

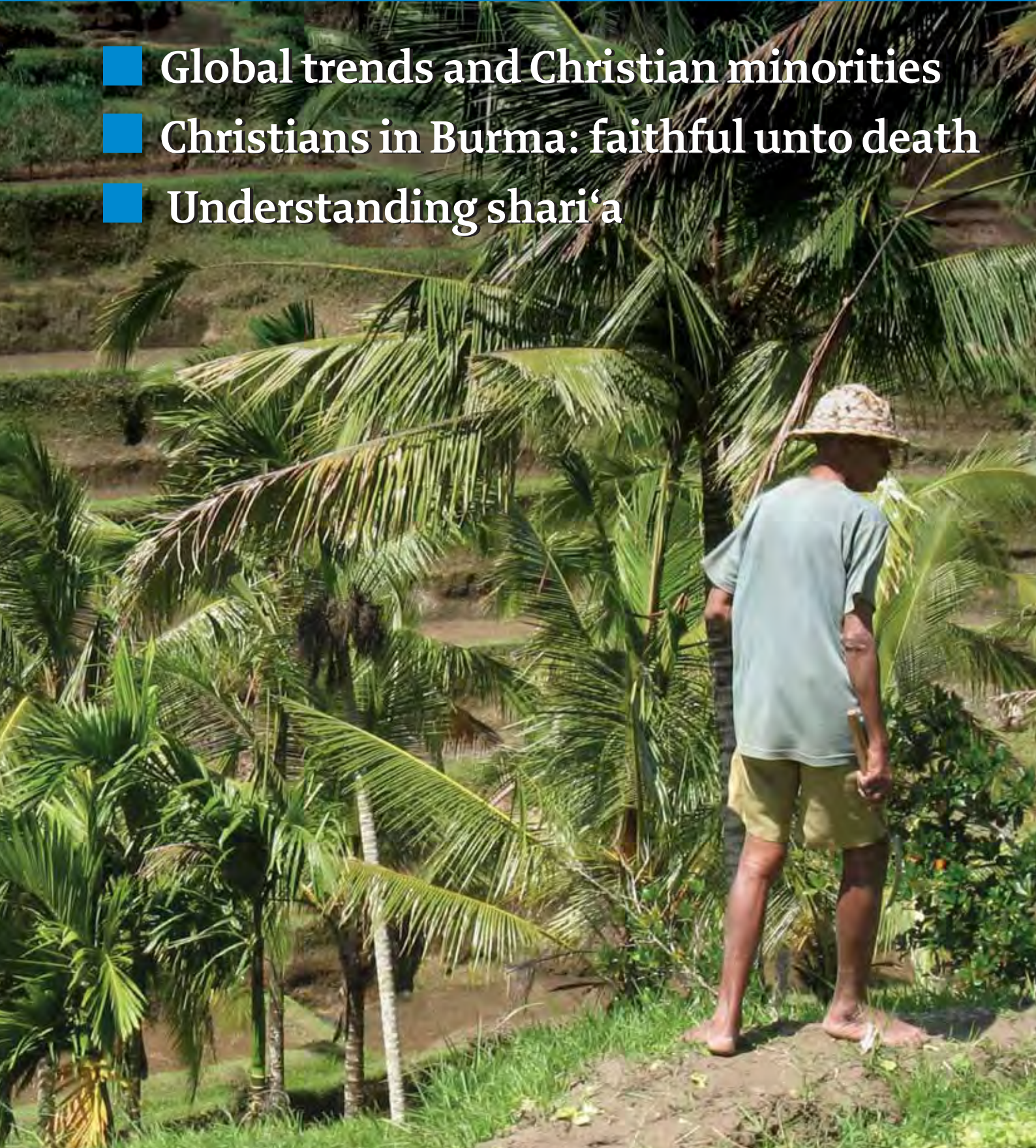
HOPE AND AID FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

barnabas aid

THE MAGAZINE OF BARNABAS FUND

JANUARY – FEBRUARY 2007

- Global trends and Christian minorities
- Christians in Burma: faithful unto death
- Understanding shari'a



from the Director

Who is defending the West?

On January 26th Pakistani Christian Daniel Scot will be awarded the annual Kairos Journal Award in New York. Daniel Scot, along with his fellow pastor Danny Nalliah, were found guilty in 2004 under the Racial and Religious Tolerance Act of Victoria State, Australia. The case was brought against them by the Islamic Council of Victoria, and resulted from a seminar they ran for Christians on the subject of Islam. Daniel and Danny are the first two people to be tried under the 2001 legislation.

What is not commonly known is that Daniel Scot was also the first person to have a case registered against him under Section 295-C of the Pakistan Penal Code, a section which deals with the crime of “defiling” the name of Muhammad. This section had been added to the Pakistan Penal Code in 1986, at which time the punishment specified was life imprisonment or death, as well as a fine. (Now there is a mandatory death sentence.) All his life Daniel has been courageously outspoken about his Christian faith, which often antagonised the Muslims around him when he lived in Pakistan. In 1986 the council of the college where he taught called him before them and asked him to give up preaching Christianity and become a Muslim. Daniel refused to reject his Saviour Jesus Christ and in the course of discussions he argued that Muhammad could not save him, supporting his assertion with quotes from the Bible, the Qur’an and other Islamic sources. As a result a case was filed against him in September 1986 under Section 295-C. He and his family went into hiding and eventually managed to get visas for Australia.

How ironic it is that, having escaped prosecution for saying what he believed in Pakistan, he faced the same difficulty in Australia, his country of refuge.

Daniel’s experience shows us all the need to take religious liberty seriously. Whereas in the past Barnabas Fund has campaigned for the rights of Christians in the Muslim world, now we find that Christians in the West are facing similar persecution. This week I have heard of yet another church arsoned in a Muslim area of the UK. Christian workers in such areas are intimidated and threatened. More than this, Western governments, police and legislatures are under pressure from both international Islamic bodies and Muslim minorities in their own countries to introduce *shari’a* (Islamic law) and to protect Islam and their prophet.

