

THE MAGAZINE OF BARNABAS FUND HOPE AND AID FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

barnabasaid

The churches of Nigeria: bulwark against advancing Islam
Christian responses to Islam: promoting a Muslim agenda?
Security for Christian workers: think before you email

MARCH/APRIL 2010



To guard the safety of Christians in hostile environments, names may have been changed or omitted. Thank you for your understanding.

Front cover: Two Nigerian Christian children. The Church in Nigeria is dynamic and growing, but is also threatened by radical Islam. Turn to pages 12-15 to read more about Christians in Nigeria

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In these pages we bring you news of some of our recent grants to help persecuted and suffering members of our Christian family. We are so grateful for your generous giving, which enables us to send this support. Please pray as you read.

Burma (Myanmar): Sacks of Rice Bring Tears of Joy

Christians in Burma (Myanmar) suffer severe persecution from the ruling military junta, partly for their faith and partly for their ethnicity (most are from non-Burman people-groups). In addition they are still suffering the effects of Cyclone Nargis back in 2008. Christians were very much neglected by the government aid distribution after this catastrophic natural disaster.

Our latest five grants for the Christian cyclone victims totalled £64,078 (US\$102,158; €71,212). They covered needs such as rice supplies, repairing or rebuilding homes, and new village wells. They also helped to provide new livelihoods for families who had lost the means to support themselves; these included fishing boats, fishing nets, and ducklings. The cost of a boat was £60 (US\$95; €66), a net £16 (US\$25; €17) and 100 ducklings (enough for one family business) cost £60 (US\$95; €66).

Knowing that other believers had sent help to them in their time of need had a tremendous impact on the Christians. At one distribution of rice, the pastor ran to fetch all the villagers from the fields where he was working to come and unload the sacks. When all the people had gathered, the pastor prayed and then explained who



A new village well

had sent the rice. “The pastor as well as all the villagers sobbed and they could not speak to us properly,” wrote our partner in Burma who had organized this distribution. “Tears of joy made them unable to speak. Because their situation was very bad and they felt that the Lord had answered their prayer like the Lord supplied manna to the Israelites in the wilderness. They thanked the Barnabas Fund and prayed for you.”

■ [Project reference 75-745](#)

The Chin people, who are 90% Christian and one of the poorest people groups, are known amongst Christians in Burma for their loud and lively worship. But “the junta treat them as an enemy” and no outsiders are allowed to travel into Chin State. In this context of ongoing persecution, Chin Christians long for the facilities to make and disseminate more Gospel music. Two grants totalling £5,710 (US\$9,110; €6,350) provided musical instruments and recording equipment. The money also covered the purchase of a generator because, as in many parts of Burma, there

is no mains electricity at the place they rent for a studio.

■ [Project reference 75-763](#)

A grant of £6,077 (US\$9,696; €6,756) provided help for three Christian orphanages. The needs covered ranged from a tube well, fencing and two new kitchens to exercise books and 100 ducklings for a duck-rearing project.

■ [Project reference 75-821](#)



A Christian couple outside their new home



A Christian orphanage assisted by Barnabas

Egypt: New Livelihoods for Pig Farmers

Some of Egypt's poorest Christians earn a living from collecting, sorting and reprocessing garbage from the capital city, Cairo. Many of them used to keep pigs to eat the organic waste. A year ago the government ordered the slaughter of all pigs in Egypt on the spurious pretext of preventing swine flu, thus depriving these Christians of an important source of protein and income.

A local church in one particular "garbage village" is helping former pig farmers to become self-sufficient again by providing equipment for recycling plastic. Most of the machines cost between £1,720 (US\$2,750; €1,910) and £2,300 (US\$3,700; €2,600) each, depending on what their function is, and will provide income for an extended family. Barnabas Fund has given a grant of £23,500 (US\$37,500; €26,100).

■ **Project reference** 11-819



A "garbage village" on the edge of Cairo ten years ago, with pig pens in the foreground. Egyptian Christians can no longer keep pigs and have lost this important means of livelihood



Recycling plastic is a way in which "garbage village" Christians in Egypt can support themselves. Barnabas is helping to provide the necessary equipment

Middle East: School Fees Put Minds at Ease for Ministry

A media ministry in the Middle East has many local Christians on its staff. They are highly skilled and include animators, graphic artists, writers, producers, editors and other media professionals. Like all Christians in this particular country, one of their great concerns is the education of their children. The government schools provide a very poor education in a strongly Islamic environment where there can be discrimination and aggression towards Christian children. So Christian parents long to send their children to private Christian schools, but the financial burden of fees, books and uniforms can be too much. Some of the ministry staff

are tempted to take their skills and emigrate to the West, which would be a huge loss to the ministry.

A grant of £9,000 (US\$14,000; €10,000) from Barnabas to the media ministry is being used to cover a portion of the school fees for 25 children of their staff. This works out at around £1 (US\$1.60; €1.10) per day per child. But what a difference this small amount makes.

A parent writes: "This project allows me to come to the ministry every morning with my mind at ease and is a great comfort, and makes me work with my full entire energy, and to give everything I have of my experience and effort to this place,

because the ministry cares about my children – the most precious thing in my life."

A child writes:

I never thought that some out there
Would even care
If I get to learn or not
Or if I pay a lot.
I never thought that some would pray
For me to know God, every day.
The least I can do is to say thank you in
words that rhyme,
Honestly, thanking you is not a waste
of time.

■ **Project reference** XX-648

Ukraine: Christians in Crimea

Ukraine is a Christian-majority country, and has been called the “Bible Belt” of the former Soviet Union. But during the Soviet period, the very different territory of Crimea was incorporated within Ukraine.

In 1223 Crimea was invaded by the Mongol Tatars. Many settled there and soon converted to Islam. The Muslim Tatar character of the region remained strong until 1944, when Stalin deported the Tatars to other parts of the Soviet Union. However, many are now returning to Crimea. Crimea’s population nowadays includes Ukrainians, Russians, Tatars and others.

In this context, Barnabas Fund is assisting Christians in Crimea with a variety of needs.

“**R**avil” left Islam to follow Christ when he was 26. He is now the leader of a small church in Crimea and has a ministry amongst Muslims. He and his family live in a village, and their house is surrounded by Muslim homes. The Muslim neighbours will not allow Ravil’s family to connect to the private water supply because they are Christians, so they have to fetch water from 300m away. A grant of £1,235 (US\$1,973; €1,375) from Barnabas paid for a borewell and pump in his grounds, which will make life much easier for Ravil and his family.

■ **Project reference** 00-635
(Water Projects Fund)

“**L**ilia” is now 72 years old, and left Islam to follow Christ at the age of 60. She lives by herself because her relatives have rejected her. Lilia is very active in a small church of Christians from a Muslim background in Simferopol, the capital of Crimea. But she needed a cataract operation on both eyes. A grant of £890 (US\$1,420; €990) from Barnabas covered the cost of the surgery, and local



Outreach in the Crimea. Barnabas helps to support a Gagauz missionary whose language is almost the same as that of the Tatar people of the Crimea

Christians undertook to raise £65 (US\$104; €72) needed for her follow-up treatment.

■ **Project reference** 00-671
(Medical Fund)

“**N**icolai” is a Christian from the Gagauz people-group, serving as a missionary in the Crimea with his wife and two children. The Gagauz are a Christian Turkic people, and their language is very similar to Tatar. Barnabas Fund provides £160 (US\$260; €180) per month, which covers 75% of the family’s living needs and Nicolai’s ministry costs.

Nicolai has begun his ministry with a street library, which is proving very popular, and many people have come back again and again and have now read almost all the books. He was recently invited to a mullah’s home, and when he got there he found four other mullahs were also present. They questioned Nicolai about Christianity and were amazed at his answers, as he explained to them how Jesus had forgiven his sins and changed his life.

■ **Project reference** 00-478
(Evangelists Support Fund)

Senegal: A Brighter Future for Former Street Children

A Christian ministry in Senegal is caring for Talibe street children. These are boys who have been given by their parents to a marabout (Muslim spiritual leader), who sends them out on the streets to beg. One marabout may have up to 100 boys in his “care”. The boys live in appalling conditions, suffering hunger, thirst and disease. After they have reached the age of 12, the marabout no longer has responsibility for them, and very often their families refuse to have them back, so they can only continue to live on the streets.

Through a Christian-run drop-in centre, where the boys go to wash, play and eat, they hear the Gospel and many of them decide to follow Jesus and give up their lives on the streets. The teenage boys who make this decision and stick to it are then cared for by the ministry and are taught cleaning and cooking and other skills they need to know for normal life. They are also taught French and maths and given work experience to help them earn their living in the future.

A grant of £19,200 (US\$30,600; €22,000) is helping to cover the costs of caring for and rehabilitating the boys who have decided to follow Christ.

