

BRINGING HOPE AND AID TO SUFFERING CHRISTIANS

SENEGAL

Lives transformed as Christians learn to read the Word of God

GRASSROOTS TRAINING

Barnabas equips pastors to guide the growing global Church

D.R. CONGO

Poverty, persecution and violence in land rich in natural resources



God's
Hope
for Ukrainian
refugees

The Barnabas Aid Distinctive

What helps make Barnabas Aid 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 send money or goods e.g. food)
- 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: A Ukrainian Christian refugee in Romania reading the Bible to her granddaughter. Barnabas is supporting them and thousands of others.

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In the world, but not of it



a broken and fragmenting world, the Christian stands out by having an identity that crosses all national boundaries, all tribal divisions, all economic disparities. The early Christians, too, lived in a greatly divided world, the main binary division being between Jews and Gentiles. But Christians thought of themselves as a third group. As Paul wrote, “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). This brotherhood is reflected in the New Testament Greek word *adelphos*. Translated as “brother”, it literally means “from the same womb” (*a-* “together with” + *delphys* “womb”). For we all share an origin in Christ our Saviour and, in a sense, His blood flows through our veins. It was the word that the first followers of Jesus took up from everyday language and used to refer to fellow believers, giving it a special and precious Christian meaning.

This is well illustrated in an anonymous letter addressed to someone called Diognetus, thought to date from around 130 AD. It is the earliest known piece of Christian writing explaining Christianity to specifically pagan readers; that is, to the majority of Graeco-Roman society at the time. Here is an extract:

... Christians cannot be distinguished from the rest of the human race by country or language or customs. They do not live in cities of their own; they do not use a peculiar form of speech; they do not follow an eccentric manner of life... Yet, although they live in Greek and barbarian cities alike, as each man's lot has been cast, and follow the customs of the country in clothing and food and other matters of daily living, at the same time they give proof of the remarkable and admittedly extraordinary constitution of their own commonwealth. They live in their own countries, but only as aliens. They have a share in everything as citizens, and endure everything as foreigners. Every foreign land is their fatherland, and yet for them every fatherland is a foreign land... They busy themselves on earth, but their citizenship is in heaven. They obey the established laws, but in their own lives they go far beyond what the laws require. They love all men, and by all men are persecuted... They are treated by the Jews as foreigners and enemies, and are hunted down by the Greeks; and all the time those who hate them find it impossible to justify their enmity.

To put it simply: What the soul is in the body, that Christians are in the world. The soul is dispersed through all the members of the body, and Christians are scattered through all the cities of the world.

The writer goes on to explain that this is why Christians are hated and persecuted, for they are like the moral conscience of the world, and humans always have a tendency to be rebellious and resentful against their consciences (see John 15:18-19.)

What a challenge to us today. Where does our loyalty to Christ rank amidst our other loyalties? Is it first and foremost? Is it our fundamental guiding principle? Do we put first our brothers and sisters who share that blood of Jesus, before our natural families and our nations?

As Christians we are citizens of heaven and therefore merely “resident aliens” or expatriates in the world (Philippians 3:20; 1 Peter 1:1). Our identity is in Christ, not in any nation where we may happen to have been born or whose passport we may happen to hold.

Scripture tells us that we must live in this world but not be of it (John 17:14-16; Romans 12:2), for the world lies in the power of the evil one, who influences all human governments (1 John 5:19). We must submit to the authorities, work for good, pray for those in power and be prophets proclaiming God's message for our world today, but always remember that we are different, we are a heavenly people here on earth.

DR PATRICK SOOKHDEO

International Director

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how barnabas is helping

Thousands of young Egyptian Christians receive the gift of God's Word

Barnabas gave personal Bibles to more than 4,790 Christian 7th grade students (aged 12-13) in Egypt to help them develop a lasting love for God's Word. Each hardback Bible included a reading plan as well as details of a free mobile phone app designed to motivate the students to check off the reading of the day and answer questions on the passage.

Christians are a minority in Egypt and often face hostility or discrimination from the Muslim majority, especially in rural areas. Abanoub, 19, cherishes the first Bible he received from our project partner at the age of 12. "The most important Bible verse for me at this time are those words Jesus said 'Don't be afraid'. These words remind me that Jesus will take me also through difficult times."

Our project partner added, "We pray that this project will help the beneficiaries to develop a love and attachment to the Scriptures in a personal way."



Students said having their own personal Bible is a "precious gift"

\$20,464 for 4,791 Bibles

Project reference: 11-1021

Building of church in Uzbekistan changes Muslim attitudes to Christians

The construction of a new church building is an answer to prayer in Muslim-majority Uzbekistan, where there are tight restrictions on congregations. The building, partially funded by Barnabas, provides vastly improved worship facilities for one of the few registered churches in the country. It is also spacious enough to be shared by other local congregations that would otherwise have to meet illegally in unregistered premises.

The church has a large hall for worship, as well as a separate area for children's services, a guest hall, prayer room, kitchen, dining room and office, together offering plenty of scope for conferences and seminars.

The building project has changed attitudes among the local Muslim community, who previously viewed Christians with suspicion. "Local people see that the church is open for everyone and Christians are not enemies," said a Barnabas contact. The local authorities are even encouraging the church to hold an official opening ceremony.



The spacious new church building is shared by various local congregations

\$33,469

Project reference: PR1424
(Church buildings in Uzbekistan)

Survivors of jihadi attack in South Sudan give thanks for food and prayer

"I have seen the love of the Church," said a Christian woman after Barnabas sent food and practical aid to survivors of a jihadi attack on a predominantly Christian village in South Sudan. "I did not know that there are people who could come and help us like the church people. We will never forget their support."

At least 25 villagers died in the latest anti-Christian attack by militants from across the border in Sudan. Homes and a church were razed, and cattle, sheep and goats stolen. Working through our church partners, Barnabas delivered food (sorghum, beans and cooking oil), soap, blankets and roofing sheets to help villagers in the days after the attack. This was followed by further supplies to help them rebuild.

Village elder Dut Ye said, "The church leaders who came to see us were our only hope because they came with food and the Word of God for encouragement and prayer for us."



The first delivery of Barnabas-funded aid is distributed among survivors

\$70,973

Project reference: 48-1171 (Aid for Christian victims of violence in South Sudan)

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



Christians in Cameroon praise God for safe supply of drinking water

Christians living in the far north of Cameroon, a region beset by Boko Haram terrorist attacks, have been provided with a safe water supply on their doorstep, thanks to Barnabas supporters. Your donations funded the digging of wells and the drilling of bore-wells in nine Christian-majority villages, where hundreds of families displaced by violence have sought shelter. Among the displaced are many widows and orphans.

Previously people struggled to find drinking water in this mountainous area, often travelling miles and spending a whole day just to fill a 25-litre can of water. The influx of displaced people put further strain on supplies.

“God is love, God is love, God is love!” Honorine exclaimed when she saw water shoot out of one of the bore-wells. “I feel happy,” added another resident, Beldena Jean. “I will never have to go far from home to supply myself with water. Thanks be to God and thank you to the partners.”



Villagers and displaced people can now collect water from a Barnabas-funded well close to their homes

\$76,260

Project reference: 07-1363 (Victims of violence in Cameroon)



Food and medicine for sick and needy Christians in Turkmenistan

Turkmenistan is a very closed country, where the movements of citizens are controlled by the authorities, and Christian worship is restricted. The authorities claim Turkmenistan has had no cases of coronavirus, while at the same time locking down travel within the country. In reality, many have died from the virus, including Christians. Poverty has deepened during the pandemic as food prices have soared and jobs have been lost.

Working with members of Turkmenistan’s few registered churches, Barnabas provided parcels of food staples for 91 poor Christian families in need (about 300 people) and medicines to 50 Christians suffering from Covid last year. Several of the recipients were deaf-mute Christian families living in an area without a registered church but served by visiting pastors.

Our church partners asked for prayers for Turkmenistan, where many poor people, especially the elderly, are starving but ashamed to say they need help, and more people than ever are trying to leave the country.



One of the Turkmenistan Christian families who received Barnabas-funded aid

\$8,134

Project reference: PR1530 (Covid Emergency Fund)



Vulnerable Pakistani Christian widows given food and practical aid

Pakistani Christian Nageena took comfort in Psalm 23:1 “The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing” after her husband, a gardener, died in a work accident. Earning meagre wages as a labourer, Nageena struggled to feed her three children and they had to leave school because she could not pay their fees.

