

Why Would a Christian Reject Jesus for Radical Islam?

The day after Mohammad Abdulazeer killed five servicemen in Chattanooga, a woman posted this on Twitter: "Gifted this morning . . . w/ the news of a brother puttin fear n in the heart of kufar [non-believers] n the city of my birth. Alhamdullilah [thanks be to God]." The woman's name is Ariel Bradley. She grew up in the Chattanooga suburb where Abdulazeer lived. How did she become an ISIS supporter?

According to BuzzFeed's just-published profile of her, Ariel was homeschooled by a fundamentalist Christian mother. She ran away from home when she was 15 or 16 and eventually converted to Islam. She is now married to an ISIS fighter in Syria. When an ISIS supporter promised to pray for her safety, she replied, "Not death I should fear but the state I meet it in. May Allah guide us & give us *shaheed* [martyrdom]."

We now know that the Chattanooga shooter conducted Internet searches on martyrdom as recently as a day before he killed five servicemen. Why is martyrdom so appealing for jihadists?

"Martyr" in Arabic is *shahada*, which means "to witness, to become a model." A shahid witnesses the truth of Islam and is willing to die for it, becoming an example for others. He or she is guaranteed an exalted place in Paradise. According to Muslim doctrine, "a crown of honor will be placed on his head, one jewel of which is better than the whole world and what it contains." It is no surprise that jihadists are so willing to die for their cause.

How can we defend ourselves against such people?

John F. Kennedy noted, "If anyone is crazy enough to want to kill a president of the United States, he can do it. All he must be prepared to do is to give his life for the

president's." If the president cannot be protected from such a person, who of us is safe?

The answer: no one. How hard would it be for someone to kill you right now? Our lives are frail and our times are dangerous. Therefore, we must live each day for the greatest cause, remembering with Thomas Merton that "the biggest human temptation is to settle for too little." What is this cause?

In Paul's letter to Philemon, he describes a man named Archippus as "our fellow soldier" (v. 2). The apostle's metaphor is pregnant with meaning. Christians are soldiers in a spiritual army, waging war against the "spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12). As soldiers, we obey the orders of our General. We serve in a war that is much larger than we can see or understand. So we go where our General sends us and do what he orders us to do.

And we are willing to fight and even to die for our cause. ISIS fighters and other jihadists are willing to die for the lies they believe. Are we willing to die for the truth?

Just as there are no part-time soldiers in battle, there are no part-time soldiers for the kingdom. Thomas Merton said, "A life is either all spiritual or not spiritual at all. No man can serve two masters. Your life is shaped by the end you live for. You are made in the image of what you desire."

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