

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

MYANMAR (BURMA)

Christians face renewed persecution after military coup

ERITREA

Prayers answered as 70 more Christians released from prisons

PAKISTAN

The Bible is shaping young lives in Barnabas-supported pre-schools



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: Myanmar Christian children

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An unchanging God in uncertain times



ong ago, I was invited to a Christian conference in Tanzania. Shortly before the date, I received a telegram from the bishop, saying: “Pray for rain. If no rain, don’t come.” I was faced with uncertainty – should I stay in the UK or go to Tanzania? I prayed for rain and took the flight I had booked. On landing I discovered that rain had fallen so abundantly that the Christians were now praying for it to stop so that the wood for cooking would not be too wet to burn. In a situation like that, a steady attitude of trusting the Lord day by day is easier to embrace than it is in a world of technical marvels, where power for light, warmth, and all our needs is reliably available at the flick of a switch.

A worldwide age of uncertainty

Many of us live in countries where God’s provision and sustaining love may be hard to detect behind the insulating wall of modern technology. While the comfort in which we live is a practical blessing for which we should give thanks, ironically it brings psychological and spiritual challenges.

After more than a year of Covid-19 rampaging across the globe, we find ourselves in an age of uncertainty. Will life ever return to pre-pandemic ways? If so, when? If not, what will be the new normal? I do not believe that living with unanswered questions like this would have troubled the Tanzanian bishop who sent the telegram about praying for rain, for uncertainty was part of the fabric of his life. But these questions are troubling for many who have been used to planning their lives with confidence, even years ahead.

One analysis of the psychological impact of the pandemic has highlighted four characteristics of our world today. All of them add to the feeling that our societies do not know where they are.

- *Volatility.* We live in a constantly changing world. Changes are getting more dramatic, less predictable and happening faster.
- *Uncertainty.* It is becoming more difficult to anticipate events or predict how they will unfold. Past experience is now of little help in forecasting the shape of things to come.
- *Complexity.* Problems and their repercussions are multi-layered and hard to understand. It is difficult to stand back and get an overview. Decision-making becomes hit-and-miss.
- *Ambiguity.* It is common for things to seem paradoxical and contradictory. Grey is much more common than black or white.

Isaiah’s vision

Stability and predictability have often been in short supply in times past. When Isaiah described his vision of the Lord seated on a throne with seraphs flying around Him, he began by saying that this happened “in the year that King Uzziah died” (Isaiah 6:1). These few words indicate a time of huge uncertainty. Uzziah’s 52-year reign had been largely prosperous and stable, but after his death the people faced a changing future. Isaiah’s vision of the thrice-holy God, supreme and unchanging, came at a time of national confusion and anxiety.

How should believers respond when society around us is in turmoil? Ultimately, the answer is not to be found merely in science or physical solutions, although these have an essential place, but in God Himself, who is always seated on His throne and in control.

Isaiah also recognises God’s holiness and his own sinfulness. Today’s society generally seeks to find an answer to uncertainty without acknowledging God, let alone recognising Him as the all-holy One before whom all creation must bow.

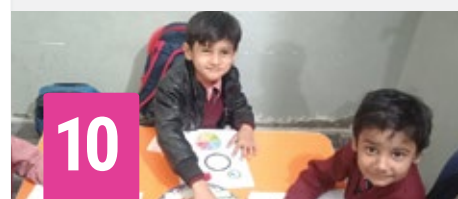
In times of uncertainty we must recognise that God is central. True stability can be found only in Him. We need the eye of faith that sees beyond uncertainties to the certainties: the “things hoped for” and “the things unseen” (Hebrews 11:1).

DR PATRICK SOOKHDEO *International Director*

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how barnabas is helping



Barnabas-supported pastors and local evangelists enable Church to grow in Uzbekistan

“We have new converts and our churches are growing qualitatively and quantitatively,” said one of our project partners in Uzbekistan. “New groups and churches are formed in places where the Name of Jesus Christ was not known before.”

Barnabas has provided funding for five full-time Christian workers in the Muslim-majority country, where converts from Islam face harassment from their families and pressure from the authorities. The funding enables the pastors to focus full time on leading home churches, guiding home groups and helping new disciples to become church leaders.

“Ruth”, an evangelist we support, was thrown out of her home two years ago by her Muslim parents because she had become a Christian. She was given shelter by a pastor and went on to complete her discipleship training. Later she returned to her home village to share the Gospel. Now the village has a church of more than 40 people and five local church leaders.



One of the growing number of convert home groups in Uzbekistan

\$15,347 helped to support five Christians workers for a year

Project reference: PR1423

Radio station in the Caucasus brings God's light to listeners

“Your radio programme has become the only source of God's light to me,” said Artur, who can no longer read the Bible because he is losing his sight to diabetes. He now receives spiritual sustenance from MCC Radio, a Barnabas-supported Christian radio station based in the Russian republic of North Ossetia.

The only Christian station in the region, it broadcasts the Gospel on FM and on the internet, giving spiritual and moral support round the clock. Tuning in brought joy to Vyacheslav, a Christian called up for military service, during his posting to neighbouring Muslim-majority Ingushetia where there is no evangelical church. “When I am listening, it is like being at home, at my church.”

Listeners say the station is a wonderful spiritual resource. A Christian in the strongly Islamic neighbouring republic of Chechnya added, “How happy I am when I listen. When I hear native Ossetian language, tears run over my face ... I can now understand the Word of God.”



A Christian mother and her blind son eagerly listen in to MCC on a portable radio

\$61,274 to cover 72% of the running costs for a year

Project reference: 43-669



Student ministry in Bangladesh

“Through this training a new chapter of my life has begun,” said “Matthew”, a new Muslim-background believer from Bangladesh. “It has helped me to grow using the Word of God in my life.” Matthew was one of more than 1,000 Christian college or university students who received discipleship or leadership training last year in Bangladesh, thanks to Barnabas funding for a series of conferences and Bible study courses.

The intensive leadership course provided students with mentoring, doctrinal studies and guidance on Bible study methods – essential skills they will need to help and guide fellow Christian students at their places of study. One of the students said he was hesitant and anxious before the course, but gained confidence as he learned about the “servant leadership” demonstrated in the life of Jesus.

The Church is experiencing encouraging growth in Bangladesh, where Christians make up 1% of the population, Hindus around 9%, and 90% are Muslim.



One group of students, who completed ten days of leadership training

\$17,915

Project reference: 04-640

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.



Thousands of Indonesian children given shoes for long walk to school

Barnabas provided a pair of shoes each for 4,710 poor Christian children living in Indonesia so that they no longer have to undertake the long walk to school in bare feet or flip-flops. Few Christian children have proper shoes because their parents cannot afford them. The more fortunate have flip-flops, which are not suitable for a long walk over rough ground or healthy for growing feet.

The children live in East Nusa Tenggara province, one of the poorest provinces in Muslim-majority Indonesia and also neglected by the government, apparently because its population is mainly Christian. The unpaved roads are an aspect of its under-development.

At Christmas each child received a pair of good-quality shoes costing approximately \$18. A grateful mother, whose two children were given shoes, said, "I cannot repay the kindness of you [all] ... only the Lord Jesus can repay you."



Two Christian schoolboys each hold a pack containing their new school shoes

\$79,686

Project reference: PR1541

Food aid brings sustenance and spiritual comfort to Eritrean refugees

Eritrean Christian asylum seekers in the Holy Land were desperately poor even before the Covid crisis. During lockdown the low-paid jobs they had in restaurants and hotels disappeared, and unemployment among the Eritrean community soared to around 80%. This was another test of faith for a community that had fled persecution in their homeland and endured a dangerous journey to find refuge.

Barnabas is providing food relief to hundreds of the neediest Eritrean Christian families. The aid is "nothing short of life-saving", said one of our project partners. However, it has extra significance. "Knowing that Barnabas has provided this aid as a Christian organisation has brought an additional level of spiritual comfort to the community, assuring them that God has provided for them in their time of need," the partner added.

The nutritious food parcels received by families typically include local staples such as rice, chickpeas, pasta, sugar, cooking oil, tomato paste and tuna.