“I started praying God for help and I asked Him to open a door for me,” said Nageena. Her prayers were answered when she began to receive monthly food packages from Barnabas. She no longer worries about the next meal and she uses money she saves on food to pay the school fees.

Barnabas provides food parcels to 400 Pakistani Christian widows who, like Nageena, are vulnerable to discrimination and exploitation because they are women, Christian and without the protection and earnings of a husband. They also receive teaching on the Bible and prayer, and on home economics, health and hygiene to help them manage better.



Nageena with her daughters Sana, 12, and Mehwish, 14, and son Ashar, 9

\$181,518 for one year’s help for 400 Christian widows

Project reference: PR1460 (Christian widows in Pakistan)

From your home to a

Ukraine appeal matched by swift response amid ongoing humanitarian crisis



The team of staff and volunteers at our Swindon warehouse, working hard to pack your generous donations for delivery to Ukrainian refugees



A truck taking dried potatoes from Canada, to be shipped from the US to Romania for refugees from Ukraine



The first lorry being loaded at our food.gives warehouse in Swindon, UK, before making the journey to Romania

Our food.gives programme responded swiftly to the needs of Ukrainians, thanks to your quick and generous donations.

“We deeply express our gratitude and thanks for the BIG help and special generosity related to the Ukrainian refugees that came in our Refugee Centre,” wrote a church leader in Moldova to Barnabas. “May God Almighty richly bless and reward you according to His great love and generosity.”

These words came after the quick and generous response of our supporters to our appeals on behalf of suffering Ukrainians. We are thrilled, grateful to God and thankful for your donations of money and supplies.

On 24 February Russia began its invasion of Ukraine. At the time of writing more than 2.8 million people have fled the country, with 1.7 million seeking refuge in Poland and tens of thousands in countries such as Hungary, Romania, Slovakia

and Moldova. There were many thousands of our Christian brothers and sisters amongst them.

Those who remained in Ukraine were also suffering. As of mid-March the official Ukraine Ministry of Energy figures show more than 650,000 people without electricity and 130,000 without gas – and this was expected to rise rapidly. Supplies of food and drinking water were also diminished.

Barnabas immediately launched urgent appeals for Christians in desperate need of food, blankets, warm clothes and other basic humanitarian aid.

The incredible response

Within days of our appeals more than six tonnes of food and five tonnes of blankets, coats and other clothes

were delivered to our warehouse in Swindon, UK. More donations continued to arrive each day from our 34 food.gives collection hubs all across the country. The first 40-foot lorry carrying 30 tonnes of aid from our warehouse reached Romania on 16 March followed by others, approximately one each week. Aid was distributed not only to refugees in Romania but also to the needy in Ukraine itself.

“One of the Biblical accounts we reflect on is the feeding of the five thousand,” said our UK food.gives Operations Manager. “Some people have come to us and said, ‘I haven’t got much to give you’ – and our response to those people is, give what you can, because all your giving adds up.”

“If everyone is doing the same thing – if your next door neighbour or another church is also giving a little amount – when you add all that together you suddenly find yourself with 12 baskets left over,” she added.

warzone



Believers in Moldova providing food for the refugees



The first lorry from the UK being unloaded in Romania



Bunk beds set up in a Sunday school room in Moldova. Churches are using every space to accommodate refugees from Ukraine

“When we bring it all together, God can do incredible things with it.”

Later in March Barnabas in the US sent its first shipment of dried food to the region. A Canada-based gleaning organisation (a group that, like in the Old Testament, collects the gleanings of crops left at the side of the fields for the poor) donated 20,000 kg (44,000 lb) of dried potatoes that were then delivered by Barnabas to refugees from Ukraine in Romania. More shipments were due to follow.

Meanwhile Barnabas in New Zealand was also collecting donations of dried foodstuff as part of the food.gives programme. There are three collection hubs at churches in Auckland, Christchurch and Hamilton, and – God willing – a container of food for Ukraine will be shipped by the end of May.

Partners in Moldova immensely grateful for prompt response

As well as sending food and supplies we have sent funds – some into Ukraine

itself and some to Poland and Moldova for churches and other partners near the Ukrainian border to use to care for refugees. Food and heating fuel were the main costs.

One partner in Moldova was able to accommodate over 100 people from Ukraine in a hotel normally used for hosting conference attendees.

“We thank God for our partners at Barnabas Aid,” said a Moldovan church leader, “who showed zeal and care for the thousands of people who found themselves in the street on the night of 24 February, with their homes destroyed, causing them to evacuate and leave their homes for other countries.”

“Thank you for your prompt response,” he added, “and for the unity of the children of God in helping people in need!”

Thank you for your donations, and for your prayers for Ukraine, the whole region and the wider world.

The conflict in Ukraine is having a terrible impact far beyond the affected region itself. Together, Russia and Ukraine export on average 53 million metric tonnes of wheat, estimated at between 23% and 33% of the global total. The two countries are also leading exporters of other grains, seeds and vegetable oils, as well as much-needed fertilisers.

The disruption to these supplies is worsening the global food crisis. As of mid-March the price of wheat had risen by 28%. In countries reliant on wheat exports from Russia and Ukraine the price of bread is rising beyond the means of the impoverished population.

In addition, in early March the Russian government barred the export of fertilisers, the time of year when many crops are being planted in the northern hemisphere. As Russia is one of the world’s top exporters of fertilisers, this could have a disastrous impact on agriculture in other countries and further drive up the cost of food across the world.

As the conflict continues, less and less food will be available, placing many in these desperately needy nations at risk of malnutrition and starvation.

The crisis in Ukraine comes at a time when – owing to various conflicts, natural disasters and the Covid-19 pandemic – food prices were already at their highest point since 2011. In late 2021 it was estimated that a billion people worldwide are facing malnutrition as the global food crisis worsens, with 45 million already on the brink of famine.

While famine is an issue that affects all people, Christians who are already persecuted and impoverished are often among the worst affected.

For more information on how you can help our hungry brothers and sisters, visit www.food.gives

Lives transformed by the Word of God



Barnabas-funded literacy classes enable impoverished Senegalese Christians to read the Bible

Dieynaba with her husband and child

“**L**ike the blind man in the Bible, ‘I was blind but now I see!’”

These are the words of Dieynaba, a young Christian mother in Senegal, as she described how literacy classes funded by Barnabas have transformed her life by enabling her to read the Bible.

“Now I understand everything Jesus has done for me and what He expects of me,” she said.

“Before, I refused to give tithes and offerings because I believed the pastor wanted to take money from us when we are poor. Now I know that it is God Himself who asks us to do this and He blesses those who give faithfully.”

Senegal is dominated by Islam with the population at least 95% Muslim. The small but growing Christian community accounts for about 4%.

Dieynaba is one of 267 Christians from an impoverished – and strongly Islamic – rural area of central Senegal who completed the 14-month programme of adult literacy and numeracy classes.

The lessons, launched by our church partners with support from Barnabas, were held for three hours every week at eight village churches, which serve Christians from three different ethnic groups. Participants studied from textbooks based on Bible stories. Of the 278 who started the course only 11 failed to complete it – six because they succumbed to Covid and five for other reasons.

“Like new converts, they are discovering the Holy Scriptures themselves”

Before the classes began, pastors said their congregants had difficulty understanding the Bible and church sermons because they could not read the Word of God.

Since learning to read the Bible in their own languages, Christians have become spiritually invigorated. “Like new converts, they are discovering the Holy Scriptures themselves and are more involved in the activities of the church,” said Pastor “Paul”. “Everyone is engaged in evangelism and the church is growing.”

In one of the participating churches, membership has risen from 63 to 105 Christians.

Pastors feel more rewarded

Another benefit of the programme is that it has reduced the seasonal departure of villagers during Senegal’s nine-month dry season. Previously most would leave to find work in towns. Now villagers are choosing to stay at home to manage their livestock or set up market gardening projects, while

maintaining their church activities, because the training has given them a greater commitment to their home village.

Pastors feel more rewarded as well because they are no longer faced with churches empty of all but the oldest of their congregants for months on end, a situation that had led some to feel discouraged in their ministry.

