

BARNABAS FUND - AID AGENCY FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH - BRINGING HOPE TO SUFFERING CHRISTIANS

ARMENIAN CHRISTIANS
Ousted from ancient homeland

TRUST
*Inspiring guidance on trusting
God in uncertain times*

NEW PULL-OUT SERIES
*Understanding Islam from
a Christian perspective*



**1261
families
freed**

The Barnabas Fund Distinctive

What helps make Barnabas Fund distinctive from other Christian organisations that deal with persecution?



We work by:

- Directing our aid only to Christians, although its benefits may not be exclusive to them ("As we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, **especially to those who belong to the family of believers.**" Galatians 6:10, emphasis added)
- Channelling money **from** Christians **through** Christians **to** Christians (we do not send people, we only send money)
- Channelling money through existing structures in the countries where funds are sent (e.g. local churches or Christian organisations)
- Using the money to fund projects which have been developed by local Christians in their own communities, countries or regions
- Considering any request, however small
- Acting as equal partners with the persecuted Church, whose leaders often help shape our overall direction
- Acting on behalf of the persecuted Church, to be their voice - making their needs known to Christians around the world and the injustice of their persecution known to governments and international bodies

We seek to:

- meet both practical and spiritual needs
- encourage, strengthen and enable the existing local Church and Christian

communities - so they can maintain their presence and witness rather than setting up our own structures or sending out missionaries

- tackle persecution at its root by making known the aspects of other religions and ideologies that result in injustice and oppression of Christians and others
- inform and enable Christians in the West to respond to the growing challenge of other religions and ideologies to Church, society and mission in their own countries
- facilitate global intercession for the persecuted Church by providing comprehensive prayer material
- safeguard and protect our volunteers, staff, partners and beneficiaries
- keep our overheads low

We believe:

- we are called to address both religious and secular ideologies that deny full religious liberty to Christian minorities - while continuing to show God's love to all people
- in the clear Biblical teaching that Christians should treat all people of all faiths with love and compassion, even those who seek to persecute them
- in the power of prayer to change people's lives and situations, either through grace to endure or through deliverance from suffering

"Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me." (Matthew 25:40)

barnabasaid the magazine of Barnabas Fund

Published by Barnabas Aid

1934 Old Gallows Road Suite 350 Vienna, VA 22182, USA

© Barnabas Aid 2021

Email info@barnabasfund.org

For permission to reproduce articles from this magazine, please contact the International Headquarters address above.

To donate by credit/debit card, please visit the website www.barnabasfund.org/nz or by phone at (09) 280 4385 or 0800 008 805

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

Every effort has been made to trace copyright holders and obtain permission for stories and images used in this publication. Barnabas Fund apologises for any errors or omissions and will be grateful for any further information regarding copyright.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com The "NIV" and "New International Version" are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™

Front Cover: A Christian Pakistani brick-kiln family that Barnabas freed from their debts

How to find us

You may contact Barnabas Fund at the following addresses

International Headquarters

The Old Rectory, River Street, Pewsey, Wiltshire SN9 5DB, UK

Telephone 01672 564938

Fax 01672 565030

From outside UK:

Telephone +44 1672 564938

Fax +44 1672 565030

Email info@barnabasfund.org

For a list of all trustees, please contact Barnabas Fund UK at the Coventry address. Registered charity number 1092935 Company registered in England number 04029536

Australia

PO Box 3527, Loganholme, QLD 4129

Telephone (07) 3806 1076 or 1300 365 799

Email bfaustralia@barnabasfund.org

New Zealand

PO Box 276018, Manukau City,

Auckland 2241

Telephone (09) 280 4385 or 0800 008 805

Email office@barnabasfund.org.nz

Barnabas Fund is a company registered in New Zealand number 9429 0429 68016. NZ Charities Services registration number CC37773.



Let us not be weary in well doing (Galatians 6:9 KJV)

Most Christians who have committed their lives wholeheartedly to the Lord's service know what it is to become dejected, listless and discouraged. We cease to feel much for the things that we used to be passionate about. We have little empathy for the suffering, or righteous anger about injustice. Prayer, worship and reading the Bible seem to be meaningless mechanical exercises.

In modern times, an extreme version of this state is sometimes called by the exciting name of "burn-out". Long ago, however, the Greek word *acedia* was used, literally meaning "not caring". Such sluggishness of heart was greatly feared by the early Christians. Although the word does not occur in the Bible, *acedia* was considered one of the most dangerous sins into which a believer could fall.

Even towering spiritual heroes can be overtaken by *acedia*, especially after a time of great stress, exertion or persecution. Elijah was afflicted so badly at one point that he begged to die: "I have had enough, LORD. Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors." (1 Kings 19:4) Jeremiah, worn down by mockery and opposition to his prophetic ministry, reached such a low that he cursed the day he had been born (Jeremiah 20:7-18). John the Baptist was apparently overwhelmed with doubts while in prison and needed assurance that his cousin Jesus was indeed the Messiah (Matthew 11:3).

We have all come through a long hard year of coronavirus. Even if not much affected ourselves, we were burdened by the knowledge of rising poverty, shrinking economies and growing inequality across the globe, with increasing anti-Christian violence in many places too. At the same time, our normal spiritual disciplines and input were probably disrupted by lockdown.

Perhaps some of us feel the inertness of *acedia* creeping up on us? As a new year starts, our hearts sink and we struggle to find the energy to keep giving of ourselves.

If so, the Bible has a message for us at the beginning of 2021: "Let us not become weary in doing good." (Galatians 6:9) These words were written by Paul, who knew all about stress, danger and exhaustion. In the first chapter of 2 Corinthians, he shares with us very frankly about a time when he hit rock bottom, when he became so extremely discouraged and his afflictions were so crushingly great that he despaired even of life itself (2 Corinthians 1:8-9). But he goes on in the same letter to state with determination that "we do not lose heart" (2 Corinthians 4:1,16). In fact, the Greek word that Paul uses to the Corinthians, *enakoumen*, usually translated into English along the lines of "not losing heart" or "not being discouraged", is the same word that he uses to the Galatians, where it is most often translated along the lines of "not becoming weary".

What is clear is that we must strive to conquer inner discouragement, rather than yield to it. We must not give up seeking to walk closely with the Lord, to hear His voice and to do His will. We must continue to do good, in Christ's Name. Paul goes on to clarify what he means about doing good: "As we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers." (Galatians 6:10)

So, we face a new year with courage, with faith, with trust in God and with a resolution that we will continue to serve Him with our whole being.

Be still, my soul: the hour is hast'ning on
When we shall be forever with the Lord,
When disappointment, grief, and fear are gone,
Sorrow forgot, love's purest joys restored.
Be still, my soul: when change and tears are past,
All safe and blessed we shall meet at last

(Katharina von Schlegel, translated by Jane Borthwick)

DR PATRICK SOOKHDEO

International Director

4 Compassion in action
Aid brings "encouragement and dignity" to Fulani Christians in Burkina Faso

6 Trusting God in Uncertain Times
An uplifting spiritual guide as we look forward to 2021

Poster **1,261 brick-kiln families freed!**
A colourful poster celebrating the many Christian families released from debt by our supporters

Pull-out **Understanding Islam from a Christian Perspective**
Theological differences between Islam and Christianity

12 Leave a lasting gift of hope for your suffering Christian family
How your legacy can make a lasting difference to Christians facing persecution and discrimination



14 Armenian Christians
A reprise of the forgotten Armenian genocide threatens as conflict flares in Nagorno-Karabakh

17 In brief
More than 50 people beheaded by jihadists in football pitch massacre in Mozambique



19 In Touch
Young Barnabas supporter touched by plight of suffering Christians

how barnabas is helping

Christian converts in Uganda gain skills to be self-sufficient

More than 130 Christian converts from Islam received vocational training in Uganda to help them find work, or start a business, in a Barnabas-supported project. Most of the trainees were apprenticed to local artisans to gain skills in occupations including hairdressing and fashion, cookery and metalwork. Others learned business management skills. At the end of the training, some were given small sums of start-up capital, or start-up kits, to begin their own businesses.