■ **Project reference** 45-833



Boys who have converted to Christ after living on the streets as Talibe beggars are cared for and rehabilitated by a Christian ministry



This church in Mosul, Iraq was severely damaged by a bomb on 26 November 2009

Iraq: Christians Endure More Bombings

Christians came under attack over the Christmas period and into the New Year in a number of cities across Iraq.

Prior to Christmas, Christians in Basra were warned by Shia Muslims that they were not to celebrate in any way apart from attending church. This was owing to the main Shia celebration during the Islamic month of Muharram, which in 2009 began on 18 December, with the climactic Ashura celebration around 26-27 December.

On 23 December a bomb outside a Mosul church killed at least three people, in an attack that Iraqi Christians saw as timed to coincide with the Christmas season. Then on Christmas morning, 25 December, a group of armed Muslims descended on the town of Bartilla, northern Iraq, tearing down Christmas

decorations and throwing rocks at the men, women and children in a Christmas procession. The mob stormed a local church, demanding that they be allowed to perform the Ashura rituals of self-flagellation inside the building. Gunfire was exchanged as church guards stopped the attackers. Four Christians were injured.

On 5 January 2010, Christians were again targeted in Bartilla when a car bomb was detonated near a church, damaging dozens of homes and shops and injuring twelve people.

These attacks followed a distressing sequence of bombings in which Christians were caught up with other Iraqi citizens. In November, six explosions in Baghdad and Mosul, including two outside Christian buildings, killed five

people and injured at least 28. On 12 December at least 127 people were killed and hundreds wounded in five powerful car bombings in Baghdad, including one in Dora, a Christian neighbourhood. Days later further explosions rocked the country; two early morning blasts in Baghdad killed at least eight people, while in Mosul two car bombs were detonated near churches, causing extensive damage, wounding nearby schoolchildren and killing at least three Christians.

The minister of one of the Mosul churches attacked on 16 December said "Words cannot describe what has happened ... but we will pray in the streets, in homes, in shops. God is everywhere, not just in churches." Barnabas Fund sent help for the victims of the Mosul bombings.

China: Christians Stand Together against Opposition

On 27 October 2009, house church leader Alimujiang Yimiti, a Christian convert from Islam, was sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment, having been in detention for nearly two years. He was accused of using his employment "as a cover to preach Christianity among the people of Uighur" and was arrested by authorities in Xinjiang province (whose population is mainly Muslim Uighurs) in January 2008 for "endangering the security of the state".



Alimujiang Yimiti's 15-year prison sentence is reported to be the longest sentence against a house church believer in nearly a decade

During his detention, Alimujiang was given only limited access to his lawyer and his family, including his two young sons, whom he has not seen in almost two years. Alimujiang's lawyers have launched an appeal against the unexpectedly harsh sentence.

Another incident, on 12 November 2009, officials locked and sealed the doors of Wanbang Church, Shanghai. Pastors from the church were summoned to the local

police station for interrogation and hindered from attending services. Despite this intimidation from the local authorities, more than 500 dedicated church members gathered outdoors to continue the scheduled worship services. These were just the latest developments in a campaign against the church's leaders and members, which have included forcibly shutting down the church website.

India: Hindu Extremists Oppose Proposed Privileges for Dalit Christians and Muslims

Christian groups in India have been encouraged by the recommendations from a government-appointed commission that Christian and Muslim Dalits should have the same rights as Dalits who are Hindu, Buddhist or Sikh.

Dalits occupy the lowest level of the Hindu caste system. Under India's constitution, they have for many years been granted various political and economic privileges, but these were

not applied to Christian or Muslim Dalits.

The report, presented to the Indian government on 18 December 2009, suggests that a small percentage of government jobs be reserved for Muslims and Christian Dalits, as well as 15% of seats in all general educational institutions. Some of the recommendations have been strongly opposed and branded "unconstitutional" by Hindu extremists.

Backlash against Christians following Swiss Minaret Ban

The referendum decision on 29 November 2009 to ban the construction of minarets in Switzerland has had serious ramifications for Christians.

In Egypt there has been a huge outcry against the Swiss decision, which concerned only minarets, and did not forbid the building of mosques. But Egypt is a country where it is normally extremely difficult for Christians to get permission to build new churches or even repair the existing ones. Christians are forced to travel long distances to worship or must meet in secret in their homes due to an insufficient number of church buildings. Furthermore, recent months have seen a spate of attacks on church buildings.

In Turkey, on 4 December 2009, the leader of a church with a bell tower was approached by three people who threatened him, saying "Switzerland is banning minarets and we will ban bell towers to you. You will demolish the bell tower by next Friday." The police were informed of the incident and are now providing security for the church.

A recent review of prominent events posted on various Islamist terrorist internet forums in December 2009 highlighted the following comment, "Switzerland is a fragile country which has always kept away from the conflict arena, but now is like other heretic countries in Europe and is placing itself at the top of the list of the sheep to be slaughtered by the Mujahideen".

While Muslim leaders are criticising the Swiss vote, Christians in some Muslim-majority countries face severe restrictions on the building and repair of churches. In Saudi Arabia all church buildings are forbidden and the government of the Maldives is in the process of passing a similar ban into law. In Afghanistan the only church is within the grounds of an embassy. In a number of other Muslim countries, there are church buildings for foreigners but none for the indigenous Christians.

Egypt: Huge Muslim Mob Causes Chaos for Christians

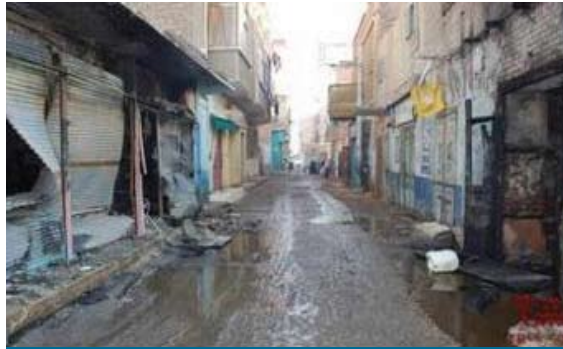
On 21 November 2009, Christians in Egypt were once again the targets of violence as a Muslim mob attacked the town of Farshoot and neighbouring villages, forcing Christians to seek refuge indoors.

The violence was prompted by reports of sexual abuse against a Muslim girl by a 21-year-old Christian on 18 November. Witnesses say that up to 3,000

Muslims gathered outside the police headquarters in Farshoot where the alleged attacker was being detained, pending the results of an investigation and forensic tests, in an effort to kidnap and murder him.

Security forces were deployed; however, witnesses report that they took no action to stop the violence and were stationed simply to protect the Farshoot police headquarters after the angry mob showered it with stones and attacked officers.

Ten pharmacies and 55 Christian-owned shops and businesses were looted, vandalised and burnt; cars were attacked, and some Christian families were thrown out of their homes. At least seven



Looted and burned Christian businesses in Farshoot, Egypt

Christians were injured in the violence, including one Christian leader who suffered a fractured skull. The mob made wooden crosses and burnt them in the street. One witness said, “We have never been so frightened and humiliated in all our lives ... our religion, and our Lord, were openly insulted.”

Christians condemned the alleged rape and protested at the scale of the retaliation. One Christian leader reported that the attacks were apparently pre-planned, which would suggest that the allegation of “rape” was used as a pretext. He also commented, “An individual incident does not call for an attack on masses of peaceful Christians.”

Russia: Martyr’s Crown for Christian Leader

Russian church minister, Daniil Sysoev (34), was murdered in his church in Moscow on 19 November 2009. He was approached by a masked gunman who checked his name and then shot him in the head and chest. A choirmaster was also injured in the attack.

Daniil had been active in evangelistic outreach to Muslims, and many people think that he may have been killed because of this ministry. He had received threats via email that he would have his head cut off if he did not stop preaching to Muslims. His widow Yulia commented that he “expected the death some years prior to its happening; he always wished to receive a martyr’s crown, and the Lord has given him this crown ... He said that he would be killed.”

There are 30 million Muslims in Russia, including a large Muslim population in Moscow, who currently enjoy much favour from the government.

Malaysia: Victory for Christian Newspaper – at Least for Now

Malaysia’s high court has ruled that a Christian newspaper had the right to use the word “Allah” when referring to God.

In the last edition of *Barnabas Aid* we reported that a Malaysian Christian newspaper was challenging a ban on referring to God as “Allah”, but that the case had been held up in preliminary hearings for nearly two years. But on 31 December 2009 Judge Lau Bee Lan told a packed courtroom, “The applicant has the constitutional right to use the word ‘Allah.’” She declared that the government’s ban

on the paper’s use of the word was “illegal, null and void”. This ruling also invalidated the government’s controversial threat to terminate the annual publishing permit for the newspaper.

The Malaysian government had banned non-Muslims from using the word “Allah” in their texts, saying that the word was Islamic and might confuse Muslims. Church officials argued that “Allah” is not exclusive to Islam but is an Arabic word that predates Islam. Furthermore, it is the only word for “God” in the Malaysian national language. It is also the word for

“God” in the Sikh scriptures.