Dieynaba, who used to join the annual exodus to town to work as a domestic servant, explained that her eyes were opened when she read Judges 6:14 where God says to Gideon, “Go in the strength you have.”

“From then on I decided to stay in the village and started to take care of my chickens and sheep,” she said. “With the help of the village veterinarian I know how to raise, care for and fatten my animals and this allows me to earn a living. With the little I earn, I take care of my family.”

She added, “Thanks to Barnabas we are worthy and free men and women. May God be praised!”

“Today everything has changed in my life”

Waly never had the opportunity of going to school and didn’t immediately see the point of learning to read, write and calculate when his pastor told him about the adult literacy classes. He acknowledges that his faith was superficial. He only went to church because his friends did and he “lived like a non-Christian”. Waly thanks God that he decided to take the classes.

“It was when I started reading the Bible that I really understood what Jesus did for me and what it is to be a Christian,” said Waly.

“Today everything has changed in my life. I am faithful to the Lord and I participate in all church activities. I share my faith with non-Christians and I sing in the worship group.”

Waly has also stopped going to town to seek work in the dry season. Instead he tends his cows – previously he did not know how to look after them properly, and he had not appreciated the value they could bring to his family.

“With my current education, I know how to maintain and care for them [the cows],” he said proudly. “Thanks to this, not only do they increase in number, but I feed my family milk and earn money when I sell one.”

Literacy causes spiritual awakening

Pastor “Simon” said the literacy project “is one of the best things that has happened to me in my pastoral ministry”.

He was discouraged and considered leaving the village, because the faith of his congregation was not strong, there were few new converts and he experienced persecution from Muslims.

“But praise the Lord! Literacy changed the whole situation and caused a spiritual awakening in the church,” said Pastor Simon. “Literacy has opened their eyes and they have direct access to the Word of God and it has transformed them.”

His words are echoed by Pastor Paul. “Barnabas Aid’s support in our very Islamised region has produced very visible results,” he said. “We now realise that ignorance is a formidable weapon of the devil because it prevents people from fully understanding the Word of God.”



Each of the eight participating churches nominated a Christian to be hired to teach others after agreeing to undertake one week of training



Waly thanks God for the classes that have transformed his life



In Senegalese culture, girls often do not have the opportunity to go to school; only boys do. 140 Christian women and 127 men finished the Barnabas-funded literacy programme



The Shepherd's Academy

Barnabas has created The Shepherd's Academy (TSA) to provide relevant ministry training for grassroots Christian leaders across the Global South who would otherwise be unable to access or afford the training they need.

"There are more than two million untrained church leaders in the Global South," explains Professor Patrick Sookhdeo, Executive Director at the Oxford Centre for Religion and Public Life (OCRPL).

"In light of increasing persecution and marginalisation, equipping the Church and her leadership becomes crucial," he adds. "Our mission is to provide accessible, affordable, applied and academic training to existing and aspiring grassroots church leaders."

Training the under-shepherds of the Good Shepherd's flock

TSA students meet for their weekly tutorial at the study centre in South Sudan

The need

Church leaders in the Global South are often ministering in Christian-minority contexts, and in some cases lands of persecution. It is vital in this context that pastors are strengthened in their calling, yet training opportunities are severely limited.

Christian leaders are often impoverished and unable to afford theological education – especially if they have employment outside the church that has to be given up or paused for months at a time in order to study. In some places the numbers of Christians are so low that some believers are required to step into positions of leadership and responsibility at a very early stage in their walk with the Lord.

As well as this, many governments are now requiring church leaders to have formal theological degrees. Our programme aims to meet this challenge by providing a recognised degree through proper validation and accreditation that will meet the stringent educational requirements of church leaders.

How it works

TSA's training programme is designed to be accessible for church leaders who cannot afford the fees for seminaries or theological colleges. Costs are kept low by using a combination of online classes and face-to-face tutorials and many students are given scholarships with funds from Barnabas. The cost per student is around \$416 per year.

Students complete self-study material throughout the week, and then meet in local tutorial groups once a week with a trained tutor to discuss and apply what they have learnt. Study is undertaken part time, meaning that students are able to continue in their ministry and, where needed, other employment.

TSA's curriculum is being expanded with the help of subject experts, pastors and theologians from across the Global South. It is hoped that by 2023 TSA will offer around 50 courses. Some students will join TSA's full bachelors programme, others will work towards certificates and diplomas, while still others will take a selection of courses that address the gaps in their ministry training.

Expanding to meet the need

Representatives of OCRPL recently met with partners from Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka to discuss how the work of TSA can be extended. Two new study centres will soon be opened in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, joining the existing centres in Cameroon, Nepal, Pakistan, South Sudan and Zambia. Course material is being translated into Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, Russian and Tamil.

By March 2022 TSA already had more than 100 students from eight different countries. It is hoped that this will rise to 500 in 2023, and that those who complete their training will use their skills and knowledge to train others, entrusting the Gospel to "reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others" (2 Timothy 2:2).

It is our sincere prayer that through TSA we will be able to train up new and existing church leaders in the Global South to be faithful and effective shepherds of their flocks.

WHY ARE CHRISTIANS PERSECUTED IN...



A church building in Beijing. The screens display a message of welcome to visitors. Increasingly churches are required to display on screens or walls quotes from President Xi Jinping



In this series we are examining some of the reasons why Christians in various contexts face opposition and persecution.

CHRISTIANITY IN CHINA

Christianity has a longer history in China than many in the West realise. The Church of the East was established by the seventh century, thanks to Syriac-speaking missionaries who brought the Gospel to the people of China. Christianity was officially tolerated by Emperor Taizong of the Tang Dynasty and many of his successors, allowing the faith to thrive in China for more than 200 years.

The Church underwent persecution in the late seventh century when Wu Hou, the former emperor's widow, used her political power to promote Buddhism as the state religion. Persecution appeared again after a decree issued in 845 by Emperor Wuzong, a committed Taoist, stating that religions from outside the kingdom were to be banished, and by 980 it was believed by missionaries who had travelled from the Middle East that Chinese Christianity was extinct.

The Church of the East, however, flourished under the Mongol Empire in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries – some of the Mongol leaders themselves became believers – but Christianity was again outlawed after the 1368 revolution that brought to power the Ming dynasty.

"Faithful is the Lord. Your labours are not rejected, ye martyrs. King Christ has not passed by whom ye have loved in the land of China."

From a commemoration of the "martyrs of China" in a thirteenth-century Syriac book



The Daqin Pagoda in Zhouzhi, Xi'an County, Shaanxi Province is a Buddhist monastery. Built over a thousand years ago, some historians believe it to have originally been a Christian church [Image credit: World Monuments Fund]

...CHINA?

In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, Western missionaries such as the Matteo Ricci helped to restore Chinese Christianity. These were followed in the nineteenth century by men such as Hudson Taylor, and Robert Morrison who translated the Bible into Mandarin.

While Hudson Taylor was among those who demonstrated respect for Chinese culture and norms, many Western missionaries were sadly flagrant in their disregard and even contempt for Chinese ceremonies and values.

The Taiping Rebellion (1850-64) also created the lasting impression that Christianity was opposed to Chinese interests. Hong Xiuquan – a revolutionary who believed himself the younger brother of Christ – led a revolt against the ruling Qing dynasty in the name of re-forming China as a Christian commonwealth. Western powers also became involved, hoping to destabilise China. This civil war was one of the bloodiest conflicts ever, with a death toll between 20 million and 100 million.

In the opium wars (1839-42 and 1856-60) European powers fought to force China to accept opium imports and open ports to European shipping. The treaties of Tianjin (1858), which China was forced to agree with France and Great Britain, gave the imperial powers extensive rights over trade within China, and denied the right of China to control its own commerce and economic activity. The construction of railways across China caused offence and resentment towards the West, for lines were often built across land that was considered sacred, including burial grounds.

The treaties also guaranteed freedom of movement for missionaries, thereby linking Western evangelism with Western imperialism. Indeed, some missionaries behaved like imperial overlords – some demanded payment from the local population, and in Shandong one even declared himself governor. Many were openly employed in keeping tabs on the local population and reporting back to Western governments.

