

barnabasaid

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2021

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

NORTH KOREA

Christian survivors of the secretive state's "re-education" camps

INDIA

Old and new forms of persecution on the rise

ARMENIA

Barnabas petition for recognition of Armenian Genocide



Growth in
tough days


barnabasfund
hope and aid for the persecuted church

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)

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Front Cover: Christian girl in India

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Redeemed and Triumphant

One of the remarkable aspects of human life is how an individual can triumph over adversity, bringing good out of the most difficult situations. An English pioneer missionary, John Williams, who was used by God to help establish the Church in the Pacific Islands (eventually being killed and eaten by the inhabitants of Erromango island, part of modern Vanuatu) wrote of a cheerful and persevering believer he met on Rarotonga (one of the Cook Islands). The man's name was Buteve and he had neither hands nor feet but still managed to cultivate his patch of land and grow plenty of food for his wife and children. He could not walk with the other local people to church to hear John Williams preach on a Sunday, but he would sit by the road when the people returned after the service and "beg a bit of the Word" from each one as they passed by. He would receive a variety of brief answers, some remembering one point in the sermon and others another. Buteve would store up in his heart all the answers and prayerfully meditate on them until he understood them. In this way he became a staunch and faithful Christian. Three times a day he would pray:

"O Lord, I am a great sinner, may Jesus take my sins away by His good blood; give me the righteousness of Jesus to adorn me, and give me the good spirit of Jesus to instruct me, and make my heart good, to make me a man of Jesus, and take me to heaven when I die."

Buteve shows us the triumph of hope over despair, of light over darkness. This is the message of the Christian faith at Easter, when Jesus burst from the grave and rose victorious from the dead.

Last Christmas, the UK television programme *Songs of Praise* ran a survey to discover the nation's favourite Christmas carol. To the surprise of the presenters, it turned out to be "O Holy Night". This was sung on the programme by Andrea Bocelli, with the original French words, which focus as much on Easter as on Christmas, as much on our redemption as on the incarnation. The final words in French are "Noël Noël, chantons le Rédempteur" meaning "Christmas, Christmas, we sing the Redeemer". We could just as well sing "Easter, Easter, we sing the Redeemer." For Jesus' redeeming work is at the heart of Easter.

The Bible character Job endured intense suffering. In the midst of his agony of sickness, pain, loss, bereavement, rejection and dishonour he cried out, "I know that my Redeemer lives." (Job 19:25). When all seemed hopeless, then came the vision of a Redeemer.

As Christians, we too can hold on to the knowledge that we have a Redeemer. The Old Testament Hebrew word is *goel*, that is, a kinsman-redeemer, the closest relative who will deliver us and rescue us. For Ruth it was Boaz (Ruth 3:9). For us it is Jesus (Galatians 3:13; Titus 2:13-14). Our Kinsman-Redeemer is our blessed Lord, on Whom we have set our hope.

There is a Redeemer
Jesus, God's own Son
Precious Lamb of God, Messiah
Holy One

Jesus my Redeemer
Name above all names
Precious Lamb of God, Messiah
Oh, for sinners slain¹

Whatever we must face today, whatever uncertainties lie in the future, we can affirm with Job that our Redeemer lives, singing:

I will sing of my Redeemer,
And His wondrous love to me;
On the cruel cross He suffered,
From the curse to set me free.

I will sing of my Redeemer,
And his heav'nly love to me;
He from death to life hath brought me,
Son of God with Him to be.²

DR PATRICK SOOKHDEO *International Director*

¹ Keith Green, 1982

² Philip P. Bliss, 1876

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how barnabas is helping



Armenian refugees fleeing conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh will never forget Barnabas friends

“Though we lost both our home and our garden, our faith in our God keeps us hopeful for the future,” said grandmother Lyuba who, with eight members of her family, fled the recent conflict in her homeland of Nagorno-Karabakh to neighbouring Armenia. The small, temporary shelter where the family found refuge has no mains water or electricity, but they are thankful for a roof over their heads.

Lyuba’s family was among thousands of Armenian Christians who escaped after their communities came under attack from Azerbaijani forces in September 2020. Armenia, a desperately poor country, afflicted with Covid-19, struggles to provide for them. Thanks to our supporters, thousands of Christians in Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia received food, warm clothing for children and other aid.

“You are our friend during these difficult times, we will never forget,” said grateful grandmother Zemfira. Another Armenian grandmother prayed for peace pleading, “May no single child become an orphan and no wife become a widow.”



Christian children in warm winter clothing provided by Barnabas

\$345,561

Project reference: PR1539

Food aid raises up Christian survivors of attacks in Cameroon

“Nothing is impossible to God,” proclaimed widow Madeleine, who has twice escaped attacks by jihadists on her village. “God remains a source of help and hope,” she added, dancing for joy as she received millet and maize to feed herself and her four children.

Barnabas provided three months of food aid to 1,000 Christian families in Far North Cameroon, where tens of thousands have been displaced by a deadly wave of Boko Haram attacks. The devastated Christian-majority communities have also been impacted by Covid-19.

A pastor from a community that suffered atrocities in the attacks said the help given by Barnabas supporters would never be forgotten. He said, “These people [Boko Haram] think they are dispossessing us and discouraging us in our faith, but God is raising up people from far away to come to our aid ... Let us be firm in our walk with the Lord.”



A Cameroon Christian woman signs to confirm she has received food aid

\$37,457

Project reference: PR1530



Small loans enable marginalised Egyptian women to become self-sufficient

Women are especially vulnerable in Egypt, and even more so if they are a Christian and a widow, left without the provision and protection of a husband. Barnabas is helping poor and marginalised Christian widows and female-headed households in Upper Egypt to become self-sufficient and financially independent by providing them with a microloan to set up their own small businesses.

“Ruth” is a 61-year-old widow. Her son is too sick to work so cannot support his mother. She struggled to survive on a small pension until getting a microloan from Barnabas, which she used to set up a small poultry business. Despite losing all her flock to bird flu at one point, the enterprise is now very successful.

Spiritual support is also offered to the women and project staff make regular home visits to offer educational support to the school-age children of widows.



Ruth’s poultry business is now flourishing

\$22,816 to help 61 women

Project reference: 11-1304

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.



Kazakhstan Covid sufferers cry tears of joy as prayers for medicines answered

“Nobody draws attention on our problems, only church and Barnabas Fund do it,” cried a Christian suffering from Covid-19 in Kazakhstan. Hospitals struggling to cope in the pandemic were accepting only the critically ill, at the time of writing, and Christian patients could not afford medicines that were expensive and in short supply.

Churches in central Kazakhstan set up a committee to ensure ill Christians received telephone advice or home visits from Christian doctors. With Barnabas funding, more than 250 Christians suffering from Covid or non-Covid pneumonia were given medicines and treatment.

Covid patients Victor and his wife Lilia, both aged 71, cried “tears of joy and thanksgiving” after their prayers for medicines were answered. “We have seen God’s love and mercy through the means we received just in time,” said Lilia, who almost died from the virus. “How wonderful that there are our brothers who have heard the Lord and organised such a fund.”



Victor has been left weakened by Covid

\$17,112

Project reference: PR1530



Farm animals and training for marginalised Indonesian converts

A Barnabas-supported project is transforming the lives of marginalised Christian converts from Islam in Muslim-majority Indonesia. Communities of new believers in Java, who suffer harassment and discrimination from the authorities and from Muslim neighbours, are becoming self-sufficient.

Advisors showed families, otherwise reliant on low-paid daily labouring jobs, how to get best use from their swampy land that regularly floods, and taught them the most nutritious vegetables to grow. Families learned to care for the chickens and goats or sheep we provided as a source of food and income. They also received regular discipleship training.

“Praise the Lord, we are successful,” said a villager who grows enough vegetables for his family and has surplus to share and sell. Villagers give excess produce to their Muslim neighbours, which is a bridge to share the Gospel with them.



A new Christian with one of the goats provided by Barnabas

\$23,596 to help 60 converts

Project reference: PR1512



Adult literacy classes for brick-kiln workers in Pakistan

Adult literacy rates in Pakistan are among the lowest in the world, especially among women. Barnabas supports five adult literacy centres within Pakistan’s brick-kiln communities to enable low-paid Christian workers and their families to break free from the cycle of illiteracy and poverty that has trapped previous generations.