The converts also received discipleship training to help them stand firm in the face of harassment and abuse from their families and other Muslims because of their Christian faith.

Our project partner said the discipleship training helped to strengthen the new converts in the knowledge of their faith. "They are committed to attend daily in church, positively influence fellow friends to Christian practices in their homes and among family members and in the wider community," he explained.



A student takes part in a discussion during a business training class

\$38,212

Project reference: 56-934

Aid brings smiles to Fulani Christians in Burkina Faso

Barnabas provided two months of maize, rice and cooking oil for 552 displaced and destitute Fulani Christian families in Burkina Faso. Some had lost loved ones in jihadi attacks, others barely escaped with their lives, forced to flee their homes and fields. Our project partner said that Barnabas' food aid brought smiles to the faces of the Christian families and gave them "encouragement and dignity", despite their daily challenges.

To some, the word "Fulani" has become synonymous with zealous Muslims committed to spreading Islam or even engaged in extremist violence. However, many Muslims in the Fulani ethnic group live peacefully alongside their Christian neighbours, and an increasing number of Fulani people are turning to Christ.

Fulani Christians are viewed as traitors by most Fulani Muslims, and their villages in Burkina Faso are targeted for attack.



Members of a persecuted Christian Fulani family receive their aid

\$76,920

Project reference: PR1491

Sri Lankan converts share new well with Hindu neighbours

More than 20 Christian convert families living in a small, Hindu-majority village in Sri Lanka have access to clean drinking water for the first time, thanks to Barnabas Fund. We have provided a tube well, complete with a solar-powered pump and storage tanks, to supply water to the families and their local church. It will mean they no longer need to walk many kilometres to access a clean, safe supply, or to buy it.

The converts from Hinduism have experienced many hardships in recent years, including periods of extensive drought. Their village is in Hindu-majority Batticaloa district, scene of one of Islamic State's Easter Sunday church suicide bombings of 2019, and the Christians have faced hostility from local Hindus because of their new faith.

The Christian families are happy to share the new well with Hindus in the neighbourhood. "It will be an opportunity to witness Christian love with our neighbours," said our church partner.



Even before the well project was fully complete, Christians enjoyed drawing its fresh water

\$5,789

Project reference: 00-635
(Water Projects Fund)

Compassion in action

Strengthened and encouraged. This is what we often hear from Christians who have received support from Barnabas Fund. Thank you for making this possible. Here are just a few examples of the many ways we have recently helped persecuted and pressurised Christians.



Arrival of food answers prayer in flood-ravaged rural Nepal

Poor and marginalised Christians living in rural, mountainous areas of Nepal suffered doubly during the Covid-19 crisis. During lockdown, they lost their jobs and businesses and could not farm their fields. Then monsoon rains in June caused devastating floods and landslides that damaged homes and washed away land, crops and livestock.

As a result, families were left in desperate need, with no means of feeding their children. At the time of writing, Barnabas has provided more than 3,000 families with one month's supply of food essentials, including rice, pulses, salt and oil.

A pastor told us the people in his village had no money and no food until the Barnabas aid arrived. "We continuously pray for our believers and our villagers for food," he said. "Today our mighty God listened to our prayer and we found out reply. Thanks to you for your kindness and love for us."



Two elderly Nepalese women carry home their Barnabas food supplies

\$60,040

*Project reference: PR1530
(Covid Emergency Fund)*

Equipping leaders to strengthen new Kyrgyz converts facing persecution

Barnabas supported a series of training seminars to encourage, strengthen and equip convert leaders for the growing number of small church groups in Kyrgyzstan, where converts face hostility from the Muslim-majority community. Persecution often arises in a village when the first Muslims begin to follow Christ. "Usually, the whole village rises up against them," said a church leader. "They watch who goes to them and with whom they communicated."

In the strongly Islamic Issyk-kul region, the number of village church groups has grown to 26, each with five to 15 adult converts. The Barnabas-supported training prepared new leaders to steer small church groups and covered Gospel-sharing, discipleship, family relationships and persecution.

"During seminar God showed me my mistakes," said one attendee. "I understood that I have a flair to share the Gospel. I every day meet people whom I could talk about Jesus but I didn't. I thank God that He gives me chance to grow spiritually."



Attendees of the training courses share time in prayer and discussion

\$5,920

Project reference: 26-1099

New believers in Bangladesh praise the Lord for gift of food

"Everything we had at home was almost finished. We were starving and couldn't even beg." These were the words of Bhupen, one of 700 Bangladeshi families newly converted to Christ whom Barnabas helped to sustain during the Covid lockdown when they were in desperate need.

As converts, they were already experiencing hostility and discrimination from their relatives and communities because of their new faith. Then lockdown brought additional economic hardship as even daily work disappeared overnight. We supplied them with essential food, including rice, lentils and oil, as well as soap.

Mother-of-two, Sukkoli, was despairing of being able to provide her children with even one meal a day after losing her job as a maid. "We praise God and are thankful to the donors," she said. Our church partner said the fact that the aid came from Barnabas supporters far away lifted the families spiritually and emotionally, adding "They believed that it was God's gift to them."



Bhupen praised the Lord for the food to feed his hungry family

\$15,403

*Project reference: PR1530
(Covid Emergency Fund)*

Trusting God in Uncertain Times



At

the beginning of 2021, we look back on a tumultuous year like no other, in which a global pandemic spread right around the planet. Praise God

that vaccination seems set to bring an end to the chaos and suffering, yet vaccines will not change the history of 2020 and the damage done by a tiny virus.

Only God knows whether 2021 will be an *annus mirabilis* or another *annus horribilis*. But, whatever the circumstances, we must guard our relationship with the Lord during the coming year; we must build ourselves up in our faith (Jude 20). For there is spiritual danger both in times of ease and plenty, and in times of hardship and danger. Agur prayed:

... give me neither poverty nor riches,
but give me only my daily bread.
Otherwise, I may have too much and
disown you and say, "Who is the LORD?"
Or I may become poor and steal,
and so dishonour the name of my God.
(Proverbs 30:8-9)

The same principle applies when a solution appears to a deadly disease whose containment has brought catastrophic social consequences. On one side lie the dangers for some of despair, anger towards God, loss of faith and the temptation to use sinful methods for personal survival. On the other side lie the dangers for some of arrogance, spiritual complacency and the temptation to put our trust in material things and human power instead of in our God. How then should we live?¹

1. Make God a priority

Whatever happens in 2021, we must make God a priority. We must trust Him every day and all day long. Many of us spend a little time with God in the early morning, but then we put Him aside to continue our day. How can we learn to trust Him moment by moment?

- a. Live a life of **desire** towards God (Psalm 42:1, Psalm 27:4). Our souls must thirst and pant for Him, as we long to behold His beauty and taste His goodness. There is nothing we desire in heaven or earth more than Him, and we yearn to know Him better, love Him better, and be more conformed to His will and likeness.

Not only must we pray for this first thing in the morning but also the burning desire must remain with us throughout the day, guiding our every thought, word and action. Our desire must be like the fire that was always kept burning on the Old Testament altar (Leviticus 6:12), ready at any time for sacrifices to be offered. This is one of the main ways in which we can fulfil the Biblical command to pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17).
- b. Live a life of **delight** in God (Psalm 37:4, Isaiah 61:10). While we desire more and more of God and long to see Him face to face, at the same time we can already delight in Him and be satisfied with Him, finding rest in Him as our thoughts dwell on Him. We can delight in His character, His creation, His covenant, His promises, His salvation.

We should have greater pleasure in thinking about our God than a lover has in thinking about their human beloved, or a miser has in thinking about their store of gold. Turning our thoughts to God should be an antidote to any sorrow, worry or disappointment.
- c. Live a life of **dependence** on God (Psalm 62:5-8). Waiting on God means that we look to Him for provision of all good that comes to us and for protection from all evil

that threatens us. Guided and grounded in the promises given to us within His Word, we can be humbly confident, with full assurance of faith.

But what about the times when “the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food ... there are no sheep in the sheepfold and no cattle in the stalls (Habakkuk 3:17) or when Covid-19 lockdown reduces our income to zero? This is when a “holy habit” of trusting God yields its most precious fruit. For it enables us to keep trusting, even in the most desperate situations, and to affirm with Job, “though he slay me, yet will I trust in him” (Job 13:15 KJV).

