

OPPORTUNITY AFRICA
Give suffering Christians
a sustainable future

FLIGHT TO ARMENIA
Gifts of hope for believers
fleeing Nagorno-Karabakh

DEATH HOLDS NO FEAR
Sacrifice of North
America's martyrs

barnabasaid



**Food for
persecuted
Kyrgyz converts**

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 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.

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
- 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 suffering Church by providing a range of prayer materials
- safeguard and protect our volunteers, staff, partners and beneficiaries
- keep our overheads low.

WE BELIEVE:

- 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.

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Front cover: A
poor Christian
convert from
Islam in
Kyrgyzstan
sustained
with food
provided by
Barnabas

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Sing of Man of Sorrows

Our world is wracked with suffering. Despite humankind's technological skills, we seem unable even to stop either human hunger or human anger. We are still buffeted by earthquakes, floods and cyclones. We can cure many illnesses but we cannot prevent death. We still grieve. We still know fear and anxiety. We still experience mental torment of many kinds. We still hate, and all too often the hatred leads to violence.

The Bible tells us that pain and sorrow came into the world because of the Fall. After Adam and Eve's disobedience, their lives became hard. Eve was to experience painful childbirth and Adam was to experience painful toil (Genesis 3:16-17). The Hebrew word for "pain" in these verses is *itzavon*, and it occurs in only one other place in the Bible. When the same Hebrew root is used as a verb, it means to be filled with sorrow or grief. So the pain that came from the Fall is not a normal pain. (There is another Hebrew word for that.) Rather, it is a pain that has grief at its core: a spiritual or mental state of mind which manifests itself as physical pain.

Therefore, the cure for this sin-caused, sorrow-filled pain is spiritual, not physical.

That cure was provided for us by God's Suffering Servant, who has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows (Isaiah 53:3-4 AV) or, in some Bible translations, our pain and our suffering. It is interesting to note that when the Gospel writer Matthew quotes Isaiah, showing us that Jesus was that Suffering Servant, the emphasis is more on pain and sickness than on sorrow: "He took up our infirmities and bore our diseases" (Matthew 8:17 NIV). In Isaiah's next verse we are told how He also bore the full weight of our sins, which pierced and crushed Him.

The message is that, on the cross, Jesus bore for us every kind of sin and suffering, whether physical, mental or spiritual.

Although we are now beginning to prepare for Good Friday and Easter Sunday, let us for a moment think back to Christmas. The symbolism of the three gifts brought by the Magi to the infant Jesus is often mentioned, for example, myrrh pointing to death because of its use to embalm bodies (Matthew 2:11; John 19:39). But myrrh has medicinal, healing properties too. In ancient times it was used as a painkiller. It is also a sedative, producing a feeling of calm and relaxation.

Mark tells us that at Golgotha, just before the crucifixion, Jesus was offered wine mixed with myrrh. It was a Jewish tradition to offer this mixture, intended to dull the pain and stupefy the mind so as to reduce the suffering. But Jesus our Saviour refused it (Mark 15:23). He knew that He had to bear all humanity's sins, past, present and future, in their full bitterness. That had to include all the agony, whether of mind or of body, which sins produce both in the sinner and in the one sinned against. His mind was to be filled with an awareness of every sin ever committed across the span of eternity, as if each one were seared on His memory simultaneously. He was not to avoid the mental anguish any more than the physical agony or the spiritual desolation.

We can never realise the full depth and breadth of what the Man of Sorrows endured for us on the cross (Isaiah 53:3). But let us rejoice in His saving death and resurrection. We might sing of the Man of Sorrows in the words of the well-loved hymn:

*Man of sorrows, what a name
For the Son of God, who came
Ruined sinners to reclaim;
Hallelujah, what a Saviour!*

But perhaps the most wonderful thing of all is that the Man of Sorrows, now our risen Lord glorified in heaven, still feels our sorrow and suffering, still weeps when we weep (John 11:33-35). He bears our every burden – if we will let Him.

DR PATRICK SOOKHDEO

International Director, Barnabas Aid

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Compassion in action

How your donations are helping

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 suffering Christians.

\$45,832

*for flights delivering
medical aid*



Food and medicines delivered to hungry Haitian Christians

“This is an answer to prayer!” exclaimed our partner in poverty-racked Haiti as food gives delivered at least 40,000 bowls of vitamin-enriched dried soup mix from the USA to hungry Christians at a cost of only 5.2 cents per serving. The rehydrated soup was served to believers at community centres, schools and other relief programmes.