The centres employ Christian teachers and together train 150-200 students a year using teaching materials based on the Bible. The ability to read and write strengthens learners’ job prospects, improves families’ quality of life and makes them less vulnerable to exploitation. It also enables them to read the Bible for themselves.

“Naomi” never had the opportunity of an education. For her, the literacy classes are “a dream come true”. She said, “I felt like God has heard my prayers and gave me a chance to study. I learned how to read and write. Now I can read verses from the Holy Bible.”



Pakistani Christians are eager to learn at the brick-kiln adult literacy centres

\$7,415 for five adult literacy centres for one year

Project reference: 41-1315



Indian Christians face new challenges through “tough days”

“These are tough days, but God is good.” This is how one Indian church leader summed up the increasing restrictions and growing violence facing Christians in India, where at the same time the Church continues to grow.

Last year saw at least seven Christian martyrdoms across India, from May to July, a country where anti-Christian violence has rarely resulted in deaths before. This followed a peak of other, less deadly, anti-Christian violence in March, which had coincided with a nationwide lockdown at the beginning of the Covid crisis.

Indian martyrs of 2020

The first Indian Christian martyr of 2020 was a woman raped and murdered in Chhattisgarh State in May, having previously been publicly threatened four times to renounce her Christian faith.

In June, a Christian father and son, who belonged to the lowly Nadar caste,

died after being tortured while in police custody in Tamil Nadu State. In the same month, a 14-year-old boy – a convert who was very active in sharing his new faith – was tortured and killed in Odisha State, and a Christian man was stabbed to death by extremists in Jharkhand State.

In July, a Christian woman living nearby died as she tried to protect her daughter from sexual assault; the mother had been harassed by extremists since her conversion six years earlier. Also in July, a pastor was shot dead in Maharashtra State by Maoist Naxalites, who were angered that he had become a Christian, left the extremist group and started a church.

The Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFI) is aware of 327 instances of discrimination and targeted violence against Christians in India in 2020, although the actual figures are likely to be far higher. Uttar Pradesh State was worst for targeted attacks on Christians, with 95 incidents,

many of which were violent, followed by Chhattisgarh with 55, and Jharkhand and Madhya Pradesh with 28 and 25 respectively.

Christians vulnerable to false accusation under anti-conversion laws

Not only did anti-Christian violence become more deadly in 2020, but new laws were also introduced that brought new restrictions. Uttar Pradesh State passed an anti-conversion law in November 2020, which brings to a total of nine¹ the number of states with this type of legislation in force. Typically, these anti-conversion laws ban the use of “force, fraud or allurement” in conversion. They are often misused to falsely accuse Christians who are evangelising in legal and proper ways. Christians and other religious minorities become vulnerable to being “targeted by just about anyone, especially vigilante groups many of whom are complicit in the mob violence,” according to the Evangelical Fellowship of India.

According to an Indian Christian leader, accusations are often “created to threaten and stop regular worship activity by intimidation”. Commenting on the troubling trend, he continued, “Christian prayer meetings that have gone on for many years without much disturbance are being targeted ...

There is a pattern here and it must be exposed.” Indeed, soon after the law was passed in Uttar Pradesh, police in the state’s Shahjahanpur district were instructed to keep a watch on Christian prayer meetings to see if there are any unlawful efforts to convert people to Christianity at such gatherings.

It has been suggested that local political leaders can advance their careers by accusing Christians of breaching anti-conversion laws because this helps their accuser “to get into the limelight” and gain the approval of more senior regional and national politicians.

Close monitoring of Christian finances and operations

In September 2020, the Indian government amended the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act 2010, making it a requirement that financial support from overseas be channelled through one State Bank of India branch, in New Delhi, which is closely monitored by the Ministry of Home



A church service in India. Christians in India comprise nearly 4% of the population

Affairs. While this in itself is not a problem for honest organisations, it puts in place a mechanism that could later be used to limit funding received by Indian Christian organisations from foreign Christian agencies. The act also now requires organisations to renew FCRA approval by October 2021, and without this approval they will be unable to receive donations from overseas.

Increasingly onerous paperwork is also being required by the Indian authorities from charities who receive funding from overseas. While not directed specifically against Christians, it is becoming very hard for small ministries to meet all the requirements, and the least slip can be a potential pretext for the authorities to hamper their work or even close the organisation down.

Indian government's legislation restricts support for Christians

The Juvenile and Justice Act (2015), which applies to children under 18, has been used to force the closure of many Christian hostels which serve Dalit and other impoverished Christians. The hostels provide residential accommodation for older children from rural areas, who have to travel long distances to get to schools or colleges for more advanced study than is available in their villages. The reported closure of almost 90% of Christian hostels in Kandhamal, Odisha State, has meant that many rural children now lack access to education beyond middle school.

The authorities closely monitor the Christian hostels, looking for any infringements of the law, no matter how small or accidental. In some instances, where no other pretext can be found, authorities have reportedly created or manufactured complaints

of sexual harassment against Christian leaders. The end result is the closure of the hostel.

Dalit Christians doubly persecuted

Dalits, formerly termed “untouchables”, are at the lowest level of the Hindu caste system and were a traditionally despised group. They are among the poorest in society and extremely vulnerable to discrimination and attack. For many decades there have been quotas to ensure that Dalits from religions that originated in India can access education and employment, but these do not apply to Christian or Muslim Dalits.

Hindu radical groups monitor and attack Christian activities

Extreme Hindu nationalism has been growing under the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which was elected to the national government in 2014 and re-elected in 2019. The BJP promotes *Hindutva* (meaning Hindu-ness), an extreme Hindu ideology that first emerged in the 1920s, which has the aim of creating a religiously pure nation. *Hindutva* has been influential in Indian politics since the 1980s. Hinduism is strongly connected with Indian identity, but Christianity is perceived as foreign and dangerous, and a threat to the public order.

Mob violence by Hindu radicals is common in some parts of India. Typically the attacks are launched when Christians have gathered for prayer and worship, church property is damaged and Christians are injured, often the police arrest the Christian victims.

Forced conversions to Hinduism

So-called “re-conversion” to Hinduism is tacitly approved by the BJP government, although many of the Christians targeted have never

been Hindus, nor their families for many generations. *Ghar Wapsi*, or “returning home”, is the subject of numerous campaigns in which Christians are pressured to convert to Hinduism.

“The narrative of India as a Hindu nation is now rarely contested in the media and by most Indians,” explained an Indian Christian leader. “That is the challenge Indian Christians face, as all have an Indian ancestry, whereas many Muslims were immigrants,” he added.

In October 2020, about 40 Indian Christians were arrested by police when an angry mob of 1,500 locals, led by extremists, converged on their village to try to pressure the believers into renouncing their faith in Christ.

“Unwritten rules of New India” generate climate of fear for Christians

Members of the BJP, Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a paramilitary Hindu nationalist group, continue to monitor, report and disrupt Christian activity under the banner of “Mission Kaali”. (Kaali is the Hindu goddess of death and destruction.) Local units of Hindu radicals at the grassroots level watch the funding and activities of the Christians and look for ways to hinder them, for example, preventing pastors and evangelists from entering certain villages or causing the legal registration of a ministry to be cancelled on some pretext. Such intimidation and harassment has been reported in Tamil Nadu, Chhattisgarh and Odisha.

An Indian Christian leader has described this as “the unwritten rules of New India”, the aim of the radicals being “to create an atmosphere of fear among the Christian community and other religious minorities”.

Despite the increasing persecution and hardship Indian Christians face, the new difficulties and challenges facing them in addition to the old ones, they continue to be active in outreach and evangelism, and the Church in India is continuing to grow.

1 The nine states of India with active anti-conversion laws in force are: Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand.



Sudan

a brave new dawn

Christians in Sudan have suffered decades of fierce persecution under 30 years of sharia law during the despotic rule of President Omar al-Bashir. But, since a popularly supported military coup ousted al-Bashir's Islamist government two years ago, Sudan has seen remarkable changes that seem to herald a new dawn for religious freedom in the country.

After widespread street protests had erupted in December 2018, a military coup ousted Bashir's Islamist government in April 2019 and a Transitional Military Council (TMC) was established in Sudan, appointing a civilian government. Since coming to power, the TMC has begun to take brave and decisive action to reform Sudanese law.