Unless we are vigilant about safeguarding our freedoms, we will go the way of the Muslim world. Nadia Eweida, a committed Christian from an Egyptian background and a long term supporter of Barnabas Fund in the UK, hit the headlines in September last year when her employers, British Airways, objected to her wearing visibly a small silver cross around her neck. Arguing that BA allowed Muslims and Sikhs to wear symbols of their faith at work, Nadia refused to conceal her cross. It has taken a Pakistani Christian to show how far the West can go in terms of suppressing freedom of speech. It has taken an Egyptian Christian to show how far the West can go in terms of suppressing Christian expression of belief.

This issue of *Barnabas Aid* contains a pull-out supplement on *shari’a*. For those who believe that *shari’a* is just a neutral set of laws which would not affect Western societies if they were introduced here, may I urge you need to read this article very carefully, and to pray that the discriminatory effects of *shari’a* will be resisted in the West.

Dr Patrick Sookhdeo

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COVER:

Growing rice in the Burmese mountains. Most of Burma’s Christians come from the mountain-dwelling ethnic minorities. They are severely persecuted, their villages and their crops destroyed. Thousands have fled to the forests where they are virtually starving. See p.10-14
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GLOBAL TRENDS AND PREDICTIONS:

IMPLICATIONS FOR CHRISTIAN MINORITIES IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

“You will hear of wars and rumours of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places.” MATTHEW 24:6-7

Our Lord’s prediction can seem very familiar. Every day we seem to hear more in the media about global warming, increasing poverty, climate change and conflicts at both regional and national levels. At this season when many people are considering what the New Year might bring, the secular world continues to issue dire predictions about the future of the planet. Climate change and poverty are global problems. But each society will be affected in different ways. What will the consequences of these issues be for Christians living as minorities in Muslim-majority contexts?

The outlook

Global warming is causing climate changes, which will have serious consequences for all societies as they attempt to cope with new situations. Much of the Muslim world is expected to suffer severely. For example, parts of the Middle East and North Africa will witness increased desertification, leading to chronic water shortages in coming years. Equally, rising sea levels mean that many populated areas are expected to disappear through flooding. One of the most vulnerable is Bangladesh, which is 83% Muslim, 16% Hindu and less than 1% Christian. Already catastrophic floods have caused widespread damage as far as 100km inland.

Progressing change in climate is expected to result in more frequent natural disasters. Floods, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, droughts – we are already aware of the devastating destruction these bring. Even after the initial impact the destruction of

infrastructure has long-term consequences, leaving weakened communities.

Some Western governments have made the link between carbon emissions and global warming, and are beginning to implement strategies and policies to counteract or reduce the effects, under pressure from “green” lobbying groups. Sadly some Western countries are not taking the necessary actions. Also many countries which are growing in industrialisation are not taking the opportunity to implement pollution-cutting strategies at this early stage, whether because they do not intend to or are unable to direct financial resources to this area. It is likely therefore that global pollution will not only continue but increase over the coming decades.

Unfortunately many countries at risk from climate change are already struggling with poverty. Most Muslim-majority countries are in the developing world and few are showing signs of rising prosperity; even in those countries which have prospered through their oil trade, the wealth does not filter down to much of the population. Indeed many have significant social and economic stratification, which leaves them with poor under-classes. As such they are unable to respond adequately to the predicted climate changes. Already reliant on overseas aid, this reliance will only grow as the challenges of global warming arrive.

Conflicts and natural disasters also produce large numbers of refugees, whether it be those fleeing from violence and fighting around their homes, or those whose homes have

been destroyed by flood or fire. The displaced communities settle in temporary refugee camps, which usually suffer from lack of resources, especially food and medical supplies. Malnutrition and other health problems are high. For countries which already have problems with health this is disastrous. A 2004 survey (Arab Human Development Report, 2004) found that in 15 Arab countries 32 million people suffer from malnutrition, which is roughly 12% of the total population of the countries surveyed. Even Kuwait, United Arab Emirates and some of the other wealthy Arab states have significant population groups who are not adequately nourished. In these circumstances they are unlikely to be able to support refugees or help them to resettle their communities.

Muslim reaction and the consequences for Christians

The Muslim reaction to these predicted problems is not usually as we might expect from a Western perspective. There is a tendency firstly to deny the existence of the problems. Many Muslim governments are amongst those who are currently unwilling to implement strategies to counter pollution or to prepare for climate change. Islamic countries have also been described as being in denial of the AIDS crisis facing their populations. A report in 2005, by the National Bureau of Asian Research, stated that “If leaders continue to ignore the problem, AIDS could debilitate or even destabilize some of these societies.” The report stated that Muslim leaders were unwilling to accept that adultery, promiscuity, homosexuality and intravenous-drug use is widespread in Muslim society and so transmitting the disease. “An important take-home message for all Muslim nations is that real behaviours on the streets are sometimes in marked contrast to the expected behaviours of good Muslims, and that is



Baptisms in Bangladesh. This low-lying country is at great risk if climate change leads to rising sea-levels

something that leaders in these countries must deal with,” said one of the authors of the report. Arab League Secretary-General Amr Moussa said in November 2006 that HIV and AIDS could contribute to a 35% economic loss in the Arab world within 25 years.

The Islamic mindset tends to have a “persecution complex”, in which every hardship is interpreted as persecution by non-Muslims, especially the “Christian” West, against Muslims. As Islamic communities struggle further this perception of victim status may intensify. Often it is the local Christians who bear the brunt of these interpretations, as they may be ill-treated by angry Muslims seeking to retaliate against the West.

Another common interpretation is that natural disasters and global warming etc. are a punishment from Allah, because Muslims have not been devout enough. It tends to be coupled with a call to stricter interpretations of the faith, to increased Islamisation.

This will lead to Christians receiving greater persecution and oppression as Muslims seek to please Allah possibly by aiming to eradicate Christianity in their countries.

For Christian minorities living in these Muslim-majority contexts the outlook is bleak. Because of discrimination Christians are often to be found at the bottom of the social stratification. Here are usually the greatest levels of poverty, the under-nourished groups, those with little access to facilities. These levels of society will be the hardest hit by any disaster or worsening of economic situations. But Christian minorities,

already facing daily persecution and discrimination, will have an extra dimension to their struggle.