The aid was flown to remote airstrips to avoid using ports controlled by criminal gangs and was distributed by eight ministries. Barnabas also funded four flights carrying much-needed medical supplies.



Haitian schoolchildren tuck into the soup mix supplied by Barnabas

Project reference: PR1611

\$59,177



Your gifts help keep Nigerian Christians safe from new attacks

Christians from 200 households (around 1,600 individuals) who fled their homes in Kaduna State, Nigeria, following attacks by Islamic Fulani militants have been given Barnabas-funded maize and beans to sustain them for four months. We also provided them with mats, blankets and mosquito nets.

Thanking Barnabas supporters for their love and care, a pastor said the gifts of maize and beans mean believers will not have to put themselves at risk of further attack while foraging for food in remote farmlands.



Christian women gather together Barnabas-funded gifts of mats, blankets, nets and sacks of food

Project reference: 39-772 (Victims of Violence in Nigeria)

\$30,707



Persecuted Iraqi Christians helped to grow in faith

More than 900 Christians from across Iraq were encouraged in their faith at a three-day conference in Erbil, part funded by Barnabas. Another 450 Christians watched on Facebook. Guests were aged between 17 and 40, and the majority of them had been forcibly displaced from Mosul and the Nineveh Plains by Islamic State (IS, also called ISIS, ISIL, Daesh) in 2014.

The conference helped believers to grow in their faith and encouraged them to become more active members of their church and community.



Young Christians attending the Erbil conference, part funded by Barnabas

Project reference: PR1589 (Youth ministry in Iraq)

\$3,944

Security increased at Uzbek church after threats of violence

Security measures have been increased around a registered church in Uzbekistan following a rise in threats of anti-Christian violence by Muslims. Barnabas funded the installation of a CCTV system and an emergency call button linked to the National Guard, measures that were requested by National Guard officers.

The church, mostly made up of converts from Islam, shares the building with four other congregations, enabling them to meet legally. Unrest grew following a dispute over the burial of a Christian convert from Islam in a local Muslim cemetery.



One of the Barnabas-funded security cameras monitoring the church

*Project reference: PR 1424
(Church buildings in Uzbekistan)*

\$1,780
*average per school
per year*


Christian schools give Pakistan brick-kiln children new hope

Yashua's father has laboured in Pakistan's brick kilns since he was a child, and until recently Yashua would have followed the same path. Yet, unlike his father, Yashua is receiving an education, free of charge, at one of 45 Barnabas-supported Christian schools helping 2,719 children of impoverished Christian brick-kiln workers.

Education helps to break the cycle of illiteracy that has trapped previous generations of Christian children in poverty and is helping Yashua to move a step closer to his dream of becoming a doctor.



Yashua says his Barnabas-backed school is a great blessing to him and his friends

*Project reference: 41-1236
(Schools for children of Christian brick kiln labourers)*

\$7,865

Bible team encourages persecuted Vietnam believers in faith

Barnabas funding helps to support a Bible team of six who visit persecuted ethnic Hmong Christians living in isolated mountain areas of Vietnam and encourage them in their faith. The pastor-led team focuses on around 60 communities inhabited by poor hill farming families. In the rainy season travel is hard and dangerous because of frequent mud slides.

The team provide Bible teaching, pray with families, visit the sick, disciple church leaders and encourage believers to stand firm in their faith, in spite of the pressures they face.



The Bible team's pastor baptises a Vietnamese Christian in a remote mountain community

Project reference: PR1610

Opportunity *Africa*

Join with Barnabas Aid to create
sustainability and resilience for
suffering Christians in Africa



Eight-month-old Precious was shot twice in the back. The bullets passed right through the baby and into her mother, who was instantly killed. Her father, four of her siblings and about 25 other Christians in the village also died in the same attack on 16 May 2023 in Plateau State, Nigeria. Precious survived, although she will probably never be able to walk.

In the same state, on Christmas Eve 2023, 295 Christians were killed in

coordinated attacks on 25 villages. These are just two of dozens of violent incidents in Nigeria last year, causing hundreds of deaths with tens of thousands of people displaced.