Five remarkable steps towards religious freedom in Sudan

In the first of three landmark developments since the coup, Sudan's Interim Constitutional Declaration was signed on 4 August 2019. The agreement established a three-year transition period under a civilian government, the TMC, led by Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok, and brought together Sudanese military leaders with a coalition of rebel groups, known as the Forces for Freedom and Change (FFC).

This declaration marked the first point in many Sudanese Christians' lifetimes that the country's constitution does not make reference to Islam as the principal source of law and, importantly, the interim constitution states that, "every citizen has the right to freedom of religion or belief".

Notorious apostasy law swept away in July 2020

Then, in July 2020, Christians rejoiced greatly, especially converts from Islam, when the wonderful news came that Sudan's apostasy law, which carried a death penalty for leaving Islam (as in sharia), had finally been abolished. The Miscellaneous Amendments Act had been reviewed without objection in April by the

new Sovereign Council, which replaced the Transitional Council as Sudan's ruling body on 21 August 2019.

Sudanese Minister of Justice Nasr al-Din Abdel Bari said in his announcement that the Act repealed the apostasy law, protected freedoms and also granted previously-forbidden liberties. Other changes included allowing women to travel abroad with their children without the written consent of their husband or male family member, and criminalising female genital mutilation (FGM).

Monumental breakthroughs came with peace agreements in 2020

A third monumental breakthrough came on 31 August 2020, when Prime Minister Hamdok signed an historic peace accord with rebel groups. The agreement ended decades of bloody conflict in Darfur, where more than 300,000 people have been killed and 2.7 million forced from their homes since 2003.

The agreement also brought peace to the volatile border states of Blue Nile and South Kordofan, which includes the Nuba Mountains – Sudan's oldest Christian region. Both states had remained in dispute since South Sudan gained independence in 2011. More than 500,000 had died in the regions during the conflicts of the 1990s which saw aerial bombing, forced conversion to Islam, systematic mass rape, and the jailing of Christian leaders.

Then, just days later, on 3 September the TMC agreed in principle to separate religion and state after three decades of Islamic rule in the country. Prime Minister Hamdok and Abdelaziz Al-Hilu, the leader of the rebel SPLM-North faction, signed a declaration affirming that "The state shall not establish an official religion. No citizen shall be discriminated against based on their religion."

Freedom of worship for all Sudanese people confirmed in October 2020

A fifth decisive step towards religious liberty came in October 2020, at a conference in Khartoum, where

Christian and Muslim leaders signed the landmark International Religious Freedom Round Table Declaration aimed at promoting peace and freedom of religion in Sudan and promising freedom of worship for all Sudanese people.

“Change will not happen overnight”

Hopes for the transition to a peaceful democracy in Sudan have been raised high by this series of political and constitutional reforms. However, church property that was destroyed or confiscated under al-Bashir has not yet been restored or returned, apparently slowed by bureaucratic processes.

Many Christians may continue to face persecution in their communities as Sudan struggles to overcome its long legacy of systematic oppression. The TMC’s reforming and liberalising agenda has not been universally accepted, and has faced a backlash from hard-line Islamists in the country.

Three crushing decades of oppression under sharia law

Sudan, a country with more than 30 million Muslims (about 91% of the population), adopted sharia (Islamic law) in 1983 under President Jaafar al-Nimeiri. The decision provoked another civil war between the Arab Islamic government in the north of the country and the predominantly African population in the south, as the South tried to resist the imposition of sharia on its predominantly non-Muslim population, which included many Christians.

More than two million people in southern and central Sudan died in the civil war, up to the time of the peace agreement in 2005. It was estimated that up to five and a half million were displaced, mostly internally, with at least 350,000 fleeing to neighbouring countries as refugees.

Later, under Omar al-Bashir, who became President of Sudan in 1989 following a military coup, the use of sharia as the basis of law and government became more definite, and the Christian minority in the North (now estimated at 3%) came under intense persecution. Al-Bashir’s regime was supported by the extremist National Islamic Front led by Hassan al-Turabi and, in 1991, sharia was enforced in the Sudanese constitution, establishing the country as an Islamic state.

Apostasy punishable by death

In Islam, conversion is seen as equivalent to treason against state and hence punishable by death. According to all schools of sharia, mentally sane adult male apostates face the death penalty. The Maliki school of sharia, which predominates in Sudan, also prescribes a death sentence for sane adult female apostates, and holds that even inward unspoken apostasy is punishable. It allows just three days for repentance before the death sentence is implemented.

Under section 126 of the Sudan Criminal Law of 1991, apostasy was a criminal offence punishable by death. Representatives of the Sudanese government claimed that manifestation of apostasy was a threat to public order and should be prosecuted as high treason.

Sudan has carried out executions for apostasy in

recent decades; more are known to have occurred in Sudan than in any other modern country. In 1985, Mahmoud Mohammed Taha, a Muslim man in his mid-seventies, was hanged after a two hour trial for preaching a moderate and liberal form of Islam.

After a vision that Muslim clan chief, Abdalla Yousef, had in 1991, he and his entire clan of around 100 people became Christians. Despite assurances given to the church that the people were free to choose their religion, several of the converts, including Abdalla, were arrested in 1994 and sentenced to 100 lashes, after which they faced execution if they did not return to Islam. Abdalla Yousef and Mahanna Mohamed were executed by crucifixion in August of that year.

In 1994, Salvatore Ali, a captain in the Sudanese army who had converted to Christianity, was dismissed from his post, tried and sentenced to death for apostasy. He was placed under considerable pressure to return to Islam and was eventually helped by fellow Christians to leave the country.



Prison ministry in Sudan

Meriam Yahya Ibrahim was sentenced to death for apostasy from Islam in 2014 after marrying a Christian man. Though she had been brought up by her Christian mother as a Christian, the authorities claimed that she was a Muslim by birth because it was the religion of her estranged father. The accusation against her had been based on the Islamic concept that children take the religion of their father, therefore making her guilty of apostasy. An international outcry led to her eventual release, and her sentence was quashed in June 2014 by Sudan’s appeal court.

Other punishments for converts from Islam

Converts from Islam in Sudan are also persecuted in many other ways without it ending in a death sentence. Many have faced arrest, imprisonment, beatings, torture or forcible injection with unknown drugs.

A crucial time for prayer

As Sudan approaches crucial elections in 2022, the country’s government has called for national and international support.

Sudanese Christians, many having lived their entire lives under pressure and persecution, have learned what it means to patiently wait upon the Lord. It is a time for faithful prayer for all as we wait and trust alongside them for Sudan’s transition to a secular democracy with religious freedom for all to be peacefully fulfilled.



Meditation on the Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven,
Who alone knows our
brokenness and pain.
Who honours us by making us Your children
Equal members of Your family,
And gives us a new identity
As Your beloved chosen people,

Hallowed be Your name,
For You are pure and sinless,
You are the great I AM,
Before whom we stand in awe,
God of truth and righteousness,
God of mercy and justice.

Your kingdom come.
Let Your glorious rule
Cover the earth
And banish all injustice,
Cast out all corruption
And right all wrongs.
Set Your people free from oppression
And let Your reign begin in us.

Your will be done,
On earth as it is in heaven.
Help us to accept Your purposes,
Your good and perfect plan for our lives,
As one day all creation will submit
And bow before You
In Whom is perfect peace and freedom.

Give us today our daily bread,
For we are poor and needy,
And we depend on You.
Father, provide our food and water,
Our clothing and shelter.
Day by day, our eyes look to You.

And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
Father, forgive our many sins
Through the shed blood of Your Son
Who died for us and rose again.
Release us from the burden of our debts
And give us grace to forgive
Those in debt to us.
Father, make us generous and merciful.

And lead us not into temptation.
Father, give us faith to overcome
our fears, doubts and worries.
Father, do not test us more than we can bear.
Give us the strength to endure patiently,
The grace to accept and persevere.
Give us a life of godliness and contentment.

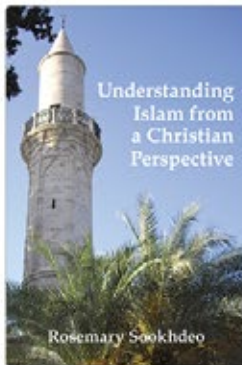
But deliver us from the evil one.
Father, rescue us from Satan's wiles,
Free us from bondage,
Snatch us from calamity, death
And the injustice of evil men.

For yours is the kingdom,
The power and the glory.
Father, establish Your sovereign rule.
Glorify Your name and keep us safe
For now and eternity.