However, the government will appeal against the ruling to the Appeals Court. As this body is expected to be composed mainly of Muslim judges, it is likely to overturn the High Court decision.

Within ten days of the court decision, at least eight Christian churches and a Christian school were attacked by firebombs, apparently in connection with this issue. One church was partly gutted, but thankfully the remaining buildings suffered little damage.

Closing Date for Apostasy Law Campaign

Easter Sunday, 4 April 2010, marks the closure of the Barnabas Fund petition for the abolition of the Islamic law of apostasy. Thank you to all who have signed the petition and encouraged your friends and churches to do so. We are pleased to report that at the time of writing **61,090** people have signed.

Please use the final weeks to gather further signatures, and return your completed petition sheets to Barnabas before the deadline. Additional copies of the form can be downloaded from www.barnabasfund.org/whysouldtheybesecret, or obtained on request from your national Barnabas office. The petition can also be signed online at the same web address. Remember, **the more signatures, the greater impact.**

Please pray for us too, as we make plans for presenting the petition to the governments of various Western countries. Further details will follow in a future issue.

Treatment of Converts by UK Border Agency

In the March-April 2009 edition of *Barnabas Aid* we invited supporters to write to their national immigration authorities on behalf of asylum-seekers who are converts from Islam to Christianity. We asked you to urge that immigration officials should be made aware of the dangers faced by these converts in their own countries, and that the possible conflict of loyalties experienced by Muslim staff handling convert cases – having to choose between the demands of their job and the demands of their faith – should be recognised.

We are grateful to all those who wrote to the UK Border Agency (UKBA) and those who sent in the replies that they received. We have followed these up by requesting that some written questions be asked in the UK Parliament.

In response a Home Office minister has stated that when converts seeking asylum say that their lives are in danger in their country of origin because they have changed their religion, this data is recorded. He also claimed that the professionalism of the UKBA workforce guarantees that there would be no conflict of interest even if a convert from Islam to Christianity were interviewed by a Muslim.

These answers do not put our concerns to rest. We are pursuing a number of lines of enquiry, one of which is how UKBA use their data collected on converts, and whether it is used to inform the training of immigration staff who deal with converts fleeing persecution. We have also asked the UN Refugee Agency, who review the work of the UKBA, if they too are disturbed about the potential conflict of interest that we have highlighted. At the time of writing we are waiting for a reply.

Write to your local paper!

We are grateful to Margaret Brown, a Barnabas supporter from Pembrokeshire, Wales, for writing to her local newspaper, the *Pembrokeshire County Echo*, to publicise the Barnabas petition and encourage readers to sign it. We have reproduced her letter below.

Please would you consider writing to your local paper too? It is a very effective way of making issues known. Your letter does not need to be long – in fact it is more likely to be published if it is fairly short. Write a sentence or two highlighting the plight of persecuted Christians across the world, and a little about the dangers faced by converts from Islam in particular. (Find out more about these by visiting www.barnabasfund.org.) Mention the petition, include the telephone number of your local Barnabas office, and point readers to the Barnabas website. Let us know if your letter is published!

Remember persecuted Christians

Mãllan,
For 1,500 years St Davids has been a centre of Christian worship and the present generation of Christians here and in the whole area will be able to attend their churches over the whole Christmas period and go home to their turkey and pudding.

Now, of all times, Christians should remember persecuted fellow-believers in less secure circumstances. In some countries severe beating, imprisonment, lynching and execution have been manifestations of pressure to switch to other religions. We rarely hear of this problem, let alone of its scale.

There is also pressure within Muslim communities to prevent other Muslims from switching to Christianity. Sharia lays down death as the penalty of apostasy. Next year a petition is being

presented to Western governments asking them to support all efforts by Muslims to have the apostasy law abolished so that Muslims who choose to leave their faith are no longer liable to any penalty.

Anyone wishing to sign this petition should phone the Barnabas Fund, which is organising the petition as part of its campaign to assist persecuted Christians, on 02476 231923. Christians in troubled regions need all the help they can get.

Most of all they need to know that they are not forgotten.

Yours etc,
Margaret Brown,
Porthclais Farm,
St Davids.

In this edition we highlight two books on issues that are current in the news: the experiences of Muslim women, and Islamic financial systems. Also featured are two new booklets in our developing series on different aspects of Islam.



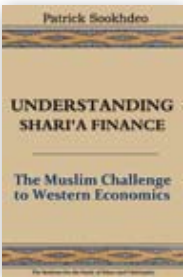
Secrets behind the Burqa Rosemary Sookhdeo

Forced marriages and honour killings are both real issues facing Muslim women and girls in the West today. But how can they happen in a modern Western democracy, and what will it take to stop them?

Most Christians have very little idea of what really happens in the day-to-day life of women in Islam. In this important book Rosemary Sookhdeo draws back the veil to reveal the inferior place that is given to women in the Islamic sacred texts, and how this is worked out in Muslims' marriage, family and community relationships. She shows how hidden religious and cultural systems within Islam control, oppress and endanger Muslim women and asks how far they will be able to escape these to embrace Western values and thinking.

With the law and practices of Islam receiving increased public attention in the West, *Secrets behind the Burqa* is a must-read for Christians who want to understand their Muslim neighbours and serve them in Christ's name.

Isaac Publishing, paperback, 145 pp, special offer price £6.99 + £2.00 postage (normal price £9.99)



Understanding Shari'a Finance Patrick Sookhdeo

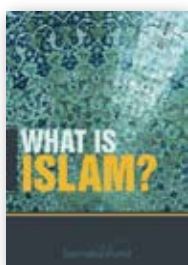
The bailing out of the troubled Dubai banking system with funds from Abu Dhabi has raised serious questions about the stability of Islamic financial markets. Are the "sharia-compliant" products and services that Muslims have generated really more reliable than their Western counterparts? Or are the claims made for them highly inflated?

In this significant study of sharia finance Patrick Sookhdeo discusses the problems and dangers presented by the Islamic economy. He identifies it as part of the Islamist agenda to subvert and subjugate Western systems, and reveals its connections to fundamentalist groups. His book illuminates a current issue relating to the Islamic resurgence and its implications for global economics and politics, also looking at the nature and implications of sharia itself.

Isaac Publishing, paperback, 114 pp, offer price £4.99 + £1.50 postage (normal price £6.99)

This series of booklets provides background information for Christians seeking to grasp the nature of Islam and how it is lived out in the world today. They explain some of the reasons why Christians are oppressed and persecuted in many Islamic countries, and describe the growing challenge that Islam presents to Western society and the churches.

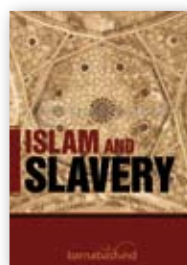
We are pleased to introduce two new booklets:



What is Islam?

This booklet provides an introduction to the basics of Islam. Topics covered are: the meaning of "Islam", Muhammad and the origins of Islam, the Islamic sources (Qur'an, *hadith* and sharia), the six articles of faith and the five pillars of Islam, the main Islamic festivals, and the different kinds of Islam.

9 pp, £0.50 (postage free)



Islam and Slavery

The European slave trade is well known; the Islamic slave trade is not. Yet this booklet shows that slavery is accepted uncritically in the Qur'an and sharia and is supported by the example of Muhammad. The expansion of Islam included the large-scale enslavement of many conquered peoples, and slavery still exists today in many Islamic countries.

12 pp, £0.50 (postage free)

Also available are: **What is Sharia?** and **Islam and Truth**

9 pp, £0.50 each (postage free)

To order any of these products, please visit www.barnabasfund.org/shop. Alternatively please contact your nearest Barnabas office (addresses on back cover). Cheques for the UK should be made payable to "Barnabas Books".

Recent Changes in Christian Approaches to Islam

Introduction

Christians and Muslims have been engaged in dialogue for several decades. The interfaith dialogue movement began during the 1950s when the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Vatican (later joined by Orthodox churches) organised several meetings between Christian leaders and representatives of other religions. These initial efforts resulted in the formation of new institutions for carrying on the work of interfaith dialogue. The WCC initiatives were based on a radical liberal reinterpretation of Christianity and had petered out by the 1990s.

Since 9/11 there has been a sea change in relations between Islam and the non-Muslim world, fed by the fear of a clash of civilisations and a war of religions. The attacks evoked not just condemnation of the violence but also a wave of sympathy for Muslims, with many in the West pointing out that most Muslims had nothing to do with the 9/11 attacks and asserting that their religion is peaceful. One visible result has been a new evangelical engagement in the interfaith dialogue movement, replacing the older, liberal, WCC involvement. Furthermore, some evangelicals are now joining Islamists and the ideological left in asserting the peaceful nature of Islam and are very critical of any opposing views.