It is not only Nigeria where Christians are being violently attacked. Christian communities in other African countries such as Mali, Burkina Faso, Chad, Cameroon, Niger, Kenya, Somalia and Uganda continue to suffer devastating attacks as terrorist groups such as Boko Haram, Fulani herdsmen extremist militias, Islamic State West Africa Province, Al Qaeda,

Al Shabaab and Ansaru target and destroy them.

Natural disasters, including last year's earthquake in Morocco, floods in Chad, Rwanda, Malawi and Libya, extreme drought in parts of Ethiopia and Somalia, and the conflict in Sudan have compounded the problems of poor and vulnerable Christians. Hundreds of thousands of Christians in sub-Saharan Africa are now displaced or refugees. Disease, hunger and the sexual exploitation of women and girls in these refugee camps are becoming prevalent.

Introducing “Opportunity Africa”

Suffering Christians in sub-Saharan Africa have become increasingly dependent on aid relief to survive. With the help of your donations, we at Barnabas Aid have frequently provided food, soap, medicines, sleeping mats and blankets for Christians who have lost everything. This has saved many lives and lifted many more from the depths of wretchedness.

But in the long term, we want to enable African Christian communities to be self-sufficient, sustainable and resilient – no longer needing repeated help from outside.

Barnabas Aid has therefore established “Opportunity Africa”. The aim is to work in partnership with local Christian communities in Africa to strengthen them for the future so that they can be robust in the face of persecution or natural disaster.

Making Christian communities self-sufficient, sustainable and resilient

Building on experience gained in earlier Barnabas projects, Opportunity Africa is now establishing partnering pilot programmes with suffering Christian communities in Nigeria and Uganda to develop and enhance local knowledge and skills for sustainability. These critical projects include:

- sustainable agricultural activities
- continuing education through skills acquisition
- apprenticeships and vocational training
- a holistic approach to spiritual education

Other key areas, especially in remote and rural communities, are the provision of clean water, and medical backpacks as first-response kits to provide emergency healthcare and health education in their rural communities. We are also bridging the digital gap by providing solar-powered internet hubs. These, together with an App we are developing, will make for easier communications between small-scale farmers to enable them



Barnabas has funded the provision of drinking wells in five Cameroon villages sheltering Christians fleeing Islamist attacks in the Far North region

to coordinate in selling their produce. Another digital project, especially aimed at traumatised young people, focuses on creative arts content productions.

To continue helping the suffering Christian communities become more resilient, Barnabas Aid has been funding training in economic empowerment, trauma counselling, skills and entrepreneurial developments, workshops and conferences and equipping community health volunteers to provide health services in very remote African villages.



A new health centre being built by Barnabas in Kaduna State, Nigeria where Christians are subjected to regular attacks by Islamists

Developing human capacity

Another vital aspect of Opportunity Africa is to work in partnership with local Christian communities in human capacity building. This will be an important part of developing

greater resilience amongst suffering Christian communities. The initial focus will be on intellectual resources, practical skills, an ethical framework and spiritual growth.

“Whenever we have an opportunity ...”

This is just the beginning. God willing, and with your help, we will extend Opportunity Africa to provide more clinics, schools, clean water, small businesses, human capacity development and however else the Lord leads.

The Bible clearly tells us, “Whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith.” (Galatians 6:10 NRSV)

Through Opportunity Africa, you have an opportunity to work for the good of the family of faith in Africa in a very practical way during their time of suffering and desperate need.

“Whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith.” (Galatians 6:10 NRSV)

Strength, hope and comfort amid flight to Armenia

Barnabas provides aid to Christians forced to flee Nagorno-Karabakh



Hasmik's baby was born during the hardships of the Azerbaijani blockade of Nagorno-Karabakh. Hasmik, a biology teacher, and her husband, a security worker, left their homeland on 25 September, carrying the baby in their car along with their three older children, the eldest of whom is ten. They spent three days on the road before reaching Armenia.

Now the extended family of eight are living in the Armenian capital Yerevan in the home of a distant relative. They are grateful for the donations of Barnabas supporters. "This money is very important for us so that we can buy winter clothes and shoes for our four children," explained Hasmik.

Elizaveta is using the money she has received from Barnabas to buy food to sustain her children. "Thank you for helping us," she said.