Eritrean women and children wait to receive food aid supplied by Barnabas

\$16,262 covered food for one month for 332 families

Project reference: 12-954

Food supplies and hygiene items for Covid-affected Christians in Africa

An elderly Christian woman wept as she approached our church partner in Eswatini (formerly Swaziland). She had not eaten for three days and said she wished she could speak English so she could thank Barnabas supporters directly for providing three months' food to 1,000 families including herself.

Eswatini was already suffering after years of drought, but then came Covid-19. Shopkeepers in rural areas put up prices during lockdown and many families were unable to buy even basic food. Kwashiorkor symptoms, a disease caused by malnutrition and unknown in Eswatini for years, began to reappear. For many on the brink of starvation, we supplied a special nutritious porridge, called ePap.

This was one of many Covid-19 relief projects which Barnabas Fund has supported in 22 countries of sub-Saharan Africa since April 2020. In the last year. Some provided hygiene items such as the communal hand washing equipment, soaps and washable masks for thousands of Christians displaced by Islamist militant attacks in Burkina Faso.



Displaced Christians in Burkina Faso use the hand washing equipment provided by Barnabas

\$1,181,207 distributed in sub-Saharan Africa from September 2020 to February 2021

Project reference: PR1530
Covid Emergency Fund



Myanmar (Burma)

**Christians face renewed
persecution amidst political crisis**

While the world watched the military coup d'état in Myanmar (Burma) on 1 February and the mass protests which followed, a chilling Myanmar Army document was discovered instructing soldiers to "punish and breakdown" dissenting civilians, which would be deemed to include ethnic-minority Christians. Christians in Myanmar have suffered at least six decades of oppression and persecution at the hands of the army, which now has full control over the country.

"We are very concerned, knowing the cruelty of the Tatmadaw [Myanmar Army]. Lord, have mercy on these people," came the message to Barnabas Fund from one of our project partners.

Thousands of Karen were forced to flee military bombardment in the Papun and Nyaunglebin districts of Karen state in Myanmar (Burma) earlier this year. Men, women and children came under a sudden attack on 1 February from the Tatmadaw, who used artillery to assault defenceless Christian villages.

Villagers fled in such a hurry that washing still hung to dry and taps were left running

The villagers had only moments to escape the deadly shellfire. Some were able to gather a few belongings while others carried children or elderly relatives to safety. Many left in such a hurry that washing still hung to dry and taps were left running. Although they escaped immediate danger, the homeless families had to journey on foot through inhospitable jungle to find a clearing where they could rest.

The following weekend the Tatmadaw sent 20 trucks filled with troops to attack another Karen village in the middle of the night. Mercifully, the villagers had fled their homes just hours before.

A week later, another 212 villagers were displaced from a Christian village in Papun District, during two days of relentless shelling. By mid-February more than 5,300 Karen people, including many Christians, had been displaced by the advancing Tatmadaw in northern Karen State.

Villagers sleep in the jungle for fear of night time attack

These brutal attacks represent only a fraction of the ongoing military assaults on ethnic Karen, Chin and Kachin Christians, the mainly-Muslim Rohingya and other minorities in Myanmar have suffered for decades.

In Karen State, the Tatmadaw is forcibly displacing Christians to gain more land for military infrastructure such as roads and bases. In some areas, villagers sleep in the jungle for fear of night time attacks. In one village the inhabitants returned in daytime to conduct a funeral service, only to be forced to flee again as the



Karen Christian villagers, including young children, the elderly and infirm, fled into the inhospitable jungle just hours before military bombardment began, carrying only a few meagre possessions

sound of guns and mortar fire grew closer. Many others, unable to return to their homes, remain in makeshift camps for internally displaced people (IDPs).



An exhausted Karen boy rests after fleeing his village with his family

The Tatmadaw's relentless programme of shelling civilian communities violates several ceasefire agreements, including an agreement signed between the Myanmar government and the Karen National Union (KNU) in 2012 and the National Ceasefire Agreement also signed by the KNU in 2015. The ceasefire violations have stepped up since December 2020.

Chin Christians caught in conflict

In March 2020, traumatised Chin Christians fled for their lives after military jets opened fire on their villages, killing at least 28 people and burning many homes.

"We did not expect that the military's fighter jet would shoot into our village," said a survivor of the attack. "In one family, seven people were killed instantly and only two teenagers, aged 13 and 15, are left – both of them were injured. Some houses were in flames when we left ... Later we heard all the houses in our village are gone."

Since 2019, Chin Christians have been caught in the middle of fighting between the Tatmadaw and the Arakan Army, a rebel military force of Buddhists from Rakhine State seeking greater self-governance. The conflict has killed at least 260 civilians and displaced more than 160,000 people. In 2020 thousands of Chin, a mainly-Christian ethnic group, endured severe food shortages for at least six months because government road blockades had cut off food supplies to the area.

Kachin Christians subjected to "ethnic cleansing" leaving 100,000 in crowded IDP camps

For more than ten years many thousands of displaced Kachin Christians have been unable to return to their homes, which lie empty, neglected and overgrown. Deadly landmines pepper the villages and access is forbidden by the Tatmadaw, who warn that they will shoot anyone who enters.

At least 100,000 ethnic Kachin, who are predominantly Christian, remain scattered across more than a hundred IDP camps in Kachin State. Living in crowded conditions and with little sanitation they are at risk of contracting cholera and other diseases, including coronavirus.

One Kachin mother of four said, "The Burmese government is trying to carry out ethnic cleansing of the Kachin people. Whenever they see Kachin civilians they kill them. If they see a Kachin woman they will rape her, even a pregnant woman."

The “persecutory intent” and “ethnic cleansing” tactics used by the Tatmadaw against the Kachin were condemned in a 2018 United Nations Human Rights Council report that included many testimonies of torture, rape and other abuses by military personnel.

Tatmadaw seize control in Myanmar once again in military coup

The attacks in Papun and Nyaunglebin came the same day as the Tatmadaw executed a coup, overthrowing the democratically-elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi and her party, the National League for Democracy (NLD). At the time of writing, Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services, Min Aung Hlaing, now heads the new military regime.

The coup followed around a decade of democratic reforms that had loosened – but not broken – the Tatmadaw’s grip on political power. Myanmar was subject to rule by military regime from 1962 to 2011, and pro-democracy protests in 1988 and again in 2007 were met with brutal repression. Aung San Suu Kyi was held under house arrest from 1989 to 2010.

Aung San Suu Kyi’s release in 2010 marked the beginning of Myanmar’s transition towards something like democracy. In 2015 the country’s first free elections for a quarter of a century were held, resulting in a majority for the NLD and placing Aung San Suu Kyi in national leadership as State Counsellor. This majority was increased at the November 2020 election.

The election results, combined with the NLD’s threats to reduce military power by amending the constitution, led the Tatmadaw to once again seize control. On the pretext of electoral irregularities, military vehicles swept into the capital in the early hours of the morning of 1 February, the day before the new government had been due to be sworn in. Military leaders declared a year-long state of emergency and Aung San Suu Kyi and President Win Myint were among the first of key political figures arrested. The coup has been condemned internationally.

Weeks of protests culminated with the military killing at least 138 civilians

Weeks of protests followed the coup. Hundreds of thousands gathered in cities such as Yangon and Mandalay as well as the capital Naypyidaw, defying orders to disperse. Protesters blockaded major roads and disrupted traffic. Doctors and nurses, civil servants and teachers went on strike. Opposition political parties – including those representing ethnic minority groups – have refused to participate with the new military regime in government.

In Tha Ton District, Karen State, over 700 people gathered in protest against the Tatmadaw base in their village, opposing the coup and demanding an end to the killing of civilians and the ceasefire violations which had displaced so many.

Civilian protesters in Kachin State were beaten, shot with rubber bullets, and arrested according to local reports.

The military blocked internet and mobile phone access to hinder communication between protesters and restrict contact with the outside world.

At time of writing, an estimated 138 protesters and other civilians, including children, have been killed by the police and soldiers who, sometimes without warning, fired a mixture of tear gas, rubber bullets and live rounds into the crowds.