- d. Live a life of **devotedness** to God worshipping day and night with intense devotedness (Acts 26:7, Weymouth). This is the life of the devoted servant, ready at every moment to do the master’s will, or to work to advance his cause and his honour. It is “waiting on God” in the way that, many centuries ago, a lady-in-waiting would wait on the Queen she served, remaining always close at hand to her mistress, poised and ready to act. This kind of devotedness lays aside our own will and says always “Thy will be done.” We make His will our rule.

It is the character of the redeemed of the Lord, that they follow the Lamb wheresoever he goes, with an implicit faith and obedience

Matthew Henry wrote:

It is the character of the redeemed of the Lord, that they follow the Lamb wheresoever he goes, with an implicit faith and obedience. As the eyes of a servant are to the hand of his master, and the eyes of a maiden to the hand of her mistress, so must our eyes wait on the Lord, to what he appoints us, to take what he allots us ...²

¹ I am greatly indebted to Matthew Henry, the Welsh Presbyterian minister and Bible scholar (1662-1714), for some of the following ideas, which are to be found in “How to spend every day with God” in *The Miscellaneous Writings of the Revd. Matthew Henry*, London, John McGowan, 1838, pp.155-159.

² “How to spend every day with God” in *The Miscellaneous Writings of the Revd. Matthew Henry*, London, John McGowan, 1838, p.155.

2. Accept God's providence

We must bear whatever afflictions come our way with a trustful spirit. The deep and mysterious truth that “all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28, KJV) is something that we must embrace with our whole being, rather than simply acknowledge with our minds.

Let us learn from Christian brothers and sisters who live with poverty and persecution how to respond to tribulations in a properly Christian way, that is, a way in which our trust in our heavenly Father remains unshaken despite our troubles.

The German pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) wrote from prison in Nazi Germany, shortly before his execution:

And when the cup you give is filled
to brimming
With bitter suffering, hard to understand,
We take it gladly, trusting though
with trembling,
Out of so good and so beloved a hand.³

Amy Carmichael (1867-1951), a missionary from County Down (now in Northern Ireland) to India, wrote a poem about how someone might react in various ways to try to deal with a great sorrow that had come upon them, but only one way was effective – to accept the inexplicable suffering from God:

She said, “I will accept the breaking sorrow
Which God to-morrow
Will to His son explain.”
Then did the turmoil deep within him cease.
*Not vain the word, not vain;
For in Acceptance lieth peace.*⁴

When Job had lost his ten children and his vast wealth, and was covered with sores from head to foot, he refused his wife's suggestion of cursing God, but declared, “Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?” (Job 2:10)

As we look for the work of providence in the world around us, let us not be too preoccupied with ourselves but look outward to those around us, all of whom are created and loved by Him.

3. Live in God's presence

If we long to trust God fully, all day, every day, desiring Him, delighting in Him, depending on Him and devoted to Him, how can we learn to do this? How can we learn to accept both our comforts and our crosses from His hand, with an unwavering trust?

Perhaps these thoughts can help us.

- a. We must trust God **seven days a week**. On Sundays it is easier to spend time with God, as we worship Him with others, and especially if we are able to rest from our daily work. But the spiritual resources with which we strengthen ourselves on a Sunday must help us through the next six days to continue trusting God. (2 Corinthians 3:18) In the words of Matthew Henry, “We must be so in the Spirit on the Lord's Day as to walk in the Spirit all the week.”⁵

*And when the cup you give is
filled to brimming with bitter
suffering, hard to understand,
we take it gladly, trusting though
with trembling, out of so good
and so beloved a hand*

- b. Whether **busy or relaxing**, we must remember the Lord. Even on days of frantic busyness, when our hands and minds may be fully occupied, our hearts can still be focused on Him, through a habitual concern for His glory and a habitual recognition of His providential hand at work. (Romans 12:1- 2) We must also take care, when we are relaxing, that we do not forget the Lord. (Psalm 63:6) So-called “me-time” should be “Him-time” just as much as any other time is.
- c. **In prosperity and in adversity** alike, we trust God (Job 1:21; Philippians 4:12). When the world smiles on us, we must



thank the One who has provided, and continually ask His blessing and favour, as well as His guidance, wisdom and grace to use for His glory and purposes what He has entrusted to us. When the world frowns on us, we must not fret or fear but continue to trust. We must bring our afflictions to the throne of God, asking that He will use the experience to help us mature in faith and grow in Christlikeness.

- d. We must trust God **in youth and in old age**. No one is too young to serve the Lord. The story of attentive little Samuel, who heard the Lord's call, is well known (Samuel 3). But elsewhere, too, the Bible commends those who are mindful of their Creator and remember Him despite the distractions of youth (Ecclesiastes 12:1). Some societies discard the elderly as useless, but in God's economy they are as valued as ever.

When through the infirmities of age they can no longer be working servants in God's family, they may be waiting servants ... Those who have done the will of God, and their doing work is at an end, have need of patience to enable them to wait till they inherit the promise; and the nearer the happiness is which they are waiting for, the dearer should the God be they are waiting on, and hope shortly to be with, to be with eternally.⁶

Indeed, long years of practice should make older believers the best guides for the rest of us regarding how to wait trustingly on God. The prophetess Anna was one example (Luke 2:36) and we probably all know others. Let us ask them to teach us what they have learned.

- e. We must **cast our daily cares on God** so that they do not distract us from trusting Him. For some of us this process will have to be repeated numerous times through the day, whether it is the same worry that comes creeping back again and again to nag away at our minds, or a plethora of fresh problems descending on us. (1 Peter 5:7)
- f. We must **manage our daily business for Him**. Whatever our task, whoever our earthly employer, ultimately we are working

for God. Remembering this moment by moment will sanctify the most ordinary actions, as we do everything as if for the Lord Jesus and in His Name. (Colossians 3:17,23). We must do everything in the strength of the Lord (Philippians 4:13).

- g. We must **resist our daily temptations** by His grace. As long as we live on earth, sin is crouching at the door and longs to master us. The evil one will seek many times a day to trip us and trap us and we must turn every time to the Lord for His strength to resist. (1 Corinthians 10:13)
- h. We must **bear our daily afflictions** with submission to His will. Troubles and grief are to be expected, for Jesus said that His followers must take up their cross daily (Luke 9:23), and warned that in this world we will have trouble (John 16:33), most likely including persecution (John 15:18-20). We must accept these afflictions as the will of God, and as a means to grow in grace and holiness. Perhaps we will have to remind ourselves of this truth many times a day, particularly if we wrestle with physical pain or sickness.

Those who have done the will of God, and their doing work is at an end, have need of patience to enable them to wait till they inherit the promise

- i. We must trust in the Lord as we **consider daily news**, and seek to discern His will and purposes. We must ask for His wisdom to see events in the world around us and in our own personal lives from an eternal perspective (Psalm 33:9-11). Trusting in God will mean that if our hopes are fulfilled, they will not distract us from Him. Equally, trusting Him will mean that if our hopes are deferred they will not make our hearts sick.

We must remind ourselves continually that our God is all-powerful, all-knowing and all-loving. Although we often do not understand His ways, we can always trust Him.

3 From the hymn
By gracious powers so wonderfully sheltered
translated by Fred Pratt and Keith Clements

4 Amy Carmichael,
Toward Jerusalem: Poems of Faith, London, SPCK, 1936, Triangle edition, 1987, pp.40-41.

5 Matthew Henry, "How to spend every day with God" p.156.

6 Matthew Henry, "How to spend every day with God" p.157.

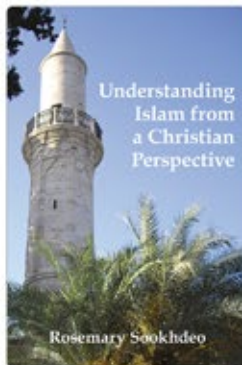
Poster

All these brick-kiln families have been set free. Praise God and thank you for your donations
This spread is a poster you can pull out after removing the pull-out opposite



1261 families freed

UNDERSTANDING ISLAM FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE



Our pull-out series for 2021 is taken from *Understanding Islam from a Christian Perspective*, by **Rosemary Sookhdeo**, Barnabas Fund's International Director of Finance.