She fondly remembers her home in Nagorno-Karabakh, where vegetables they grew in the yard of their apartment provided them with vital nutrients during the difficult days of the Azerbaijan blockade.

"On 25 September we left our house with seven people in our own car and were on the road for three days," she said.

She and her husband, who is hearing-impaired, and their children are now living with a relative in Yerevan. They hope one day to move to a home where they will be able to grow vegetables again.

Father-of-four Nverik thanks God and Barnabas for the assistance given to his family. "I will spend this money on improving our family living conditions," he said as he signed to confirm receipt of the grant.



Nverik and his family left Artsakh on 27 September and spent 23 hours travelling by car before arriving in Armenia, where they are now living with a distant relative. It was the third time they have had to move because of Azerbaijan's occupation; the first was during the six-week 2020 war.

In Karabakh, Nverik's wife worked in a village kindergarten, and he was a Major in the army. Now Nverik is looking to earn a living as a taxi driver using the only thing he still owns, the family car.



"We miss our beloved Nagorno-Karabakh, but we know these are the conditions now and we must adapt," said mother-of-four Marta, thanking Barnabas for its financial assistance. "Life goes on, we must continue to live for our children." The family fled their homeland in September and returned to the same Armenian shelter where they had been given refuge when displaced during the six-week 2020 war between Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh.

"Despite how hard it is for us, we don't let the children feel it. Now they are adapted and living comfortably here."

Flight to Armenia

"We live by the grace of God, giving glory every evening and morning. It gives us strength to cope." These are the words of grandmother Anahit, just one of tens of thousands of Christians who arrived exhausted, malnourished and traumatised in Armenia after leaving almost everything they had behind.

They fled their ancestral homeland of Nagorno-Karabakh where Armenian Christians have lived and worshipped for more than 2,000 years, towards the end of September 2023.

They had already endured almost ten months of terrible deprivation and near-starvation while blockaded by neighbouring Muslim-majority Azerbaijan, followed by a full-scale invasion by the Azerbaijani military, which began on 19 September.

Almost the entire 120,000 Christian population – including 30,000 children – has left the disputed enclave that, by a quirk of history, lies within the borders of Azerbaijan.

Christian families crammed whatever possessions they could into whatever means of transport they had available to leave for Armenia. Anahit and her husband were travelling with their four grandchildren.

Their faith gives them the strength to make a fresh start in a new land and they thank God for the help given to them by Barnabas that sustained them on their arrival.

Hope, comfort and solidarity

The couple and their grandchildren are among 1,650 newly arrived Christian families most in need who are receiving financial assistance from Barnabas.

"By providing financial and spiritual support, the programme brought hope, comfort and a sense of solidarity"

Our church partners in Armenia advised us that providing a cash grant to individual families was the best and quickest way to help them. The money, donated by Barnabas supporters, has been distributed through church leaders who have also given much-needed spiritual and emotional support to refugees young and old.

This has had a profound effect. "By providing financial and spiritual support, the programme brought hope, comfort and a sense of solidarity," said our church partners.

UGANDA SOAP- MAKING TRAINING

**provides lifeline for
Muslim-background believers**

Twenty Christians in south-west Uganda, all recent converts from Islam, have received a crucial employment opportunity thanks to Barnabas-funded vocational training. Barnabas has funded costs to train the Muslim-background believers in soap-making. Whilst Uganda is 80% Christian, converts are often ejected from their families and dismissed from Muslim-owned businesses. Barnabas supports Ugandan ministries that provide converts with shelter, discipleship training, trauma counselling and vocational training, including soap-making. After training the new believers will be able to get jobs in a church-owned soap-making facility.



1 Hands-on tuition enables trainees to know their product better. During their training they learn how to mix, measure, cut and stamp soap, as well as how to operate the soap-making machines which melt and form the soap

2 Trainees show what they have produced

3 A watchful eye is maintained throughout the process. The success of the project has attracted interest from Christians elsewhere in Uganda who have made learning visits to the factory

4 The tutor puts his trainees through their paces at the beginning of the soap-making process



Strengthen the voice of Christians in Nigeria as they plead desperately for protection



Christian mother Nanchin and two of her children receiving hospital treatment for machete wounds inflicted by Islamist militants during the Christmas Eve attacks in Nigeria. Her third child, more seriously injured, was in another hospital.

Sign our petition to help protect Christians like Nanchin and her children.