Amen

Based on Matthew 6:9-13

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.

These 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 NINE

The Muslim Jesus (part 1)

Jesus is called *Isa* in Islam. There are two main sources for the Muslim Jesus: the Quran gives a history of his life, while the *hadith*^a establishes his place in the Muslim understanding of the end times. Christians who engage in dialogue with Muslims sometimes argue that the *Isa* found in the Quran is essentially the same as the Jesus of the New Testament. However, all the evidence from the Quran, the *hadith* and the New Testament leads both Muslims and Christians to precisely the opposite conclusion. In fact, the *Isa* of Islam and the Jesus of Christianity are radically different and irreconcilable in their person and work. If *Isa* and Jesus shared the fundamental commonalities then either Islam or Christianity would have to rewrite and reinterpret all the theology and teachings of their faith.

Isa is only a prophet

Isa (the Muslim Jesus) is a great prophet in Islam, but he is a different person from the Jesus whom we know as the Son of God. In the Quran, “Christ the son of Mary was no more than a Messenger; many were the messengers that passed away before him” (*sura* 5:75). There are 28 prophets in the Quran and *Isa* is one of them. Six of these prophets receive special titles: Adam the Chosen of God, Noah the Prophet of God, Abraham the Friend of God, Moses the Converser with God, *Isa* the Spirit of God and Muhammad the Apostle of God. Muhammad is called the last and Seal of the prophets. *Isa* is considered to be the greatest of the prophets before Muhammad, yet he is human like the prophets of old and is superseded by Muhammad, the “Seal”.⁶⁷

In the Gospels Jesus is called a prophet by those who first hear His teaching (Mark 6:15, 8:28) and accepts this title when He says that a prophet is not

without honour except in his own country (Mark 6:4, cf. Luke 13:33). However, the New Testament, apart from the above references, makes no explicit mention of Jesus using the title of prophet.

Parallels and differences between the Biblical Jesus and the Muslim *Isa*

The birth of *Isa*

The Quran states that a “spirit” appeared to Mary and promised her a son. Islamic tradition assumes this to have been the angel Gabriel. The messenger goes on to say that the child will be a sign not only for his own people but for all humanity. *Sura* 19:21 states: “We wish to appoint him as a sign unto men”.

The Quran says that *Isa* was born of Mary, who was a virgin. Mary is mistakenly called Miriam the sister of Aaron and Moses whose father was Imran.^b There is no mention of Joseph in the Quran. In the Gospel of Luke, when Mary asks the angel Gabriel how her conception is possible since she is a virgin, the angel replies: “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35).

The place where *Isa* was born is not clear, but the Quran states that he was born in a remote place under a palm tree. Straight away *Isa* comforts Mary in her pain and her fear of people’s rejecting her. *Isa* then speaks from the cradle and says, “I am indeed a servant of Allah: he hath given me Revelation and made me a prophet” (*sura* 19:30-31).

However, there are stark differences between the virgin births in Christianity and Islam. The virgin birth in Islam was a divine sign but was not indicative of a special role or purpose. *Isa* was created out of the dust of the earth. The Bible says Jesus was born of God and “conceived of the Holy Spirit”. The virgin birth was the indication of His role as Son of God.

Isa and miracles

According to the Quran *Isa* raised the dead and healed the blind and leprosy and breathed life into clay birds. “I have come to you, with a Sign from your Lord, in that I make for you out of clay, as it were, the figure of a bird, and breathe into it, and it becomes a bird by Allah’s leave: And I heal those born blind, and the lepers, and I quicken the dead, by Allah’s leave; and I declare to you what ye eat, and what ye store in your houses. Surely therein is a Sign for you if ye did believe” (*sura* 3:49).

According to this verse (in Arabic) *Isa* did God’s work and bore God’s attributes (e.g. creator), but he was able to perform miracles only with Allah’s permission.

The story of Jesus creating a bird out of clay is reported in a number of apocryphal gospels. The *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* narrates: “This little child Jesus when he was five years old was playing at the ford of a brook ... and having made soft clay, he fashioned thereof twelve sparrows. And it was the Sabbath when he did these things ... Jesus clapped his hands together and cried out to the sparrows and said to them: Go! and the sparrows took their flight and went away chirping”.

Isa was sinless

Muslims believe *Isa* was sinless, as in *sura* 19:19: “(the angel says) I am only a messenger from thy Lord, (To announce) to thee the gift of a holy son.”

Isa was the only prophet mentioned in the Quran who had these three characteristics mentioned above.

Isa is the “Word of God” and “Spirit of God”

Isa is called “Word of God” and “Spirit of God” – the only prophet who is given these titles in the Quran (*sura* 4:171). “Christ Jesus the son of Mary was (no more than) a messenger of Allah, and His Word which he bestowed on Mary and a Spirit proceeding from Him.” However, the Quran indicates that *Isa* is only “a” word of God and not “the” Word of God (or the divine *logos* who was pre-existent with the Father at creation) as described in John 1:1, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God”.

Isa brought a gospel to humankind

Muslims believe that *Isa* brought a gospel called the *injil* and a law to humankind. However, this gospel bears no resemblance to the four Gospels in the New Testament or to the Gospel, which is the Good News of salvation through Christ alone. Since the Quran denies the crucifixion of Jesus, it eliminates any possibility of defining the Gospel as the belief that “Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, (and) that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

The Muslim gospel mentions nothing of the life of *Isa* or any of his teachings. There is also no reference to any content from the book of Acts or any of the epistles of Paul, Peter, James or John. The message *Isa* gives is one confirming the message of earlier prophets. “We [Allah] sent Jesus the son of Mary, confirming the Torah that had come before him: We sent him the Gospel: therein was guidance and light. And confirmation of the Torah that had come before him: a guidance and an admonition to those who fear Allah. Let the People of the Gospel judge by what Allah hath revealed therein. If any do fail to judge by what Allah hath revealed, they are those who rebel” (*sura* 5:46-47).

The apostle Paul categorically rejects any other message as “a different gospel which is really no gospel at all”. He emphatically makes clear that the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is non-negotiable. “But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God’s curse! As we have already said, so now I say again: if anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God’s curse!” (Galatians 1: 8-9).

Isa was only human and the son of Mary

As we have seen, Muslims believe that *Isa* was a mere man like any other prophet, and that all of them have been superseded by Muhammad. *Isa* was created from dust and lived like other prophets or messengers sent by Allah before him. Hence, it is not surprising that the Quran repeatedly refers to Jesus as “son of Mary”. This title occurs 23 times in the Quran, 16 times as *Isa*, son of Mary, and seven times as Son of Mary alone or with some other title. In marked contrast, the New Testament calls Jesus “Son of Mary” only once in the Gospel of Mark. “Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary?” (Mark 6:3 KJV). The Islamic commentator M. Ali notes that “the epithet Ibn Maryam (Son of Mary) is added to show that he was a mortal like other prophets of God”.⁶⁸

“The use of the title Son of Mary, found only once in the Bible, was not taken up by the early church generally. A search in the orthodox Christian literature of the centuries after the Bible was written has found no trace of this title, though it is possible that it was used occasionally or obscurely. Even apocryphal and heretical works rarely use it,” writes Parrinder.⁶⁹ The exceptions are the Arabic Infancy Gospel and the Syriac Infancy Gospel where the title “Son of Mary” occurs five times and 15 times respectively. Both these works were never accepted by orthodox Christians and entirely rejected by the Church.

Christians believe that even though Jesus was fully human, He was also fully God. He had a human body and exhibited normal human characteristics such as hunger and thirst and weariness. Both human and divine natures came together in one person. “... Christ

Jesus ... being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage, rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness," the apostle Paul explains (Philippians 2:5-7).

Isa is the Messiah but not the Redeemer

Isa is called the Messiah in the Quran eleven times. However, the title is empty and meaningless, as it does not carry the Old Testament meaning of "Messiah" or its fulfilment in the Jesus of the New Testament, where it means "Anointed One" and "Redeemer" or "Deliverer". The Quran does not explain the title.

Isa is not the Son of God

Muslims deny the deity of *Isa* and therefore do not accept him as the Son of God. They quote *sura* 4:171 of the Quran: "O People of the Book! Commit no excesses in your religion: nor say of Allah aught but the truth. Christ Jesus the son of Mary was (no more than) a messenger of Allah, and His Word which he bestowed on Mary, and a Spirit proceeding from Him: so believe in Allah and His Messengers. Say not "Trinity" desist. It will be better for you: For Allah is One God: Glory be to Him: (Far Exalted is He) above having a son".