It is predicted that by 2015 much of the Middle East will have significantly larger populations, who will be poorer, more urban and disillusioned. A poor, struggling population can result in desperation, which in turn can be a cause of Islamic radicalisation. Additionally significant population pressures arise because more than half the population of nearly all the Middle Eastern countries are under 20 years old. A particularly young population can become restless and volatile, and more prone to conflict because of large-scale unemployment. The sharp increase in population size means that society is not prepared to meet all the needs. Especially significant is that there will not be enough facilities to educate this growing young population. Lack of education means not only that people do not have the means to lift themselves out of poverty, but also they lack the ability to question what they are taught at a street level, and are vulnerable to indoctrination by Islamic extremists and radicals.

As resources become scarcer, everyone will be fighting for their share. However in the context of Christian minorities and Muslim majorities, there is not a level playing field. The Muslim majority will have greater access to the majority of the resources, and any resources which Christians are able to get will be resented by Muslims who might feel that Christians do not deserve access to clean water or fertile agricultural land if there are Muslims who are going without. We have already

seen situations where Christians are the last recipients in the distribution process of overseas aid, or some are left out altogether. If they have to rely on aid distributed by local authorities who are most often Muslims, they will be in very precarious situations.

In conclusion, there is a direct link between disaster, deprivation and persecution.

In God's hands

When the Lord Jesus gave His signs of the future to the disciples, He continued to tell them of the suffering they would endure – **“Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me.** At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, **but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations,** and then the end will come.” Matthew 24: 9-14 (emphasis added)

Jesus promises that those who stand firm will be saved. At Barnabas Fund we are sending aid and encouragement to many Christians to help them to stand firm. Our Lord also promises that through these trials the Gospel will be preached to all nations. We must pray that Christians suffering persecution will be used by God to glorify Himself. In the aftermath of the December 26th 2004 tsunami Christians who received aid from Barnabas Fund were able to witness to the love and generosity of our God as they shared their limited resources with their Muslim neighbours.

Christians who have been blessed with living in contexts of religious freedom have a responsibility to support those who are suffering persecution. In John 13:34-35 Jesus gave all Christians a command: **“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”** By our love for our brothers and sisters in Christ living as minorities in difficult situations, we can point others to the Saviour. ●

What is Shar‘ia?

**PULL-OUT
Supplement**

“It is through the Shariah, commonly translated as ‘Islamic Law’, that Islam is expressed in Muslim societies ... Shariah had come to signify Islam per se. If Islam is submission to the Will of God, then Shariah is the path by which submission is enacted, the actual route map of religion as a way of life. Hence, for many Muslims, Islam is the Shariah and the Shariah is Islam.”

(Ziauddin Sardar, *Desperately Seeking Paradise*, London, Granta Books, 2004, pp. 216-217).

Introduction

In the twenty-first century there are increasing calls for greater *shari‘a*-compliance in the West, especially in the UK, and for full *shari‘a* to be practised in more Muslim-majority countries.

Shari‘a is an Arabic word meaning “path” or “way”. Nowadays it is used to mean “Islamic law”, the detailed system of religious law developed by Muslim scholars in the first three centuries of Islam. This law expresses the Islamic way of life and – much more than the Qur’an - is the key to understanding Islam.

Shari‘a covers all aspects of life and does not separate between secular and religious spheres. It provides a framework of *dos* and *don’ts*, rituals and rules within which a Muslim leads his or her life.

Most Muslims hold that *shari‘a* protects them from sin like a fence or a roadblock. It also serves as an identity marker separating Muslims from non-Muslims. *Shari‘a* influences the behaviour and worldview of most Muslims, even in secular states where it forms no part of the law of the land.

The perfect divine norm

Most Muslims believe that *shari‘a*, as God’s revealed law, perfect and eternal, is binding on individuals, society and state in all its details. They therefore believe that any criticism of *shari‘a* is heresy. Most Sunni Muslims believe it to be completely unchangeable, although Shi‘as allow for the possibility of interpreting and adapting it to new circumstances.

Muslims who deny the validity of *shari‘a* or criticise it in any way are labelled as non-Muslims (infidels, apostates) by traditionalists and Islamists. As such they face the threat of being prosecuted as apostates, a crime that carries the death penalty in *shari‘a*.

Development and characteristics of *shari‘a*

Shari‘a systematises all human acts

Shari‘a is a complex legal system derived from the Islamic source texts Qur’an and *hadith* (traditions of Muhammad’s words and deeds) through interpretation, commentary and case law. It was created in a context in which Muslims held political power, and thus lacks guidance for Muslims living as a minority under non-Muslims.

Shari‘a tries to describe in detail all possible human acts, dividing them into permitted (*halal*) and prohibited (*haram*). It subdivides them into various degrees of good or evil such as obligatory, recommended, neutral, objectionable or

forbidden. It is a vast compendium of rules, regulating in detail all matters of devotional life, worship, ritual purity, marriage and inheritance, criminal offences, commerce and personal conduct. It also regulates the governing of the Islamic state and its relations to non-Muslims within the state as well as to enemies outside the state.

Schools of law

Four Sunni orthodox schools of law, named after their founders, developed and were codified by the end of the tenth century. These are the Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi‘i and Hanbali schools. These schools differ somewhat in the way they arrive at legal decisions, but they accept each other as orthodox. The Shi‘a version is very similar to the Sunni schools.

The work of the founders was continued by their disciples, and over the centuries several widely accepted handbooks of law were composed by famous scholars. Modern Muslim jurists often differentiate between *shari‘a* as revealed divine law and *fiqh*, the jurist’s interpretation of *shari‘a*.