"Why did security agencies fail to respond swiftly despite several distress calls? Why the choice of Christmas Eve for the attacks despite assurances from security agencies to provide adequate security during the yuletide?" questioned Rev. Stephen Baba, Vice-President of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN)

He was referring to the killing of at least 295 Christians, mainly women and children, by Islamist militants during a wave of attacks spanning 24 December 2023 carried out on 25 isolated communities in Plateau State, Nigeria.

"I was told today that these killers or herders actually sent letters to the villagers. They told them that they will not celebrate Christmas but will run away with their rice. So I am surprised they were not able to tell security agents or anybody about it," declared Rev. Polycarp Lubo, the Plateau State CAN chairman, on 26 December.

A shockingly familiar failure to protect

The failure of Nigerian security forces to protect the Christians of these villages on Christmas Eve is just one example of a shockingly familiar pattern in Nigeria.

"I have never seen a nation so comfortable watching the killings of its citizens on a daily basis," said Bishop Jude Avodeji Arogundade of Ondo in April 2023, adding that "nothing has been done for the past 15 years". He urged, "The government must wake up."

Rev John Joseph Hayab, Kaduna State CAN Chairman, said in November 2021, "Citizens are being killed like chickens with only press statements as consolation."

"The Nigerian government has betrayed us for so long, they leave us at the mercy of gunmen because of our faith," said Lawrence Zongo, National Publicity Secretary of the Irigwe Youth Movement in August 2021, after seven Christians were killed and 275 houses razed in Plateau State.

Support and empower African governments to stop the slaughter

Why have governments and security forces been unable to stop the slaughter of more than 50,000 Christians (45,000 of them in Nigeria) in the wave of anti-Christian violence that is sweeping across parts of sub-Saharan Africa?

There are many factors which make it difficult for any government to combat this particular form of violence.

But we believe that more could be done by African governments, supported and empowered by the international community, to protect Christian communities that are especially vulnerable to extremist violence.

Please help us to help our vulnerable brothers and sisters by signing our petition "End the genocide of African Christians". Your signature will strengthen their voice.

Please ask your friends, church members and colleagues to add their names as well.

ACT NOW to help stop more deaths of African Christians

Our petition urges the UK, Australian and New Zealand governments to request institutions such as the African Union and its legislature the Pan-African Parliament to consider this urgent situation. The petition requests that the matter be discussed at the October 2024 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting.

Please download a copy of our petition from barnabasaid.org/resources/africa-petition and gather signatures from your friends, relatives, colleagues. Why not take it to your church and see how many people you can encourage to sign?



Alternatively, people can sign online at barnabasaid.org/resources/africa-petition

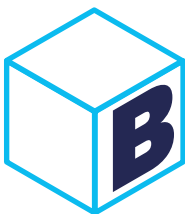
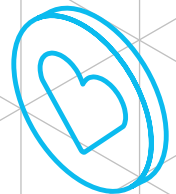
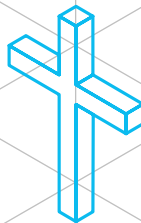
In the previous article (Barnabas Aid, January-February 2024, pp.i-iv) we looked at the fourth and fifth beatitudes and our yearning to be like Jesus. In the article below, we see how this is focused more sharply in the sixth and seventh beatitudes and the glorious honours we are promised of seeing God and being called His sons and daughters.

A Manual for Christian Living



One thing we ask from the Lord, and one thing He asks from us

Matthew 5:8-9



lessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. (Matthew 5:8)

When Jesus said these words to His closest disciples, sitting together on a mountainside, no doubt they were gazing intently at Him while they listened. They

did not realise it, but they were seeing God.


It was a stunning promise for those who had grown up in a faith which, perhaps uniquely in the Middle East at that time, had no images of its God. They were strictly forbidden by the second of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:4).

Yet some believers yearned greatly to see God. David prayed that he could “gaze on the beauty of the Lord” (Psalm 27:4). This was his heart’s desire. “One thing I ask from the Lord,” he said,

“this only do I seek.” Yet he did not envisage more than spending time in the Tabernacle, where the Lord was specially present but still could not be seen with physical eyes.