Muslims believe that *Isa* confirms this himself, and say the idea that Allah could have a child is blasphemous. "They do blaspheme who say: 'Allah is Christ the son of Mary'. But said 'Christ O Children of Israel! Worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord'. Whoever joins other gods with Allah – Allah will forbid him The Garden, and the Fire will be his abode. There will for the wrong doers be no one to help" (*sura* 5:72).

The Quran has many passages denying that God has offspring. The most famous is the short *sura* recited daily by Muslims. "Say: 'He is God, One; God, the eternal; he brought not forth, nor hath he been brought forth; Co-equal with him there hath never been any one'" (*sura* 112). Another *sura* confirms this: "That is Jesus, son of Mary – a statement of the truth concerning which they are in doubt. It is not for God

to take to himself any offspring; glory be to him! When he decides a thing, he simply says 'Be!' and it is" (*sura* 19:35-36).⁷⁰

Paramount in Islam is absolute monotheism or the unity of Allah (*tawhid*) and this is in direct opposition to the Trinity and therefore the divine nature and Sonship of Jesus Christ. Muhammad believed the idea that Allah should have a son is a lie believed only by those that are ignorant. We read in (*sura* 18:4-5). "What they say is nothing but falsehood!"

Islam not only proclaims the unity of God but constantly attacks the Sonship of Christ at every level from its theology to its practice. Muslims consider the statement that "Jesus is the Son of God" to be blasphemous, and it will cause them to react sharply with great disgust (*sura* 19:88-92).

a The *hadith* is the second sacred source text of Islam.

There are six authoritative *hadith* collections, which include thousands of Muhammad's sayings that were passed on by his companions and were collected from 275 to 350 years after his death. The way of life of Muhammad as recounted in the *hadith* is known as the *sunna* and is used as guidance for his followers.

b In the Quran, Mary the mother of Jesus is confused with Miriam the sister of Aaron who was the first high priest of Israel.

"When Jesus was born Mary's neighbours said to her, 'Mary! Truly an amazing thing has thou brought! O Sister of Aaron! Thy father was not a man of evil, nor thy mother a woman unchaste!'" (*sura* 19:27-28). Muslims say that Mary had a brother called Aaron, but in the Quran the only one called Aaron is the brother of Moses (*sura* 20:30).

67 Parrinder, Geoffrey *Jesus in the Qur'an*. London: Sheldon Press, 1965, p. 40.

68 M. 'Ali, *Translation and Commentary on The Holy Qur'an*. 4th edition, Lahore, 1951, p. 40.

69 Parrinder, p. 26.

70 *Sura* 19:35-36 in Richard Bell, *The Qur'an: Volume I*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1937, p. 287.

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Healing and happiness for Christian schoolchildren in Bethlehem

“ will not replace our school with any other. Here I feel closer to God. We pray, we are told Bible stories. The teachers always smile at us. We are happier than at home.” This was the answer from one little boy when asked what was special about his school, St Aphrem’s, which is supported by Barnabas Fund.

Life is hard for many of the children in Bethlehem, especially in the cold winter months. Some live in homes with no heating or hot water, or in basements without daylight. But at St Aphrem’s they find both physical warmth and loving care

“You can feel the joy in the morning prayers; especially these days where we cannot go to church the school is taking care of the spiritual side as well.”

from the teachers in a unique Christian setting. One mother explained, “You can feel the joy in the morning prayers; especially these days where we cannot go to church, the school is taking care of the spiritual side as well.”

The school provides vital practical, educational and spiritual support, irreplaceable to the 600 Christian children who attend and their parents. St Aphrem’s charges very low fees to needy Christian

families or, in some cases, nothing at all so that even the poorest Christian children can receive a good education.

Aram able to learn in a Christian setting

Aram, now in grade two, used to be a very troubled little boy. His family is poor and, though they are Christians, live in a Muslim area of Bethlehem where they suffer abuse from their neighbours. Aram’s behaviour became so extreme that he was in danger of being taken into care. But St Aphrem’s accepted him on to the school roll, and brought his mother to school too so she could learn how to help her son

more effectively. The school also provided transport for the family to go to church every Sunday. Aram is now quiet, attentive and learning well, while all the family have benefited from being much more amongst fellow Christians.

Practical and spiritual support for devastated Marielle

Marielle’s father was used and deceived by some local Muslims, ending up in huge debt because

of the way they exploited him. The result was devastating for the family, and especially for little Marielle who was greatly distressed and had to go and live with her grandmother for a while. But St Aphrem’s cared for the whole family, and now Marielle is back with her mother, who has found work as a cook so she can support her daughter. Marielle is thriving at school and doing very well in her studies.

“The school is our refuge”

Bethlehem, a city very dependent on the tourism industry, was hit hard economically by the coronavirus pandemic. The Christian minority are especially vulnerable as many used to be employed in the tourism industry and suffer discrimination from the majority population.

During this difficult time, the school had to close during lockdown. But the staff and pupils pray continually for the care of the Lord Jesus, and the school is providing help, healing and wholeness. One father told that, “In times of trouble and worry, the school is our refuge.” Thankfully, no children have been affected by Covid and none of the teachers have been seriously ill. “It is the protection of God,” commented one teacher.



True comfort

The longing for comfort has never been more urgent. Living with pain, sorrow and uncertainty is never easy. Being lonely and isolated, cut off from loved ones, can be devastating. People dying surrounded by strangers, their loved ones unable to be at their bedside or say goodbye to them, is a new kind of trauma that the world has perhaps never seen before. For some, even the solace of a funeral at which to mourn those they have lost and celebrate their lives has been impossible.

In his second letter to the Corinthians Paul reveals his heart, emotions, and above all his sufferings. In opening, he speaks of God as “the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort” (2 Corinthians 1:3). Ultimately, it is God’s very nature to bring succour and help to His afflicted people. The short passage (v.3-7) resounds with the word “comfort” – repeated nine times and interwoven with words for suffering and affliction seven times. Paul derives great comfort, strength and reassurance from knowing that God Himself is the source of all his comfort, albeit channelled to him through Christian brothers and sisters.

The Biblical meaning of comfort

But what does “comfort” mean? Some English words have changed their meaning dramatically. Today the word “comfort” has a “soft and fluffy” feel to it, but in the fourteenth century, when John Wycliffe was translating the Bible, it was a robust and powerful term. Most of its broad range of meanings have disappeared, leaving little but the idea of soothing and consoling with sympathetic words. It has become a mundane, everyday word, with little substance.

In order to understand the word “comfort” in the Bible, we must banish modern ideas from our minds. We must not think of reassuring blankets, cosy armchairs or easy lifestyles.

The “fort” part of the word “comfort” comes from the Latin *fortis*, which has two meanings (1) physical strength (2) courage and steadfastness. So, the old meaning of “comforting” someone was to make them strong and

brave to endure. Wycliffe even translated Ephesians 6:10 as “Be ye comforted in the Lord” which to him meant “Be empowered in the Lord.” William Tyndale, in the fifteenth century, first gave us “Be strong in the Lord.”

Comfort, comfort my people

The Bible was not originally written in English, so to better understand God’s Word to us, we must look at the meanings in Hebrew and Greek later translated as “comfort”.

The most famous use of the word “comfort” in the Old Testament is surely the command:

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the LORD’s hand double for all her sins. (Isaiah 40:1-2).

Based on this text, “comfort” resounds thrillingly as the first word of Handel’s magnificent oratorio *Messiah*.

The Hebrew word is *nachamu* from which the names Nehemiah and Nahum come. Its literal meaning is “to cause to breathe again”, letting one’s breath out in relief. It is an emotionally charged word that certainly includes the idea of consolation in grief (Genesis 37:35; 1 Chronicles 7:22; Jeremiah 31:15). But it means more. It also describes a process of learning to think differently about a situation. A rabbi explains: “Comfort begins when we can reframe the immediate pain of a loss in a larger, more encompassing picture or story.”¹

The source of Job’s true comfort

Job’s sufferings – his excruciating agony of spirit as well as body – are recounted vividly in the Old Testament. Before long his wife was revolted by him, most of his friends and relatives abandoned him, his servants refused to obey him and little children mocked him (Job 19:13-19). However, there were three friends who stood by him and tried, in a misguided way, to comfort him, although in fact only

making his mental torment worse. But Job tells us that he did have one source of true comfort – the fact that he had not denied the words of the Holy One. (Job 6:10 NKJV)

The Friend and Helper who is always with us

In most English New Testaments, occurrences of the word “comfort” are concentrated in 2 Corinthians 1, where the Greek *parakalein*, and words from the same root, appear nine times in five verses (v.3-7). Literally meaning “to be called to the side of”, the idea is of summoning someone to come and help in time of need. This root gives us the noun *parakletos* (one who is summoned to be alongside), used by Jesus to describe the Holy Spirit (John 14:16; 14:26; 15:26; 16:7).