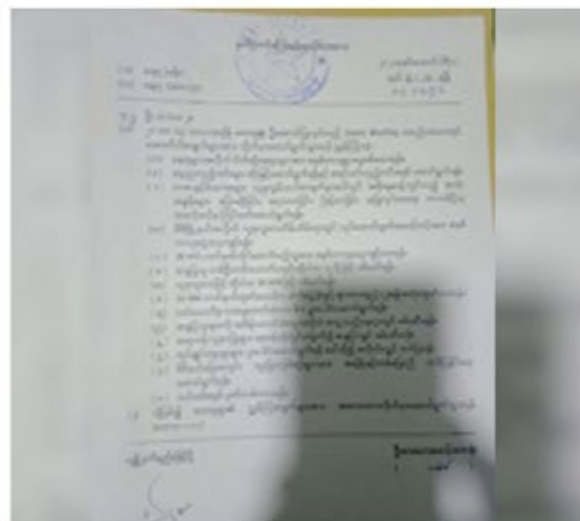
Soldiers ordered to “punish and breakdown” civilians after coup

Aung San Suu Kyi’s government, which was widely criticised by the international community for denying the Tatmadaw’s persecution of the mainly-Muslim Rohingya, had always remained significantly under military control.

The constitution reserves at least 25% of legislative seats in parliament for the military, which means it can effectively block any legislation not in military interests. In March 2020, military members blocked democratic reform amendments proposed by the NLD that would have reduced military parliamentary presence. Concerns are growing that total military rule could lead to even more extreme persecution of minorities, with the restrictions of even a semblance of democratic governance removed.

Evidence of a step-change in military tactics came soon after the coup, when a document came to light in mid-February instructing soldiers to “punish and breakdown” ethnic-minority Christians and other civilians deemed to be against the military regime, or even appearing critical of it in social media posts.

The official document listed a sequence of actions that military personnel should take including firing a 12mm weapon (equivalent to a powerful machine gun) at individuals or using a 38mm weapon (a gun capable of launching grenades) on groups of civilians. The directives included special instructions to round up any dissenting civilian doctors and nurses and to report on any local leaders who were not fully co-operating with the military.



Soon after the coup, an official army document was discovered that instructs military personnel to take violent action against civilians



Kachin Christian children Barnabas helped to resettle in safe villages from war-zone IDP camps take part in a worship service



Karen Christians, as well as many other ethnic peoples in other states, have found themselves without homes or any means to provide for themselves, having left livestock and rice fields along with their villages. Barnabas Fund has helped displaced Karen Christians with their immediate urgent needs by providing plastic sheets for basic shelter as well as staple food items such as rice, fish and cooking oil

The use of live ammunition against protesters and the resulting deaths and injuries seem to indicate implementation of these instructions. The use of lethal force, as well as non-lethal means including tear gas and stun grenades, was “strongly condemned” by the United Nations. UN human rights spokesperson

Ravina Shamdasani stated, “The people of Myanmar have the right to assemble peacefully and demand the restoration of democracy.”

A crucial time for prayer for Myanmar

It continues to be a tense and dangerous time in Myanmar. At the time of writing, Barnabas contacts had just reported further escalations in conflict between the Tatmadaw and insurgent military groups and called for urgent prayer.

Our contacts told us more and more Christian families are on the run, taking refuge in the jungle without food and lacking other basic needs. “Please pray for the safety of local Christian workers who are trying to reach and help believers hiding in the dense jungle, despite the severe risks. Ask for divine intervention and de-escalation of conflict,” they said.

Humanly speaking, the situation in Myanmar appears bleak, and Christian and other minorities seem set to endure even harsher persecution under the military regime.

But God is working all things together for good for His people, even in the desperate difficulties so many are facing in Myanmar. As we pray for an end to the violence and for the restoration of democratic government in Myanmar, we also ask that our Christian family will be given strength to hold fast in their faith in the face of such peril and throughout this time of national trial.



Lives shaped by the Bible

at two pre-schools for Christian children from Islamabad slums

Barnabas Fund supports 124 schools in Pakistan, providing a quality Christian education for more than 11,000 Christian children and employment for Christian teachers. They provide a loving Christian environment where children are able to grow in their faith and receive a general education.

Among the schools we support are two pre-schools in Islamabad, for children aged between three and five, living in the slums of the Pakistani capital, Islamabad.

“My daughter is learning very fast,” said one of the mothers, Neelam. “Teachers are doing an excellent effort in helping children to shape their lives as per the teaching of the Bible.”

The majority of the people living in these Islamabad slums are poor Christians who have migrated from rural areas to find work. They live in small mud-and-brick houses and most are illiterate and work in low-paid jobs such as office cleaners or domestic servants.

The pre-schools have had a 100% success rate in the last eight years with their pupils passing the tests in maths, Urdu, English and general knowledge that they need to go to their next schools.

The two pre-schools cater for 138 pupils from Christian families. Their ten members of staff, including five teachers, are all local Christians.

Bible taught through pictures, songs and stories

Parents especially appreciate the pre-schools’ unique Spiritual Development Course, which uses pictures, stories and songs to teach children about significant Biblical figures. These include Adam and Eve and Moses in the Old Testament, and Mary and Joseph in the New Testament, as well as five key lessons on the life of Jesus Christ. Each lesson ends with a series of

questions to enable teachers to assess their pupils’ understanding.

Teachers also encourage children to think for themselves and consider how to apply their lessons to their daily lives by making regular class visits in the local community.

Teacher “is so kind and caring”

Four-year-old Ananies felt sad when he could not go to pre-school during the lockdown, and loves his teacher very much. “She is so kind and caring,” he explained.

Last year he came top in the annual exams for his group. “I was so happy that I started jumping for joy,” he said.

His favourite Bible verse is Matthew 5:3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”



Ananies jumped for joy when he heard he had top marks in his exam

Ananies said he was very happy when he performed in the school Christmas song and has an almost unbroken attendance (90%) record at his Sunday school, where he is very punctual.

During lockdown, staff ensured their

young students’ learning continued uninterrupted by providing weekly worksheets in all subjects, and gave weekly assessments and encouragement on the children’s progress. Teachers also arranged regular meetings with parents in small, Covid-compliant groups to mutually review pupils’ progress and seek suggestions for further improvement.



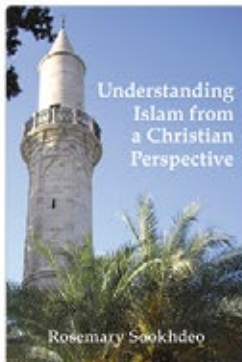
Teacher Adeela helps her pupils celebrate the colour orange. Oranges are also a popular seasonal fruit that the children enjoy eating

Pupils given ability to innovate

“The school management involve parents in school ... to improve its systems, policies and syllabus to better serve children and parents,” said Naila, whose son, Abneer, is a former pupil, and daughter, Zaina, is a current pupil at the school.

Naila is thankful that the pre-school’s Christian guidance and its general knowledge teaching have instilled in her children the ability to think, analyse and be innovative.

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 NINE

The Muslim Jesus (part 2)

In part 1 of chapter nine, to be found in the pull-out section of Barnabas Aid, March/April 2021, we saw that Muslims deny the deity of Isa (as Jesus is called in Islam) and therefore do not accept him as the Son of God.

Christians believe that Jesus is the Son of God

As Christians we believe that Jesus is the Son of God, and we should not be fearful in proclaiming it to any religion that is out to destroy this crucial point of our faith. Jesus is the very cornerstone and centre of our faith. It is in Him that we put our trust.

Interestingly, Jesus never speaks of Himself as the Son of God in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. Other people call him the “Son of God” but Jesus prefers to refer to himself as the “Son of Man”, drawing this title from Daniel 7:13, where it specifically refers to a divine figure coming down from heaven. In John’s Gospel, Jesus does refer to Himself as the Son of God (e.g. John 5:25), and Paul’s letters also refer to Jesus as the “Son of God”.

Jesus was a personal manifestation of the Godhead

His two titles, “Son of God” and the “Word”, ensure that we understand Him as a personal manifestation of the Godhead, equal with the Father. He is an accurate expression of God’s glory and person. Our Lord is not merely a likeness of the Father but of “one substance with the Father”. He and the Father are one. He is described as the Word, the pre-existent Christ, in a unique relationship with the Father.

John 1:14 reads, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, full of grace and truth.”

Colossians 2:9-10 states very clearly, “For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority.”