The closeness of Moses’s relationship with the Lord was likened to God speaking to Moses “face to face, as one speaks to a friend” (Exodus 33:11). Yet it seems that Moses never actually saw His face. Once Moses asked, “Now show me your glory.” The Lord passed by but let Moses see only His retreating back, not His face (Exodus 33:17-23).

Like so many of the other beatitude promises, the complete fulfilment of this one will happen only in heaven. There we shall indeed see God, with the eyes of our resurrection bodies. “They will see his face” (Revelation 22:4).



But the promise of seeing God begins to be fulfilled in this life too, because of its many layers of meaning. The Aramaic word Jesus probably used for “see” was *chaza*, which is not about physical vision. Rather, it is about a deep awareness. Those who see God in this life recognise Him in what is happening to them and around them. By an inward spiritual perception, they see Him at work in circumstances, in nature, in miracles, in suffering, in day-to-day life, in other people, in themselves. They can distinguish His providence and His grace in the tumult of our world.

With this awareness we also discern the presence of Immanuel (God with us, Matthew 1:23) in our own lives. We feel, personally, the reality of promises like “I am with you always” (Matthew 28:20). For the one who sees God, the head knowledge of such Scriptures is transformed into a heart knowledge of felt experience. From that heart knowledge flows the abundance of comfort, peace and joy which the presence of Jesus would bring if He were standing visibly before us. With this awareness we can affirm that in Jesus “we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28).




Another layer of meaning comes with the Greek text of Matthew 5:8. Out of many possible words for “see”, the one used here means to gaze. It is not a casual glance. Nor is it simple, passive observation. It means looking long and hard, feasting our wide-open eyes on something wonderful. John used the same word in Revelation 22:4.

This is how it will be when we see God in heaven in the fullness of His glory. We shall be absorbed and held as we gaze and gaze on Him. It can be the same here on earth, when we see Him with the eye of faith.

In the first century, mirrors were made of bronze, tin or silver, highly polished but giving a reflection that was blurred and somewhat dark. At the end of 1 Corinthians 13, where Paul compares earth and heaven, he tells us “now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face” (1 Corinthians 13:12 ESV). When we find it a struggle to see God in our daily lives, let us encourage ourselves with the knowledge that one day we can throw away the mirror, lift our eyes and gaze directly upon His dazzling beauty.

This promise is for those who are pure in heart, meaning those whose hearts have been purified, as if all the toxins have been purged out and all the stains removed. The phrase would have brought to the minds of Jesus’s listeners a picture of pruning away the useless branches of a vine to make it fruitful, or preparing a field to be planted by removing the stones and ploughing it.



It is the blood of Jesus that purifies us from all sin (1 John 1:7) but we have a part to play in developing a pure heart. We must confess our sins (1 John 1:9). We must strive to avoid wrong desires, wrong attitudes, and wrong motives or intentions. We must try to keep out selfishness, pride and ambition. We must be sincere and focused simply on serving God. The yearning for such purity of heart forms part of the fourth beatitude’s yearning for righteousness.

Paul gives some practical advice: “Fill your minds with those things that are good and that deserve praise: things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and honourable” (Philippians 4:8 GNT). But, by God’s grace, as we grow in purity of heart, we will become those to whom all things are pure (Titus 1:15). Then we are fitted to see God face to face, to be in His presence (Psalm 24:3-4).

Being allowed into the presence of kings was traditionally considered a high honour. In the culture of Bible times, to see the king’s face was a special favour, granted to his friends. The queen of Sheba exclaimed to Solomon, “How happy your people must be! How happy your officials, who continually stand before you and hear your wisdom!” (1 Kings 10:8). If there was such joy in being continually in the presence of a human king, then to be continually in the presence of our heavenly King must fall into the category of unimaginable blessedness that Paul struggled to express (1 Corinthians 2:9).

This beatitude promises us the honour of seeing the face of the King of kings and the joy of seeing the face of our Beloved Friend. This is the bliss of the pure in heart.


Perhaps such purity seems beyond our reach. Let us not despair. The more clearly we see God in *His* purity, the more we become aware of the pride and deceit in our hearts and the need to repent. So we increasingly feel our unworthiness, even as we grow in Christ-likeness. Paul called himself the chief of sinners (1 Timothy 1:16). Godly Job repented in dust and ashes (Job 42:5-6).