Attempts at reform and the Islamist backlash

Since the nineteenth century there have been efforts at reforming *shari‘a* in a liberal direction in order to accommodate it to the modern world. Most reformers saw the return to the sources of Islam as the “golden key” that would cure Muslim societies of their backward state and political weakness. Many downgraded the authority of the four legal schools and of later traditions; this approach enabled jurists to select and mix from the different schools and to make the good of the community (*maslaha*) their ultimate guiding principle. Most such reformers stressed the importance of reason, and differentiated between a core of universal values in *shari‘a* that was unchangeable and eternal, and the larger part dealing with social relations that was open to change and adaptation to new contexts.

In the contemporary Muslim world, however, it is the traditionalists and especially the Islamists, upholders of the traditional view of *shari‘a*, who are dominating Muslim public opinion. This leaves liberal reformers as a small minority surviving mainly in the West. Liberal reformers face heavy pressure from Islamists and traditionalists who brand them apostates and infidels and attack them verbally, legally and physically.

Shari‘a and modern standards

Muslims often claim that *shari‘a* was quite moderate by the standards of the seventh to tenth centuries when it was created. However it has remained unchanged since then, and is thus extremely harsh compared to modern Western

standards. It infringes many modern principles of human rights, religious freedom and equality of all before the law. *Shari'a* inherently discriminates against women, non-Muslims and “heretical Muslims” as well as against

Muslims who choose to convert to another faith.

Five main areas in which *shari'a* is incompatible with human rights

1. *Hudud* punishments

These are the severe punishments prescribed by *shari'a* for some offences defined as being against God himself. The punishments for these crimes are seen as divinely ordained and cannot be changed by humans. These include 100 lashes or stoning to death for adultery; 80 lashes for false accusation of adultery; amputation of limbs for theft; 40 or 80 lashes for drinking alcohol; imprisonment, amputation or death (by crucifixion in serious cases) for highway robbery; and the death penalty for apostasy from Islam.

Many Islamic scholars, academics and popular preachers support the present day application of *hudud* punishments, seeing them as identity markers of true Islamic revival. Well known Islamic scholars responded negatively to a call in March 2005 by the popular Islamist professor, Tariq Ramadan, for a temporary halt to *hudud* punishments. One claimed any attempt at softening *shari'a* was giving in to Western Christian concepts.

2. Jews, Christians and other non-Muslims

Discrimination on the basis of religion is fundamental to *shari'a*. Islam must be dominant and only Muslims are full citizens, so Muslims are treated as far superior to all others.

Jews and Christians are defined as *dhimmis* (literally “protected” i.e. permitted to live). However this protection is on condition that they do not bear arms, know their lowly place in society, treat Muslims with respect, pay a special poll tax (*jizya*), and do not behave arrogantly. Numerous petty *shari'a* laws used to restrict and humiliate *dhimmis* in their daily lives. They could practise their faith inside their synagogues and churches but not in public places (bells were not allowed to be rung). No new church buildings were allowed, nor were existing churches to be repaired. *Dhimmis* could not testify in a *shari'a* court against a Muslim. They could not share their faith with Muslims. They could not hold any public office that placed them in a position of authority over Muslims. At best, they could serve their Muslim rulers in administrative capacities.

The general attitude of contempt for non-Muslims created by centuries of applying such laws means that even in modern secular Muslim states that have constitutionally guaranteed equal rights to all citizens, non-Muslims are

discriminated against in numerous ways.

Pagan non-Muslims were, in classical *shari'a*, to be offered the choice of death or conversion to Islam.

3. Muslim heretics and apostates

Muslims who accept teachings considered heretical by orthodox Islam are held by *shari'a* to have reverted to paganism and therefore to deserve the death penalty. The same is true for Muslims converting to another religion (apostates), who are considered as traitors. All schools of *shari'a* agree that adult male apostates from Islam should be killed. Even where the death sentence is not carried out, their marriages may be automatically dissolved and they face severe penalties such as exile, disinheritance, loss of possessions, threats, beatings, torture, and prison.

Many liberal or secularist Muslims find themselves in danger of being classified as apostates for views which the religious establishment or militant Islamist groups hold to be heretical. Muslim “heretical” sects are severely persecuted. This is especially true of the Ahmadiyya sect in Pakistan and of the Bahai religion in Iran.

4. Holy War – *jihad*

Shari'a lays down *jihad* as one of the most basic religious duties, clearly indicating by the regulations listed that *jihad* is understood as physical warfare. Linked to the concept of *jihad* is the division of the world into two opposing domains: the House of Islam (*Dar al-Islam*) and the House of War (*Dar al-Harb*). Muslims are supposed to wage *jihad* to change the House of War (where non-Muslims are politically dominant) into the House of Islam, politically dominated by Muslims. While some modern Muslims reject this aggressive understanding of *jihad*, most Muslims agree that *jihad* includes defending Muslim territory and Muslims from any form of aggression; this leaves the door open to interpreting any conflict involving Muslims as a case of defensive *jihad*. Islamic terror groups justify their atrocities by references to the *shari'a* rules on *jihad*.

5. Status of women

Shari'a also discriminates on the basis of gender. Men are regarded as superior. Women are treated as deficient in intelligence, morals and religion, and must therefore be protected from their own weaknesses. *Shari'a* rules enforce modesty in dress and behaviour and the segregation of genders. They place women under the legal guardianship of their male relatives. Women are inherently of less value than men in many legal rulings. A man is allowed up to four wives, but women can have only one husband. A man can divorce his wife easily; a woman faces great obstacles should she want a divorce from her husband. A daughter inherits half as much as a son, and the testimony of a female witness in court is worth only half that of a male witness. In cases of murder, the compensation for a woman is less than that given for a man.

In many Muslim societies gender segregation in public is imposed or encouraged. *Shari'a* courts often display a clear gender bias. This is seen in the widespread practice of accusing rape victims of illicit sexual relations (*zina*), an offence which carries punishments ranging from

imprisonment and flogging to death by stoning. The victim is thus transformed into a culprit. Large numbers of Pakistani rape victims are in prison because of this.

In a few countries, for example, Turkey and Tunisia, secular codes have improved the situation for women. Recently Morocco passed a much more liberal version of the *shari'a* family code which gives much more equality to women.

