

Dear friends,

This is a very sad time in Egypt where we are in seven days of official mourning for the 21 young Christian men who were brutally slaughtered by ISIS in Libya on Sunday. The gruesome, professionally-produced video of that execution shocked the country and has united Christians and Muslims as never before. As soon as the video was broadcast on Sunday evening, the President delivered a speech declaring 7 days of mourning for the nation. Shortly afterwards the Egyptian Air Force bombed ISIS targets in Libya. As I arrived at the Bible Society office in the morning, feeling sad and depressed, I met a young coworker who told me that she was "very encouraged." I could not imagine what on earth could encourage her!

"I am encouraged" she said, "because now I know that what we have been taught in history books about Egyptian Christians being martyred for their faith is not just history but that there are Christians today who are brave enough to face death rather than deny their Lord! When I saw these young men praying as they were being prepared for execution and then many of them shouting "O Lord Jesus" as their throats were being slit, I realized that the Gospel message can still help us to hold on to the promises of God even when facing death!"

This same sentiment is being reflected in different ways by people who watched that gruesome video! I don't think I will ever read Chapter 11 of the *Epistle to the Hebrews* again without seeing in my mind the images of these men dressed in orange jump suits with black-clad, masked executors behind each one of them! As many of you know, these men were simple, Egyptian laborers who had gone to Libya to make a living. They were captured and executed by ISIS for being - as the video caption charges - "People of the Cross". Egyptians have been shocked by this news and it is the most talked about event in our country at this time. The purpose of the video was to foment sectarian strife in Egypt between Christians and Muslims. Those Islamic extremists clearly intended to provoke the 10 million Christians in Egypt to rise up violently against their Muslim neighbors. But the loving and caring response of Muslims all over the nation softened the blow which many Christians felt. Up till now the Christians of Egypt have responded with restraint, sorrowfully calling out to God. The President and dozens of political leaders personally gave their condolences to the Coptic Pope. The Prime Minister travelled to the small village where most of these men come from, sitting on the floor with their poor relatives to express his concern. All this sends a clear message that Christians are considered an integral part of the fabric of Egyptian society. On Sunday night, when I heard the terrible news of the martyrdom of the 21 Egyptian young men in Libya, I telephoned the Bible Society publishing manager and told him *"We must have a scripture tract ready to distribute to the nation as soon as possible!"*

Here is an English adaptation of the poignant poem which is on the back cover of the tract:

*Two rows of men walked the shore of the sea,
On a day when the world's tears would run free,
One a row of assassins, who thought they did right,
The other of innocents, true sons of the light,
One holding knives in hands held high,
The other with hands empty, defenseless and tied,
One row of slits to conceal glaring-dead eyes,*

*The other with living eyes raised to the skies,
One row stood steady, pall-bearers of death,
The other knelt ready, welcoming heaven's breath,
One row spewed wretched, contemptible threats,
The other spread God-given peace and rest.*

A Question...

Who fears the other?

The row in orange, watching paradise open?

Or the row in black, with minds evil and broken?

Please pray that during this period of sadness and unprecedented openness God will use this tract to comfort and challenge hundreds of thousands of people.

With thanks for your partnership,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ramez". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping initial 'R' and a long, horizontal flourish at the end.

Ramez Atallah
General Director
The Bible Society of Egypt