In other colonised parts of the world, mission stations were used as a means of dividing territory, leading to fears that missionary activity was a ploy to carve up China among the Western powers. Resentment flared in the 1899-1901 “Boxer” rebellion, in which around 32,000 Chinese Christians and 188 Western missionaries were killed.

CHINESE RELIGIONS

China has its own religions, quite different in outlook from both Christianity and Western philosophies. The “three pillars” of ancient China were Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism. Although there are key differences, combined these still exert an enormous influence.

Confucianism is derived from the teachings of Confucius (c.551–479 BC), who set out rules and guidelines for social behaviour. Confucius taught that all people had unavoidable obligations to other people and to society as a whole. The overarching objective of his principles was to sustain social stability, harmony and wholeness.

Although Confucianism is more about the proper ordering of society than any afterlife or spiritual realm, the Confucian principle of obligation to one’s own family, including reverence for elders, linked well with the ancestor worship of ancient Chinese folk religion.

Taoism (or Daoism), the other major religion to emerge in China, is associated with the philosopher Laozi who lived in the sixth century BC. Later Taoist thinkers developed the idea of yin and yang – dark and light – which together make up a cosmic whole. Taoism is much more spiritual than Confucianism and represents a pushback against the strict customs advocated by Confucius, but does share a commitment to wholeness and unity that has shaped Chinese culture.

Buddhism, with origins in Nepal and India, became popular in China during the first century AD. Buddhist teachings further emphasised harmony. Both Taoists and Buddhists in China continued to engage in ancestor worship. Chinese people in general would not regard themselves as belonging exclusively to any one of the three religions, but would draw from all three along with other religious and philosophical ideas.



A church building in Harbin, Heilongjiang Province. The church was closed in 1967 during the Cultural Revolution, and only re-opened for worship in 1980

This religious and philosophical culture leads to opposition to Christianity in several ways. Firstly, the Gospel – which separates humankind into saved and unsaved – is seen as divisive, opposed to the harmony and unity valued in Chinese culture. The exclusive claims of Christianity – one God, one Saviour, one true faith – are quite different from the Chinese view of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism as distinct but mutually compatible.

Secondly, converts to Christianity will no longer worship their ancestors, regarding this as idolatry no matter how much they love and reverence their elders. This can lead to hostility from family members and from the wider culture, especially as the refusal to continue with rituals around the traditional ancestral tablets or household altars is thought disrespectful.

Thirdly, Chinese society is more focused on family ties, social obligations and duties to others than the individualistic West. Western society is often radically individualistic, atomistic and self-centred. Christianity – generally associated with Western values by those in other parts of the world – may therefore be treated with suspicion.

Fourthly, the presence of Christianity may be a slap in the face to national pride. One convert to Christianity recalls being asked by family members why she would choose a foreign religion when there are China's own religions to choose from.

COMMUNISM

China has been an officially communist state, governed by the Chinese Communist Party, since 1949. The rise of communism in China creates an additional context for persecution of the church. Religion is viewed by Marxists as a means of subjugation. In Marxist theory Christianity is a man-made system designed to blind the working class to their need for revolution and reconcile them to their oppression, as in the famous remarks of Karl Marx:

Man makes religion, religion does not make man. [...] It is the opium of the people. The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is required for their real happiness.¹

Once established, communism usually results in an authoritarian one-party system that tolerates no competing worldviews. For this reason, the Soviet Union for many years engaged in anti-religious propaganda against its own people and barred the teaching of religion to children.

In some ways Maoism – the ideology of Mao Zedong, the Communist Party leader who ruled China from 1949 until his death in 1976 – was an even greater threat to Christianity than the Soviet communism. Mao believed in revolution by changing the hearts and minds of each individual – it was not possible that anyone in society should subscribe to any religion or philosophy distinct from Mao's thought. Maoism was therefore even more likely to insist on unity of thought or to institute brainwashing.

During the Cultural Revolution – the period from 1966 to 1976 in which the Communist authorities attempted by extreme and brutal methods to re-assert Maoism – Mao urged the supporters of communism to destroy the “four olds”: old ideas, old customs, old habits and



Chinese Christians have more freedom and the Chinese Church is far more resilient than we in the West often realise [Image credit: China Christian Daily]

old culture. Many Christian believers faced censure and imprisonment, while church buildings and Bibles were attacked and destroyed. In the overall chaos and the subsequent attempt to restore order, between 500,000 and two million people lost their lives.

Mao himself became the centre of a quasi-religious personality cult. A song about Mao declared, “He is the great Saviour of the people.” George Paterson describes how:

Mao's likeness adorned every home, every school, every public office and factory. In many homes his image occupied the central place on the family altar previously held by the ancestral tablets of the family. Mao was compared to the life-giving forces of nature, most especially the sun.²

After Mao's death and the end of the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese government became more tolerant towards religion. Registered churches, part of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, were allowed to re-open, while in most cases the authorities turned a blind eye to unofficial churches.

The Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) is China's officially recognised Protestant church, supervised by the Chinese authorities. Unofficial churches – often referred to as house churches – are those that operate outside state control. Technically illegal, such churches have often been tacitly permitted to operate by the Chinese authorities, provided that they do not engage in political activities.

THE PRESENT DAY

The Chinese Church grew rapidly throughout the years of persecution in the second half of the twentieth century. The period from the 1990s until the mid-2010s can be considered a relative “golden age” for Chinese Christianity, in terms of freedom of worship, church planting and tolerance from both the Chinese government and Chinese society. Yet from the mid-2010s onwards the environment began to worsen for Christians. The authorities became less willing to tolerate unofficial churches.

For example, in May 2020 a church member had two ribs broken when police forcibly shut down an unofficial church meeting in Fujian province. Across the country unofficial church buildings have been demolished. A Chinese Christian reported to Barnabas Aid that “as house churches refuse to register with the state and be managed by it, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) exerts a lot of effort to pressure them”.

At the same time as unofficial churches are targeted, official churches face pressure to teach what the Chinese authorities order them to. China’s Measures for the Administration of Religious Personnel, which came into effect in May 2021, require that pastors and church ministers in the TSPM must be those who “love the motherland, support the leadership of the Communist Party of China, support the socialist system, abide by the constitution, laws, regulations and rules, [and] practise the core values of socialism”.

In July 2021 TSPM pastors were instructed to deliver sermons based on President Xi Jinping’s speech commemorating the 100-year anniversary of the CCP. These instructions form part of an overall process of Sinicisation – that is, making Chinese, at least according to the CCP’s idea of what it means to be Chinese.

All religions – whether their origin was in China or elsewhere – are targeted. A church minister in China commented, “In practice, your religion no longer matters, if you are Buddhist, or Taoist, or Muslim or Christian: the only religion allowed is faith in the Chinese Communist Party.”

Persecution of the Church is not at the same level as it was under Mao, and certainly not as horrifying as in China’s communist neighbour North Korea. Yet the tide is moving gradually against Christians in China.

MISUNDERSTANDINGS AND MISCONCEPTIONS

Christians in the West have many misunderstandings and misconceptions about Chinese Christianity and about China itself. Some believe that all Christianity is illegal in China, the Bible outlawed and churches barred from existing. This picture of China is not justified.

Others have the idea that only the unofficial “house churches” represent true Christianity, while the TSPM has betrayed the faith and become apostate. While there are of course many faithful believers in unofficial churches, there are also many in the official church.

The “three-self” principle – self-governance, self-support and self-propagation – is neither a CCP imposition nor a result of Sinicisation, but rather a Bible-based response to Western dominance of the Chinese Church. Instead of relying on Western leadership, finance and missionary work, these principles prompt the Chinese Church to develop its own leadership, fund its own work and activities, and train Chinese evangelists rather than relying on overseas missionaries.

Furthermore, unofficial churches are not without their problems – chief among them the temptation to engage in anti-government political activity, sometimes in conjunction with Western forces. Some stories we in the West hear of anti-Christian persecution are in fact a crackdown on political opposition, while churches that quietly teach and preach the Gospel are often unofficially permitted to continue meeting for worship.

Chinese suspicion that Western powers may be behind this anti-government activity may well be justified. Xi Jinping and the Chinese authorities know well how Christianity was misused as a tool of Western oppression in the nineteenth century, and how Western powers still use the principle of religious freedom as a means to achieve their own foreign policy aims.