The following excerpts from her popular and informative book give invaluable insights into areas where the religion of Islam, which was established 600 years after Christ, has borrowed from Christianity and explains the key theological differences between the two religions.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Theological Differences between Islam and Christianity

Some say that Christianity and Islam have much in common and that they are blood brothers. But on a close analysis the two religions are found to be poles apart; the divide between them is so great that it can never be bridged.

At the heart of the division is the person and work of Jesus Christ. The centre of the opposition between Islam and Christianity is the deity of Christ, His status as Son of God, His atoning death on the cross and His victorious resurrection from the dead. Muslims vehemently reject the historicity of Jesus' crucifixion, death and resurrection. Instead, they claim that Jesus was transported alive into heaven without passing through death. Thus, Islam denies and distorts the most fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith.

Jesus to a Muslim is not the Son of God

Jesus, to a Muslim, is not the Son of God, but a mere man and a prophet of Allah like other prophets who preceded him. It is Muhammad, the final prophet, who has superseded the other prophets and even Jesus. On the other hand, the Letter to the Hebrews makes precisely the opposite claim and proclaims the finality of Jesus over every preceding prophet and revelation.

"In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe" (Hebrews 1:1-2).

Islam rejects Jesus as the Christ

Islam rejects Jesus as the Christ. The word "Christ" comes from the Greek word *Christos*, which means the "Anointed One". It is a translation of the Hebrew word Messiah. The Old Testament prepares Israel and the world for the coming of the Messiah – the one who would be specially anointed by God and sent by God to save the world. Islam's categorical repudiation of Jesus' claim to be God's Messiah is characterised as a lie in the First Letter of John.

"Who is the liar? It is whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a person is the antichrist – denying the Father and the Son" (1 John 2:22).

Islam condemns the Trinity as polytheism

The very mention of Jesus as the Son of God presupposes the doctrine of the Trinity and the Trinitarian nature of God. Islam condemns the Trinity and calls it blasphemy. Conversely, Christianity holds the Trinity to be a central pillar of the Christian faith and those who have not accepted this have historically been known as heretics.

The Quran asserts that God is one in several places (e.g., *suras* 16:51, 44:8, 47:19, 112:1-4), and monotheism or *tawhid* is the foundational doctrine of Islam. Muslims assert that the doctrine of the Trinity compromises this monotheism and entails tritheism. They insist that Christians worship three gods and thus commit the unforgivable sin of *shirk* – polytheism or associating partners with God. *Shirk* is also the worst form of idolatry.

The verses in the Quran that address the doctrine of the Trinity

There are three main verses in the Quran directly addressing the doctrine of the Trinity. The verses come from *suras* 4 and 5.

Believe therefore in God and His Apostles, and say not, "Three" (sura 4:171).⁶¹

They surely disbelieve who say: Lo! Allah is the Messiah, son of Mary. The Messiah (himself) said: O Children of Israel, worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord. Lo! Whoso ascribeth partners unto Allah, for him Allah hath forbidden Paradise. His abode is the Fire ... They surely disbelieve who say: Lo! Allah is the third of three; when there is no God save the One God. If they desist not from so saying a painful doom will fall on those of them who disbelieve (sura 5:72-73).⁶²

They misbelieve who say, "Verily God is the third of three." ... The Messiah, the son of Mary, is only a prophet ... and his mother was a confessor, they both ate food (sura 5:77-79).⁶³

And when God shall say, "O Jesus son of Mary hast thou said unto mankind, "Take me and my mother as two Gods besides God?" (sura 5:116).⁶⁴

From these verses, it is clear that Mary, rather than the Holy Spirit, is included as the third person of the Trinity. Either Muhammad received distorted information about the Trinity from heretical Christian sects, or he himself confused the identity of the persons in the Trinity. Muhammad mistakenly thought that Christians believed that God had a physical relationship with Mary that resulted in the birth of Jesus. The first Muslims therefore believed that the Trinity was comprised of father, mother and child: God the father, Mary the mother and their son Jesus. The Quran also makes it explicit that Christians are unbelievers who will be doomed to Hell for believing in the Trinity.

It is because Muhammad fundamentally misunderstood and misrepresented the doctrine of the Trinity, that he taught that it was not possible for God to have a son.

Islam has a false understanding of the Trinity

Muhammad replaces the Holy Spirit with Mary, the mother of Jesus, and assumes that Christians worship Mary. In the process, he dilutes the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and renders it ambiguous.

When Muhammad was asked about the Spirit, he could not give a clear answer. The Quran describes Jesus as the "Spirit of God" breathed into Mary (*sura* 66:12). It claims "To Jesus the son of Mary we gave clear (signs) and strengthened him with the Holy Spirit" (*sura* 2:253). The Quran also goes on to say that God strengthens all believers with his spirit: "He has written faith in their hearts and strengthened them with a spirit from Himself" (*sura* 58:22). Islam fails to identify the Holy Spirit or Spirit of God as a Person of the Trinity.

The Bible does not mention the word "Trinity"

So how can Christians defend the notion of a Triune God? Although the word "Trinity" does not occur in the Bible, the doctrine of One God in Three Persons is clear from many verses. All three Persons are called God in different places in the Bible. Examples are: Father in Galatians 1:1; Son in John 20:28; Spirit in Acts 5:3-4. All three Persons are mentioned close together on an equal basis in many places. For example, in Matthew 28:19 we are commanded to baptise in one Name but three Persons – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Another example is "chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood" (1 Peter 1:2). It is interesting to note that God sometimes refers to Himself as "us" (e.g. Genesis 1:26).

In the fourth century, St Augustine of Hippo attempted to demonstrate that the fundamental logic of the doctrine of the Trinity can be stated in seven statements:

1. The Father is God.
2. The Son is God.
3. The Holy Spirit is God.
4. The Father is not the Son.
5. The Son is not the Holy Spirit.
6. The Holy Spirit is not the Father.
7. There is only one God.

The Jewish creed affirms the oneness of God

The Jewish creed, the *Shema*, affirms the oneness of God. “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one” (Deuteronomy 6:4). Christians accept this creed and even recite it in the liturgical services of some Christian traditions. Indeed, the New Testament emphatically reiterates this Jewish Old Testament creed. When Jesus is asked to name the greatest commandment, He quotes the *Shema*: “The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one’” (Mark 12:29). In his letter, James the brother of Jesus writes, “You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that – and shudder” (James 2:19).

The early Christians were all originally monotheistic Jews. As they continued to worship the one God of Israel, they were faced with two historical events – the resurrection of Jesus and the descent of the Holy Spirit. First, they were confronted with Jesus – His life, death and above all His resurrection. They recognised that there was something supremely divine about Jesus. Thomas the apostle fell at Jesus’ feet and confessed Him as “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28). The Gospel of John went back to the beginning and located Jesus as the Word who existed with God from the very beginning. “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God” (John 1:1).

The doctrine of the Trinity, which had already been articulated by the apostles, was established at the Council of Nicaea (325 AD) and ratified at the Council of Constantinople (381 AD). The doctrine of the Trinity completely debunks the

simplistic and superficial assumption that the Triune Christian God is the same God as the Allah of Islam. Muslims would find such a theological equivalence deeply offensive.

Islam rejects the doctrine of original sin

The Bible presents us with bad news and good news. The bad news is that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). We are not sinners because we sin. Rather, we sin because we are sinners. Our innate propensity to sin comes from the “original sin” committed by our ancestors Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. If there is no sin, there is no need for salvation and if we are not sinners, we do not need a Saviour.