The eternal nature of the Son of God

The Nicene Creed uses the term “begotten” not “made” to clarify Jesus’ origin. This means that He was not created as the angels were. Here we have the eternal nature of the Sonship of Christ. He was the Son of God

before time began. “No-one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and[a] is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.” writes John (John 1:18). Jesus himself prays in His High Priestly prayer, “And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began” (John 17:5). Also in 1 John 4:9 we read: “This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.” In John 1:1,14, the terms “Logos” or “Word” and “only Son” are applied to the same person.

Isa was not crucified or raised from the dead

Only one verse in the Quran explicitly addresses *Isa’s* crucifixion, and even that verse is ambiguous as to whether *Isa* suffered death by crucifixion or not. According to *sura* 4:157-158, “That they said (in boast), ‘We killed Christ Jesus the son of Mary, the Messenger of Allah’ – But they killed him not, nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them, and those who differ therein are full of doubts, with no (certain) knowledge, but only conjecture to follow. For of a surety they killed him not – Nay, Allah raised him up unto Himself; and Allah is exalted in Power, Wise.”

The traditional Muslim interpretation of this verse is that the Jews tried to kill *Isa* but were unable to do so. Quranic translator Yusuf Ali explains in a footnote: “The Quranic teaching is that Christ was not crucified nor killed by the Jews, notwithstanding certain apparent circumstances which produced that illusion in the minds of some of his enemies⁷¹”. Muhammad would not have understood the meaning of the crucifixion: that Jesus died on the cross to provide salvation so that a person’s sins might be forgiven, reconciling us to God and giving us the assurance of eternal life.

A *hadith* says that God substituted someone else in *Isa’s* place who appeared to be *Isa*. A detail of the story recounts *Isa* hiding in a niche in a wall and one of his companions being killed in his place.⁷² Instead of being crucified, they claim, *Isa* was eventually taken up to heaven. It is not clear whom they believe God substituted, but there are many theories, such as Judas, one of the disciples, Simon of Cyrene, a criminal, etc. The so-called “Gospel of Barnabas” (see appendix), which is an Islamic

apologetic document, claims that Judas Iscariot was crucified in place of Jesus. The Ahmadiyya movement believes that *Isa* survived the crucifixion, migrated to India and eventually died a natural death.

It is possible that the ancient Christian heresy of Docetism has influenced Islam. The Docetics believed that Jesus only “seemed” to be physical and to suffer in His body. His suffering was only an illusion. Such tendencies find echoes in some of the apocryphal gospels. According to the second century *Gospel of Peter*, on the cross Jesus “was silent, since he felt no pain”, and at the end “the Lord cried out, saying, ‘My power, my power, you have left me’. And when he spoke he was taken up”. The Biblical Gospels however emphatically affirm that Jesus “gave up his spirit” and died.

The *Acts of John*, dating from about the middle of the second century, claims that Jesus appeared to John in a cave during the crucifixion and said, “John, unto the multitude below in Jerusalem I am being crucified and pierced with lances and reeds, and gall and vinegar is given me to drink. But unto thee I speak”. And later it says, “Nothing, therefore of the things which they will say of me have I suffered ... I was pierced, yet I was not smitten; hanged, and I was not hanged; that blood flowed from me, and it flowed not”. The ambiguity as to whether Jesus was slain on the cross and died in these heretical and sectarian writings bears a close resemblance to the Quranic ambiguity regarding the crucifixion and death of Jesus, even though the Quran states explicitly only that the Jews did not kill Jesus.

Muslims view the crucifixion as a defeat. If they believed *Isa* was crucified it would mean that he established no earthly kingdom and achieved no success; he would have no followers and no legacy. Muslims also see crucifixion – to be nailed to the cross – as worthy only of criminal, a disgrace which could never have happened to an honoured prophet.

As Islam denies Jesus’ crucifixion, so it also denies the resurrection.

Isa ascended into heaven

Even though the Quran denies *Isa* to be the Son of God, it does concede that *Isa* ascended into heaven. “Allah raised him up unto himself” (*sura* 4:158). In the context of this verse, it apparently makes this claim to support its own view of *Isa* escaping his crucifixion. In another verse from the Quran, “Behold! Allah said: ‘O Jesus! I will take thee and raise thee to Myself and clear thee (of the falsehoods) of those who blaspheme; I will make those who follow thee superior to those who reject faith, to the Day of Resurrection: then shall ye all return unto me’” (*sura* 3:55). Here, God raises *Isa* to heaven, but only after first causing him to die.

According to the Muslim commentator al-Tabari, *Isa* did not die but ascended body and soul to heaven while someone else died in his place. Tabari reports a story from tradition recounting a day when *Isa* was together with seventeen disciples and the Jews came to the

house where they were gathered. The Jews were intent on killing him but *Isa*’s image was implanted on all his disciples. The Jews were bewildered and demanded, “Show us which one is *Isa* or we will kill all of you”. *Isa* asked his disciples, “Which one of you will win paradise for his soul today?” The faithful disciple who responded to *Isa*’s appeal retained the image of *Isa*, while the rest were restored to their original appearance. This faithful disciple was crucified by the Jews, while God took *Isa* to heaven.⁷³

Isa will come again

One day *Isa* will come again (*sura* 43:61): “A Sign for the coming of the Hour of Judgement: therefore have no doubt about the Hour but follow ye Me: this is a Straight Way.” In Islam the coming again of *Isa* will be one of the main signs of the last days. He is presented as an eschatological figure who has an important role to play in the end times.

Muslims believe that *Isa* will descend to earth to the *Isa* minaret of the large Umayyad Mosque in Damascus. This was originally the Christian Cathedral in Damascus, which was demolished and rebuilt as a mosque by a Muslim caliph in 709-715. *Isa* will come as a Muslim warrior to destroy Christianity and Judaism and will establish Islam as the only religion in the world. He will fight all its enemies (including the Antichrist *al-Dajjal*).

A *hadith* says, “Narrated Abu Hurayrah: The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: There is no prophet between me and him, that is *Isa* (peace be upon him). He will descend (to the earth). When you see him, recognise him: a man of medium height, reddish fair, wearing two light yellow garments, looking as if drops were falling down from his head though it will not be wet. He will fight the people for the cause of Islam. He will break the cross, kill swine, and abolish *jizya*. Allah will perish all religions except Islam. He will destroy the Antichrist and will live on earth for forty years and then he will die. The Muslims will pray over him.”⁷⁴

To “break the cross” means to destroy Christianity. Pigs are associated with Christians, as both Muslims and Jews consider them unclean, and the killing of the pigs also refers to the destruction of Christianity. Under Islamic law the humiliating poll-tax (*jizya*) is paid by subjugated Christians and Jews to protect them from *jihad*. The abolition of the poll-tax signifies the revival of *jihad* against Christians and Jews, who will face the choice of converting to Islam or being killed.

Isa will then marry, have children, die and be buried alongside Muhammad.

Jesus as the Son of God threatens Islamic theology

Jesus as the Son of God challenges the very basis of Allah and Islamic theology. The deity of Christ challenges the primary tenet of Islam, the absolute unity of Allah. If God has a Son, Islam would be in error, and that is why

Muslims consider that the idea of *Isa* as the Son of God has to be adamantly denied.

Every Friday, Muslims recite *sura* 112 during the service at the mosque: “Say, He is Allah the One and Only, Allah the Eternal, Absolute, He begetteth not, nor is He begotten and there is none like unto Him.”

This is a polemic against the Christian confession that Jesus is the only begotten Son of God. Constantly repeated, it is a denial of Jesus as the Son of God and of the Trinity. The Muslim call to prayer (“There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is the messenger of God”) goes forth over the rooftops five times a day from the minaret and is a polemic against both the Sonship and deity of Christ and the Christian faith.

The Muslims have Islamised Jesus into their *Isa* and made him to be the forerunner of, but subservient to, Muhammad. But Christ cannot forever be robbed of

His glory, since the Holy Spirit is the great vindicator of Jesus Christ (John 16:4-15). New Testament verses about the Holy Spirit are, in Muslim polemic, applied to the coming of Muhammad; yet in the New Testament text it is clear that the Holy Spirit is the third Person of the Trinity and the Glorifier of Christ, the Son of the living God.

Notes:

71 A. Yusuf ‘Ali, *The Holy Qur’an*. Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1975, p. 236, fn. 663.

72 Parrinder, Geoffrey *Jesus in the Qur’an*. London: Sheldon Press, 1965, p. 109.

73 Gabriel Said Reynolds, ‘The Muslim Jesus: Dead or Alive?’, *Bulletin of SOAS*, Volume 72, No 2, 2009, p. 241.

74 *Sunan Abu Dawood*, 2025, at <http://www.alim.org/library/hadith/SAD/2025>.