Western attitudes towards China may also be overly harsh. An example is the response to China’s new regulations on online religious content, which came into force on 1 March 2022. Organisations and individuals wishing to provide religious information online must gain permission from their local Department of Religious Affairs office, while foreign organisations and individuals will not be permitted to operate online religious information services within Chinese territory.

While there are genuine concerns that Christians who simply wish to practise their faith freely and peacefully may be adversely affected, it could be argued that the reason for these regulations is understandable. Western nations know all too well the scourge of extremist online material, much of it religious, whether in the form of Islamist or of far-right content.

In situations like this we should follow the wonderful example of our Chinese brothers and sisters, who long before the regulations even came into force were making plans to adapt and to change their ministries so as to continue their brave stand for the Truth that never changes, the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us continue to pray for them and for the spread of that Gospel, in spite of obstacles, opposition and persecution.

1 - Karl Marx, “Contribution to the critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right”, in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *On Religion* (New York: Dover, 1964), pp. 41–2.

2 - George Paterson, “The Spiritual Marxism of Mao Tse-tung”, in Alan Scarfe and Patrick Sookhdeo, eds, *Christianity and Marxism* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1982), p.95.

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The Triumph of Suffering

The story of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, could be described as the story of God's triumph over evil by means of the suffering of His Son.

As we have already seen (*Barnabas Aid*, Nov-Dec 2021 pp.13-14), this triumph is first foretold in Genesis 3:15 where the LORD tells the serpent that a descendant of Eve "will crush your head, and you will strike his heel". Satan will be utterly defeated and destroyed (in this imagery, the crushing of his head) by our Lord Jesus, who will Himself suffer (the striking of his heel) in the encounter.

In Revelation we see the Lamb, who is King of kings and Lord of lords, with His armies triumphing in battle over the beast, the kings who followed the beast and their armies, and the false prophet (Revelation 17:12-14; 19:11-21).

Between the first prophecy and the last battle lies the Cross.

Triumphing by the Cross

It is on the Cross that the Son of God both suffered and triumphed. The Apostle Paul tells us that "having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross" (Colossians 2:15). In the first century Roman Empire to "triumph" not only meant being victorious but also could refer to having a long and spectacular procession through the streets of Rome in honour of a victorious general. During this "triumph" the general, crowned with laurel, travelled in a chariot, preceded by civil dignitaries, musicians, prisoners-of-war and other spoils of war he had captured from the defeated enemy of Rome. Behind him came his troops. A triumph was the highest accolade that could be given to a military leader, and was granted by the Senate only after a decisive victory and subjugation of territory. This is the image that Paul and his first readers would have had in mind, when he wrote of first disarming and then making a public spectacle of the "powers and authorities".

But what were these powers and authorities? Meyer calls them "the devilish powers".¹ Barnes describes them as

the formidable enemies that held man in subjection, and prevented his serving God ... the ranks of fallen, evil spirits which had usurped a dominion over the world ... The Saviour, by his death, wrested dominion from them, and seized upon what they had captured as a conqueror seizes upon his prey. Satan and his legions had

*invaded the earth and drawn its inhabitants into captivity, and subjected them to their evil reign. Christ, by his death, subdues the invaders and recaptures those whom they had subdued.*²

We read of them elsewhere in the New Testament (see John 12:31; Ephesians 2:2; 6:12).

The concept of the Roman triumph appears also in 2 Corinthians 2:14.

But thanks be to God, who always leads us as captives in Christ's triumphal procession and uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere.

(2 Corinthians 2:14)

It is clear that, in this use of the triumph imagery, we Christian believers are the trophies of war in a triumphal procession that celebrates Christ's victory. But we are not sullen and resentful captives, dragged against our will from our homeland to His city. Rather, we have submitted joyfully to His rule and lordship. As we have seen, Barnes explains that Christ has recaptured us from the powers and authorities who had had control over us.

Charles Wesley must have had this verse in mind when he wrote his great hymn about the Second Coming of Christ:

*Lo! He comes with clouds descending,
Once for favoured sinners slain;
Thousand thousand saints attending
Swell the triumph of his train:
Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!
God appears, on earth to reign.*³

Reigning from the Cross

The Cross, which seemed a place of defeat for Jesus, was in fact a place of triumph for Him and defeat for His enemies. From the Cross He reigned.

The glorious Psalm 96, in which we sing of the LORD's greatness, splendour and majesty, has a much debated wording in its tenth verse, which begins, "Say among the nations, 'The LORD reigns.'" According to some sources, the verse should run: "Say among the nations, 'The LORD reigns from the tree.'"

While scholars argue over this particular text, we can embrace the truth of the thoroughly Biblical idea that the disputed words express, for Christ did reign even as His dead body hung in ignominy on the Cross.

Hymn writers have celebrated this wonderful theme. An ancient hymn, first sung in France on 19 November 569, affirms “how of the Cross He made a throne, on which He reigns, a glorious king”.

Nearly thirteen centuries later, Henry Milman wrote:

*Ride on, ride on in majesty!
In lowly pomp ride on to die.
Bow thy meek head to mortal pain,
Then take, O God, thy power and reign.⁴*

The message of the Cross

The Cross and all that it means were very precious to the first Christian believers. The sign of the Cross was not considered a glorification of suffering in the early Church but a “sign of victory”, a *tropaion*. This was the term used by the Greek-speaking ancient world for a triumphal sign set up to mark the spot where the turning point in a victorious battle had occurred. It was usually a vertical tree trunk or post, sometimes with a pair of outstretched branches, like arms, on which the armour of the defeated foe was hung. For Christians, the Cross is a *tropaion*, marking the place where victory over death was won.

After Christ’s “death, even death on a cross”,

*God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ
is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.*

(Philippians 2:9-11)

What nonsense this seems to unbelievers. It is only through humble faith that the eternal truth can be understood.

*For the message of the cross is foolishness to
those who are perishing, but to us who are
being saved it is the power of God.*
(1 Corinthians 1:18)

In Isaiah’s prophecy about the Suffering Servant (Isaiah 52:13 - 53:12), the onlookers were astonished at the exaltation of the Servant who had been so appallingly disfigured and marred (52:14). The nations were startled (a better translation than “sprinkled”) and even kings were speechless with amazement (52:15). This is the same leap from utter abasement and degradation to highest exaltation described in the early Christian hymn that Paul quotes in Philippians 2.

In the culture of the first century Graeco-Roman world, achieving “wisdom” was the highest goal. But this was not wisdom in the sense we understand it today; still less was it the Biblical wisdom that begins with the fear of the LORD (Proverbs 9:10). The wisdom

that society at large sought was an arrogant mixture of scholarly learning, aloofness, self-confidence and nobility of bearing, which sought fame and recognition from other great people but despised the ordinary masses. Judged by these criteria, Jesus “failed” badly and therefore “Christ crucified seem foolishness to the Gentiles” (1 Corinthians 1:23).

The same verse tells us that, for the Jews, His death on the cross was a “stumbling block” (*skandalon* in Greek), which can also be translated as an offence, snare or scandal. In many ways he did not match up to what they expected of the Messiah foretold by the prophets. The most serious “mismatch” was His suffering and death. In Jewish belief a conquered Messiah or a crucified Messiah would be literally unthinkable. Prophecies such as the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 were interpreted as the suffering of the people of Israel, or in other ways – never as the suffering of the Messiah Himself.

The Suffering Servant

We, however, with the Holy Spirit’s illumination, can see in Isaiah 53 the whole story of our beloved Saviour’s suffering and death. Verse 2 sets the scene with an ordinary-seeming childhood, a carpenter’s son growing up with nothing obviously special to distinguish Him. But in verse 3 we discover that in adulthood He became “a man of sorrows”, despised and rejected (by both Gentiles and Jews, as we have seen). The Hebrew poetry, with its near repetitions, underlines the contempt He endured. But this first rash and superficial reaction gives way to an understanding that God’s Servant is suffering in our place. He is suffering for sin – not His sin, but ours. For the Man of Sorrows is carrying *our* sorrows and is bearing *our* griefs (v4 AV).