Challenge of shari'a in Western countries

Shari'a poses a challenge to Western societies because of the constant pressure in Muslim communities to implement it and expand its area of influence. For many Muslims in the West, secular law lacks legitimacy, especially in the realm of family law. A recent survey showed that two-thirds of British Muslims would prefer to follow *shari'a* in cases where UK law conflicts with Islamic law.

Many Muslims claim they have the right as a religious minority to follow their own customs and laws, including *shari'a*. There have been calls for partial incorporation of *shari'a* into British civil law. Some Muslim groups have campaigned for the legal incorporation of Islamic family law into the British legal system. In 1990 the Muslim Institute suggested "the creation of a Muslim legal framework to decide cases that may then be recognised as valid in British law".

Creation of a parallel alternative legal framework

Many Muslims in the West try to live by *shari'a* regulations as far as possible, creating an unofficial enclave in which Islamic religious scholars and lawyers offer their services. This has created an alternative legal structure of *shari'a* courts and councils.

The stronger the parallel network of Islamic institutions becomes, the more pressure is exerted on Muslims to use these in preference to non-Muslim institutions. Once a *shari'a* alternative is available, it becomes obligatory for Muslims to obey *shari'a* in that specific case. A serious question is the amount of social, family and community pressure brought to bear on the most vulnerable members of the Muslim community – mainly women and children – to abide by the verdicts of such courts even when they place them at a disadvantage as compared with verdicts achieved in the official British court system. For those living in insular and tightly knit traditional communities such pressures to conform must be virtually irresistible.

Many Muslim leaders are constantly applying pressure on Western society, institutions and legal systems to adapt as far as possible to Muslim *shari'a* concepts and models, while at the same time constructing their own alternative *shari'a* systems.

Marriage and divorce

Women are undoubtedly the main victims of the *shari'a* system which inherently favours the husband. British law, for instance, recognises Muslim marriages that were performed abroad before the partners entered the UK. However British residents in the UK must contract marriage according to civil law in order for the marriage to be legally recognised. It is very common, even for well educated

Muslims, to think it unnecessary to register their marriages in the civil system.

Some wrongly believe that the Islamic wedding ceremony is recognised by British law. In cases of divorce the women are then left with the much lesser legal rights of a "cohabitee". Some Muslim men knowingly exploit the ignorance of their wives so as not to have to pay maintenance and repay dowry should they divorce them. Widows may find they lack pension rights and rights to their husband's property.

Another problem is that many Muslim women in the UK may get divorced under *shari'a* only, without getting their divorce ratified by a civil court. Some believe they are free to remarry, but under British law they are then committing bigamy (an offence punishable by seven years' imprisonment).

Child marriages

In several Muslim countries child marriages are legal. For many traditional Muslims, child marriages are acceptable because Muhammad married his favourite wife Aisha when she was six years old and consummated the marriage when she was nine. This is why, following the 1979 Iranian Revolution, Iran's new rulers lowered the minimum age of marriage for girls to nine. Recently in India, the All India Muslim Personal Law Board attempted to gain an exemption for Muslims from the legal minimum marriage age of 18 set by Indian law. According to the board, child marriages are part of *shari'a* which is "absolute, final and non-negotiable".

Even in Britain it is possible that child marriages are happening. The Sharia Council of Darul Uloom London gives some rules for divorce on its website, one of which clearly indicates that the council envisages the possibility of divorcing girls below the age of puberty.

Polygamy

Under *shari'a* a man is allowed up to four wives. Polygamy is allowed in many Muslim countries but prohibited in Western countries. This raises problems for Muslim residents in the West who married another wife either before their immigration or while visiting their "home countries".

The Muslim Parliament of Great Britain has complained that many families are being forced to live outside the law because their polygamous marriages are not recognised in the UK. One estimate gives the number of polygamous families in Britain at several hundreds.

Female genital mutilation

Female genital mutilation is widespread among some Muslim communities, especially Egypt, East Africa, Yemen, and Indonesia. Some Muslim leaders condemn it as un-Islamic but many believe that it is ordained in the

shari'a. They also believe it is essential for preserving women's chastity on which the all-important family honour largely depends. In 1994 the former Sheik of Al-Azhar, Egypt, Jad Al-

Haqq 'Ali Jad Al-Haqq, ruled that circumcision is an Islamic duty for women as well as for men. In the UK it is a criminal offence under the 1985 Prohibition of Female Circumcision Act, but an estimated 7,000 girls in Britain are of an age to be at risk from this procedure at any given time. The law is being evaded by families taking the girls abroad for a holiday and having the procedure carried out there.

Veiling

In *shari'a* there are differences between the various schools of law as to the extent of what a woman may reveal in public. The Hanafi and Maliki schools of law permit face and hands to be revealed in public, thus there is no need for a veil over the face. Among Hanbalis there are two opinions, some permitting the revealing of face and hands, others forbidding it. The Shafi'is demand that a woman's face and hands be covered in public, thus demanding some kind of veil over her face. It would seem that the majority of classical scholars agreed that a woman's face may be displayed, and a minority said the face must be covered. Practice thus differed regionally depending on which school of law and scholars were followed in that area.

Both Qur'an and *hadith* urge modesty in women's dress and command them to cover themselves in public. The problem is a matter of interpretation of the original Arabic words used. One such word, *jilbab*, is obviously an outer garment, but what did it look like? Was it just a mantle-like garment that covered the under clothes, or did it cover head and face and ankles as well? Does another word, *junub*, mean bosom only, or did it mean head, face, neck and bosom?

Some modern Muslim women in the West are adopting the strictest version as a way of asserting their Muslim identity. It appears that Muslim organisations in the West

are manipulating the issue to further the Islamisation of their host societies.

The problem of full veiling of the face for security and anti-terrorist measures is obvious. Yet in the US the Council on American-Islamic Relations has managed to persuade the states of Kansas, Pennsylvania, Indiana, Montana, and Washington to allow Muslim women to have their driving licence photo taken with their faces veiled showing their eyes only.