Western government responses

The US and the British governments concluded that there was no such thing as “Islamic terrorism” and that Al-Qaeda was a heretical strain of Islam. Government policies therefore sought to bring the Muslim community into the mainstream of society and strengthen its institutions so as to prevent its radicalisation. This thinking was developed through appropriate legislation, indoctrination of the security forces and pressures for a cultural shift in society – a change that was to include Christianity.

US Congress and British Foreign Office funding was given to Christian organisations, conferences and consultations with the aim of bringing about reconciliation between Islam and Christianity. “Ecumenical” relations were redefined to include Islam, and concepts such as the “Abrahamic religions” were introduced to consolidate Islam, Judaism and Christianity into one monotheistic system. Western governments encouraged Christians’ involvement in interfaith dialogue and the reshaping of their theologies. Many evangelicals have responded with enthusiasm to these government initiatives, basing their approaches on postmodernist and liberal concepts of religion as culture and disregarding orthodox Christian claims regarding the absolute truth content of the faith. Their response has created confusion among grassroots evangelicals, who sense that basic Biblical and Christian positions are being shelved.

An initiative of Western governments: the C-1 World Dialogue

Western governments, through the medium of the Davos-based World Economic Forum, have founded a framework for interfaith dialogue aimed at improving relations between Islam and the West. The Council of 100 Leaders (the West-Islamic World Dialogue, C-100)

was founded in 2004 as a community of political, business, religious, media and opinion leaders that promotes dialogue and understanding between the West and the Muslim world. In 2007 its name was changed to C-1 World Dialogue, and the inaugural meeting of its Executive Committee was held in London in March 2009.

High ranking Anglicans are prominent in this venture. A Chairman of C-1 is Richard Chartres, Bishop of London, and his co-Chairman is the Grand Mufti of Cairo. The Director General (and co-founder) of C-1 is Canon Alistair Macdonald-Radcliff (formerly Dean of All Saints’ Cathedral in Cairo).

Muslim agenda and initiatives

Muslim governments were deeply worried by the effects of the 9/11 attacks and the resulting equation of Islam with violent jihad as well as by their weakened legitimacy and security. They decided to regain a respectful position for Islam in the world while expanding its influence and looked for partners in the West to further this ambition. Realising that the WCC had run out of steam, Muslim governments went out of their way to woo evangelical Christians whom they now viewed as an important political force in the West.

Jordan

The Jordanian Royal Family has endeavoured to exercise intellectual and theological leadership within Islam by founding and supporting a think tank, the Amman Al al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, and its interfaith activities. This institute has launched international consensus-building initiatives within Islam such as its “Amman Message”. It has sponsored scholarly *fatwas* on *takfir* and jihad aimed at countering extremist Islamist interpretations and practice. Finally it sponsored the “Common Word” initiative that has had a major impact on

Pull-out supplement

Western Christians. King Abdullah II also founded the Jordanian Interfaith Coexistence Research Center (JICRC) in 2003, which organises an annual conference for Muslim and Christian leaders from the Middle East under his chairmanship.

Saudi Arabia

The Bush administration placed immense pressure on the Saudi regime to moderate its established form of Islam (Wahhabism) and to engage with Christians. The Saudi government was also worried by the dangers to its legitimacy and internal security from the jihadi radicals. As a result the Saudi government entered into interfaith dialogue against the wishes of some Wahhabi hardliners. In November 2007 King 'Abdallah met with the Pope to promote mutual understanding between their religions. He also prompted Saudi clerics to call for joint Jewish-Christian-Muslim conferences and organised the July 2008 Madrid "World Conference on Dialogue" under his patronage, which was attended by some evangelicals. The King followed this up by sponsoring a two-day Special United Nations General Assembly gathering on Interfaith Dialogue in November 2008 and an International Conference on Interfaith Dialogue held in Geneva from 30 September to 1 October 2009 under the auspices of Swiss President Hans-Rudolf Merz. One aspect of the King's interest in interfaith dialogue is his sponsorship, along with the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, of a campaign for a global law against blasphemy, meant especially to protect Islam from all criticism.

Libya

Libya has long been involved in interfaith initiatives, organising conferences and dialogue especially with the Vatican. Recently it has shown interest in dialogue with evangelicals, sponsoring and hosting through its Islamic Call Society the "Evangelical Christian-Muslim Dialogue" events held in Chicago (November 2006) and Tripoli (January 2008). The January 2008 meeting saw many evangelical leaders present (including Brother Andrew) from a variety of evangelical Christian institutions such as Wheaton College, North Park University, Fuller Theological Seminary and the Arab Baptist Seminary in Beirut, Lebanon, as well as representatives of organisations such as World Vision International, Sojourners, Venture International, and Evangelicals for Middle East Understanding.

Iran

Iran's interest in interfaith dialogue preceded 9/11 as part of its efforts to neutralise Western opposition to its radical policies and gain Christian sympathy for its version of Islam. In 1998 former President Mohammad Khatami proposed to the United Nations a dialogue among civilisations that strongly emphasized interfaith dialogue. As a result the UN declared 2001 as the "Year of Dialogue Among Civilizations". In 2004 Khatami founded the International Institute for Dialogue among Cultures and Civilizations. As a follow-up to these Iranian efforts, the Alliance of Civilizations (AoC) was established in 2005 at the initiative of the governments of Spain and Turkey under the auspices of the United Nations. Iran has held several interfaith dialogue meetings with the Vatican and with the World Council of Churches, and in February 2007 a delegation of American Christians including Mennonites, Quakers, Episcopalians, United Methodists and Baptists were invited to Tehran for a series of talks on interfaith relations and peacemaking. It has also tried to reach out to evangelicals.

Muslim scholars and "A Common Word" Letter

Pope Benedict's September 2006 Regensburg lecture seemingly suggesting that Islam was violent and unreasonable caused outrage and violent protests among Muslims around the world. A group of 38 Muslim scholars wrote him an open letter (13 October 2006) to correct his views on Islam. When they received no response, 138 Muslim scholars, coordinated by The Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, wrote an open letter to the world Christian community called *A Common Word Between Us and You*. On the surface the letter looked like a well-intentioned and urgent plea for a better understanding between Muslims and Christians, so as to avert an

apocalyptic war between the two largest religious blocs in the world. It presented the very Christian concepts of love for God and love for neighbour as themes they hold in common.

However, the letter actually falls into the tradition of Muslim *da'wa* (a call to convert and submit to Islam), which historically was often linked to the threat of violent war and conquest (jihad) should the call be rejected. It clearly asserts the concept of *tawhid* (the monolithic unity of God) and the finality of the prophethood of Muhammad, while reducing and "Islamising" Jesus into a mere human prophet inferior to Muhammad. Underlying the letter was the erroneous view that the war against Islamist terrorism is a global war of an aggressive Christianity against Islam, fuelled by a Christian disposition to animosity and hatred towards Muslims.

Evangelical responses

1. Yale Response to "A Common Word"

The Common Word letter had a tremendous impact on the Christian world, calling forth a plethora of enthusiastic responses that revealed new developments among evangelicals regarding interfaith dialogue with Muslims. One of the most high-profile responses was the 18 November 2007 "Yale Letter" drafted by evangelical Christians at the Yale Center for Faith and Culture and signed by over 300 Christian leaders, many of them evangelicals. Among the four authors of the letter were two well known evangelicals: Miroslav Volf, Henry B. Wright Professor of Theology at Yale University Divinity School and Director of its Center for Faith and Culture, and Joseph Cumming (a former member of Frontiers, a mission to Muslims heavily committed to extreme contextualisation), Director of the Reconciliation Program at the Yale University Divinity School Center for Faith and Culture. The following July a conference was held at Yale, bringing together Muslim and Christian scholars, on the theme of "Loving God and Neighbor in Word and Deed: Implications for Muslims and Christians". A "Final Declaration of the Yale Common Word Conference" was issued on the last day.

The Yale Common Word Conference and its Final Declaration included several problematic issues:

- Accepting responsibility for both the Crusades and the contemporary war on Islamist terrorism in the name of all Christians, so reinforcing the Muslim view of all Christians as one bloc, responsible for any perceived offence given to Muslims. This encourages Muslims to punish indigenous Christians in Muslim lands for all the supposed Christian sins against Islam.
- The affirmation of the Islamic source texts as "sacred texts" along with the Bible, which could imply that the Qur'an is a revealed word of God.
- The inclusion of Islam in "our common Abrahamic heritage" and in the "Judeo-Christian-Islamic monotheistic heritage" implies that Islam, like Christianity, is God-given and God-revealed. This is a step towards affirming Muhammad as a prophet and the Qur'an as a word of God and so denying the uniqueness of Christ and the Bible.
- An end-time vision of a better world based on the cooperation of Muslims and Christians in alleviating poverty. The Biblical hope of a better world rests ultimately on the preaching of the gospel of Christ and the building up of His Church.
- Identifying Christian mission as one of the main factors causing tensions in the world, which encourages Muslims in their view that Christian mission is an aggressive attack on them.
- Ignoring the right of individual humans to choose, change and proclaim their religion without fear of sanctions. The issue of full reciprocity was not effectively addressed. While Muslims in Western states have full freedom to propagate their faith and build mosques, the Christian right freely to propagate Christianity and build churches in Muslim lands is either severely limited, or as in Saudi Arabia, totally non-existent.

