



Muslims Identify Christians As Western Enemies

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BAGHDAD/MOSUL, Iraq -- Being a Christian, "of the same religion as the Western soldiers," is enough to be considered an enemy in Iraq, says a Chaldean monk.

Father Waheed Gabriele Tooma's statement was echoed by Fides news agency, recalling the recent incident involving two Chaldean monks of the Dora monastery south of Baghdad, kidnapped a few days ago by unknown individuals and released two days later.

The "flourishing industry of kidnapping knows no end," the agency reported. The targets of religious Muslim fundamentalism are foreigners, wealthy Iraqis -- because of the ransom --, and religious personnel, especially Christians.

Father Tooma, religious brother of the kidnapped monks, said to Fides that "Iraq is a nation that dies every day, and not only because of lack of food and medicines. It dies morally and culturally, deprived of its identity, freedom, and right to live in peace as the other nations of the earth. The path of this nation is dark; it seems to be without a future. Children die no sooner they are born, without a smile."

It's a situation from which the people flee. "More than 3 million have emigrated abroad, among them, Christians," he said.

"Only in the last months, after the attack on the Christian Churches, more than 50,000 Iraqi Christians have emigrated to Syria, Jordan, and Turkey, because of the threats received by Muslim fundamentalists. What is the offense? Being Christians, that is, of the same religion as the Western soldiers."

On Dec. 7, two attacks destroyed the Armenian-Catholic church of Mosul and the Chaldean Episcopal Palace of that city. They were part of a series of attacks against churches which began in early August, when four churches in Baghdad and one in Mosul were hit. Dozens of Christians died in these attacks. Attacks against stores owned by Christians in Iraq started earlier.

From Mosul, the Dominican Sisters of the Presentation recently confirmed, in a statement sent to ZENIT, that the situation of danger for Christians is such that many have been obliged to emigrate "to Syria or Jordan, and have left all their property to save their lives."

The nuns' house in the Iraqi city is located in an area between "the Americans, on one side, and the terrorists on the other," which means a constant danger that impedes them for days from leaving the convent, even to go to Mass.

Despite the problems, the sisters are not thinking of leaving, given that, as they affirmed, "we are here, in this neighborhood, our neighborhood, and we will stay to witness to Christ crucified but risen from the dead."

The congregation has seven communities in Iraq, in which some 40 religious work in education and run residences for young people, children's homes, and health centers such as St. Raphael's Hospital in Baghdad.

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