Halal products

According to *shari'a*, certain foods such as pork and alcohol are forbidden to Muslims. The *shari'a* also says that animals must be slaughtered by Muslims in a religious ritual which includes slitting the animal's throat and draining its blood. Stunning of animals before slaughter is forbidden. Only meat produced by this type of slaughter is *halal* (permitted) for consumption. *Halal* food is provided in many public institutions in the UK such as schools, hospitals and prisons. Sometimes it is served to everyone, irrespective of faith. Likewise, most of the lamb exported from New Zealand is *halal*, whether it is going to a Muslim-majority country or to the West. The Muslim Council of Britain has recommended that the Islamic method of slaughter be adopted universally in Britain for all consumers. This trend can be seen as part of a process of Islamisation, whereby non-Muslims end up living by Islamic rules.

Though the Qur'an specifically prohibits only pork and alcohol, the Islamic Food and Nutrition Council of America has made a list of 36 different categories of food, drinks, and cosmetic products covering 301 products which meet *shari'a* requirement. Such products must not contain any prohibited ingredients and must be processed according to Islamic guidelines. To protect the certification process from fraud, Muslims in New Jersey, Illinois, Minnesota, Michigan, Texas, Virginia and California have successfully persuaded their legislators to adopt a halal bill.

Shari'a and Muslims in the West

Muslims in the West face a dilemma about whether to obey *shari'a* or the law of the land in which they live. Scholars have a variety of options. We shall look at this subject in a future issue.

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IRAN: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF 2007



Tehran, the capital of Iran. The Iranian president expects the return of the *mahdi* this year, and perhaps believes that he should speed the process up by creating chaos on earth. Copyright 2006 © iStockphoto/Klaas Lingbeek van Kranen. No. 1391599

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran believes strongly in the imminent return of the *mahdi*. He has placed this belief at the centre of Iran's domestic and foreign policy. In 2005 he stated that his government's main mission was to "pave the path for the glorious reappearance of Imam *mahdi*". He also told regime officials that the Hidden Imam would return in two years' time. That means he is expecting this event to happen in 2007.

The *mahdi* is an Islamic End-Time deliverer, whom Muslims believe will appear in the last days. For Shi'a Muslims (who form the majority in Iran) the coming *mahdi* is their twelfth and last Imam who disappeared in 874 in Samarra, Iraq. He is believed to exist today in an invisible spiritual mode (the Hidden Imam), and will return at the end of time to set up God's (Islamic) Kingdom of justice and peace. The *mahdi* on his return will purify

Islam and establish it as the global religion, implementing true *shari'a* without any leniency. He will offer Islam to all non-Muslims: those who accept will be spared, those who refuse will be killed.

For President Ahmadinejad the whole mission of the 1979 Iranian Revolution was to prepare the way for the *mahdi*. He considers it to be his and his government's responsibility to pave the way for the return of the *mahdi*. He has mentioned the twelfth Imam in almost every one of his public speeches. As Mayor of Tehran he secretly instructed the city council in 2004 to build a grand avenue to prepare for the *mahdi*. As President, he has urged Iranians to work hard for the return of the hidden *mahdi*. There are persistent rumours that Ahmadinejad's new cabinet had drawn up a contract with the *mahdi* promising to work for his return in exchange for

his support. Constructing a powerful Islamic state is part of this preparation, a tool to be handed over to the *mahdi* on his return which he can then use to fulfil his programme.

Ahmadinejad is linked to the Hojjatieh, a *mahdist* group that believes that chaos must be created to hasten the coming of the *mahdi* and his final Islamic state. Ahmadinejad seems to believe that an apocalyptic conflagration will precede the return of the *mahdi* so chaos on an international scale will hasten the *mahdi*'s return. Nuclear weapons in the hands of Iran would seem to be an ideal tool for encouraging such chaos and for proffering to the *mahdi* to ensure his victory. Critics say this explains Ahmadinejad's reckless statements and policies as he seems to believe that a nuclear war with Israel and the USA would speed the return of the *mahdi*. ●

FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH: CHRISTIANS IN BURMA

WHERE RACE, RELIGION AND MILITARY MIGHT ARE DESTROYING A NATION

The soldiers set fire to the church, school and houses, looted the clinic and destroyed it, and burnt the crops. It was a typical attack by the Burma army on a Christian village, this particular one being on the Moei River in eastern Burma. The people fled and rebuilt their village a few miles away.

The notorious military junta in Burma represses and kills its people mercilessly. Their persecution is focused especially on the ethnic minorities, among whom are many Christians. But, unlike most other military regimes, the junta appears no longer to have any particular political or ideological basis apart from support for the Burman ethnic group. Sometimes it makes use of Buddhism, the majority faith, as a weapon to suppress Christians, but can equally turn on Buddhists if they oppose the junta. Its real guiding principle appears to be simply to maintain itself in power.

Ethnicity and religion – and their interlinkage – are key factors in understanding the situation in Burma. The population of around 50 million is divided into at least 15 major ethnic groups, with a wide variety of geographical origins and hence of cultural and linguistic differences. Since independence all census data has been unreliable and has tended to exaggerate the number of Burmans. But, according to the Karen Human Rights Group, Burmans probably

constitute no more than 50% of the population, with Karen (including Karenni and Pa’O) the next largest group (6-7 million) and then the Shan and Mon (4 million each).

No one knows which group arrived first in the area which is now Burma. But for hundreds of years various small kingdoms were at war with each other, seeking to increase their territory. The less successful or less inclined to fight were gradually pushed to the hills around the

peripheries of the area.

The main towns and cities are in the lowland plains of the centre and south. The west, north and east are more rural, hilly and inaccessible. The old Burman kingdoms were in the central plains, and the non-Burman people lived in the surrounding hills.