2. The new evangelical "Grace Approach" to Muslims

This is based on a naive approach of seeing only the good in Islam in the desire to follow the radical teachings of Jesus on love, grace, acceptance and forgiveness. It also reflects postmodern and liberal approaches to Christianity and culture and a theology of ecumenical inclusivism towards Islam. Some of the main characteristics of this movement are:

- Regarding Islam as a true though deficient way to God. On this view Islam is an Abrahamic faith, differing from its supposed Jewish roots only in degree, not in kind. The Qur'an is a valid commentary on the Jewish scriptures and a correction to the inadequate Judaism of Muhammad's time. Muhammad was a prophet from the line of Ishmael, whose original mission was a kind of apostleship to the Jews. This view adds a fourth category to the New Testament's three (Jews, Gentiles and the Church of God): Arab Muslims, who are seen as ethnic descendants of Abraham through Ishmael. The implication is that they therefore have a special relationship with God outside of Christ. This understanding of Islam threatens to compromise the uniqueness of the Christian Church as the people of God.
- Discouraging fear of radical Islam. Steve Bell, National Director of Interserve UK, has argued that Christians need not fear a Muslim takeover of Britain. As the Muslim community becomes more prosperous, Muslims will peacefully integrate into their societies and support a more moderate form of Islam¹. The problem with this view is that Islamic fundamentalism and radicalism are not simply products of poverty, but are theological and ideological movements with deep roots in classical Islam. Islamism has infiltrated many Muslim institutions in the UK and many British-born, prosperous Muslims have become increasingly radicalised.
- Sympathy with Muslim grievances and acceptance of Christian guilt for the victimisation of Muslims throughout history. This includes guilt for the Crusades and for the suffering imposed on Muslims in colonial times, and today in Palestine, Iraq and Afghanistan. Christians must compensate by actively supporting "just" Muslim political causes. Many Christian individuals and churches have confessed the evils in their history and apologised for them. But Muslims have not accepted any blame for evils committed in the name of Islam and have never apologised to its many victims. Until they do so, dialogue on this basis will inevitably be biased in their favour.
- A sympathetic understanding of the motives of Islamic terrorists. On this view Islamic terrorism is caused by the injustices perpetrated in the Muslim world, not by Islam's essentially violent nature. Brother Andrew urges a sympathetic understanding of the motives of Islamist terrorists.² However, seeing terrorists as oppressed people without any hope, whose violent response is understandable, is not a Biblical perspective. The Apostle Paul preached boldly to Jewish and Roman leaders and offered them the gospel of Christ, but he did not seek to excuse their evil practices. It is also important not to deny or minimise the suffering imposed by Muslims on Christians over the centuries.
- Engagement in dialogue with Muslims. On this view Christians should search for areas of common ground with Muslims and develop relationships of trust and respect, honesty and openness. They should be able to challenge and critique each other's beliefs and practices. However, "dialogue" has different meanings. Western Christians understand it as an intellectual engagement to resolve problems; Muslims see it as a bridge they can walk over to further their goals. Moreover, persecution of Christians across the Muslim world is not abating as a result of dialogue, yet this item is rarely on its agenda.

3. Radical contextualisation and the Insider Movement in missions

Among those involved in the Grace for Muslims approach and the Yale response are proponents of the Insider Movement, a missiological trend built on an extreme form of contextualisation (C5) in Muslim missions. It recommends that Muslims who accept Jesus should not be "extracted" from their families and culture but remain as "insiders", not just within the Muslim cultural milieu but also within the Muslim religious framework. They should continue to attend the mosque and to recite the double shahada ("There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is his apostle") and read the Qur'an alongside the Bible. On this view the Qur'an is one of a series of authentically divine, "God-breathed" books, and Muhammad is an authentic prophet of God who is to be praised for bringing the polytheistic Arabs to a monotheistic faith. His example (sunna) and teaching are regarded as to some degree binding (including his teachings on Christ, the cross, the Bible, Christianity and Judaism). The Insider Movement teaches that Ishmael is included in the covenant with Isaac as part of the "chosen people" of God. Muslims, as Ishmael's descendants, thus have a unique place in God's salvation plan. The movement distances itself from traditional Christian forms and endorses Muslim rites and traditions, many of which were developed in conscious opposition to Christianity and the Bible. In its extreme form the movement recommends that Christian missionaries to Muslims convert to Islam in order to be more effective.

A critique of the Insider Movement

The New Testament does not sanction the view that Muslims have a unique place in God's plan. It stresses the uniqueness of the revelation and covenant given to Israel, through which God's salvation in Christ is offered to all humanity. It is only through the unique Saviour Jesus that salvation is offered and only in the Church He founded as His body that fellowship is to be practised. The Insider Movement model inevitably leads to a marginalisation of Christ, the Bible and the Church.

While converts from Islam do not need to give up all their old cultural forms and may even retain religious forms that are not contrary to the Bible, they ought clearly to reject anything that denies the finality and deity of Christ, His sole position as God's final Apostle, Priest and King, and the final authority of the Bible. For believers from a Muslim background this involves rejecting Muhammad as an apostle from God and the Qur'an as a word from God.

Practitioners of the Insider Movement presume that Islam can be reformed from within by authentic Jesus movements. God's purpose, however, is not the reform of Gentile religious systems but the formation of a new community of true believers in Christ. To be capable of reform in a Christian sense, Islam must be a form of Christianity, which it is not. While some aspects of truth and some analogies may be found within it and be used to win Muslims to Christ, they cannot form the basis of a true Christian community.

Some non-Western believers, including converts from Islam, have criticised the Insider Movement as a new form of imperialism by Western missionaries. This is causing a growing alienation between Western missionaries and indigenous Christians. Most Muslim converts to Christianity in North Africa, for example, do not call themselves "followers of Isa", nor do they conform to the Insider Movement paradigm. They openly call themselves "masihiyin" (the Arabic term for Christians), worship in a recognisably Christian form and are not ashamed of the cross as a symbol of their new faith.

Conclusion

The danger inherent in these new Christian approaches to Islam is the implicit reduction of Christianity to something compatible with Islam and of the Biblical Jesus to the status of the Qur'anic Jesus. They could revive old heresies such as Arianism, which rejected the Trinity and the eternal

¹ "Christians do not need to fear Islamic takeover in UK, says Interserve head", Christianity Today, 18 July 2008.

² Brother Andrew and Al Jansen, *Light Force: The only hope for the Middle East*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2004, pp179, 188.

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deity of Christ, and which Islam, being unitarian, is well able to exploit. In their search for common ground with Muslims, Christians involved in interfaith dialogue are increasingly embracing a unitarian paradigm focused on the one God and the human Jesus.

The ancient heresy of Marcion is also re-emerging, for embracing only a Gospel of grace, and thereby rejecting the wrath of God, is leading, as it did for Marcion, to a rejection of the Old Testament and ultimately of Israel as the "elder brother", thereby producing anti-Semitism. The new evangelical approaches have also caused disunity, arguments and splits within Christian churches, movements and missions.

The churches must preach love for all Muslims as human beings created in God's image and for whom Christ died. They should certainly not preach fear of Islam or hatred of Muslims. But neither should they be naive as to what is happening in the Muslim world or fail to support the suffering churches there. Since its inception Islam has sought to stifle Christianity in its domains, and this process is still being actively pursued today in most Muslim states and societies.

The churches must both distinguish between individual Muslims and the religious-political system of Islam, and recognise that Islamist terrorists (jihadists) are much more than a miniscule fringe group with no legitimacy in Islam. The violence perpetrated by such groups is rooted both in the ideology of large contemporary Islamist movements and in the traditional, orthodox and classical version of Islam presented in the authoritative Islamic scriptures and commentaries.

Finally the dangers of the political pressures in the dialogue movement must be fully recognised. The new Christian approaches are actually helping the Islamisation of the West. Christians should not offer themselves as pawns to powerful governments, whether Western or Muslim, seeking purely political advantage. While Muslims affirm the unity of religion and the state, Christians must always guard themselves against such manipulation. The Islamic version of peace may be realised when all people submit to the political rule of Islam, but the Christian vision is realised only when Christ rules the hearts of people.