In the Quran, Adam does not “fall” and Adam’s sin has no consequences for the “fall of mankind” (*sura* 2:36). Adam and his wife do sin in Paradise, but they confess their sin and God shows them the straight path (*sura* 2:37), since they sinned in a manner that they said of themselves, “We have been unjust to ourselves” (*sura* 7:23).⁶⁵ Hence, because there is no “original sin”, there is no need for a Saviour since “no bearer of burden shall bear the burden of another” (*sura* 39:7). When man forgets God’s commands, strays from them, or obeys the “whispers” of Satan, who is mankind’s “enemy” (*sura* 35:6), he commits a sinful act. “However, he is not basically lost as a result, nor is he fallen or separated from God. When he again remembers God’s commandments and takes refuge in God, he is in the position to again do good.”⁶⁶

⁶¹ *Sura* 4:171 in George Sale (trans.), *The Koran: commonly called the Alkoran of Mohammed*. London: Frederick Warne and Co., nd., p. 72.

⁶² *Sura* 5:72-73 in Marmaduke Pickthall (trans.), *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran*. London: Everyman Publishers Plc, 1992, pp. 128-129.

⁶³ *Sura* 5:77-79 in E H Palmer (trans.) *The Qur’an: The Sacred Books of the East: Vol VI, Part I*. 1880, repr. Delhi: Low Price Publications, 2006, p. 108.

⁶⁴ *Sura* 5:116 in J M Rodwell (trans.), *The Koran*. 1909 repr. London: Everyman’s Library, 1968, p. 499.

⁶⁵ *Sura* 7:23 in M H Shakir (trans.), *Holy Qur’an*. Elmhurst, NY: Tahrike Tarsile Qur’an, Inc., p. 138.

⁶⁶ Thomas Schirmacher, *The Bible and the Koran*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2018, p. 67.

International Headquarters The Old Rectory, River Street, Pewsey, Wiltshire SN9 5DB, UK **Telephone** 01672 564938 **Email** info@barnabasfund.org

Australia PO Box 3527, Loganholme, QLD 4129 **Telephone** (07) 3806 1076 or 1300 365 799 **Email** bfaustralia@barnabasfund.org

New Zealand PO Box 276018, Manukau City, Auckland 2241 **Telephone** (09) 280 4385 or 0800 008 805 **Email** office@barnabasfund.org.nz



Thanks to your generous support Barnabas has freed 1,261 Christian brick-kiln families from bonded labour.

What is bonded labour?

Brick-kiln workers in Pakistan are low paid and families live just at survival level. If someone falls sick or another kind of family crisis occurs they have to take a loan from their employer, the brick-kiln owner. After this interest on the loan is deducted from their weekly wages and this can go on for years, even for generations. They are forced to try to subsist on reduced wages and, as long as the debt remains, they are bonded to their brick-kiln, unable to leave and get another job. It is almost like slavery.

How Barnabas Fund is setting Christian bonded labourers free

Barnabas Fund pays off in full the debt that Christian bonded labourers owe to the brick-kiln owner, setting them free from bondage. Other projects we fund make sure they never fall back into debt again.

Could you or your church help free another brick-kiln family?

Typical debts range in size from \$498 to \$2,391; the current average is \$917. Your gift of any amount will help bring freedom, hope and a future to a faithful Christian family.

We can provide a photo of the family your gift has helped, with their names and ages, if requested.

If you would like to make a gift, please direct your donation to:
Pakistani Christian Brick Kiln
Workers Project Reference: 41-1356



Barnabas Fund helps to meet the needs of Christian children in regions of pressure and persecution, such as these youngsters in India

Leave a lasting gift of hope and a future to your suffering Church family

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms – 1 Peter 4:10

When you go to heaven, after your loved ones are provided for, the earthly treasures you no longer need can continue to transform the lives of your Christian brothers and sisters.

By remembering Barnabas Fund in your will, even after you have gone to be with the Lord, your legacy can carry on making a lasting difference to the lives of Christians who face persecution, discrimination and poverty.

Investing in hope

Your legacy can help by supporting a “living business” start-up cost that will help a persecuted Christian family to become self-sufficient for years to come, help to provide access to vital healthcare that saves lives, or give hard-pressed believers the spiritual sustenance and strength they need through the gift of the Word of God.

Barnabas provided aid for Christians after a murderous attack by Fulani militants on Hura village in Plateau State, Nigeria, in which nine Christians died. The village was already sheltering hundreds of Christians who had fled previous onslaughts on Christian communities. Thanking Barnabas for the food and essential supplies, a local pastor said, “What you have done is rekindle the faith in our people that indeed God cares and is always with us in our suffering.”

By remembering Barnabas Fund in your will, you can help sustain Christians enduring violence

Amongst the most vulnerable are widows and orphans, who are a growing group worldwide, many of them bereaved in anti-Christian

violence. Your legacy could help them survive physically and also encourage them spiritually.

A good person leaves an inheritance for their children's children – Proverbs 13:22

Your legacy could help to transform the lives of hungry persecuted Christians

Hundreds of thousands of Christians are going to bed hungry in Africa and Asia where anti-Christian discrimination occurs in many countries and food insecurity continues to rise. Your bequest to Barnabas could help provide parcels of essential food aid to sustain Christians in desperate need of nourishment.

Barnabas Fund provided three months of food for 200 destitute and displaced Christian families in northern Mozambique where attacks by Islamist militants have devastated crops for the last two years. Mani recalls how the terrorists took over a town where he lived with his wife in Cabo Delgado province. They divided Muslims from Christians, before decapitating the Christians. Mani managed to flee, but he does not know where his wife is. Thanking Barnabas for the food aid, he said, “Without this gift from God, I really don't know how me and my little girl would have got through a day.”



Mani lost all his possessions when his home was burned down by jihadists

By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it – 1 Corinthians 3:10

Through Barnabas Fund, children receive gift of an education – and a future

Roshni’s parents work hard in one of Pakistan’s many brick-kilns but still could not afford to send her to school, even though she yearned to study. “I used to pray to God to fulfil my desire and He heard my prayers when this school got opened by Barnabas Fund in our village,” said Roshni. She attends one of 33 Barnabas-supported schools for Christian brick-kiln children in Pakistan.



Roshni’s prayers were answered when a Barnabas-supported school opened near her home and she has hope for the future

For many Christian children, school is something they can only dream about. Your legacy to Barnabas can help us to give the next generation – children and young people – the education and vocational skills they need to break out of the vicious cycle of illiteracy and poverty that held back previous generations of Christians. Barnabas provides Christian teachers, school buildings, books and stationery to enable young Christians to get an education that will bless their whole family.

Your legacy could also ensure a better future for young Pakistani Christians like Nikson, one of 100 Christian young men and women already serving apprenticeships in four cities across Pakistan, with the help of Barnabas. Christians,



Nikson’s future is bright now, as the disabled young man, who has never been to school, learns skills to enable him to support himself

a despised minority in Pakistan, are often discriminated against in employment. Add to this is the fact that Nikson is disabled, and the future seemed hopeless for him. But now Nikson is learning to be a motor mechanic, gaining skills that will enable him to learn a living.

Barnabas helps to build up and strengthen Christian convert communities, where Muslim-background believers are viewed with distrust and struggle to find work because of discrimination against them.

We will not hide them from their descendants; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done – Psalm 78:4

Your bequest could help us provide healthcare for our brothers and sisters

Poor and persecuted Christians are in desperate need of healthcare. Your legacy could help Barnabas to establish and support simple, cost-effective clinics and dispensaries, especially in places where Christians are already marginalised and persecuted. It could also help us to offer trauma counselling to areas where anti-Christian violence is frequent.

We fund mobile health units with nurses and a driver/assistant that provide regular health checks, medical treatment and medicines for impoverished Christian brick-kiln families in Pakistan.

A bequest to Barnabas can also ensure the Gospel message reaches far and wide

Your legacy could help Barnabas to provide Scriptures to hard-pressed believers in remote regions to enable them to build up their faith.

“Dawgn”, a Sunday school teacher in an Asian country where Christians are violently persecuted, lost her precious Bible as she fled with her children from the violence. “I have been depressed and sad about this for the past eight years. But today God answered my prayers,” she said after Barnabas supplied Bibles to Christians sheltering in a camp for Internally Displaced People (IDP).



