



Written by [John F. McManus](#) on July 24, 2014

Iraq's Christians Attacked by Militant Islamists

Early in July 2014, for the first time in 1600 years, there was no Catholic Mass celebrated in the city of Mosul in northern Iraq. Islamic militants calling themselves the "Islamic State of Iraq and Syria" (ISIS) had taken control of the region. They immediately targeted the minority Christians, many of whom fled north into territory controlled by Kurds.



On June 29, the leader of ISIS, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, told his followers from the pulpit in Mosul's Great Mosque how to proceed with [establishing a caliphate](#) (an Islamic state) with him as its religious leader. "Do jihad in the cause of God," he urged. "If you knew about the reward and dignity in this world and the hereafter through jihad, then none of you would delay in doing it." Al-Baghdadi's followers performed as directed.

When 45-year-old retired army officer Maan Abou, a Christian, asked the newly established ISIS court in Mosul if the threats against him and his family were accurate, he learned that "the man there told me that I should leave my house, car, money and properties behind." Christians were told they had three choices: convert to Islam, pay a huge fine and live as slaves, or be executed. A few have converted, most have fled.

Before the U.S.-led invasion in 2003, approximately 1.5 million Christians, mostly Catholics, called Iraq their home. [They could trace their ancestry back almost two millennia](#), well before Mohammed was born. Though he was surely not a paragon of freedom, Saddam Hussein's leadership of the nation saw Christians living side-by-side with Muslims and others in relative peace. All that changed during the past decade that saw Hussein's regime toppled and him executed. [Fewer than 500,000 Christians remain in their homeland — even they are fleeing.](#)

Iraq's Shiites now fear the rising power of ISIS which is led by the Sunni faction. When there are no Christians left in the country, the Sunni-Shiite rivalry will surely escalate. [If ISIS becomes dominant, neighboring nations, even those Muslim-controlled, would have much to fear.](#)

The United States, still dependent on imports of oil from the Middle East, would be wise to develop its own oil and gas findings with great haste. Dependence on the Middle East cannot be counted on.

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