The early Church fathers sometimes took the meaning to be “consoler” and sometimes “advocate”. Some English translations, reluctant to diminish the rich variety of meanings by selecting just one of them, put “Paraclete” where Jesus speaks of the Holy Spirit. Wycliffe decided to use the word “Comforter”, conveying the thought that the Holy Spirit fills us with courage and strength to cope with whatever comes our way.

Our Advocate and our Consoler

“If anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.” We must remember that when Jesus spoke of the Holy Spirit as the *parakletos*, His role as our advocate was part of the meaning, along with being our counsellor and consoler, our friend and ally who fights for us in spiritual battles. He is our encourager who urges us to stand firm and face our perils and difficulties with courage.

What a holy mystery it is that Jesus’ going away was for our good, so that the *parakletos*, our friend and helper, could be alongside us (John 16:6-7) for ever (John 14:16). This is how Jesus fulfils His promise to be with us to the very end of the age (Matthew 28:20).

The God who always comforts us in all our troubles

Let us now turn to what Paul wrote to the Corinthians about *parakalein*. It was unusual for Paul to begin a letter by pouring out his personal anguish as he does in this one. But he had just come through a time of terrible suffering and the wonderful message that he gives to the Corinthian believers is that God the Father is “the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God”. (2 Corinthians 1:3-4)

The God of all *parakleseos* (v.3) is the God who is always there as our *parakletos*. The God of all comfort does more than sympathise. He strengthens us and inspires us to endure. He encourages us to face troubles boldly and bravely. If it is not irreverent, we might even say He is the God who cheers us on.

We can depend on our heavenly Father’s comfort for it will never fail. His comfort is abundant and overflowing (v.5). He comforts us in *all* our troubles (v.4a). We also know that He comforts us in *any* kind of trouble because we learn from Him how to do that for our brothers and sisters (v.4b).

What kinds of troubles are these?

Paul uses the word *thlipsis* in this passage and, later, the stronger term *stenochoria*. Literally, *thlipsis* is a crushing weight or pressure, and *stenochoria* is confinement in a small space. Both can be used to describe real physical suffering. Centuries ago, English law had a punishment that consisted of placing heavy weights on a person’s chest until they were crushed to death. The torture method of confining people in a box or cage so small that they cannot stand, sit or lie down has been used in many countries throughout history.

Metaphorically, we all know the feeling of pressure as troubles of various kinds become a burden, weighing us down. We can feel there is no escape from our problems. Paul’s words cover the wide spectrum of troubles that we may face. His message is that God is alongside us in them all, giving us strength and courage and enabling us to pass the breaking point without breaking.

Comforting others – a complete cycle of blessing

Our suffering can equip us to be “an agent of God’s bountiful comfort”² for others in distress. Paul tells the Corinthians that God comforts us **so that** we can comfort others in trouble with the same comfort God has given us (1:4).

For when we came into Macedonia, we had no rest, but we were harassed at every turn – conflicts on the outside, fears within. But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, and not only by his coming but also by the comfort you had given him. (2 Corinthians 7:5-7.)

The Corinthians comforted Titus, Titus comforted Paul – and then Paul comforted the Corinthians, making a complete circle of blessing.

If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. (2 Corinthians 1:6)

The result of Christian comfort is a change in attitude, not a change in circumstances. The new attitude is neither unfounded optimism nor permission to wallow in self-pity. It is a “patient endurance” that is triumphant, even joyful – it is not about holding on through gritted teeth. Nourished by a fresh infusion of divine power, we are comforted by a renewed inner experience of God’s grace, our spiritual muscles are strengthened and we have courage to cope.

DR PATRICK SOOKHDEO

International Director of Barnabas Fund

¹ Rabbi Julian Sinclair, “Nachamu”, *The Jewish Chronicle*, 15 August 2008, <https://www.thejc.com/judaism/jewish-words/nachamu-1.4503> [accessed 3 January 2021].

² Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary of the Greek Text*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans and Milton Keynes, Paternoster, 2005, p.137.



More than conquerors

Survivors describe courage of Christians tortured, starved and abused in North Korean prison camps

North Korean prison guards force water mixed with red pepper powder down the nostrils of inmates to extract false confessions from them [Image credit: Korea Future Initiative]

A Christian woman sat weeping in a prison cell, in agony after enduring a prolonged beating from a prison guard. “I am God’s daughter,” she whispered. “I am crying because I am worried that God will be in pain seeing his daughter being assaulted in prison.”

The anguish of this faithful and brave sister is repeated many times over in North Korea where tens of thousands of Christians have been starved, tortured and worked to death in political labour camps or “re-education” camps because of their faith. The harshest punishments are often reserved for Christians.

The closed country is under the despotic rule of President Kim Jong-un and strict communist control. His grandfather, Supreme Leader Kim Il-sung, established the state-propagated ideology of *Juche*, or human “self-reliance”, which is almost a religion, along with near-worship of Kim Il-sung and his successors.

Christians executed in front of large crowds as deterrent

North Korea is one of the most dangerous places in the world to be a Christian. Believers whose only “crime” is to possess pages of a Bible are executed, often in front

of large crowds as a deterrent to others. A witness interviewed by the London-based campaign group, Korea Future Initiative¹, described being among 1,000 people forced to watch a Christian being shot by a firing squad in a market place. Another described how their uncle was shot – “our whole school attended,” they said.

Some parents dare not even let their own children know they follow Christ, as pupils are encouraged at school to report their parents if they see them praying or reading Scriptures. The state indoctrinates children in kindergarten with the message that Christianity is “bad” and missionaries are “evil”.

Families prayed together silently in their cells

Entire Christian families are sent to prison camps. A witness described the courage of two families, whose members ranged in age from ten to almost 80, as they were arrested for worshipping at an underground church. A teenage child was admitted to a pre-trial detention centre as an adult, while the younger children were forcibly placed into care.

In another case, the child of a Christian was imprisoned in a North Korean political prison camp because their parent attended a church in China. The parent was later informed that their child had died at the camp.

Harrowing accounts of forced abortions

Christians recalled inhumane forms of torture. “Men were beaten like dogs,” added a Christian woman. “They screamed like crazy because they hurt so much. Even though women were beaten less, I was hit in the face ... I wept a lot when they hit me again.”

In another instance, a Christian was forced to sit curled inside a tiny steel cage, measuring 120cm (4ft) long by 100cm (3ft) high, and its bars were heated with an electric current. “Usually prisoners lasted only 3-4 hours but I sat there for 12 hours and prayed,” he said. “I kept praying for God to save me.”

“Usually prisoners lasted only 3-4 hours but I sat there for 12 hours and prayed”

Harrowing accounts are given of pregnant women forced to undergo abortions. A witness described how babies who survived at birth were suffocated by guards and their mothers were forced to resume manual labour the following day, without medicine or rest.

Starving prisoners beaten with shovel for picking grass to eat

A prison camp inmate described being fed a soup made of water, salt and sand. When forced to labour in the camp’s agricultural fields, the inmate received a soup containing liquidised grass thickened with cornflour. Prisoners caught picking and eating grass from the field were beaten with a shovel.

A prisoner released after a three years in one of the camps weighed just 27kg (4 stone 3lb) and had lasting damage to a kidney.

Death rates are high among prisoners and corpses were burned every few days, said a survivor. “The cremated body ash was scattered on the field and the whole field was black when it rained in the summer because the body oils resurfaced,” said the former inmate. “When they planted spinach, it would grow thick and tall.”

Christian prisoner was “a light that warmed me”

Despite the torture and violence suffered by Christian prisoners, courageous believers helped support others, even though they knew that discovery would result in a severe beating. One recalled how a Christian prisoner told her, “God had sent me here for you.” The survivor said, “Eventually I listened to her ... she was a light that came and warmed me when I was drowning in my sorrow ... I would have killed myself if it were not for her.”