Dawgn holds her new Bible, in her own language, which Barnabas helped to provide for her in the IDP camp where she has sheltered for eight years

Blessed to be a blessing to others

Please contact us if you would like more information about how to leave a gift to Barnabas through your will, or would like to take advantage of our free will writing service from our Barnabas Legal team of experts. Please email: office@barnabasfund.org.nz or phone (09) 280 4385 out the form in this Barnabas Aid magazine and send it to: PO Box 276018, Manukau City, Auckland, 2241



ARMENIA AND NAGORNO-KARABAKH

A forgotten genocide – a people in repeated peril

Armenian Christian deportees on their long journey. Syria. 1915

A short but bloody conflict flared up last year in Nagorno-Karabakh, an Armenian-populated enclave in Azerbaijan. This article looks at how the events of 2020 echo the horrific but forgotten Armenian genocide of a century earlier.

“**W**ho, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?” were the words of Adolf Hitler in a speech to his generals on the eve of the German invasion of Poland at the beginning of the Second World War. His directive was to kill every man, woman and child of the mainly Roman Catholic Polish population, just as the Nazis were soon to slaughter millions of Jews, and other “undesirables”, in Germany. Hitler reasoned that if history had simply overlooked the first major genocide of the century, who would care about the extermination of the Polish people?

Why was the genocide not prevented?

An estimated 1.5 million Armenian Christians are thought to have died in a state-sanctioned genocide by the Ottoman authorities. By 1922, the Armenian population of the former Ottoman Empire was depleted by at least 90%.

Why did no nation, especially the European “Christian” powers, rise up to protect the Christian minority living under Ottoman dominion from the annihilation that came in a sequence of massacres, beginning in 1843 and peaking in the horrific slaughter of 1915?

It all began with Europe’s best intentions

Armenians, Assyrians, Greek and Syriac Christians had been treated as second-class citizens in the territories of the Ottoman Empire for centuries. This was in accordance with *sharia* (Islamic law).

In 1839, the Ottomans came under diplomatic pressure from the European powers to improve the situation of Christian minorities in their empire. The Ottoman government responded by introducing the first of the Tanzimat reforms, with similar reforms following until 1876.

Reforms backfire for non-Muslim minorities

The gradual improvement that the reforms brought to the situation of the Armenians encouraged them

to request protection from the Ottoman government against the thefts, abductions, murders, fraud and punitive taxation they routinely suffered.

But the Ottomans viewed these pleas for help as a rebellion, fearing that the non-Muslim minorities would rise up and demand to secede from the empire.

Clumsy diplomacy that sparked a massacre

The massacre of 1843, in which at least 10,000 Christians were killed in south-east Anatolia, was triggered when the British consuls in Van and Mosul had encouraged some Christians not to pay *jizya*. This is the classic Islamic tax that subjugated non-Muslims pay in return for Muslim protection. When the Christians stopped paying, they were attacked and killed by the Muslims, who considered that the Christians had broken their contract of subjugation. The Christians may well have expected the British to come to their defence, but no support was forthcoming.

In 1860, another 10,000 Christians were killed in Lebanon and possibly as many as 25,000 died in a third massacre in Bulgaria in 1876.

In 1877-78, the Ottomans lost territory in the Balkans in a war with Russia, which started when Russia intervened to protect Slavic Christians from Ottoman brutality. This led to violent suppression by the Ottomans of the non-Muslim subjects who were campaigning for their rights. In 1877, Kurdish militias massacred 1,400 Christian men and enslaved many women in four Armenian areas of south-east Anatolia.

Britain's fears of "fatal philanthropy"

British politicians were divided about whether they should step in to help the Armenian Christians. In 1896 George Curzon, under-secretary of state for foreign affairs, described Britain's position to a cheering Parliament. In response to a motion by Samuel Smith calling for action to help the Armenians and criticising the "weakness and apathy" of the European powers, Curzon stated, "We were not prepared at any moment to go to war for the sake of Armenia. We were not prepared to plunge Europe into a Continental war for the sake of Armenia. We were not prepared to jeopardise the interests of this country and I will go further and say the interests of the Armenians themselves, in pursuit of ... what might, in the last resort, have turned out to be a perilous, if not a fatal philanthropy."

Christians caught in the crucible of the crumbling empire

Organised massacres of Christians in 13 towns took place from 1894 to 1896, in which as many as 300,000 Armenians were killed. Sultan Abdul Hamid's agents incited Turkish Muslims to rise up against their Armenian Christian neighbours, alleging that the Armenians were plotting to attack them.

The Christians appealed for help to Russia and the European powers. But the response was minimal. Some aid was provided by Western missionaries

and some diplomatic warnings were issued, which the Ottomans ignored.

Armenians an obstacle to a new Muslim state

By 1913, the Young Turks had come to power in the Ottoman Empire and the revolutionary government in Constantinople adopted a new "centralisation" policy whereby the empire no longer accepted multiple ethnicities and religions. The aim now was to create a purely Turkish and Muslim state.

The Armenian kingdom had been part of the Ottoman Empire since the sixteenth century and the Armenian people, with their strongly Christian identity, had spread throughout the empire. That made the Armenians one of the biggest obstacles to the new policy.

An order was issued to abolish the Armenian language, part of a purge of Armenian culture that raised vehement criticism in Europe. The measures brought terror to the Armenians, who rightly feared the Kurds and Turks who vastly outnumbered them.

The chilling answer to the "Armenian question"

In late 1914, extermination became the Ottoman authorities' answer to the "Armenian question".

All able-bodied Armenian men aged between 18 and 60 were conscripted into the Ottoman army as part of a general mobilisation in preparation for the First World War. The Armenian recruits served for a while as unarmed labour before being executed by their Turkish officers and fellow soldiers.

In 1915, the worst single year of the genocide, approximately 800,000 Armenians were killed. Anyone who tried to protect Armenians often met the same end. Some 200,000 Armenians converted to Islam in order to be spared, which also demonstrated that the motivation for the genocide was religious not racial.

Calls for intervention went unheeded by European powers, who valued the Ottoman Empire's role as a counter-balance to Russia. Ottoman-ruled Armenia was geographically located as a useful buffer to stop Russian expansion southwards, and Britain and Germany, in particular, did not want it to come under Russian control. Therefore the atrocities against the Armenian people continued unchecked. French commentator Charles Vellay lamented that "the outlook of the Powers does not extend beyond their own economic or political interests".

Systematic destruction of Armenians and their society

On 24 April 1915 there was a roundup of thousands of Armenian intellectuals and leaders, who were later executed, thus "cutting off the head" of the Armenian community, as Armenians saw it.

Other Armenians – mainly women and children – were freighted by train or forced to walk hundreds of miles without provisions to concentration camps in the Syrian desert. Only one quarter of the deportees survived the exposure, starvation, violent attacks

and other abuses to reach their destinations, which usually lacked any food, water or shelter.

On arrival, many were systematically murdered. Killing units in Deir al-Zor smashed children against rocks, mutilated adults with swords, and burned people alive. In 1916, nearly 300,000 were massacred there. On 24 October that year the police chief in Deir al-Zor had 2,000 Armenian orphans tied together and thrown into the Euphrates river.

The Ottoman Turks also massacred an estimated 750,000 Assyrian Christians between 1915 and 1918 and slaughtered up to 1.5 million Greeks between 1914 and 1923.

Was Hitler's analysis correct?

The chilling fact is that Hitler was correct in his analysis. History had “forgotten” the Armenian Genocide – not because no one had known what was happening to the Christians, as the debates and diplomatic discussions of the day show, but because countries' own vested political interests took priority so governments preferred to look away.

A blanket of denial covered the shame of the West

A collective blanket of “denial” about the Ottomans' staggering crime against humanity seemed to fall across the West. The powers, including Britain, France, Germany, Russia and the USA, which had failed to act – leaving millions of fellow-Christians to perish – turned their backs not only on the facts of history, but on their own shameful complicity.