The C1-C7 spectrum, showing the different ways in which Christian converts from Islam and missionaries are contextualised within Muslim-majority cultures

	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7
Description	Converts from Islam in a Church foreign to them in culture and language	C1 in form but worshipping in local language. Religious terminology is non-Muslim	Culturally indigenous churches but avoiding forms seen as too Islamic	Culturally indigenous congregations with some biblically acceptable Islamic practices	Follow Jesus as Lord and Saviour in fellowship of like-minded believers within the Muslim community	Secret / underground believers, may be active in religious life of Muslim community	Foreign missionaries convert to Islam
Self identity	Christian	Christian	Christian	Followers of Jesus	Muslim followers of Isa, culturally and officially Muslim	Muslim followers of Isa in secret, culturally and officially Muslim	Effective identification with Muslims
Muslim perception	Christian	Christian	Christian	A kind of Christian	A strange kind of Muslim	Muslim	Muslim

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The following article from the October 2009 issue of Echoes magazine highlights the importance of taking care when passing on information about Christians and their ministry in sensitive contexts. This is an issue that bears closely on the work of Barnabas Fund, and we are grateful for permission to reproduce the article below.

Echoes of Service has operated as a mission service agency for over 130 years and has supported thousands of workers (mainly from the UK) serving around the world. It remains committed to its task of enlightening, enabling and encouraging in mission.

Security and Risk

by Dr Ian Burness

Electronic communication and the Internet have transformed the world in the past two decades. This is a wonderful help to workers in remote locations, who keep in touch through e-mail and access urgent information quickly.

However, this “blessing” needs to be used with care, particularly in sensitive countries.

A cautionary tale

Some workers in an Islamic majority country sent their regular newsletter. In it they expressed frustrations with the people among whom they were serving and with the authorities in their host country. A comment was made in the newsletter about how this problem could be resolved, and then the writer added that he was only joking.

The comment was sent to their supporters, one of whom, on reading it, sent it on to the consulate of the country mentioned, with the result that the Christian workers were arrested and given a prison sentence for their “anti-government comments”.

This incident highlights a number of issues that need to be borne in mind when using electronic communication.

The wonderful world of the Internet

We can now communicate with almost anyone anywhere instantaneously, by mobile phone, Skype video call, e-mail or through social networking sites such as Facebook.

But there is a downside

This virtual world of constant communication is also accessible to security services and government agencies who can listen in to mobile phone conversations or check e-mails. Skype calls can be monitored, and those with the necessary expertise can read our information.

In “closed countries” or in countries hostile to the gospel this is a serious issue.

Don't overreact

It is possible to become excessively cautious and live with fear or paranoia. However, we do need to use wisdom and common sense, and follow advice from those who live in the context. They can advise what are acceptable ways to communicate.

Think before you hit the “Send” button

E-mail creates a sense of immediacy. It is easy as soon as something hits our inbox to deal with it at once, often with a one-line reply. Thought, consideration and prayer are required regarding content. The same caution applies to forwarding e-mails or reports, especially if the news is urgent or concerning. Think before you forward news for prayer. *Think!* Should it be forwarded to? Don't compromise someone by failing to take time to think.

Mind your language

When reporting on their work, Christian workers sometimes use the language of “spiritual warfare”. This is biblical and therefore appropriate. However, when this language is read through non-Christian eyes it can sound aggressive. Several years ago, *The Hindu*, which is one of India's main national newspapers, quoted from a newsletter sent by workers serving in India in which they referred to “*taking territory for God*”, “*the enemy*”, “*conflict*”, “*the opposition to be defeated*” and similar topics. This raised serious issues for the reader and gave an impression of Christianity which did not equate with a message of peace.

When communicating with those serving in closed or restricted access areas, we need to choose our words carefully. Check what can be said and what should be

avoided. When writing to China, we are advised not to use the words “prayer”, “church” or “God”. It is wise to keep our language as neutral as possible and never to make political comment.

Junk mail

Junk mail is not confined to the secular world. Lots of “Christian” communication circulates in cyberspace which may not be factual and may be linked to appeals for funds. Think about what you are reading, check the sources, and never send funds until you have established the bona fide nature of the ministry. If you do decide to help, ensure accountability for any money sent.

Consult those who know more

People who are familiar with a given situation are always pleased to advise. If they do not have the information required, they will point you in the direction of those who can provide it. Ask first rather than risk circulating potentially dangerous material. To personally engage in prayer may be the best way to deal with concerning situations rather than simply widening the circle and unthinkingly sending on information.

At the Echoes office, we are consulted frequently about issues with regard to the above. We try to respond or establish facts for enquirers. We are pleased to give advice on security issues. We ask supporters to seek permission before they transmit news sent from the office.

It was Jesus who said we should be “wise as serpents and harmless as doves”. Thus we hope the advice and comments in this article will help you to stop and consider before you send. First, read your communication through hostile eyes and ask yourself the question, “Should I send this or not?”

Nigeria

Nigeria has one of the world's largest Christian communities. Since the country gained its independence from Britain in 1960, the churches have experienced spectacular growth, and their dynamic mission and ministry continues to attract new converts.

Yet despite their numbers and success the position of Christians in Nigeria is precarious. They live alongside a Muslim population of similar size and strength, in a nation where Islamic law, mission and militancy are advancing rapidly. With ethnic and economic rivalries also widespread and separatist movements growing, there is a real danger that Nigeria will descend into chaos, with potentially disastrous consequences for its churches.

education and health care, some of which still exist. British policy at this time, which became known as "indirect rule", served to entrench Islam and sharia in the areas that were already Muslim-majority.

The result of this dual development is a nation divided between a strongly Muslim North (about 93%) and a predominantly Christian South (around 80%). The population of the Middle Belt states is more evenly mixed. Although accurate

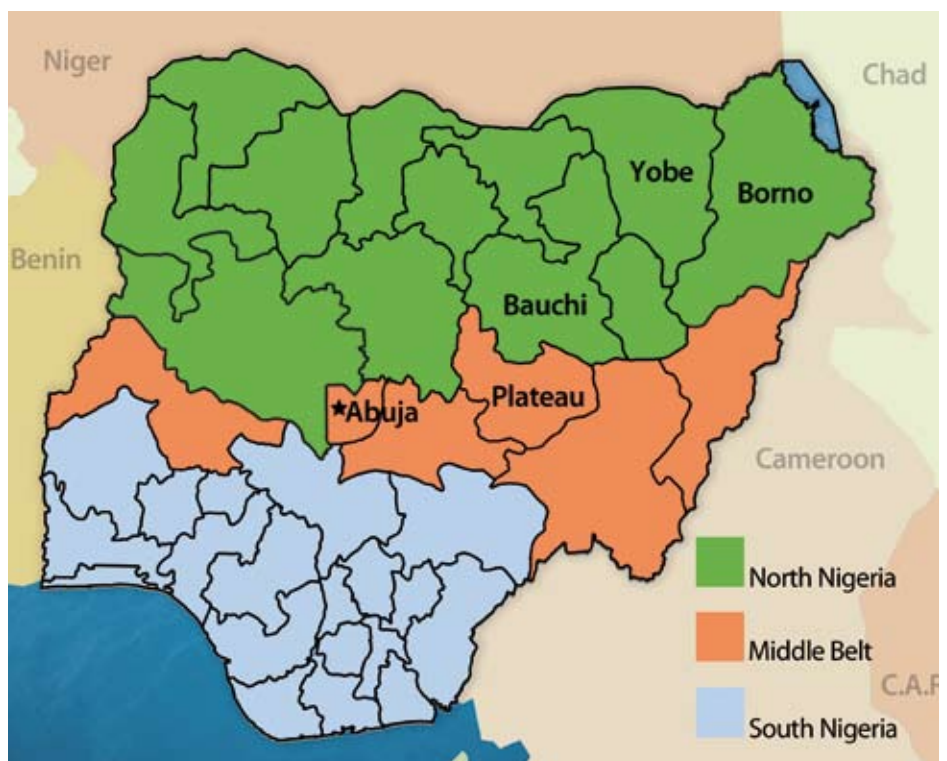
figures for the whole country are difficult to calculate, and estimates vary widely, it is generally assumed that Christians and Muslims are present in roughly equal numbers. A much smaller number are adherents of African traditional religions, and some of their practices have been incorporated into parts of Nigerian Christianity and Islam.

To this religious division is added considerable ethnic and economic

A nation divided by history

Islam reached the North of the territory that is now Nigeria in the 11th century through Arab merchants and scholars from North Africa. It was well established there by the 16th century and spreading into the Middle Belt. In the early 19th century a jihad led by Usman dan Fodio further extended and strengthened the Muslim presence in the region and turned Islam from a tolerated minority faith to the official religion of a large and powerful state.

Parts of Nigeria came into contact with Christianity as early as the 15th and 16th centuries, but the principal phase of mission activity began in the 19th century. Arriving by sea in the South, in an area where Islam had not penetrated, the Western mission agencies founded and encouraged strong churches. Then in the period of British colonial rule from 1900 they also established rural networks of



This map shows the three major divisions of Nigeria and its various states. Those named have been the scene of serious anti-Christian violence in the last two years

diversity. A three-cornered rivalry between the Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo peoples has dominated Nigerian politics since independence, and the country is also home to many smaller people-groups. Nigeria is rich in agricultural land and mineral resources and has large oil reserves in the Niger delta, but much of its wealth is squandered or embezzled by a political establishment that has often been riddled with corruption. Few Nigerians have benefited from oil revenues, and the majority of the people live in poverty.

