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Guest Editorial

The Destruction of Christianity in Iraq Since the American Invasion

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The American invasion was meant to install democracy and fresh hope. However, democracy is a long way away and secular law, which protected the rights of Christians, women, minorities, and others, during the reign of Saddam Hussein, was replaced by de facto Islamic Sharia law. Therefore, the Christians of Iraq have not only been betrayed by the American led coalition but they have also seen their legal status diminish. So why did America pave the way for the destruction of Christianity in Iraq?

Before we focus on this neglected issue it is important to look back at Iraq prior to the invasion. Therefore, when we look back we notice that terrorism was not a problem in Iraq and Islamic radicalism was put down by the central government. More important, from a Christian perspective, it was clear that Christians had options within the old Iraq under Saddam Hussein because Christmas and Easter was openly celebrated and they mixed freely with their Muslim neighbours. Given this, the Christians of Iraq had a future and they felt that they belonged to the nation state.

Of course major problems existed for people who challenged the government of Saddam Hussein, however, for the majority of Christians they merely got on with their lives and inter-mixed freely with the majority Muslim population. Indeed, the Deputy Prime Minister, Tariq Aziz, was Christian and his co-religionists had a vital role to play in society. Given this, Christian women could dress how they liked and Christians never feared radical Islam, terrorism, or being murdered by Muslim radicals. Of course political persecution applied to the whole of society if they challenged the regime, but this applied to people of all faiths and the Kurds and Shia who opposed the regime were dealt with brutally. Yet for the Christian community it was the American led invasion which would turn their world upside down.

Because shortly after the invasion radical Sunni Islam began to spread via wealthy Muslim nationals who opposed the American led invasion, organizations, and via international terrorist networks. These militants began to turn on both the Shia Muslim majority and the Christian minority. Within months many churches had been destroyed and Christians were killed alongside the more numerous attacks against the Shia community. Therefore, new Iraq, from its birth, was a nightmare and this nation would witness a huge exodus of Christians and Mandaean from their homeland.

But why is it that the majority of Christians and Mandaean fled Iraq under America and not Saddam Hussein? The answer put simply appears to be obvious: because unlike the regime of Saddam Hussein which did not support the destruction of the Christian community, the Americans, and their allies, simply do not care enough about this issue. Therefore, Christians and minorities have been abandoned and now it is open season on them and other minorities.

Of course many American soldiers have tried to protect churches and minority communities, however, the leaders of the USA and United Kingdom are indifferent at best, or at worse, they simply do not care about their plight. Instead both nations focused on introducing Islamic Sharia law and no special zones were created to protect the Christian community and other neglected minorities, like the Mandaean, Shabaks, Turkmens (who are Muslim), and Yazidis. This policy led to alienation and Christians and other minorities became easy targets because they had no military forces to protect them.

Before my conclusion it is important to mention the other point of view. After all, it is vital to mention that many Sunni Muslim fighters believe that they are fighting to protect their rights and they feared losing power to the Shia majority. Also, many Sunni Muslims were caught up in a war they did not start and with each new death the spiral of violence increased. Therefore, the Shia, Kurds, and the Christian community, were deemed to be traitors in the mindset of many Sunni fighters.

Also, vast numbers of Sunni Muslims have been killed by coalition forces and by Shia Muslim militia groups. Shia Muslims have also persecuted minorities in places like Basra; however, these attacks are on a lesser scale when compared with Sunni attacks. Yet the Christians, Mandaean, Shabaks, and Turkmens, are innocent at all levels because they don't have any major militias to protect them and they have no power within the government of Iraq.

Therefore, the destruction of Christianity in Iraq is taking place because of misguided American policies and because the Christian community is not deemed to be important. So did more Christians leave Iraq under Saddam Hussein or under the American led coalition? And did Saddam Hussein introduce Islamic Sharia law or was it introduced under the American led coalition? Both times the negative answer belongs to the American led invasion because Christians and other minorities have fled their homeland because they feel abandoned and completely marginalized.

Lee Jay Walker serves as Tokyo Correspondent of The Seoul Times. He specializes in international relations and geopolitics. He is also involved in analyst work and research on business. After finishing BA degree in East European Studies at the University of London, He earned MA degree in Asia Pacific Studies in Nottingham Trent University. He also studied business at London Institute.

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