Even today only 32 countries officially recognise the Armenian Genocide including Chile, France, Germany and Russia. The US Congress voted in 2019 to recognise the Genocide but the Trump administration responded with a statement that it did not consider the mass killings of Armenians in 1915 to be genocide. Syria recognised the Genocide in 2020. Neither Israel nor the UK has yet recognised it, although the parliaments of Wales and Scotland have voted to do so. The Australian states of New South Wales and South Australia have recognised it, but not Australia as a whole. The Iranian government has often unofficially recognised the Armenian Genocide (e.g. the Iranian ambassador to Armenia lays a wreath every 24 April on the Armenian Genocide Memorial) but the only part of Iran that has officially recognised it is the Tehran Regional government. Turkey continues to deny the Genocide.

Renewed threat of obliteration for Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh

In 2020 the Armenian people faced renewed danger of extermination in the ancient homeland they call Artsakh, which is currently known to the world as Nagorno-Karabakh. Under the Soviet Union, this mountainous territory, with its fourth century churches and monasteries and its history as an important centre of Armenian culture, was made a part of Muslim-majority Azerbaijan.

The predominantly Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh declared independence in 1992 and a war erupted with Azerbaijan, who saw this as a violation of its borders. The Armenian forces, supported by Armenia, drove out the Azeri army amid a bloody conflict that saw massive internal displacement of Armenians and Azeris. The conflict ended with a ceasefire in 1994. There have been skirmishes since, but the enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh remained under Armenian control – as it had been for 16 centuries – along with swathes of land bordering it and a mountain pass linking it to Armenia.

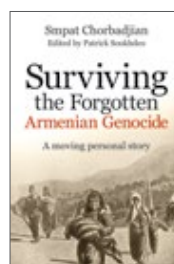
In September 2020, Azeri forces attacked Nagorno-Karabakh, which was defended by Armenian troops. Far better armed than their opponents, the Azeris had soon taken much of the territory and after six weeks the Armenians had to accept a ceasefire and a Russia-brokered deal which allowed Azerbaijan to keep all the territory it had gained. Thousands of people were killed on each side and 90,000 Armenians were displaced. The significant involvement of Israel and Turkey (a NATO member), who provided advanced armaments and military support to Azerbaijan, stoked real concerns of a regional war erupting.

Azerbaijan is an oil-rich country and is a long-term supplier of energy to Israel. Israel, in turn, has lucrative arms supply trade deals with Azerbaijan. Erdogan's Turkey is seeking to establish a “new Ottoman Empire” and is a close ally of Azerbaijan, which also has an ethnically Turkic population. The UK, which has been supplying small arms to Azerbaijan, has declared it has a “strong relationship with Turkey, both as a trade and investment partner, and as a strategic ally in NATO”.

International protection of ethnic-religious enclaves

There is clear precedent for international powers intervening to protect religious-ethnic regions from obliteration. In 1998, the USA and NATO went to war to save the Muslim enclave of Kosovo, then part of Christian-majority Serbia, on the principle of “responsibility to protect” (R2P) and established the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) in 1999. Kosovo declared full independence in 2008.

So why, yet again, was nothing done to help the Armenians?



See back cover of this magazine for further details of this book, a gripping narrative of the appalling suffering endured by one survivor of the Armenian Genocide.

Indian Christians in “fear and shock” after extremists warn leave faith or die

INDIA



Chhattisgarh State has the third worst record for anti-Christian violence in India, according to latest figures from EFI

Christians were warned “to leave their faith or face fatal consequences” before around 16 of their homes were razed by extremists in India’s Chhattisgarh State on 22 and 23 September.

The series of “brazen and perilous” attacks on three villages in the district of Kondagaon left the Christian victims in a state of “fear and shock”, according to the Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFI).

It said no action was taken against the attackers, even though complaints were lodged at Kondagaon police station. Instead, the victims were

pressured by the authorities to agree to a “compromise”.

Warning of a “build-up of a large mob threatening the peace and harmony in the area as well”, EFI called on the authorities to provide urgent protection for Christians.

“We urge you to take immediate action in providing security and safeguarding the constitutional right of the victims to profess and practise their faith,” added EFI in a letter to Chhattisgarh’s chief minister of state. “We also request you to ensure that the perpetrators are brought to justice.”

Lao Christians detained for “violating” traditional funeral customs

LAOS

Four Lao Christians remain in jail four months after they were arrested for planning a Christian funeral, which was deemed by local authorities to violate traditional customs.

The four were arrested on 3 July after travelling to Phousath village, Khammouane province, for the funeral of the son of a local Christian family.

“They were detained because they came here to perform ceremonies that don’t conform with Lao culture, which creates unrest and divides community solidarity,” said a local official.

He said non-Christian villagers wanted to perform a funeral ceremony “according to our culture handed down to us by our ancestors”, which, under local tradition, would include inviting Buddhist monks to pray at the family home.

“But [the Christians] wanted to do things that violate our traditional customs,” added the official. “They were preparing things that we felt were strange and wrong and do not understand, and so we acted in order to prevent them from happening.”

Eritrea releases on bail 69 Christians imprisoned for their faith

ERITREA



Notorious Mai Serwa high-security military detention facility, near Asmara, is known to put detainees in underground cells and metal shipping containers

The Eritrean government released 69 Christian prisoners in September, many of whom have been in detention for their faith for up to 16 years without trial.

The releases from Mai Serwa military jail, which have been linked to Covid-19 policies, were made on condition that bail securities were lodged with guarantors held liable for the detainees’ future actions.

Eritrean Christian leader, Dr Berhane Asmelash, welcomed the news but flagged that no pastors or other senior Christian leaders known to be among the 300 Christians in captivity in Eritrea were among those released.

“Christianity is not a crime. There is no crime being done apart from believing in God,” he said, adding that the prisoner release is “an answer to prayer”.

Dr Berhane called for further prayer for the released prisoners, “People have souls and minds that will need healing. They need to rehabilitate. We need to pray that they will recover from their trauma.”



To view our most current news scan this with your device

Pakistani Christian acquitted of “blasphemy” after six years on death row

PAKISTAN



Christian father-of-three Sawan Masih was aged 26 when he was falsely accused of “blasphemy” in March 2013. He was convicted a year later

Pakistani Christian Sawan Masih was acquitted of “blasphemy” charges by the High Court in Lahore on 5 October, after enduring more than six years imprisoned on death row.

His defence lawyer, Tahir Bashir, told the court that the case against the father-of-three was fabricated by his Muslim accuser in March 2013 because of a property dispute in Joseph Colony, the Christian area of Badami Bagh, Lahore, where Sawan Masih lived. The accusation triggered rioting by a 3,000-strong Muslim mob in which 178 Christian homes, 75 shops and at least two churches were destroyed.

Tahir Bashir highlighted that there was a 34 hour delay between the alleged incident of “blasphemy” and the registration of a First Information Report (FIR) by police. The lawyer pointed out that, although Sawan Masih was accused of making derogatory remarks against Muhammad, under section 295-C of the Pakistan Penal code, no alleged remarks were recorded in the FIR.

At the time of writing, there are believed to be approximately 23 Pakistani Christians (including four minors) in prison accused of “blasphemy”; seven have been sentenced to death. To date no one has been executed under section 295-C of the Pakistan Penal code, which carries a mandatory death penalty.

At least 54 mainly-Christian ethnic Amharas massacred in Ethiopia

ETHIOPIA



Witnesses to the slaughter in Guliso District said that attackers dragged victims from their homes

Survivors of a massacre at a school in the western Oromia region of Ethiopia reported that at least 54 ethnic Amhara people, most of whom are thought to have been Christians, died after gunmen opened fire on a gathering of about 200.

Around 60 armed terrorists ... rounded up women, children and elderly, who were unable to run away, before shooting them

Around 60 armed terrorists, identifying themselves as the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), swept into Gawa Quanqa village, Guliso District at around 5 p.m. on 1 November and rounded up women, children and elderly, who were unable to run away, before shooting them. They also burned down 120 homes. Around 200 families fled the area.

This assault followed in a series of other massacres over about four months in Ethiopia, which have left several dozen dead, apparently targeting the Amharas, a mainly Christian ethnic group, and Christians of other ethnic groups.

Jihadists behead more than 50 people in football pitch massacre in Mozambique

MOZAMBIQUE



Christians worship at a church in Mozambique. The rise of Islamist violence in the north-east is a particular threat to Christians, who are targeted for their faith

Islamic militants turned a village football pitch in northern Mozambique into an execution ground where they beheaded more than 50 people during three days of savage violence between Friday, 6 November and Sunday, 8 November.

