity. So in late 2014, Moore traveled to Mosul in northern Iraq to see for himself.

There he met Sister Diana Momeka, the nun who became so well known for her valiant defense of persecuted Christians in the Middle East that she was invited to testify before Congress in May 2015.

Moore found her caring for some of the tens of thousands of middle-class Christians who lost their homes

and jobs to ISIS. Many families were struggling to survive, living on the streets or in abandoned buildings.

Moore recalls: "She told me, 'I love America. It's a beautiful country, such wonderful people.' And she said, 'I have a doctor degree from an American university. I studied there.'"

But what she said next stunned him. "You take care of your pets so well," she remarked, her eyes searching. "So why are you so silent in the face of our genocide?"

Moore returned home to write a book exposing the persecution, *Defying ISIS: Preserving Christianity in the Place of Its Birth, and in Your Own Backyard*.

Moore says Islamic terrorists' genocide against Christians in the Middle East is just part of a larger global assault on Christianity — a crisis that the world and the previous administration have largely ignored.



MOORE



"Why are you so silent in the face of our genocide?"

— Sister Diana Momeka

The most dramatic increase in Christian persecution in the modern era is unfolding before our eyes, experts say. Over 100 million Christians suffered for their faith last year alone, and many of them paid the ultimate price.

According to Open Doors USA, considered the world's largest outreach to help persecuted Christians, the problem is "more extreme than ever."

Hundreds of thousands of Christians are fleeing religious cleansing in the Middle East and Africa. In North Korea alone, 70,000 believers are imprisoned in labor camps. The number of Christian martyrs is sharply spiking around the globe.

Over 7,000 Christians were killed for faith-related reasons last year, and some 2,400 churches were destroyed or damaged, the organization reports.

Open Doors President David Curry remarks, "Every year for the past three years we've essentially seen a near-doubling in people we can document who are martyred for their Christian faith."

He says the statistics actually understate the scope of the crisis. His organization only reports persecution it can independently verify.

Among the horrific incidents coming to light:

- Today, Christians are among the most persecuted religious group in the world. The U.S. State Department estimates believers in more than 60 nations face persecution from their governments simply because of their beliefs.
- The shocking death of a Chinese



TARGETING BELIEVERS Local women react in horror after al-Shabab terrorists killed 147 people, mostly Christian students, at Garissa University in Kenya.

pastor's wife, who was buried alive by a bulldozer while protecting her church from demolition.

- The torture and death of Christian humanitarian worker Kayla Mueller, who was forced to be ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's sex slave.
- The massacre at Garissa University College in Kenya, where the militant group Al-Shabaab singled out Christian students, killing 142 execution style.
- The flight of some 600,000 Christians from Syria since the civil war broke out there in 2011.
- The videotaped beheadings by ISIS in February 2015 of 21 Egyptian Coptic Christians on a remote Mediterranean beach.

The initial White House statement about the massacre in Egypt somehow avoided mentioning either the word "Christian" or the word "Islamic" — the fact that all the murdered people were Christians appeared to be unimportant.

Bill Donohue, president of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, says the Obama State Department did too little to fight this intensifying global threat.

Donohue sees a connection between the "soft persecution" of believers on television and in the arts with the explosion of violent persecu-

tion worldwide.

From relentless attacks on Christians by the "Bill Mahers of the world," to the rise in assaults on believers and destruction of church property in Europe, to the plague of the "machete boys" in the Middle East, Donohue says the persecution of Christians is the worst he's ever seen.



MUELLER

"One tends to feed the other," Donohue says. "After all, if you are constantly beaten up in the entertainment media and looked upon as the enemy, you are not going to get a

whole lot of sympathy when these people are being killed in the Middle East."

While there is no comparing the violent persecution of Christians in the Middle East with anti-Christian intolerance in the United States, Donohue sees the two as interrelated.

He suggests that could explain why the Obama administration, heavily influenced by its friends in the entertainment industry, has done so little to combat the genocide.

"I'm not saying that Hollywood is to blame for ISIS," he says. "I am saying that Hollywood is to blame for softening up the American public by beating up on Christians, particularly Catholics, in a relentless fashion, the likes of which they never treat any other demographic group."

One hopeful sign: Political and reli-

Author Warns Slaughter Is Just Beginning

Mary Eberstadt, a former speechwriter to U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz and author of *It's Dangerous to Believe*, says that a new chapter has opened in the Western world in which people of faith, especially tradition-minded Christians, are on the receiving end of militant secularism.

And it doesn't appear there will be an end to the Christian struggle anytime soon.

"Activists within progressivism and secularism are treating believers unjustly on a number of fronts," Eberstadt says. "There are lots of details... about attacks on Christian education, Christian homeschooling, Christian charities, and other kinds of discrimination, that are a result of this new intolerance toward religious believers." — T.A.

gious leaders are increasingly speaking out. During the GOP primaries, Donald Trump characterized the slaughter of Christians in the Middle East early on as genocide.

Donohue says the U.S. government has plenty of tools at its disposal, beyond sending troops overseas, to counter religious persecution.

But Moore, echoing Sister Diana, wants to know what Christians themselves are willing to do. He urges them to raise their voices en masse and insist that their fellow believers be defended.

"One famous rabbi told me that there were 20 million Jews in the world during the Holocaust," Moore says. "He said, 'There was probably more that we could have done, but there were only 20 million of us, and 6 million of us died.'"

Then the Rabbi noted that the world has 2.2 billion Christians.

"He looked just totally perplexed when he said: 'One thing I don't understand is there are billions of Christians on planet Earth. So why aren't you raising your voices more for each other? Why aren't you fighting more for each other?'" □