For most of the first 40 years after independence Nigeria stumbled from one military coup and regime to another. Although democracy was restored in 1999, the fairness of the various elections since that time has been widely questioned. Political disorder and dishonesty have encouraged demands for separation, which provoked a damaging civil war in the late 1960s and continue to threaten the country's unity.

These unstable conditions aggravate the dangers posed to Nigeria's Christians from their Muslim compatriots. These fall into three main categories: sharia law, Islamic *da'wa* (mission) and Islamist violence.

Introduction of sharia law

Nigeria is a secular state, and its constitution forbids the government to declare a state religion. Provision is made for freedom of religion, including the freedom to practise, spread and change one's faith. In general the government respects these rights.

However, Nigeria is a federal republic of 36 states, and state governors and parliaments have a good measure of autonomy. After 1960 the Muslim Northern People's Congress began pressing for the introduction of sharia law in the Northern states, and this became the principal goal of Muslims who wanted to emphasise the Islamic identity of the region. Twelve Northern states have established sharia courts in their territories, and although the constitution recognises their jurisdiction only in civil matters, they adjudicate criminal cases too. Since 1999 these states have also extended, or made plans



Three Nigerian Christian children

to extend, the application of sharia within their criminal law.

Christians in these states were promised that they would not be made subject to sharia, and they are not obliged to take their civil cases before the sharia courts or to be tried by them in criminal cases. In practice, however, they have to conform to sharia in certain areas, including the separation of the sexes in education, health care and public transport. Several states fund vigilante groups of sharia-enforcers known as *hisba*, who have the power to arrest or attack people – including Christians – whom they believe not to be following sharia. The sharia system has shown itself open to corruption and abuse, and is often used to penalise women, the illiterate and the poor.

Many Christians have argued that the presence of sharia courts amounts to the adoption of Islam as a state religion, or to the giving of preferential treatment to the Muslim community. So far, however, the federal government has been reluctant to resist the changes, a response that is likely to encourage further demands for sharia-compliance.

Christians in the North suffer other forms of discrimination too. New religious buildings have to be registered, and in some states the authorities have denied

permission for the construction of new churches and the expansion and renovation of existing ones. Some churches have even been demolished, and permission to rebuild them is hard to obtain. Although the state schools are supposed to instruct Christian children in their own faith, in many Northern schools there is often no teacher capable of teaching Christianity. Christians are regularly denied access to the official media, representation on government bodies, and employment by the state, on the grounds that they are not native to the North, even though their families may have lived there for several generations. Some public religious activities are banned.

Progress of Islamic *da'wa*

In sub-Saharan Africa, including Nigeria, *da'wa* (Islamic mission) has a double focus. First, it is aimed at strengthening Muslim communities, especially those that are not strongly Islamic or that might easily convert to Christianity, and those engaged in political or armed struggles. Secondly, it seeks the conversion of Christians and other non-Muslims, inviting not only individuals but also whole tribes to embrace Islam.

Anti-Christian violence in Nigeria in 2008-9

In November 2008 riots broke out in Jos, the capital of Plateau State in the Middle Belt, triggered by a rumour that a mainly Muslim party had lost the election to a mainly Christian one. Senior Christian leaders in the state believed that the attacks were planned and co-ordinated, and that the political events were used as a pretext for anti-Christian violence. More than 300 people were killed, some 10,000 displaced from their homes, and churches and homes burned.

With tensions running high, violence erupted again in February 2009, this time in neighbouring Bauchi state to the North. A disagreement between local Christians and Muslims over the use of a church car park prompted the Muslims to burn down the church. Muslim extremists then accused the Christians (without proof) of burning down a mosque and began attacking them. Nine more Christians died here, either shot or killed with machetes, and there was further destruction of churches and homes. Church leaders protested against the unsatisfactory measures being taken to ensure the safety of Christians in the state.

Then in July 2009 attacks coordinated by Boko Haram were launched against police and Christian targets and spread across Borno and Yobe states. At least twelve Christians were killed, including three pastors, who were beheaded when they refused to convert to Islam. One of them, Sabo Yakubu, a father of seven, was hacked to death. Another, George Orjih, sang and prayed throughout the ordeal and asked another prisoner to "tell my brothers I died well".



The homes of many Christians in Jos were destroyed in rioting in November 2008



Two Nigerian Christians walk through the ruins of a church demolished in an outbreak of anti-Christian violence

texts are translated into African languages, including those traditionally spoken by Christians. Muslim groups build mosques, train imams and evangelists, and establish Islamic schools and colleges. They also encourage the study of Arabic, and cultural, educational and economic links to the Middle East.

Many of the Christian churches in Nigeria are poorly equipped to counter this well-coordinated and funded mission strategy. Without a good knowledge of Biblical teaching, Christians may not realise that Islamic doctrines are incompatible with the Christian faith, and they are therefore much more vulnerable to enticement by Muslim missionaries. The number of conversions from Christianity to Islam is a source of deep concern for the Nigerian churches.

Upsurge of Islamist violence

Nigeria has a long history of tensions between Muslims and Christians. Nigerian Islam is strongly influenced by religious brotherhoods, which are traditional and tend to be anti-Western and anti-Christian. Religious differences have been exacerbated by ethnic, economic and political conflicts and discriminatory practices. The return of the country to civilian rule in 1999 has allowed different groups to express their frustrations more freely, and with increasing violence.

But the simmering hostility of Muslims towards the Christian minority in the North has recently been brought to the boil by the presence of radical Islamist groups such as Boko Haram and the Nigerian Taleban, some of them linked to al-Qaeda. The aims of these groups are to Islamise the whole of Nigeria under the rule of sharia, and to enforce extreme forms of the law, including harsh punishments. In pursuit of these goals they routinely resort to violent tactics, often directed against Christians, whose presence in the country they wish to eradicate. Other Islamist sects have arisen in response to the call by Muslim *da'wa* agencies for faith-based partners in the region.

There have for many years been riots in the Middle Belt, usually initiated by Muslims. But as a result of the increased

Da'wa in Nigeria is carried out by various Muslim organisations, which are supported by Muslim nations, especially Saudi Arabia. Leading members of the Saudi government head many of the agencies, and large sums of money from oil revenues give them huge leverage in the region. Arab states link the aid that Nigeria needs so badly with Islamisation:

often it is offered only to Muslims and those who are willing to convert to Islam.

Economic development on a large scale is provided by Muslim charities, building on a long tradition of spreading Islam in Africa through trade and business. Typically they assist only Muslims or those who will convert to Islam. Islamic

Islamist presence the last two years have also seen large-scale rioting in the North. Local government and police are frequently slow to respond, and their intervention sometimes makes matters worse. Thousands of Christians have fled their homes, hundreds have been killed, and dozens of churches have been destroyed. The three incidents described (see text box on page 14) are only the most serious in a rising tide of anti-Christian unrest.

Unstable present, uncertain future

The churches of Nigeria face huge challenges in seeking to co-exist with their Muslim neighbours in an increasingly volatile context. They are concerned to resist the further spread of sharia law in the country; they need resources and strategies to counteract Muslim *da'wa*; and they live in danger – especially in the North – from Islamist pressure and violence. Barnabas Fund helps to finance a variety of projects that provide support for various needs. (See text box.)

But the present acute insecurity of Nigeria's Christians has wider implications. Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa and easily the most

powerful in West Africa. If the whole nation, or part of it, were to become an Islamic state under sharia, the strength of Islam in the entire region would be massively enhanced. If its large Christian community were to be undermined or demoralised by large-scale conversion to Islam, Christianity throughout that part of the continent would be correspondingly weakened. And if it were to disintegrate into civil war and anarchy, the safety of other West African Christians would be seriously jeopardised.

Pray for Nigeria's Christians

Please pray for the churches of Nigeria in their crucial role as a bulwark against the progress of Islam in their own country and in West Africa generally. Pray that the reach of sharia in Nigeria will extend no further, but rather be retracted, and that Christians will be strengthened in faith and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus so they can resist the enticements of Muslim missionaries. Give thanks for those who have been faithful to Christ even to death, and pray that the authorities will restrain the violence of Islamist groups. Pray for protection for all Christians in Nigeria, and for stability in the region.



Nigerian Christians at worship. Despite the pressures that they face in parts of the country, many churches in Nigeria are vibrant and growing

Some examples of current aid from Barnabas to Nigeria

Victims of rioting

Barnabas has provided aid to those in need following the outbreak of Islamist attacks on Christians in many parts of North and Middle Belt Nigeria.