Christianity comes

When Adoniram Judson, the first Western missionary to what is now Burma, arrived amongst the Karen in 1813, he was astonished by the warmth of the welcome he received. The Karen already believed in one creator God named Y’we. They had a legend that they had carelessly lost a “Golden Book” which contained the truth about life but one day a young white brother would bring them the book again. Their folklore also spoke about a man and a woman living in a garden, and a snake who gave the woman some forbidden fruit. It is thought that the Karen may have encountered Nestorian* Christian missionaries,

Some of the main ethnic groups of Burma (figures are estimates)

Ethnic group	Geographical origin or ethnic links	Main Religion	Estimated population	Main location within Burma
Burman	Indo-Tibetan region	Buddhist	25 million	centre
Karen, Karenni and Pa’O	Mongolia	60% animist 40% Christian	6-7 million	south and south-east
Shan	China (Sino-Thai race)	Buddhist	4 million	east
Mon	Related to the Khmer of Cambodia	Buddhist	4 million	south-eastern coast
Rohingya	Related to Bengali and other Indians	Muslim	1.5 million	western coast
Chin (also called Zo)	Tibet and north-east India	90% Christian 10% animist	1.3 million	western hills
Kachin	Tibet	60% Christian?	1 million	north

perhaps in China while the Karen were migrating south from Mongolia in the early centuries AD. These missionaries would have been fair-skinned Middle Easterners. Other people believe that the Karen may be one of the “lost tribes of Israel” and had retained some knowledge of the Old Testament. Whatever their origin, these beliefs meant that many Karen readily became Christians when the white missionaries brought them the Gospel. The Karen are now about 40% Christian.

In the late nineteenth century, the first Chin became a Christian. As more and more Chins decided to follow Christ, their culture changed in many ways to make it conform more to Biblical teaching. Chin State is now thought to be 90% Christian. Christianity has acted as a unifying force, bringing together different Chin communities which had previously been divided and hostile to each other.

Creating Burma

The boundaries of Burma were created by the British after they had forcibly annexed the territory in three separate portions over a period of six decades in the nineteenth century. Before this time it had not been considered a single geographical unit.

During the Second World War, Japan invaded and occupied Burma (1942). A Burman group called the Burma Independence Army (BIA) who had helped the invading Japanese, hoping that this way they could get independence from Britain, later turned against them and began to resist Japanese rule. In 1945 Britain liberated Burma from Japanese occupation, with the help of the BIA, now called the Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League and led by Aung San. The British were also helped by non-Burman groups such as the Karen, Karenni and Kachin, who hoped that in return they would be granted independence from the Burmans.

After the war the British convened the Frontier Areas Commission of Enquiry to investigate the situation of the non-Burmans, especially the Karens. However as more and more villagers testified about atrocities perpetrated against them by the BIA,



A simple Bible school in Burma – classroom (inset) ... and dormitory

the British appeared to regret having set up the Commission. It was closed and much of the testimony wiped from the record.

Independence was granted in 1948 for the former colony as a whole; the non-Burmans were not given their own state(s). Immediately the non-Burmans began to call for some kind of autonomy or independence, at first by peaceful demonstrations, but this had no effect. In 1949 the non-Burmans began an armed rebellion.

Military rule

In 1962 a military coup led by General Ne Win ousted the elected government and Burma has been under military rule of one sort or another ever since. Ne Win formed a single-party socialist state, crushed all opposition and began to guide Burma into a position of isolation from the rest of the world.

In 1989 the government renamed the country “Myanmar”. They declared martial law and arrested many people who were calling for democracy and human rights. One of those arrested was Aung San’s daughter, Aung San Suu Kyi, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize two years later.

Brutality against minorities

The regime concentrates on controlling the civilian population, in particular the ethnic minorities, who include most of the Christians in

Burma. One of the main methods is for the army to forcibly relocate whole villages from the hills into more accessible army-controlled areas. They are usually given no more than a week to move, and are warned that after the deadline their old homes and any remaining belongings will be destroyed while any people spotted in the village will be shot on sight. After relocation it is not normally possible for people to get to their fields and tend them, so they must forage for food or try to find other work.

A MEDITATION BY A CONTEMPORARY KAREN CHURCH LEADER

*They call us a displaced people,
But praise God: we are not misplaced.
They say they see no hope for our future,
But praise God; our future is as bright as
the promises of God.
They say they see the life of our people is
a misery,
But praise God; our life is a mystery.
For what they say is what they see,
And what they see is temporal.
But ours is the eternal.
All because we put ourselves
In the hands of the God we trust.*

“Pastor Simon”

Sometimes the army also puts pressure on by controlling schooling, with the result that many children are now growing up without education. Furthermore the army uses the relocated people as a convenient source of unpaid labour, making it even more difficult for them to support themselves. After a few months they face the choice of starvation or fleeing.

The forced labour can include building fences and roads, digging trenches, cutting firewood, cooking for and carrying water to soldiers, clearing scrub, doing sentry duty, growing crops for the army, or providing the labour for various business enterprises run by the officers for their own profit. One of the hardest tasks is being a porter for the army. Carrying huge loads, and marching in front of the soldiers, the porters are kicked or beaten if they are too slow. If they become sick or cannot continue they are killed or left behind. Many porters die anyway of illnesses linked to exhaustion and malnutrition.

To avoid forced labour some village men have tried hiding in the forest, leaving only the women, children and elderly in the village. But the result is that the unprotected women are raped, or taken as porters, or held hostage pending the return of their husbands.

Now that people are aware of the consequences of relocation, many refuse to move but go into hiding in the forests surrounding their fields. They try to survive by growing small patches of crops in a number of different places, hoping that the army will not find the tiny fields and destroy them. Tens of thousands of people are now believed to be living like this, with inadequate food and no access to education or medical care. If the army finds them they are captured or shot.

There are also non-Burman military groups, who are fighting a guerrilla war against the government. They too make their demands on the villagers, forcing them to provide food and other support. The villagers are then punished by the government army for having helped the rebels.

Both the government army and the rebels have taken to laying landmines,

especially in Karen State. The army uses villagers as "human mine-sweepers", forcing them to walk ahead of the troops. Often they make a point of choosing women or children for this task.

There are believed to be around 2 million people internally displaced in Burma, many of whom are hiding in the forests or surviving by begging in the towns. Many more have fled to Thailand.