One of the most poignant, powerful and revolutionary verses in the Bible follows:

*... he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was
on him,
and by his wounds we are healed.*

(Isaiah 53:5)

What can we do but throw ourselves face down and worship Him? Voluntarily He allowed Himself to be pierced and crushed, taking our punishment. He was wounded that we might be healed and made whole (“peace” in verse 5 is *shalom*). The wounds at the end of verse 5 (*chabbûrâh* in Hebrew, often translated “stripes”) are weals or welts, the streaks of severe raised bruising that result from being hit with a lash. They are the wounds created by flogging, that is by punishment, as indeed our Lord did endure (Mark 15:15).

The early Church historian Eusebius wrote of Jesus in words that are either an unconscious or a deliberate

quotation from Hippocrates, the founder of Greek medicine:

He was like some excellent physician, who, in order to cure the sick, examines what is repulsive, handles sores, and reaps pain himself from the sufferings of others.⁵

The Suffering Servant was innocent of all wrongdoing (v9) and it is we who have sinned and gone astray (v6). God laid on Him the iniquity of us all (v6), the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2). For – incredible as it may seem – it was the LORD’s will to crush Him and cause Him to suffer.

We can never understand the crushing weight of the sins He bore for us.

We may not know, we cannot tell

We may try to imagine Gethsemane where such was the agony of the knowledge of what lay ahead for Him that the Bible tells us He sweated “as it were great drops of blood” (Luke 22:44 AV). Then followed His betrayal, arrest, detention, several trials (unjust and partly illegal) and physical assault. This may be more within the grasp of our minds, or even within the personal experience of some. Then we can try to imagine the pain of what Isaiah calls being pierced: the multiple wounds of the mocking crown of thorns rammed down on His head, the nails tearing through His hands and feet. Finally, after death, came the spear in His side.

Yet even if we were to experience all this ourselves, we could never understand the far greater spiritual agony of the sinless Son of God, cut off from His beloved Father by the sins of humanity, as He cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46). Therefore we can never understand the depth of Jesus’ suffering for us and for our salvation. Sometimes this profound mystery, at the very heart of our faith, is overlooked or trivialised today, but in the past it was rightly emphasised. A well-loved hymn reminds us that:

*We may not know, we cannot tell
What pains He had to bear;
But we believe it was for us
He hung and suffered there.⁶*

Another hymn, less often sung now, says:

*But none of the ransomed ever knew
How deep were the waters crossed;*

*Nor how dark was the night that the Lord
passed through
Ere He found His sheep that was lost?⁷*

Joseph Hart began a hymn with this verse:

*Much we talk of Jesu’s blood,
But how little’s understood!
Of His sufferings, so intense,
Angels have no perfect sense.
Who can rightly comprehend
Their beginning or their end!
’Tis to God, and God alone,
That their weight is fully known.⁸*

Hart was apparently inspired by Lamentations 1:12, “Is any suffering like my suffering that was inflicted on me, that the LORD brought on me in the day of his fierce anger?”

The victory of the Cross

That suffering achieved its purpose. “It is finished,” cried Jesus as He died (John 19:30). His work was done. The victory was won. We guilty sinners are justified, that is, declared righteous before God (Isaiah 53:11):

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

(2 Corinthians 5:21)

This is the victory of the Cross, the triumph of the suffering of the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Out of death and seeming defeat came victory and exaltation to glory, where the Lamb on the throne still looks as if it had been slain (Revelation 5:6). And so we sing:

*Crown him the Lord of love!
Behold his hands and side,
Those wounds, yet visible above,
In beauty glorified:
No angel in the sky
Can fully bear that sight,
But downward bends its burning eye
At mysteries so bright!⁹*

One Person’s suffering saved the world. As we shall see in the next article, our suffering too can be a pathway to glory.

Dr Patrick Sookhdeo

International Director, Barnabas Aid

1 - Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Hand-Book to the Epistles to the Philippians and Colossians and to Philemon* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1885), p.308.
2 - Albert Barnes, *Notes, Explanatory and Practical, on the Epistles of Paul*

to the Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1855), p.305.

3 - Charles Wesley, “Lo! He comes with clouds descending”, 1758.

4 - Henry Hart Milman, “Ride on, ride on in majesty!”, 1827.

5 - Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 10.4.11. Eusebius (c. 260-339) was Bishop of Caesarea in Palestine.

6 - Cecil Frances Alexander, “There is a green hill far away”, 1848.

7 - Elizabeth Clephane, “There were ninety and nine that safely lay”, 1868.

8 - Joseph Hart (1712-1768) “Much we talk of Jesu’s blood”.

9 - Matthew Bridges, “Crown him with many crowns”, 1851.

A child labourer working at one of the DRC's many mines

VIOLENCE AND PERSECUTION IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

On Christmas Day 2021 a suicide bomber – a suspected member of Islamist group the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) – killed seven people, including two children, celebrating Christmas at a restaurant in Beni, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

This was not the only example last year of anti-Christian, Islamist violence in the DRC. In June 2021 two women were severely injured when a bomb exploded at a Beni church.

In May 2021 a church minister was among at least 55 people killed in ADF attacks on camps for internally displaced persons in both Irumu territory, Ituri province, and Tchabi, North Kivu province. The Islamists were targeting the Christian-majority Banyali Tchabi ethnic group (also known as the Nyali). Nyali people are regularly attacked because their lands are rich with gold deposits.

Christian leaders in the DRC warn of a strategy by the ADF – which has suspected ties to the Islamic State (IS, ISIS, ISIL, Daesh) – to “kidnap and force victims to join the Islamic faith”.

A land of death and disease

The land now known as the Democratic Republic of the Congo has never enjoyed peace since it was first colonised in the nineteenth century. The Berlin Conference of 1884-85 that divided African territories among the European powers awarded the land to King Leopold II of Belgium, who declared it his own private possession.

Leopold used what he named the Congo Free State for the production of valuable resources such as rubber, ivory and minerals, and enslaved the indigenous population.

The result was one of the most brutally repressive regimes in human history. Torture and amputation were used as punishments when quotas were not met; children were abducted from their families to provide slave labour; famine

and disease were rampant. Conditions were so horrific that even the other colonial powers condemned them. From an estimated 20 million in 1880, the Congolese population was halved.

In 1908 Leopold was forced to give up his possession, which was sold to the Belgian government – but conditions in the newly renamed Belgian Congo scarcely improved.

On gaining independence in 1960 the DRC immediately dissolved into civil war, based in large part on ethnic and tribal divisions. In the 62 years since independence, conflict, disease and malnutrition are thought to have caused more than six million deaths. More than half of these deaths have been children under the age of five.

Danger and violence in DRC's mines

The DRC's mineral resources remain a cause of hardship, not prosperity. Southern DRC is estimated to contain 3.4 million tonnes of cobalt deposits – almost half of all the world's known deposits. Cobalt is highly valued as a



Isidore Bakanja,
Belgian Congo
(1887-1909)

Tell them that I am dying because I am a Christian

Isidore was about 18 when he gave his life to the Lord Jesus. His great love of Christ could be seen in his commitment to prayer and to evangelism. Isidore chose to leave his home village and move to a large town, hoping to find further opportunities for fellowship and sharing the Gospel. He found work with a Belgian company on the Ikili rubber plantation.

The plantation manager Van Cauter, who hated Christianity, took a special dislike to Isidore because he always tried to preach to his fellow workers. Van Cauter said, "You'll have the whole village praying and no one will want to work." One day he flew into a rage when he saw Isidore praying during a rest period, and ordered him to be flogged with an elephant-hide whip that had nails protruding at the end.

When Isidore's skin was flayed from his back, the other workers refused to flog him anymore, but Van Cauter threatened their lives, so they continued, perhaps up to 250 lashes in all. Afterwards Isidore lay in a pool of blood, his back so lacerated that some bones were exposed. He was heard saying, "He did not want me to pray to God... He killed me because I said my prayers... I stole nothing from him... It's because I was praying to God."

Isidore was given no medical help; rather, he was chained up and hidden away, suffering from his wounds. When a visiting inspector was due, Isidore was thrown off the plantation, but was able to drag himself out of the forest to seek the inspector's help. The horrified inspector took Isidore with him, hoping to help him to recover, but by then no medical help was any use.

Isidore survived a further agonising six months, each day praying to God. He declared before his death that he had forgiven the man who treated him so brutally.