China enables North Korean regime’s persecution of Christians

Exiles have affirmed rumours that the Chinese government cooperates with its communist North Korean neighbour in the arrest, detention and abuse of North Korean Christians and their forcible repatriation.

In one instance a North Korean Christian was abducted in China by three Chinese men and a North

Korean woman and driven to the Chinese border on the Amnok River (also known as Yalu River). The Christian was bundled into a boat by at least four waiting North Korean security agents and taken across the river to North Korea for interrogation.

Other Christians explained how their documents authorising their forced repatriation to North Korea had been marked by China’s Ministry of Public Security with a black stamp. The stamp indicated that the victim had practised Christianity in China.

Christians in North Korea since 1945

At the end of the Second World War, the Christian community accounted for 2-3% of the population of Korea². The north of the Korean Peninsula, which became North Korea in 1948, was the powerhouse of Korean Christianity, with an estimated 300,000 Christians and many of the best of the church leaders.

In 1946, the pacifist Presbyterian leader of the interim northern government mysteriously disappeared and was never seen again. A young communist, Kim Il-sung, seized power. Although Kim’s mother and maternal grandmother were staunch Presbyterians, Kim began a gradual suppression of Christianity.

In 1948, Korea was divided into two nations and Kim assumed leadership of the North. Two years later, in June 1950, he authorised a surprise attack on South Korea. Most Protestant missionaries fled the country. Church leaders were taken prisoner and carried back to the North when the communist army was forced to retreat. About 500 church leaders died in captivity.

By 1953, an estimated 100,000 Christians had moved from North to South Korea, depleting the North of up to one third of its Christian population.

In South Korea, the Church has grown rapidly, and Christians now account for about 30% of the population.

By contrast, North Korea, ruled by Kim Il-sung and his descendants, is a place of terrible persecution and only God knows how many faithful followers of Christ there are in that country.

¹ Korea Future Initiative, 2020, *Persecuting Faith: Documenting religious freedom violations in North Korea*. <https://www.koreafuture.org/projects/forb> (Accessed 21 January 2021)

² *Hated Without a Reason: The remarkable story of Christian persecution over the centuries*, Patrick Sookhdeo, Isaac Publishing, 2019, p115

Christian couple arrested as “apostates” in Somaliland now released



A Christian husband and wife, detained for being “apostates and evangelists spreading Christianity” in Somaliland, where almost the whole population is Muslim, were unexpectedly released and deported by a regional court on 1 November.

The couple’s lawyer said the decision came after European government representatives raised the case with the Ministry of Religious Affairs. It allowed them to travel with their youngest child to a safe country where they were reunited with their two elder sons.

The couple were arrested by police on 21 September when Christian material was found at their home. Shortly afterwards, a police colonel threatened that “whoever dares to spread Christianity in this region should be fully aware that they won’t escape the hand of the law enforcement officers and that the spread of Christianity will not be allowed and is considered blasphemy”.

Many members of the small Christian community in Somaliland were reported to have fled abroad following the couple’s arrest.

Islam is the official religion of Somaliland, which declared independence from Somalia in 1991. Its constitution states that individuals have the right to freedom of belief. However, the constitution also prohibits Muslims from converting to another religion, bars the propagation of any religion other than Islam and stipulates all laws must comply with the general principles of sharia (Islamic law). Sharia lays down a death sentence for apostasy from Islam.

Christian businesses prosecuted for selling audio Bibles in China



An audio Bible player manufactured in Shenzhen, China

Five Christians have been prosecuted by Chinese authorities in Shenzhen for selling audio versions of the Bible as part of the government’s ongoing policy to eradicate “illegal publications”.

In two separate trials, on 7 December and 9 December, first Christian businessman Lai Jinqiang, and then businesswoman Fu Xuanjuan and three of her staff were tried for “illegal business operations” over the sale of audio Bible players.

No sentences had been passed at the time of writing, but the prosecutor recommended that Mrs Fu be sentenced to five years in prison. Her three Christian employees were recommended to receive sentences of between 18 months and three years.

Sui Muqing, a Chinese human rights lawyer, said that trials such as these are intended to stop the spread of the Bible in China.

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has stepped up the increasing enforcement of its ban on the printing of Christian and other religious material by threatening printers and reprographics businesses with closure, and owners and staff with large fines or imprisonment.

Eleven Armenian POWs killed and 70 soldiers captured following Azerbaijani ceasefire violations

AZERBAIJAN

Eleven Armenian prisoners of war have been killed by their Azerbaijani captors, and more than 70 Armenian soldiers taken captive, following Azerbaijan’s violation of the ceasefire, which had halted the fighting in Nagorno-Karabakh on 10 November.

Footage emerged on 15 December showing the shooting of the eleven prisoners.

Azerbaijani forces also took control of four Armenian villages in addition to territory gained during the fighting, which took place from September to November last year.

The incidents come amidst allegations of Azerbaijani war crimes committed during that fighting

The incidents come amidst allegations of Azerbaijani war crimes committed during that fighting, including the beheading of two elderly men and an attack on Ghazanchetsots Cathedral in Shushi. Azerbaijani soldiers have also been accused of defiling corpses and desecrating graves.

A Russian-brokered ceasefire agreement, signed on 9 November, had led to an abatement in the conflict. The agreement required Armenia to cede large areas of the Nagorno-Karabakh region previously under its control to Azerbaijan, creating the possibility of a land corridor linking Azerbaijan with Turkey.

Although nominally within the borders of Muslim-majority Azerbaijan, the region is populated by Armenians and has, since the end of the first Nagorno-Karabakh war in 1992, been largely self-governed by Armenians. Most Azerbaijanis are Muslims whereas Armenians are Christians.

Islamist militants brutally murder four Christians in remote Indonesian village

INDONESIA



The Christians of a remote forest village in Central Sulawesi mourn with devastated relatives the deaths of four members of the community murdered by Islamist militants

Four Christians were killed in a brutal attack by Islamist militants on a church and homes in a remote Christian community and Salvation Army post on the Indonesian island of Sulawesi on 27 November.

In the raid on Lemban Tongoa, Central Sulawesi, a gang of around ten militants armed with guns and knives beheaded one victim, slit the throat of a second and broke the neck of a third. A fourth victim was burnt to death. All four of the adult victims were church members and belonged to the same extended family.

The terrorists also razed the church building and set six village homes on fire.

Regional contacts report that the attack was perpetrated by the Islamist terror group, East Indonesia Mujahidin.

“The security situation has deteriorated since extremist cleric Rizieq Shihab, in exile in Saudi Arabia for the past three years, recently returned to Indonesia,” explained a regional expert. Shihab founded and leads the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), which wants to establish an Islamic state in Indonesia.

Muslim neighbours protect Egyptian Christian family after “insulting” Facebook post prompts mob attack

EGYPT

A Muslim mob took to the streets in al-Barsha village, Minya governorate, Upper Egypt, attacking Christian homes and the church of Abu-Seifein, in violent retaliation to a Facebook comment deemed insulting to Muhammad.

Christian, Girgis Sameeh, who allegedly posted the comment, claimed that his social media account was hacked.

Stones and Molotov cocktails were thrown during the violence on 25 November. The mob attempted to

attack Girgis’ family home but were unable to reach it as their Muslim neighbours stepped in to protect them.

Property damages incurred by the Christians in the village included the burning down of a stable, theft of cattle and damage to a bus belonging to the church.

In subsequent hostilities on 29 November, six farm huts and yards owned by Christians were burnt by Muslim villagers. Some Muslim extremists called for a boycott of Christian-owned businesses.

Nigerian Christians murdered as a “Christmas present” in terror attacks on Christmas Eve

NIGERIA



At least 24 people were killed, over 20 abducted, a church burnt and a pastor kidnapped by jihadi militants during two attacks on Christmas Eve, in Borno and Adamawa states, Nigeria.

On 24 December, armed militants thought to belong to Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), raided the predominantly Christian village of Pemi, near Chibok, in Borno State, killing eleven people, and setting fire to buildings.

Jihadists abducted at least 20 Christians in the region and singled out five to be lined up and shot in a second Christmas Eve attack in Garkida, Adamawa State. In an online video released by the militants showing the killings a voice said, “Celebrate your Christmas with the present of the heads of these Christians,” followed by the sound of gunfire as the Christians were shot.