Villagers who tried to flee were caught and taken to the sports ground in Muatide village where they were decapitated and chopped to pieces in a series of ferocious attacks in Muslim-majority Cabo Delgado province.

In one attack, gunmen shouting “Allahu Akbar” stormed into Nanjaba village on 6 November, firing weapons and setting homes alight. Two villagers were beheaded and several women were abducted.

Barnabas Fund’s contacts in the area report that anyone who refuses to support the jihadists and embrace their beliefs is attacked, and their property set on fire. Thus Christians who refuse to deny Christ are amongst the victims.

The attacks are amongst the worst seen in recent years in the brutal campaign by militants to establish an Islamist caliphate in the oil and gas-rich Cabo Delgado province. Desperate people are flooding in to Christian mission stations for protection.

In Touch

Barnabas Aid | January/February 2021 | 19

Young Barnabas supporter touched by plight of suffering Christians

Young Barnabas supporter Dylan Keeler was so touched by the plight of Christians suffering around the world that he set about fund raising, including selling some of his collection of torch coral from his home aquarium.

The youngster from Uxbridge, UK, decided he wanted to help others less fortunate than himself after seeing news stories and hearing his family talk about the impact of Covid-19 globally. Dylan raised a magnificent total of £95, which he shared among different good causes, including Barnabas.

Dylan's mum, Claire Keeler, said Dylan was "so excited" to receive a thank you letter from Barnabas Fund that "he is even more determined to raise more money for those in need".



Caring Dylan was "so excited" to receive a thank you letter from Barnabas Fund

Keep up to date with our new NZ Instagram page

You can keep up to date with the latest news, prayers and appeals and any New Zealand specific events by following our new Instagram page: [@barnabasfundnz](https://www.instagram.com/barnabasfundnz)

Why don't you take the opportunity to "like and share" Barnabas' posts with your Instagram friends to let the stories touch their hearts too? You can also follow our Facebook page: [@barnabasfundnz](https://www.facebook.com/barnabasfundnz)

Help us to promote Barnabas Fund's work helping the persecuted Church

There is still time to become part of the Barnabas Fund promotional team at New Wine Camp and/or Festival One this month.

We are looking for volunteers to help represent Barnabas Fund at our stands at both of these Christian events, for either one day or the whole of the festivals. You will receive a free ticket to the events if you sign up to help us promote Barnabas Fund's work helping suffering Christians around the world.

New Wine takes place from 21-25 January 2021, and Festival One dates are 29 January-1 February 2021.

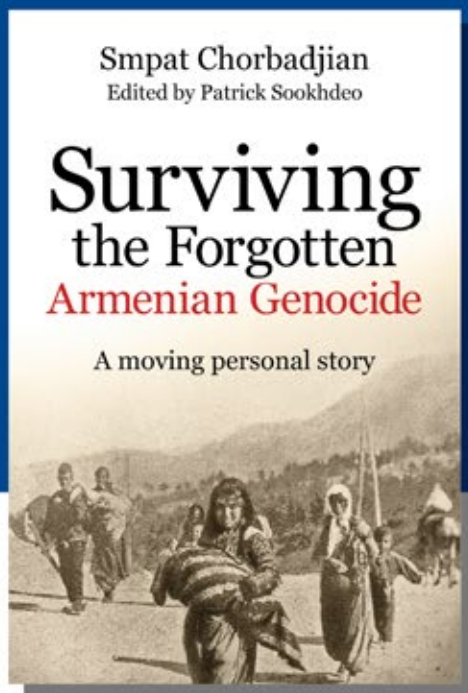
Please email office@barnabasfund.org.nz for more information and to sign up before the cut-off date of 8 January. As a volunteer, we will register for you so please contact us first.

Book a Barnabas speaker for your church meeting

Barnabas Fund has well-informed speakers located across New Zealand, who are passionate about the persecuted Church and are enthusiastic to share what God is doing to help Christians in some of the most hostile regions of the world through Barnabas' work.

To book a Barnabas speaker for your church meeting or event, please email us at office@barnabasfund.org.nz and we will be in touch as soon as possible. We recommend providing as much notice as possible, as our speakers are often in high demand.

Start the year with ...



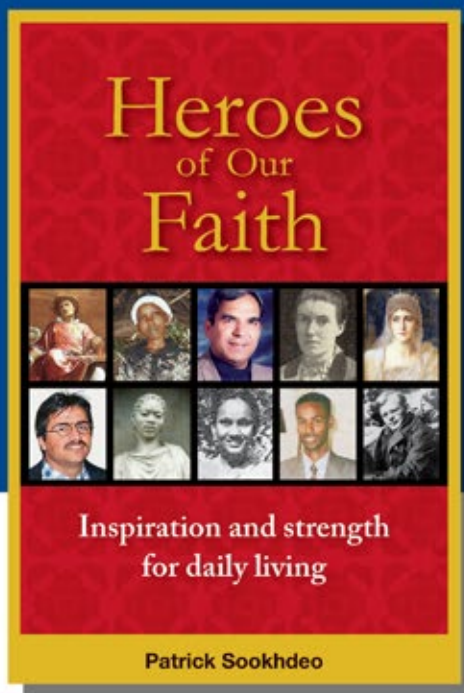
\$15 (plus P&P)

Surviving the Forgotten Armenian Genocide

A moving personal story

A gripping eye witness account of the genocide perpetrated by the Ottoman Turkish government against its Armenian subjects during the First World War. Smpat Chorbajian tells his story of the appalling hardships he suffered. It shows his courage, endurance and the will to survive and records his healing and restoration, after years of extreme misery.

ISBN: 9780991614578 Number of Pages: 136 Cover: Paperback



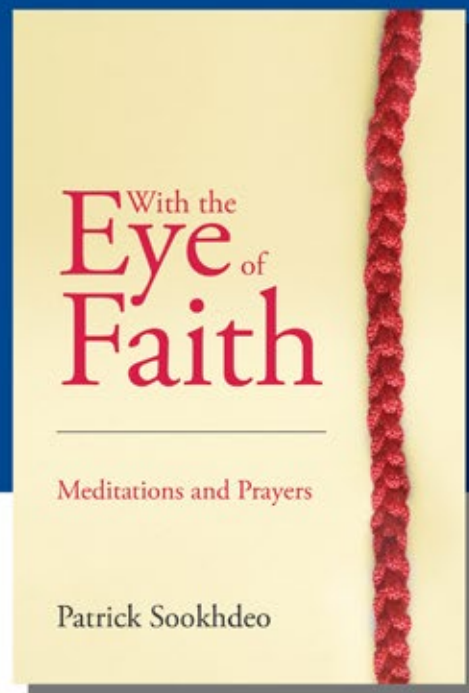
\$30 (plus P&P)

Heroes of Our Faith

Inspiration and strength for daily living

In this outstanding devotional book you will find 366 stories of Christians who gave their lives for their Lord. These believers, from New Testament times to the present day, witnessed to the truth and power of the Gospel by their faithfulness to Christ. Their stories inspire us to live wholeheartedly for Him. The book is interwoven with Bible verses, hymns, prayers and words of wisdom. Spend a year with these great heroes of our faith and allow God to touch your life.

ISBN: 978-0-9825218-9-2 Number of Pages: 380 Cover: Hardback



\$20 (plus P&P)

With the Eye of Faith

Meditations and Prayers

This book of 98 meditations and prayers is intended to help the reader encounter God and His love in a variety of situations, whether joyful praise or sorrow, loneliness, rejection, despair or even imminent death.

“May God bless us all as we follow in the steps of our Lord Jesus, journeying together to our heavenly Home, learning from one another and from His Spirit, and may He satisfy our longings with that vision of Himself.”

– Patrick Sookhdeo

ISBN: 978-1-952450-04-4 Number of Pages: 208 Cover: Paperback

Or all three for \$30 (plus P&P)

To order, please contact your nearest Barnabas Fund office (addresses on inside front cover).

barnabasfund.org/nz


barnabasfund
hope and aid for the persecuted church