APPENDIX

The so-called “Gospel of Barnabas”

A Christian discussing matters of faith with a Muslim may find their friend alluding to the “Gospel of Barnabas”. This document is believed by many Muslims to contain the ultimate truth about the life and teaching of Jesus. Some even hold that it is the true and original *Injil*, for which Christians later substituted the New Testament.

The book professes to be a gospel written by the Apostle Barnabas. The author also claims that he, Barnabas, was one of the twelve disciples of Jesus, for which there is no support in the real Gospels. Furthermore, his denunciation of the Apostle Paul’s teachings discounts the close and supportive relationship which existed between Paul and Barnabas according to the New Testament. The book denies that Jesus is the Son of God and portrays Him as a forerunner (like John the Baptist) who proclaimed the future coming of Muhammad. It also denies the crucifixion. In addition, it even contradicts the Quran by declaring that Muhammad will be the Messiah, whereas the Gospels and Quran agree that this title belongs to Jesus alone. Such evidence, along with geographical and historical errors, shows that the Barnabas of the New Testament is not the author of this book.

Various references in the “Gospel of Barnabas” point to its having been written in the Middle Ages, not earlier than the fourteenth century, i.e. well over a thousand years after Christ and 700 years after Muhammad. The book contains most of the stories found in the four Gospel accounts in the New Testament, but with many things artfully turned in favour of Islam. A general study of its contents and authorship shows that it is a clumsy attempt to forge a life of Jesus consonant with the profile of him in the Quran and Islamic tradition.

An English translation of the “Gospel of Barnabas” by Lonsdale and Laura Ragg was reprinted in Pakistan in the 1970s and circulated in large numbers.

For further reading see John Gilchrist, *Origins and Sources of the Gospel of Barnabas*. Brighton: F.F.M. Publications, 1992, also available at <https://answering-islam.org/Gilchrist/barnabas.html>

This appendix is an extract from Patrick Sookhdeo, *A Christian’s Pocket Guide to Islam*. Fearn: Christian Focus Publications and Pewsey: Isaac Publishing, 2005, pp. 87-88.

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Faith in uncertain times

What is faith?

We live in strange and perplexing days, and the way ahead is far from clear. How should we respond to the uncertain times in which we live? The answer in the Bible is “faith” but what exactly is this faith which we are called to by definition. There is only one clear-cut definition in the Bible. “Now faith is firm confidence in things hoped for, conviction regarding things not seen,” says the writer to the Hebrews (Hebrews 11:1). In the words of Lenski (whose translation I have used in the previous sentence) this definition gives us “the *essence* of true religious faith, the heart of what the Scriptures call saving faith”.¹ So, faith is defined in terms of our response to two kinds of things: “things hoped for” and “things not seen”.

Confidence in things hoped for

“Now faith is firm confidence in things hoped for ...” To put this statement in context, we must look

back to the verses immediately before (Hebrews 10:35-39). Faith is a sure, solid and firm confidence (*hypostasis* in Greek) in what awaits us in the future – our reward (v.35), God’s promise (v.36), the second coming of Christ (v.37). God’s promise comprises our resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:20-23), the better and lasting possessions (Hebrews 10:34) of our glorious inheritance (Ephesians 1:14,18), the eternal weight of glory that will be ours, (2 Corinthians 4:17), the new heaven and the new earth (Revelation 21:1-22:6) and much more. These are some of the wonderful “things hoped for”. Christian faith produces Christian hope, that is, the confident and joyful expectation of good things to come.

Conviction regarding things not seen

“Now faith is ... conviction regarding things not seen.” Our faith is not only about things yet to come but also about things that have already come which we cannot

see. The writer to the Hebrews uses the word *elegchos* for this certainty about “things not seen”. Literally, it means “exposing” in the sense of giving evidence or proof of the existence of the things not seen. “Seeing is believing” goes the common phrase, suggesting that we can only believe what we can see. But Christian faith enables us to believe what we cannot see. In the words of the Apostle Paul, “we live by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7). Creation and all the other events of the Old Testament; the birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus – these are some of the things in the past which we have not seen with our eyes but are convinced of by faith.

Occasionally, the veil is lifted and we are granted a sight of the invisible. When Elisha’s young servant got up early one morning and discovered that a huge Syrian army had arrived in the night and encamped around the city of Dothan where he and Elisha lived, he cried out to Elisha, “Alas, my master! What shall we do?” Elisha reassured him, “Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” But those on the side of Elisha and his servant were invisible. So Elisha prayed, “O LORD, please open his eyes that he may see.” And the servant saw that the mountain on which Dothan stood was “was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha”. (2 Kings 6:15-17 ESV)

A true faith

Confidence, conviction and faith are, in themselves, neutral terms. They can be false, as when Eve put her faith in the lies of Satan, which she mistook for truth. Our faith is only Christian faith if it is focused on Christ, who is the Truth. As we sometimes sing,

My faith looks up to Thee,
Thou Lamb of Calvary,
Saviour Divine;
Now hear me while I pray;
Take all my guilt away;
Oh, let me from this day
Be wholly Thine.²

Our faith does not originate inside ourselves, but rests on something outside of ourselves, or rather on Somebody outside of ourselves, that is, on the Lord Jesus Christ. We do not create our faith; we receive it as a gift from God. It is through His Word and by His grace that the things not seen are revealed to us.

A trusting faith

Biblical faith is more than believing what is true. Faith is primarily trusting in a Person, rather than adhering to a correct set of theological principles, important though that is. It is humble child-like dependence on God, which has no place for pride or self-sufficiency. Through faith we trust in Him whom we have not seen and believe in what He has not yet done. This is the faith for which the ancients were commended (Hebrews 11:2).

Faith and righteousness

This trusting faith is the foundation and bedrock of our spiritual lives and is closely linked with righteousness. When Abram believed the Lord it was credited to him as righteousness (Genesis 15:6). The Apostle Paul explains how we, like Abraham, can be counted righteous, that is, justified or made just, by faith (Romans 3:21-5:1). Doubt and fear are at heart a form of unrighteousness for the one who doubts or fears is not allowing God to shape their mind and life. “The righteous one [i.e. the one declared righteous by God] shall live as a result of faith,” or, translated literally from the Greek, “The righteous - from faith he shall live” (Hebrews 10:38). The writer to the Hebrews was drawing on Scriptural language from the book of Habakkuk to express his thoughts (Habakkuk 2:3-4). If faith is gone then our spiritual life is gone. Without faith we apostatise. But

if we are living by faith, then though it may be through scourgings and mockings and perils and dangers, we shall arrive, for “the just shall live by faith”³

Faith is linked to righteousness. Faith is counted as righteousness. Doubt and fear is unrighteous at its heart. Who does not allow God to shape their mind and life? The writer to the Hebrews also borrows from Habakkuk a phrase about coming without delay, and adapts it for Christ, who is on His way: “... he who is coming will come and will not delay” (Hebrews 10:37). The writer prefaces this with his own introduction to emphasise just how short the time is, literally, “There is a yet a little time, how very, how very (little).” His message is that we only need to hold on for a short time more, we only need to persevere a little longer, and then Christ will come and all the other “things hoped for” will occur.

When faith fails

So we must not throw away this emboldening assurance, we must not be amongst those who shrink back in fear when things get tough i.e. who give up their faith. The faith of the Israelites in the desert was overwhelmed when they heard from the spies who had visited the promised land about how great the challenge was and how many dangers lay ahead of them. They shrank back and wished that they had never embarked on God’s saving journey out of slavery in Egypt. They even decided to reject Moses, choose another leader and make their way back to Egypt (Numbers 13:26-14:4).

Without faith the Israelites could not see the end. Unlike Joshua and Caleb, the rest had no spiritual vision. They were shaped by the immediate, by what they could see, for example, the “giants” living in the promised land (Numbers 13:33). With a secular and faithless mindset, they were influenced by what

the visible and the here and now (not by things to come or things unseen). They were controlled by their desire for safety and stability, even if they came at the cost of being re-enslaved.