An abridged version of this story can be found in Heroes of Our Faith: Volume 2 (2021) by Patrick Sookhdeo – available from www.barnabasfund.org/resources/books



Children, sometimes as young as three, are among those working in the DRC's many brutal and hazardous mines [Image credit: Sylvain Liecht]

necessary component of lithium-ion batteries, used in mobile phones, tablets and electric cars.

In a country where three-quarters of the population live on less than US\$2 a day, the prospect of income from mining cobalt can become all-consuming. Informal mines are everywhere. Residents will dig under their own homes and, if they have them, gardens in the hope of finding precious metal. People will break into official mines in order to dig, lacking the necessary safety equipment and risking a severe beating if caught.

Child labour is common – of 255,000 miners in the DRC it is estimated that 40,000 are children. Those as young as three have been known to work in mines. Some spend up to a week at a time in the tunnels and mineshafts.

They eat only infrequently. Even very young children quickly learn to assess the value of the stones and metals they unearth.

Even in official mines, conditions for all miners are dangerous, with cave-ins and other disasters a constant risk. The cobalt itself is hazardous, sometimes radioactive, and contains toxins that can be harmful to unborn children, increasing the risk of birth defects and stillbirths for pregnant women at work digging and mining.

The mines remain places of violence – church leaders who seek to minister to the miners face fearful reprisals if they are seen to disrupt work. Efforts to reform the sector have led to little if any change. Much prayer and help is needed for this impoverished, troubled and traumatised land. ■



Barnabas-funded food aid is distributed to hungry Congolese Christians

Barnabas Aid sends practical support to Christians in the DRC when there is opportunity, whether in the DRC itself or refugees who have fled to neighbouring countries.
(Project PR1571 DRC General Fund)

Christian named as top Egyptian judge as 141 more churches are legalised

EGYPT

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi has appointed a Christian, Judge Boulos Fahmy Eskandar, as President of the country's Supreme Constitutional Court (SCC).

Judge Boulos, 65, previously one of the SCC's vice-presidents, is the first ever Christian to be appointed to the position, which effectively makes him Egypt's highest judge.

The appointment of a Christian to such a high position of authority is rare in a Muslim-majority country.

The SCC is Egypt's highest court, independent of both the Egyptian

president and parliament, with the role of interpreting laws and regulations and deciding whether they are constitutional.

President al-Sisi has been supportive towards the Christian community (10% of Egypt's population) whenever anti-Christian incidents occur and his government is working steadily to legalise churches following the repeal of Ottoman-era restrictions in September 2016.

Licences for 141 churches and church-affiliated buildings were granted on 4 January – the largest number approved in a single sitting of the Cabinet committee overseeing the



Judge Boulos Fahmy Eskandar (left) is sworn in by President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi on 9 February [Image credit: Wataninet]

process for almost three years.

The number of licensed churches has risen to 2,162 out of the 3,730 that applied for registration since 2016.

Congregations are allowed to worship in unlicensed church buildings pending completion of the licensing process.

Three Christians killed in Islamist attack on village in Borno State, Nigeria

NIGERIA

Three Christians were killed in an attack by Islamist militants on the village of Kautikari in the Chibok Local Government Area (LGA) of Borno State, northern Nigeria.

Gunmen from the Islamic State West Africa Province invaded the predominantly Christian area of the Muslim-majority state on 25 February, causing many residents to flee.

One of the dead was identified as Bulama Wadir, the son of a traditional ruler. The other two victims had sought safety in Kautikari after fleeing violence elsewhere in the region.

Kautikari resident Barka Amos explained that attacks

on the village had been recurrent over the years. "I was born here, I have no other place to go and I am tired of running ... I think I should stop running at 56 years old," he said.

Kautikari was one of three villages in Chibok LGA attacked by Islamist extremists in December 2021 and January 2022.

In these earlier attacks four men were killed and 24 Christians – 22 women and girls along with two men – were abducted.

At the time of writing at least 37 Christians have been killed in Islamist violence in Borno, Kaduna and Plateau states since the beginning of 2022.

Homes, shops and land stolen in Iraq returned to rightful Christian owners

IRAQ

More than 120 properties stolen in Iraq from Christians and members of another minority group have been returned to their rightful owners.

The Committee for the Restitution of Christian and Sabeen Property completed a review of proof of ownership on 21 February. In an official act of restitution houses, factories, shops and parcels of land expropriated by force or deception by gangs were returned to Christians and Sabeens (a religious minority indigenous to Iraq).

The committee set up in early 2021 by

Muslim cleric Muqtada al-Sadr expressed hope for a "prompt return" of all displaced Iraqis after completing "the restitution" of all their properties "within legal parameters and the improvement of security conditions".

An estimated 75% of Iraq's Christians (around 1.5 million in 1990) have left the country in the last 30 years because of anti-Christian hostility and violence, which began after the 1990-91 Gulf War and intensified after the US-led invasion of 2003 and again after the emergence in 2014 of Islamic State (IS, ISIS, ISIL or Daesh).

Pakistani pastor shot dead after preaching at service

PAKISTAN

A Pakistani lay pastor was shot dead by gunmen firing through his car window after a church service near Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, on Sunday 30 January.

Pastor William Siraj had been preaching at a church in Gulbahar district where he had served every Sunday since its founding more than ten years ago, amongst a community of poor, uneducated Christians, mostly doing low-paid, dirty jobs.

William was the eldest brother of Wilson Saraj, Barnabas Aid's Regional Coordinator for Pakistan and several other South Asian countries.

William and senior pastor Patrick Naeem were driving home together after the service when the shooting occurred. William was killed but Patrick was unharmed, a bullet passing through his clothes.

The perpetrators are thought to be from an Islamist group who had crossed the border from nearby Taliban-ruled Afghanistan.



William Siraj was martyred on 30 January after preaching at his church in Gulbahar district, Peshawar

William's wife Shamim had asked him not to go to church on 30 January as he was not fully well, but he insisted on preaching his prepared sermon.

He was not fully well, but he insisted on preaching his prepared sermon

Seven members of the church, including William's son-in-law, were among those who died in a suicide bombing at their mother-church, All Saints in Peshawar, that killed over 120 people on 22 September 2013.

Iranian Christian's request for retrial is dismissed by the Supreme Court

IRAN

An Iranian Christian convert serving a ten-year prison sentence has been denied his request for a retrial.

Naser Navard Goltapeh, 60, has served more than four years of his sentence for "acting against national security with the intention to overthrow the regime".

He is alleged to have connections to Christian groups outside Iran and was charged with acting "against national security" by running a house church.

Since his prison term began in January 2018 Naser has written several

open letters contesting the charges. Three previous applications for a retrial were rejected before the Supreme Court finally agreed to review his case in January 2022.

The court has now ruled that there are insufficient grounds for a retrial

However, the court has now ruled that there are insufficient grounds for a retrial and again rejected Naser's request. No explanation for this decision was provided.

The judgment was dated 19 February, but it was not communicated to Naser's family until 1 March.

Naser's lawyer, Iman Soleimani, described the issuing of verdicts by the branches of the Supreme Court as "arbitrary", adding that the decision contravened Naser's civil rights and Iranian law.



Naser Navard Goltapeh has been imprisoned for more than four years on charges of acting "against national security" [Image credit: Article 18]

Sri Lankan pastor barred from holding services in his home

SRI LANKA

A Sri Lankan pastor in Padavi Sripura (Anuradhapura District) was served with a notice barring him from holding church services in his home.

The pastor received the letter from the Divisional Secretariat on 8 January, which asserted that express permission is required for a building to be used as a

place of religious worship.

The letter referred to objections to Christian worship taking place in the pastor's home from the Pradeshiya Sasanarakshaka (the local authority overseeing Buddhist affairs).

The pastor, who has been using his home for worship since 2013, said that he has sought permission several

times, but has received no response from the Ministry of Buddhasasana and Religious Affairs (the Sri Lankan government's department with oversight of religious policy).

A Barnabas Aid contact explained that the law does not in fact require official registration for places of worship.

"The government is trying to get the information about house churches," he explained.

"This is a new development by the Ministry of Buddhasasana and Religious Affairs trying to crack down on house churches.

"Many have applied for permission, but the officials have not responded with any proper approval documentation."

