



The Monks of Tibhirine: Faith, Love, and Terror in Algeria

John Kiser

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"The inspiration for the major motion picture "Of Gods and Men"

A true story of Christian love set against political terrorism in contemporary Algeria.

In the spring of 1996, militants of the Armed Islamic Group, today affiliated with Osama bin Laden's al Qaeda network, broke into a Trappist monastery in war-torn Algeria. Seven monks were taken hostage, pawns in a murky negotiation to free imprisoned terrorists. Two months later, the severed heads of the monks were found in a tree not far from Tibhirine; their bodies were never recovered.

The village of Tibhirine had sprung up around the monastery because it was a holy place, protected by the Virgin Mary, who is revered by Christians and Muslims alike. But after 1993, as the Algerian military government's war against Islamic terrorism widened, napalm, helicopters, and gunfire became regular accompaniments to their monastic routine.

The harmony between these Christian monks and the Muslim neighbors of Tibhirine contrasts with the fear and distrust among Algerians fighting over power and what it means to be a Muslim. Woven into the story of the kidnapping and the political disintegration of Algeria is a classic account of Christian martyrdom. But these monks were not martyrs to their faith, as preaching Christianity to Muslims is forbidden in Algeria, but rather martyrs to their love of their Muslim neighbors, whom they refuse to desert in their hour of need.

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