The heart of the problem was that they were unwilling to face an uncertain future and had no confidence in the God of tomorrow, forgetting how He had led them, fed them and kept them up to that point. Their faith failed, they shrank back in cowardice and gave up, choosing what seemed to them the easier and safer way. They were not in touch with God, as Moses, Joshua and Caleb were. They were ruled by the immediate rather than by things hoped for and things not seen, and the pestilence which killed them became one more factor in the uncertainties that beset the Israelites.

Again we see the contrast between the faith-filled, who react to uncertainty by waiting on God in His holy place, and the faithless, who are controlled by the immediate and the visible. Psalm 91, which talks of future deliverance from pestilence and other forms of violent death, says that these promises are for “he that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High” (Psalm 91:1 KJV).

Heroes of our faith

Habakkuk’s prophecy was written in dark and tragic days. Enemy troops were closing in. There was injustice and corruption, arrogance and idolatry, crop failure and famine. Habakkuk recalled times of pestilence and other natural disasters (Habakkuk 3:5). He did not know what to do but, in that age of uncertainty, the Lord gave him a task: to “write the vision” as everything unfolded around him (Habakkuk 2:2-3).

It is striking how similar this command is to the commissioning of Isaiah at an earlier time of national crisis. Habakkuk obeyed – and one result of this is the teaching that the righteous will live by faith, quoted three times in the New Testament (Habakkuk 2:4; Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38). In the midst of death, disaster and destruction Habakkuk clung in trusting faith to God and continued to wait patiently for God’s deliverance. He did not shrink back. His faith did not fail. His confidence and certainty came from God.

The Bible is full of examples of trusting faith that does not falter when tested. The rest of chapter 11 of Hebrews is an amazing, humbling, inspiring catalogue of those who lived by faith and not by sight. Noah in faith built a ship on dry land, knowing only that God was going to destroy all the people and the earth; that was surely an uncertain future (Genesis 6:13 ff). Abraham left his home, his extended family and his country to follow God’s call into the unknown (Genesis 12:1). He did not know where he was going, how long his trip would be or what dangers and hardships he might encounter on the way. Everything was uncertain. But he trusted in God and obeyed. Moses’s parents put their baby

boy into a basket on the river Nile, not knowing if this would save their son’s life or what would happen (Exodus 1:22-2:4). Rahab sheltered the Israelite spies, explaining to them that the whole population of her country were melting in fear, knowing that the Lord had given their land to the Israelites. How uncertain the future was for her (Joshua 2:8-11). Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refused to worship King Nebuchadnezzar’s huge golden statue, and were thrown into a blazing furnace, knowing that God had the power to rescue them but uncertain whether He would (Daniel 3:12,16-18). We know that God “quenched the fury of the flames” (Hebrews 11:34) and they were to emerge from the furnace completely unharmed (Daniel 3:27), but when they were thrown into it the wonderful ending of their story was uncertain and unknown.

The courageous achievements of this list of but a few heroes of faith, which could be extended a million-fold with the addition of faithful, trusting Christians in the centuries since. All marvellously show what trusting faith in God can achieve, some being miraculously delivered and others gloriously martyred.

See God in Christ, then look at the times

The times in which we live are not only uncertain but for some they are also deeply distressing and dangerous. But we should not fear. There is not much longer to wait and endure, before “the Coming One” (Hebrews 10:37 ESV) will be here. Now is not the time to shrink back but to continue in faith, making sure to “fix our eyes not on what is seen ... since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal”. In this way we see our troubles in perspective, as light and momentary in comparison with eternal glory. (2 Corinthians 4:17-18).

It is in times of uncertainty that our faith can be most fruitful. It is then, when our faith is truly put to the test, that either we can become unrighteous in our worry which, as we have seen, can even end in apostasy, or we can trust God and put our hand in His.

As Campbell Morgan said, let us “see God in Christ, and then look at the times”.⁴

Dr Patrick Sookhdeo

International Director, Barnabas Fund

1 R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of The Epistle to the Hebrews and The Epistle of James*, Minneapolis, Augsburg Publishing House, 1966, p.373.

2 Hymn written in 1830 by Ray Palmer, after he received a vision of Christ

3 G. Campbell Morgan, *he Triumphs of Faith*, London, Pickering & Inglis Ltd, 1944, p.14.

4 Campbell Morgan, p.128.



Eritrea

“I Will Free Your Prisoners” (Zechariah 9:11)

“This is an answer to prayer. Thousands of Christians have been praying for this.” These were the words of Eritrean church leader Dr Berhane Asmelash as Christians long imprisoned for their faith were freed from captivity.

Since September 2020, at least 160 Christians have been released from Eritrean prisons. The first 69 Christians were released from the notorious Mai Serwa high-security military detention centre near the capital Asmara in September. In January 2021, 70 more were released from Mai Serwa and two other prisons. This was followed in February with the release of 21 female prisoners who had been held for four years in the hostile and isolated Nakarua prison on the Dahlak Islands, in the Red Sea.

The releases were, to the Church in Eritrea, a reminder of the Biblical promise of the Lord Jesus Christ releasing prisoners from captivity

because of His eternal covenant with His chosen people (Zechariah 9:11-12).

Imprisoned Christians ready to die for Christ

Some of these Christians had been held for more than 16 years, others for only a few months, but all sacrificed their liberty, and often their health too, for the sake of their faith in Jesus Christ.

Any one of the prisoners could have chosen to be released from their ordeal. “The only thing they needed to do was to sign a piece of paper to say that they renounced their faith,” explained Dr Berhane. “But they preferred to stay in prison rather than do this and get out. They never thought they would get out. They were ready to die.”

While the release of prisoners is cause for celebration, as many as 400 Christians are thought to remain in Eritrea’s prisons, often enduring inhumane and brutal conditions.



The notorious Mai Serwa high-security military detention facility, near Asmara, where many Christians are beaten, tortured, staved and forced into hard labour

Persecuted Church “picks up the pieces” and cares for children of jailed parents

Among the hundreds arrested were parents forced to leave behind children as young as eight or nine. In some cases grandparents or other family members could care for these children, but in others there was nobody to offer

support. The Church sought to provide for as many of the children as it could, but it had to be done in secret for fear of further government reprisals.

Prisoners tortured, starved and forced into hard labour

Imprisoned Christians are tortured, starved and forced into hard labour. Conditions are worse for pastors and theological students who are singled out for beatings or have their jail terms extended as a warning to others. Most Christians are held indefinitely, often without trial, not knowing when they will be released.

“All the prisoners have faced harsh treatment,” explained Dr Berhane. “There was always lack of food, always beatings. Sometimes guards would punish them by stopping them from taking a bath. This led to many suffering from skin infections.”

Unlit underground cells led to sight problems for prisoners

One prisoner recounted that he was held with three other men in a cell four metres underground with only a small opening at the top. They were only allowed out twice a day to use the toilet, and suffered from infections caused by the unsanitary conditions, and sight problems resulting from the lack of light.

Some prisoners did indeed die for Christ, as they perished in the harsh conditions. A husband, wife and their 17-year-old son were arrested together, with the wife held in a separate location. When father and son were released, they discovered that she had died in prison from heat exhaustion and acute kidney failure.

One of the worst countries in world for persecution

Eritrea remains one of the worst countries in the world for Christian persecution, where conditions are so harsh for believers that it is described by some as Africa’s North Korea. Only three denominations are legally permitted – Eritrean Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Lutheran – as well as Sunni Islam. All others are illegal and members of unofficial churches are subject to arbitrary arrest and detention without trial. As a result of this persecution tens of thousands of Christians have fled Eritrea.

The leaders of unofficial churches



A cathedral in Asmara, the capital city of Eritrea. Only three Christian denominations are legally permitted in the country – Eritrean Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Lutheran

are often a target for persecution. Sadly no pastors or other senior Christian leaders were among those released from prison in recent months.

Yet even those churches granted official status are not guaranteed freedom from intimidation – for the government is quick to undermine their status if it is thought to threaten the power of the state. During 2019, authorities shut down 21 health centres run by a registered church denomination and ordered the closure of seven Christian schools.

“Christians are considered illegals,” explained Dr Berhane, “but ... There is no crime being done apart from believing in God.”

“Sometimes they get lost – sometimes they don’t know where they are – because they have suffered so much for so many years.”