The murders are part of a continuing wave of anti-Christian attacks in north-east Nigeria carried out by jihadists, many of which go unreported.



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Sign our petition

Barnabas calls for the New Zealand government to recognise the

Armenian Genocide

#RecogniseArmenianGenocide

A blanket of “denial” about the Armenian Genocide – the Turkish Ottomans’ staggering crime against humanity – hangs over what historians now widely describe as the first modern genocide. The national powers of the day took little action to avert the Ottoman atrocities against Armenians and other Christian minorities before, during and after the First World War.

Even today only 32 countries officially recognise the Armenian Genocide including Chile, France, Germany, Russia and Syria. In 2019, the US Congress voted to recognise the Armenian Genocide, to the anger of their NATO ally Turkey, but the Trump Administration disagreed after President Erdogan threatened to close down an air base in Turkey that is hosting US nuclear weapons.

The UK has yet to recognise the Armenian Genocide, although the parliaments of Wales and Scotland have voted in favour of doing so. The Australian states of New South Wales and South Australia have recognised it, but not Australia as a whole. New Zealand has not recognised the genocide; nor has Israel.

Turkey continues to deny the genocide and has made it illegal to even use the term “Armenian Genocide”.

More than ever, the genocide’s warning from history must be heeded

Today, a century later, this issue is again of urgent concern. A short but bloody conflict flared up in September 2020 when Azerbaijan, supported by Turkey, attacked civilian communities in Armenian Nagorno-Karabakh, raising the spectre of renewed anti-Christian atrocities.

Thousands of Armenians were killed in a few brief weeks of battle, and some 90,000 fled their homes, as hostile forces, including jihadi mercenaries, overran the enclave within Azerbaijan. Some were killed by having their throats cut, just like a century ago under the Ottoman Empire.

An uneasy ceasefire halted the fighting, with Azerbaijan retaining the territory it had taken from the Armenian inhabitants of Nagorno-Karabakh. But in November Azerbaijani ceasefire violations saw eleven Armenian POWs killed, 70 soldiers captured and four Armenian villages taken.

Will there be another Armenian Genocide?

Since Azerbaijan’s victory in November 2020, there have been

Azerbaijani threats against the country of Armenia itself, the world’s oldest Christian nation. Armenians fear the conquest of their homeland and another genocide while national powers turn a blind eye.

Between 1893 and 1923, some 1.5 million Armenians died in the Ottoman Empire in a policy of extermination of Christian minorities. In addition some 2.25 million Assyrian, Greek and Syriac Christians were also killed within Ottoman territories between 1914 and 1923, making a total of 3.75 million Christians killed.

Historians and scholars agree that Turkey’s murderous policy was state-sanctioned and directed against Christians. Some Christians were spared death, but only if they converted to Islam.

Immediately after World War One, few Turks in Anatolia (now western Turkey) publicly doubted that Armenians had suffered atrocities that were extreme even by the standards of that terrible war.

Sign our petition for recognition of the Armenian Genocide – and a second one may be averted.

Please sign and return the petition overleaf and encourage family, friends and others to follow your example.

You can download further copies from barnabasfund.org/nz/armenian-genocide or you can request them by contacting the New Zealand office: office@barnabasfund.org.nz (09) 280 4385 or 0800 008 805

In Touch

Barnabas Aid | March/April 2021 | 19

Speak out for persecuted Nigerian Christians

Barnabas Fund is sending an Open Letter to the New Zealand Prime Minister, **The Rt. Hon. Jacinda Ardern**, from Barnabas supporters and friends calling on her to ensure the deteriorating situation for Christians in northern and Middle Belt Nigeria is put on the agenda for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in 2021 (CHOGM).

You can sign the letter at our campaign website: savenigerianchristians.co.nz



New prayer meeting in Dunedin

A new Barnabas Fund prayer meeting has started in Dunedin on Tuesdays. For more information please contact our office on (09) 280 4385 or email office@barnabasfund.org.nz



Could your church take up an Easter offering for Barnabas Fund?

This Easter, as we remember Christ's own sufferings and His joyous resurrection, could your church take up an Easter offering for Barnabas Fund, to bring hope and aid to believers who are celebrating in the midst of persecution because of their faith in Christ? The plight of many of our brothers and sisters has been made much worse by the impact of a long hard year of coronavirus.

Particularly at this time of year we think of Christ's simple promise to us, "Give, and it will be given to you" (Luke 6:38). For suffering believers, the knowledge that fellow Christians around the world are praying for them, standing with them and supporting them practically is a great encouragement.

Reminder on tax receipts for Barnabas Fund donations

Just a reminder that overseas gifts given to Barnabas Fund NZ do not qualify for the NZ IRD tax rebate. Only gifts given for the NZ office/support fund qualify.

If you have given to this fund and have not received a receipt during the year, an annual consolidated receipt will be sent clearly indicating that the receipt qualifies for the rebate. If you need your receipt quickly, the best way is via email.

Receiving a receipt by email does not mean you can no longer receive the magazine and/or prayer diary by post. If we do not have your email address please email office@barnabasfund.org.nz as soon as possible. NZ IRD now accepts receipts throughout the year, if you would like to change from annual to one-off receipting please let us know before 1 April.

March postal donations should be sent no later than 24 March to ensure inclusion in the 2020/21 year.

Pray for God's persecuted family around the world

We offer many resources to assist churches, local prayer groups and individuals in the vital task of praying for our suffering family. Daily prayer suggestions are in our printed *Barnabas Prayer* diary included with this magazine and monthly prayer suggestions in our *Prayer Focus Update*. Our weekly email, *Christian Newslines*, brings current news on Christians under pressure and persecution.

Our annual booklet, *Praying for the Persecuted Church*, provides updates on the global persecuted Church together with prayer points.

The *Barnabas Fund Daily Prayer* can be viewed on your smart device by visiting us on Facebook (facebook.com/BarnabasFundNZ), and is also available on the *PrayerMate* app.

We are hosting regular online meetings to bring supporters together via Zoom for intercession on behalf of persecuted Christians. Details of how you can sign up for one or all of our prayer resources can be found at: barnabasfund.org/nz/pray

New title

Lifting up the Downcast

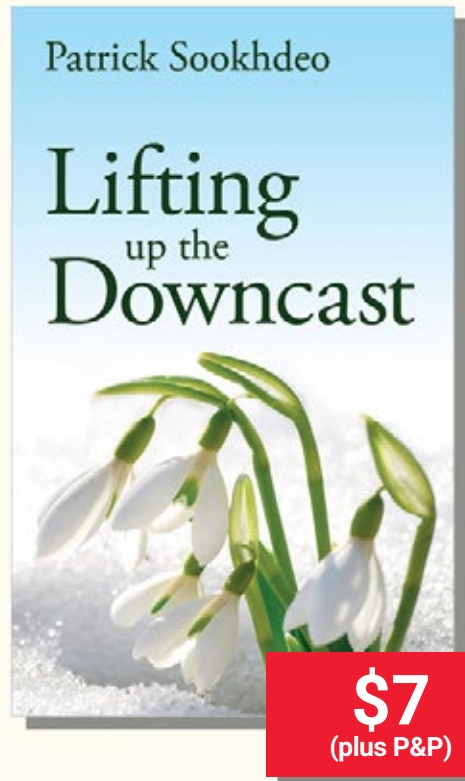
by Patrick Sookhdeo

“Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Saviour and my God.” (Psalm 42:11)

Life can bring us many challenges, uncertainties and sorrows. Sometimes, like the psalmist, we are downcast and disturbed, dejected and in turmoil, anxious and fearful, overwhelmed, even despairing. Perhaps God seems far away and we feel bereft and alone.

Many believers through the centuries have felt like this at times. And they have left us a rich treasury of writings, which can help us in our own struggles. The author’s prayer is that this book will bring its readers peace, comfort and strength through the Word of God and the words of His faithful people. Then, like the psalmist, we can once more put our hope in God and praise Him.

ISBN: 978-1-952450-06-8 Cover: Paperback



Smpat Chorbajian
Edited by Patrick Sookhdeo

Surviving the Forgotten Armenian Genocide

A moving personal story



Surviving the Forgotten Armenian Genocide

A moving personal story

by Smpat Chorbajian, edited by Patrick Sookhdeo

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.

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