Graduate School of Theology

Very few church leaders in Nigeria have the opportunity to study at an advanced level, so this Graduate School meets a real need to equip Christian leaders and strengthen the churches. Barnabas Fund is helping with the costs of refurbishing a building for the School. (Project reference 39-808)

Nigeria General Fund

As well as the projects described above, Barnabas Fund has helped many other projects to assist Christians in Nigeria including borewells, schools, a clinic, small-business start-up costs, evangelism, leadership training and support for full-time Christian workers. The Nigeria General Fund helps with any current project in Nigeria. (Project reference 39-970)

Scarves, Soup and Smarties Raise Money for Barnabas

We would like to express our sincere thanks to our generous supporters who have written to tell us of the creative and imaginative ways in which they have been raising money for Barnabas Fund.



Tina Brace displays her hand-made scarves

On 18 November 2009, Tina Brace hosted a one-day fundraising event at her home in Penarth, south Wales, where she sold her hand-made scarves and a selection of jewellery produced by Allison Wakeley, while providing a generous supply of tea, coffee, cakes and other snacks. Between them, Tina, Allison and Megan Guest, their tireless helper, raised £250 for Barnabas Fund. Tina says her recipe for success was that she *“approached the whole thing in prayer, placing it into the good Lord’s capable hands”*.



Some of the items used to raise funds for Barnabas, displayed with Barnabas literature

On 29 November 2009, Tir-Y-Berth Community Church, Gwent, Wales, raised £521 to help our persecuted Christian brothers and sisters around the world. The money was donated as a result of their Suffering Church Sunday meal where, following the evening service, church members shared a bowl of soup together.

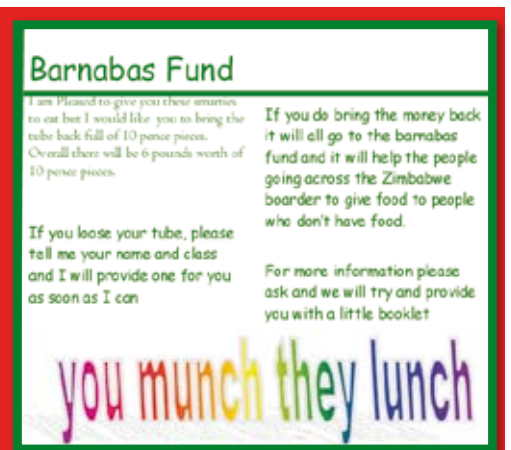
We would also like to share the story of 10-year-old Harry Leggett from the Isle of Wight, UK, who raised money for our Zimbabwe Feeding Project. Not content with just his church being involved with fundraising for Barnabas, Harry wanted to get his school involved too. He decided that, for harvest, every child would be given a tube of Smarties. Having eaten the contents (of course!), the children were then encouraged to



Harry Leggett, who raised money for Barnabas at his school

fill the tube with loose change and present their full tubes at the school’s harvest service. Each tube holds £6 worth of 10p pieces. Harry designed his own poster and presented his case to the charities committee at the school. They managed to raise an impressive £626.13! Praise the Lord for the blessing of children and the exciting ways they consider others and help those who are so much less privileged than we are.

Harry’s poster, which encouraged his fellow students to raise money for our Zimbabwe Feeding Project



Easter Offering for Persecuted Christians

Please consider making a donation or asking your church to take up an Easter offering to help our Christian brothers and sisters who are suffering for their faith at this time.

With your help, we can care for our Lord's "little ones".

Barnabas Fund on Facebook and Twitter!

You can now easily keep up-to-date with Barnabas Fund in a number of new ways. We have set up a Facebook page, where we keep our supporters informed with stories from *Barnabas Aid* and other important Barnabas features. We are also now using Twitter, a quick and free service that lets you keep in touch with up-to-date stories relating to persecuted

Christians around the world. Twitter is updated regularly with Barnabas prayer points and links to news stories.

Each has different information and a different feel. To view Barnabas Fund's Facebook page, please visit <http://www.facebook.com/BarnabasFund>. To get involved with Barnabas Twitter, visit <http://twitter.com/BarnabasFund>.



Give As You Earn

Barnabas Fund receives some funding from the voluntary "Give As You Earn" payroll giving scheme. The programme enables employees to donate to any UK charity of their choice straight from their gross salary (before tax is deducted). In support of donations, some companies also top up employee contributions. By giving employees the opportunity to support their chosen charities, this

scheme allows people to assist those causes that really matter to them.

If your company has a "Give As You Earn" scheme, would you please consider supporting Barnabas Fund through it. This is a quick and easy way of enabling us to continue our work to serve the Lord by helping persecuted Christians. For further information on the scheme, visit <http://www.cafonline.org>.

Barnabas Fund Supporters' Days 2010

This year, we are trying something a little different. We will be holding **two** Supporters Days, one in Coventry and one in South London, to allow even more of our supporters to meet the staff, hear up to date reports of the ministry, and listen to Dr Patrick Sookhdeo. The proposed dates are:

Midlands

Queen's Road Baptist Church, Coventry
Saturday 12 June 2010

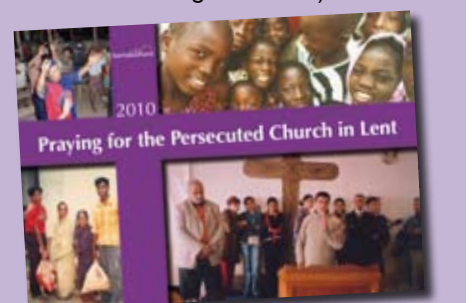
South

Reigate Baptist Church, Reigate
Saturday 26 June 2010

Please make a note of the date for the location that is most convenient for you. The events will be ticket-only; tickets will be available from Barnabas Fund. Further details will be confirmed in the May/June 2010 edition of *Barnabas Aid*.

Lent 2010: Prayers for the Persecuted Church

Included with this magazine is a copy of our 2010 Lent Prayer Booklet. We hope you find this a useful tool to inspire and assist your prayers for Christians around the world during the weeks before Easter. Further copies are available to order from your nearest Barnabas office (addresses on back cover) or from our website (www.barnabasfund.org/resources).



Peace in Christ at Times of Turmoil – a Testimony from Iran

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you ... Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. (John 14:27)

Religious freedom in the Islamic Republic of Iran is severely limited. Those who convert from Islam to Christianity can face harassment, persecution, imprisonment and even death. Below we share the testimony of Ali, an Iranian convert who came to Christ while studying in India. As he sought to share his faith with his family and other Iranian Muslims, it was the peace and confidence of Christians in the face of severe danger that spoke most strongly.

Ali was born in Iran into a Muslim family. After military service, he left Iran for India to pursue a college education. While studying in a small city college, he gradually became familiar with Christianity. Ali says “I became very curious about the life and teachings of Christ. I asked myself, ‘If Islam is the perfect and true religion, which Muslims believe, why then don’t the world’s hundreds of millions of Christians embrace Islam?’”

Ali soon began to study an English-language Bible to learn more about

Christianity. During his reading he searched for a verse that would foretell the coming of the Muslim prophet Muhammad, but he could not find one. After a year of listening to Christian radio programmes and taking correspondence courses on the New Testament, Ali became convinced of the truth of Christianity.

Acknowledging that Jesus Christ was the only way to salvation, he accepted Him as his Lord and Saviour.

Following his baptism, Ali returned to his native Iran for a holiday. He had no knowledge of the church in Iran and did not meet any Iranian Christians on his visit. On his return to India, and after considerable searching, Ali made contact with someone who could put him in touch with Iranian believers in his homeland. He says “To my joy, the next summer when I returned to Iran for my summer vacation, I located the church and became acquainted with the believers there. For the first time in my life, I learned Christian hymns and sermons in Persian, my own mother tongue.”

A couple of years after his conversion to Christianity, Ali told his family about his new-found faith. Although they did not oppose it strongly, they were unhappy about Ali’s decision. Nevertheless, his father read and studied Ali’s Bible with great interest.

Ali writes, “One evening, the movie ‘Jesus’



There has been a Church in Iran since the first century. But Christians suffer much repression, especially converts from Islam. When Ali first returned to his homeland as a Christian, he was unable to find any fellow-believers.

was to be shown at the church. My sister accompanied me to see the film. This was during the time that Iraqi jets bombed Tehran almost every night. During the middle of the film, as the bombing began and the anti-aircraft guns blasted, the lights went out. We sat in total darkness listening to the bombing and the blasts of the anti-aircraft guns. My sister leaned her head on my chest and began to cry. She insisted that we return home. However, no one else in the church left to look for shelter. Instead, everyone began to pray. Then a little candle was lit. I told my sister, ‘If you find anyone else here who is fearful, we will go home.’ As she looked around, she couldn’t find a single frightened person. The pastor was standing in the front of the church praying. Soon, the electricity was restored and we were able to see the remainder of the movie. The startling events of that night caused my sister to become more interested in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ.”

Ali’s prayer is that he will be able to share the good news of salvation with more Muslims, and particularly with Iranians.



This imposing mosque at Jamkaran testifies to the dominance of Islam in Iran