The years of physical and mental abuse in prison have taken their toll on the freed Christian prisoners, and many released are in a poor physical condition and suffer from trauma. One man suffered heatstroke in prison due to the scorching temperatures and lack of water. He was finally released to a hospital when he was at the point of death. He now has problems with his speech, is unable to move his arms and

legs properly, and requires the aid of a walking frame.

A young woman, only 16 at the time of her arrest and now 28, is struggling alone to adjust to her freedom because her parents died during her 12-year imprisonment.

“Sometimes they get lost – sometimes they don’t know where they are – because they have suffered so much for so many years,” Dr Berhane told Barnabas Fund. “The only thing that gives them strength is their faith. They still pray – they don’t question their faith.”



Eritrean church leader Dr Berhane Asmelash asks for prayers for healing and God’s provision for freed Christian prisoners and persecuted believers in Eritrea

We can also rejoice that God has overruled in the release of our brothers and sisters, praise God that He has sustained the Christians of Eritrea over decades of persecution, and give thanks for their faithful witness. Ask that God will provide all their needs and continue to uphold them in their faith.

Boko Haram releases Nigerian pastor kidnapped on Christmas Eve

NIGERIA



Pastor Bulus Yakuru appeared in a Boko Haram video a week before his release with an armed terrorist standing behind him

Kidnapped Nigerian Pastor Bulus Yakuru was released by Boko Haram on 3 March, the day the Islamist terror group said they would murder him.

His release was negotiated by the Nigerian government's Department of State Services and a Nigerian charity.

On 24 February Boko Haram issued a video in which Pastor Bulus said that his captors had given him an ultimatum threatening to kill him a week from that date.

The militants snatched the pastor on Christmas Eve 2020, during a raid on the predominantly Christian village of Pemi, about 20 km from Chibok, in which eleven people were killed. The gunmen went on to murder five Christians abducted in the region as a so-called "Christmas present".

In Nigeria's Kogi State, a pastor was attacked and beaten unconscious on 1

March by around 20 youths in the Ibaji area after refusing to allow them to conduct a traditional African religious ceremony in a church building.

Pastor Michael Samson was asleep in his bed when the gang, armed with weapons, entered and severely beat him.

Earlier that day, he prevented the young men from using the church building to hold a "Masquerade", a traditional Nigerian animistic religious ceremony in which worshippers of a particular deity perform rituals linked to the seasons of the year.

Kogi State, in Nigeria's Middle Belt, has a Muslim population of around 40% and an estimated 25% are Christian. The remainder mainly practise traditional African religions either solely or in combination with Islam.

Couple with baby among five Christians arrested in Somaliland

SOMALILAND

Prosecutors in Muslim-majority Somaliland were granted extra time on 10 February to detain in custody a Christian couple and their new-born baby and two other Christian women on suspicion of "spreading Christianity".

The time extension allows prosecutors up to 45 days from the date of the arrests in January to file charges.

On 21 January, police from the capital Hargeisa arrested and detained in custody Mohamed and Hamdi with their baby, as well as Aster, an Ethiopian woman. The following day, police arrested another woman who was living with the couple.

Police from the capital Hargeisa arrested and detained in custody Mohamed and Hamdi with their baby, as well as Aster, an Ethiopian woman.

The Christians' lawyer said that on his initial visit they all appeared in good health and were being well treated. However, he has since been denied access.

In September 2020, a Christian couple were detained for being "apostates and evangelists spreading Christianity". They were unexpectedly released and deported two months later after European government representatives raised the case with the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

Church building in Nepal demolished while adjacent Hindu temple left intact

NEPAL

A church building in Nepalgunj, Nepal, has been demolished by the government after it took mandatory possession of the church's land and the surrounding area, including a Hindu temple, in order to build a school.

The congregation requested that their church building would not be destroyed, but the building was demolished at the

end of January on government orders. The Hindu temple was left intact.

The church's congregation of around 20 families is currently holding services in the open air and the pastor requests prayer that they will be able to construct a new building for the church, which was established in 2006, to minister to a slum area of the city.



Police oversee the demolition of the church building in Nepalgunj, Nepal

New interreligious aide to Imran Khan says minorities in Pakistan are “not second-class citizens”

PAKISTAN



Prime minister of Pakistan, Imran Khan, and his new aide, Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mehmoed Ashrafi, at a meeting in June 2020 [Image credit: paktribune.com]

The Pakistani government has renewed a commitment to protect minorities and promote religious tolerance with the appointment of a special aide to advise Prime Minister Imran Khan on interreligious matters.

Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mehmoed Ashrafi, a respected Muslim scholar and Chairman of the Pakistan Ulema Council (PUC), was named Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Religious Harmony and Middle East.

His appointment came as the government acknowledged a need to restrain the abuse of “blasphemy” laws and protect all victims of false accusation, as well as Christians and other religious minorities from forced marriage to Muslims and forced conversions.

After his appointment was announced, Ashrafi affirmed that minorities living in Pakistan are “not second-class citizens” and guaranteed that they will be protected under the rights and privileges enshrined in the constitution of Pakistan.

Christians are often despised by the majority-Muslim population in Pakistan and referred to as “sweepers” or Chuhra as a term of derision. Most Christians today in Pakistan are confined to low-paid menial jobs such as street sweeping and latrine cleaning.

Among Ashrafi’s first tasks was the appointment of a network of Religious Harmony Council Conveners across the country who will work at a local level to promote tolerance between all religious groups.

He has already set up a grievance helpline to resolve complaints of false “blasphemy” accusations or any threats made on religious grounds. Pakistan’s notorious “blasphemy” laws are often used to make false accusations in order to settle personal grudges. Christians are especially vulnerable, as merely stating certain Christian beliefs can be construed as “blasphemy” against Islam.

On 13 February 2021, a complaint of “blasphemy” was filed against two Christian friends soon after they had a conversation with a group of Muslims in a park in Model Town, Lahore.

One of the Muslims alleged the two men talked to them about Christianity and made derogatory remarks about Muhammed and the Quran.

Section 295-C of the Pakistan Penal Code stipulates a mandatory death sentence for anybody found guilty of “defiling the name” of Muhammad. At the close of 2020, approximately 22 Christians were on death row in Pakistan on “blasphemy” charges, including four minors. To date no one has been executed.

Centuries of Christian heritage “under threat” in Turkey

TURKEY



President Erdogan recites Islamic prayer at the Hagia Sophia cathedral, turned into a mosque in 2020

Centuries of heritage belonging to Christians and other minorities in Turkey are under threat following the agreement of new import restrictions between the US and Turkey, according to Armenian and other Christian groups.

On 19 January, they condemned as “reckless” and “a travesty” the bilateral Memorandum signed by the outgoing American administration in its final hours whereby the US agreed to place import restrictions on heritage objects from Turkey and to repatriate “trafficked” cultural property.

This, in effect, places the care and control of the vast heritage of all cultural, religious and ethnic groups in the hands of the Turkish government, which has a long track record of “destroying minorities” and their holy sites, even to the point of “erasing their memory from the landscape of their ancient, indigenous, homelands”, said Armenian leader Aram Hamparian.

Toufic Baaklini, President of the campaign group In Defence of Christians (IDC), slammed the agreement as a “shameful stamp of American approval on the destruction of Christian cultural heritage in Turkey”.



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Will you sign our...



Open letter

to Prime Minister,
Hon. Scott Morrison MP to
Save Nigerian Christians

DEADLINE 31 MAY 2021

For Christians living in the North and Middle Belt of Nigeria, persecution is rife and relentless, and life itself is precarious. Since 2015, extremist violence has killed at least 8,400 Christians. The exact death toll is unknown and the numbers may be much higher than this, as many cases go unreported. One village head from the Middle Belt told Barnabas Fund in 2020, “We are tired and we do not want to bother others about our tragedies. We seem always to be reporting deaths and attacks, and people are weary of our reports.”

We are urging Prime Minister Scott Morrison to oppose the ethno-religious cleansing of Christians in northern Nigeria, bringing this to the attention of the Commonwealth Heads of Government, which will be meeting in June 2021 for the first time in three years, and to consider diplomatic pressure and policy responses to the following:

1. The Nigerian Government’s failure to respond adequately to the violence,
2. The need for persecuted communities to be protected, and
3. The need for Nigerian authorities to bring perpetrators of violence to justice.