A Christian widow in Pakistan receives food aid provided through the donations of our generous supporters. The new name Barnabas Aid better reflects our ongoing ministry to suffering Christians around the world

Barnabas Aid

The new name for our international charity

As of 1 June 2022 Barnabas Fund is changing its name to Barnabas Aid. We hope that the new name will better communicate the nature of our work as an agency offering hope and aid to suffering Christians.

With God's help and the gifts and prayers of our supporters, we are still "Serving the suffering Church", just as our very first magazine tagline, back in 1998, stated. We give Him the glory and we thank you all.

Although we seek to be flexible and to adapt our priorities in response to changing needs and situations in the world, the heart of our mission remains the same. So too does the

basic way we serve our suffering brothers and sisters, which is by providing aid for their practical and spiritual needs.

Of course, the name *Barnabas Aid* is already familiar as the title of this magazine and – more recently – our weekly *Barnabas Aid Update* email. In the United States, we have always been known as Barnabas Aid, and many of our friends and supporters all around the world refer to us by that name.

As for Barnabas himself, the New Testament character continues to be an inspiration and example to us with his own personal generosity (Acts 4:37) and his reputation as a "son of encouragement" (Acts 4:36).

Barnabas and Saul were the channel by which the Christians of Antioch sent financial help to the Christians of Judea during a severe famine (Acts 11:27-30). Sending aid "from Christians, through Christians, to Christians" is the model that we have always followed. Mostly the aid has been money sent to local churches and ministries to use for their own projects, just as Barnabas and Saul gave the famine relief money to the Jerusalem church elders to disburse. In the last year, however, we have extended to sending goods – food, medical equipment, blankets, clothes or whatever is required for each situation – through our food.gives and medical.gives programmes.

Please pray that the Lord will continue to guide and equip us for many more years, in our calling and mission of doing good, "especially to those who belong to the family of believers" (Galatians 6:10).

In Touch

Thank you for your generous and loving support for Tonga

“Generosity extended during such times of crisis and recovery is a testament of hope and God’s unfailing love for His people – through His people.”

These were the words of gratitude from our church partner for the help Barnabas supporters sent to our brothers and sisters in Tonga after it suffered three devastating natural disasters in succession in January – a volcanic eruption, a tsunami and an earthquake.

Thanks to your donations shipped by our food.gives initiative, 500 Tongan Christian families (approximately 5,000 individuals) received bottled water, rice and other non-perishable foodstuffs to sustain them for two months.

You also provided cleaning equipment and hygiene supplies, as well as building materials, for six churches in Tongatapu and the outer islands of Vava’u and Ha’apai to help them rebuild and restore battered communities that were engulfed in a cloud of ash.

As part of a long-term recovery plan, the shipping containers in which the Barnabas aid supplies arrived in Tonga are being modified to store emergency supplies that will help communities prepare for and respond to future natural disasters.

“We have so appreciated the support received from Barnabas,” said our church partner. “We would not have been able to reach so many affected families without [your] support.

“Thank you to all of your supporters who have so generously and lovingly given. Malo Aupito to all those that are helping to make a difference through Barnabas.”

Sign up to watch our Supporters’ Meeting

Please sign up to register to watch our Barnabas Supporters’ Meeting taking place on 11 June. During the meeting our International Director, Dr Patrick Sookhdeo, and our International CEO, Hendrik Storm, will share updates on:

**SAVE
THE
DATE**

1. the emerging needs of the suffering Church at present;
2. Barnabas’ response, particularly in Ukraine, Afghanistan and regarding the Covid pandemic;
3. future challenges.

To register to receive a recording of the event, please go to www.barnabasfund.org/nz/get-involved/ events and we will send you a link. The meeting is being held at our new UK offices in Swindon, Wiltshire.



Supporters Gavin and Angus delivered 72 food.give boxes filled with dry foodstuffs from West Hamilton Community Church to Barnabas ready for shipment to Tonga

Please remember the suffering Church in your will

You can continue to be a blessing to the suffering Church long after you have gone to glory by leaving a gift to Barnabas in your will. Barnabas’ role as a channel of hope and aid from Christians, through Christians, to Christians means that your legacy will be used to give practical help to those suffering in the Name of Christ.

You can bring restoration to believers who have suffered violence, feed Christians facing hunger and deprivation, give shelter to displaced families, strengthen Christian brothers and sisters with Bibles and train young children up in their faith through Christian schooling.

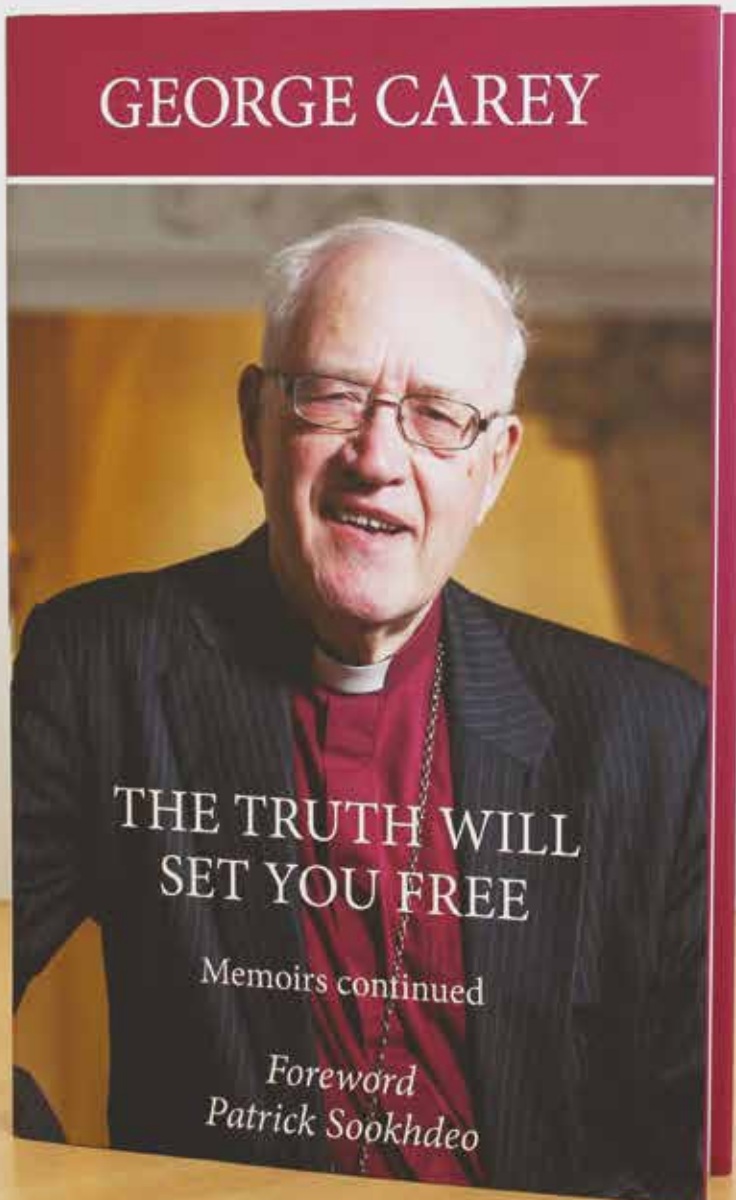
Writing a will can be a daunting task that many people delay. Our free information booklet, *A Christian guide to making and changing your will*, provides the advice you need to complete the process. The booklet explains the various terminology needed for preparing a will, and provides you with information about how to leave a gift to Barnabas.

To receive a copy of our free information booklet, please email office@barnabasfund.org.nz, or write to us at PO Box 276018, Manukau City, Auckland, 2241, or ring us on (09) 280 4385.

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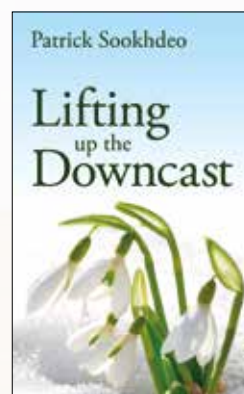
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Life can bring us many challenges, uncertainties and sorrows. Many believers through the centuries have felt like this at times and left us a written treasury to help us. The author's prayer is that this short book will bring its readers peace, comfort and strength to carry on, through the Word of God and the words of His faithful people.

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