Anti-Christian persecution

There are nearly four million Christians in Burma, chiefly among the Karen, Karenni, Chin and Kachin ethnic groups. Therefore the army uses Buddhism in its persecution of these groups. Indeed some years ago



These children are healthy and well dressed but many children in Burma are malnourished, hiding in the jungle, without schooling or healthcare

the junta, when it was known as the Burma Socialist Programme Party, adopted the slogan "To be a Burmese is to be a Buddhist". Church buildings are often the first buildings attacked by the army when they target a village, while Buddhist temples are left untouched. But in cities, too, church buildings are targeted. For example, 80 churches in the capital Rangoon were closed down in 2001 and an order was issued forbidding Christian meetings in buildings less than a hundred years old. The army sometimes makes a point of demanding forced labour from Christians on Sundays or during Christian festival times such as Christmas. Christians in the army are denied promotion beyond the rank of major.

Chin State

Chin State, which is 90% Christian, suffers many forms of specifically anti-Christian persecution by the government. The Chin Christians had chosen to erect crosses on the mountain-tops, as symbols of their faith, but the army has now forced them to tear the crosses down and, sometimes, to build a Buddhist pagoda in their place. Christians must obtain a permit for any gathering of more than five people, apart from Sunday services, and such permission is not necessarily granted. In the ten years to 2004 all applications for permission to construct new church buildings were refused. Church ministers are particularly targeted for persecution because of the respect and influence they have within the Chin community. Printing Bibles is forbidden in Chin State and those which are smuggled in may be seized and burned if they are discovered.

The junta send in Buddhist monks to various towns and villages in Chin State, with soldiers to protect them. The monks effectively rule the communities in which they are living, and report anyone who disobeys them to the army so that they can be punished. Anyone who converts to Buddhism is exempt from forced labour or portering and all other kinds of persecution. Attempts are made to force Christians to build Buddhist monasteries or temples.

Some converts to Buddhism receive special training in how to attack Christianity. (See box on page 13.) They are given rice and other materials and promised education for their children. They are also promised monthly financial support if they can convert other Christians to Buddhism. The amount of money depends on how many families and how many individuals they can manage to convert.

Chin Christian children as young as 11 are sometimes lured away from their families by the offer of a good education. Instead they can find themselves in a Buddhist monastery, their heads shaved, forced to train as novice monks. Some never see their parents again.

Muslims also targeted

The government also targets the Rohingya ethnic group who are

Muslims. They are effectively denied Burmese citizenship, their freedom of movement is restricted and they suffer the same forced eviction, destruction of property and forced labour as the other non-Burman minorities. Muslims elsewhere in Burma are also persecuted. For example, 40 mosques in Rangoon and Mandalay were ransacked in 1997.

Destroying a country and its people

Burma has fertile soils and offshore oil and gas deposits. It is the world's largest exporter of teak, and is also an important source of jade, pearls, rubies and sapphires. Nevertheless it is one of the poorest countries in Asia and has some of the worst health conditions in the world.

Neither the regime, nor the brutal and corrupt army, which cause such suffering to so many of Burma's people, has popular support. The army sustains itself largely by forced conscription or by making hollow

promises of protection for the families of new recruits. It is also a way to earn one's living in a country where hunger abounds, and is one of the few viable career options in Burma. Soldiers are not allowed to leave the army until they have recruited several more. There are an estimated 70,000 child soldiers, making up 20% of the army.

The traditional system of subsistence farming in villages is increasingly unable to function because of the activities of the army. Persecution by the junta has created such an appalling situation amongst the Karen, Karenni and Mon of eastern Burma that a report published in September 2006 said that they were more likely to die than people in Congo, Sierra Leone or Afghanistan. The death rate amongst children under five is 22%, a figure which is ten times higher than in neighbouring Thailand. Fifteen percent of children have malnutrition, and many people are dying from diseases like malaria, respiratory ailments and diarrhoea.



A church in a rural part of Burma

The report puts the health crisis down to the evictions, forced labour, destruction of crops and constant fear of death which people in this area are enduring.

Faithful Christians

In the midst of this destruction, Burma's Christians hold on to their faith. Above the platform in the new church rebuilt after the village on the Moei River was destroyed, a text from Revelation 2:10 was hung. "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

"We have to leave village after village, house after house," said the minister. "But it increases our faith. We are Christians; we know God will help us. But please remember us in your prayers. Please do not forget."

There is a remarkable amount of Christian ministry in Burma, including many Bible schools and other institutions for Christian training. Church growth is continuing, especially among the non-Burman peoples.

Aid for the Church in Burma

Barnabas Fund's aid for Christians in Burma has included:

- 11 wells for Christian villages
- a mini sound-proof studio for a radio ministry
- support for the leader of a radio ministry
- building student hostels for a Bible school
- building and equipment for training Bible school students in tailoring
- advanced theological training for a church leader

Pray that Christians in Burma will indeed be faithful unto death, if that is necessary, and that their faithfulness will bring glory to God.

17 ways to attack Christians

Translated from a pamphlet given to a Chin convert to Buddhism during a 10-day period of Buddhist missionary training. He later returned to Christianity. The pamphlet was entitled *Missionaries, Honourable Monks, Cleansing Organisation: The Facts to Attack Christians*.

1. Attack Christian families and the progress of Christians.
2. Criticise sermons broadcast from Manila, Philippines.
3. Criticise God as narrow-minded and egotistical because he claimed that "There is no god except the eternal god."
4. Be against corrupted youth and inappropriate fashion.
5. Criticise the preaching of Christians wherever it has penetrated.
6. Criticise Christianity by pointing out its delicacy and weakness.
7. Stop the spread of the Christian movement in rural areas.
8. Criticise by pointing out "It is not salvation, but purchased by blood."
9. Counterattack by pointing out Christianity's weakness and overcome this with Buddhism.
10. Counter the Bible, after thorough study.
11. Criticise the statement that "God loves only Israel but not all the races."
12. Point out the ambiguity between the two testaments.
13. Criticise Christianity for being partisan.
14. Criticise Christianity's concept of the Creator and compare it with the scientific concept.
15. Study and access the amount given in offerings.
16. Criticise the Holy Spirit, after thorough study.
17. Attack Christians by means both non-violent and violent.