Sign our open letter

Thank you to all those who have already signed our open letter to Prime Minister, Hon. Scott Morrison MP. **Please sign the letter today** to add your name to the growing list of Christians worldwide calling for an end to the slaughter of Christians in northern Nigeria. Visit savenigerianchristians.org and click “sign letter”

Petition

calling for the Australian government to
recognise the Armenian Genocide?

#RecogniseArmenianGenocide

DEADLINE 30 JUNE 2021

Good news! The Dutch parliament voted on 27 February to call upon their government to recognise the Armenian Genocide. Submitted by Christian Union (*ChristenUnie*) MP Joël Voordewind, the motion was passed with an overwhelming majority of 146 (of 149) MPs in the House of Representatives of the Netherlands voting in favour.

Between 1893 and 1923, some 3.75 million Armenian, Assyrian, Greek and Syriac Christians were killed within Ottoman territories. Historians agree that Turkey’s murderous policy was state-sanctioned and targeted Christians. Some Christians were spared death, but only if they converted to Islam.

However, the only countries that officially recognise the Armenian Genocide are: Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Cyprus, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Iran, Lebanon, Lithuania, Luxemburg, Netherlands, Paraguay, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Syria, Uruguay, Vatican City, and Venezuela.

In support of our campaign, Dr Patrick Sookhdeo, International Director of Barnabas Fund, has written personal letters to US President Joe Biden and UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson asking that their governments formally recognise the Armenian Genocide.

Will there be another Armenian Genocide?

Azerbaijan’s victory in a brief and bloody conflict in the Armenian enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh ended with a ceasefire agreement signed by Armenia, Azerbaijan and Russia in November 2020. There have since been Azerbaijani threats against the country of Armenia itself and Armenians fear the conquest of their homeland and another genocide while national powers turn a blind eye.

Despite Armenia’s release of all Azerbaijani Prisoners of War (PoWs), Azerbaijan has not exchanged “all for all” in accordance with agreement terms and has failed to provide a complete list with actual numbers of PoWs. Armenia believes these to be far higher than the figures so far released suggest.

At the time of writing about 150 Armenian PoWs are known to remain alive, but the fate of 1,300 other people still unaccounted for is unknown – whether killed, missing in action or held as PoWs. At least eleven Armenian prisoners have been killed by their Azerbaijani captors.

The Dutch parliament has also recently passed a motion recommending the release and repatriation of Armenian PoWs by Azerbaijan.

Sign our petition before 30 June deadline

Join the thousands who have already signed the petition. You can help to avert a second Armenian genocide by **signing our petition** to the Australian government and gathering as many other signatures as you can. Return the forms to our office by 30 June 2021 (address inside front cover of this magazine). You can download the petition from: barnabasfund.org/au/armenian-genocide

In Touch

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Well done to “Stalls in the Hall” stalwarts on Sunshine Coast

Our thanks and congratulations go to the wonderful ladies of St Peter's Anglican Church, Maroochydore on the Sunshine Coast in Queensland, for their magnificent fundraising efforts.

For several years their Mission Fellowship group has been organising twice-yearly sales, called “Stalls in the Hall”, which annually raise about \$6,000 in support of three major mission agencies, including Barnabas Fund.

The parish family and the community look forward to buying plants, craft items, baked goods, jams and chutneys from the well-stocked stalls. An added attraction are the reasonably-priced Devonshire Morning Teas that are served.

During the initial Covid-19 restrictions, Stalls in the Hall were unable to be held, but the Mission Fellowship members continued to sell their goods to the parish family. “In spite of increasing age (our members are all over 80), we aim to continue as long as the Lord enables us,” they declare.

The fundraising sales event reopened in a smaller covid-safe format from September 2020, and are beginning to grow again as restrictions ease. A recent weekend jams and pickles stall raised more than \$400!



Gardeners make a beeline for the well-stocked plant stall



Safety comes first at the covid-safe sales, which resumed in a limited format in September 2020



Craft items are always popular with visitors to Stalls in the Halls

Encouraging parliamentary support for persecuted Christians

In a recent meeting with parliamentarians in Canberra, CEO Ashley Saunders discussed the plight of persecuted Christians across the globe. In his meeting with George Christensen MP, Member for Dawson (QLD), discussions focused on the situation faced by Christians in parts of Africa, as well as our campaign for the Australian Government to recognise the Armenian Genocide.

After the meeting Mr Christensen commented, “It was a pleasure to meet with Rev Ashley Saunders as I’m a big supporter of the Barnabas Fund, given they are at the forefront of the push for action against the persecution of Christians.

“The brutality of oppressive atheistic communist regimes and the barbarity of militant Islamist states and terror networks has seen Christians subjected to all sorts of horrors in recent years. The atrocities in Nigeria are particularly galling and so I support the Barnabas Fund’s www.savenigerianchristians.org campaign.

“I am keen to work with the Barnabas Fund and other like-minded organisations to see what more the Australian Government can do to combat Christian persecution around the world.”



George Christensen MP had encouraging words of support for Barnabas' work

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Another way to give to the suffering Church is to make Amazon purchases through **AmazonSmile**. AmazonSmile customers can have the same shopping selection but the AmazonSmile foundation will donate 0.5% of the price of eligible purchases to charitable organisations selected by the customer.

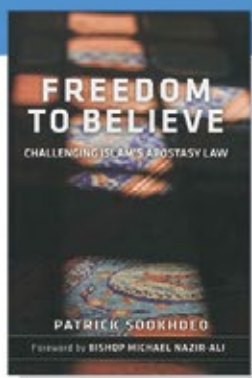
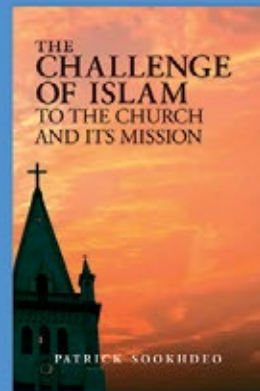
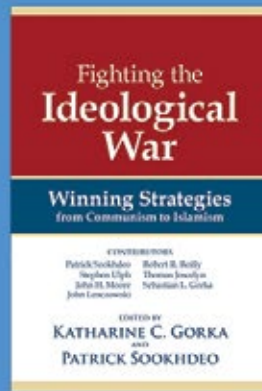
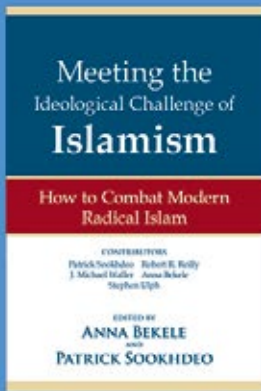
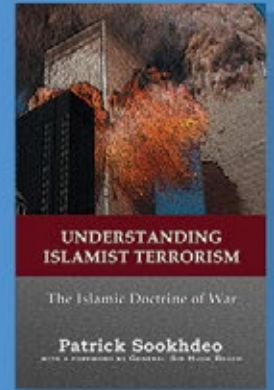
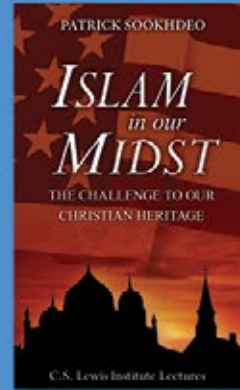
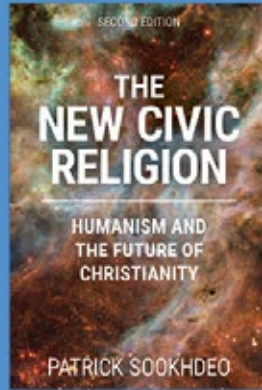
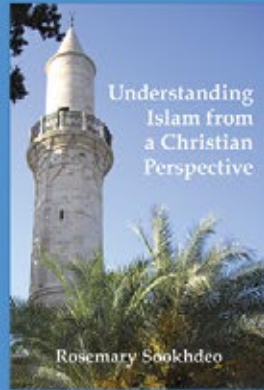
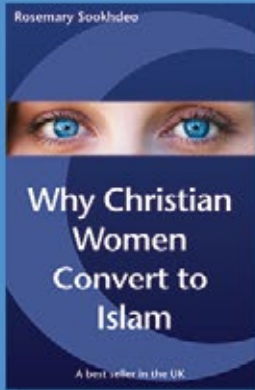
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