In the end, however, “when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). Alfred Plummer describes a gradual process, begun on earth and completed in heaven, as we grow in purity and simultaneously grow in our ability to see God:

Those who are admitted to the Presence will see Him, because they are like Him, and they will become more like Him because they see Him. Assimilation is the natural result of intimacy, and the intimacy must be begun in this world, if it is to bear fruit in the next.¹

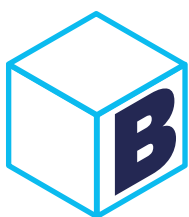
There is a sense in which all will see God, for all will appear before Christ’s judgment seat (2 Corinthians 5:10). My terminally ill brother, a Marxist and a militant atheist all his adult life, said to my mother that he had died and found himself before God, who told him that he was not yet ready, because of his sinfulness, and sent him back to earth. My brother found himself alive and back in his hospital bed. He asked for a cross and I believe that in his last few days he turned to Christ.

We are also told that every eye will see Jesus when He returns and then “all peoples on earth will mourn because of him” (Revelation 1:7). But the sixth beatitude does not refer to the dread experience of seeing God in His role as Judge and the terrible grief of having despised and rejected



Him. Rather, it is a precious promise for those who have longed for his appearing (2 Timothy 4:8) that in heaven we shall at last see our dearest Lord.

O the joy and honour of feeling the presence of our Beloved, the King of kings, whom we shall one day see face to face, as our hearts are purified by our growing experience of Him and His holiness.



lessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. (Matthew 5:9)

After six beatitudes about the thoughts and inner life of a Christ-like Christian, we now move to one – the only one in the whole

list – which involves a specific outward action. We know that being merciful (the fifth beatitude) involves actions, but it is only here in the seventh beatitude that we are given a specific action to perform: we are to make peace.

“Peace” in the New Testament is the Greek word *eirene*. Its everyday meanings include harmonious relationships between people and between nations, security, lack of conflict and orderliness. Its Christian meaning focuses on a harmonious relationship between God and humans. The Biblical concept of peace is also strongly coloured by the Old Testament word *shalom*, meaning wholeness. *Shalom* indicates a complete wellbeing of body, mind and spirit and in our relationships with each other.

Because “peace” has so many meanings, “peacemaking” also has many meanings. One of them, corresponding to the everyday meaning of *eirene*, means practical efforts to bring peace between individuals who have quarrelled. In our sinful world, peacemakers are not always welcomed. Their efforts may be rejected as interference. Peacemaking is a task that needs courage, patience, wisdom, insight and tact. It can be costly and sacrificial.

This type of peacemaking could be called spreading the peace of the world. But a Christian should also be a spreader of the peace of God. This means we are to help others to be reconciled with God. We are to help them find peace with Him by repenting and trusting in Jesus who saves us by His atoning death, just as we ourselves have done. For we are His ambassadors, speaking the words He would speak, imploring people to be reconciled with God (2 Corinthians 5:19–20). Our message is the “gospel of peace” (Ephesians 6:15). Christians should be not only “healing the outward sores of

the world” but also “staunching the deep inward hurts of men’s souls”.²

The peacemaker who is bringing a challenging spiritual message may find themselves viewed as a troubler like Elijah (1 Kings 18:17) or criticised for creating division rather than unity (Matthew 10:34–37). Peacemaking may result in hostility towards the peacemaker, but this is part of the cross that we take up when we follow Christ (Matthew 10:38).

We could say it is the same within our own souls. We have made peace with God by yielding ourselves joyfully and trustingly to Him. But the moment that we make peace with God, Satan declares war on us. For the rest of our earthly lives we have to fight off his efforts to drag us from the Kingdom of the Son back into the dominion of darkness (Colossians 1:13). Richard Chenevix Trench, summarising the teaching of Augustine (354–430), writes of this inevitable war in a believer’s heart between the flesh and the spirit:

... in one sense in the redeemed man there is not peace but war – a war which this very redemption has brought in ... yet this is in the way to that peace, which alone deserves the name.³

The Beatitudes are for the followers of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, whose reign is characterised by endless peace and eternal justice (Isaiah 9:6–7). As peacemakers we are helping to extend His sovereign rule. Jesus’s own peacemaking was costlier and more sacrificial than ours can ever be, for He made peace with us by shedding His blood on the cross (Colossians 1:20).

He is the Son of the God of peace (Romans 15:33; 16:20; 1 Corinthians 14:33; Philippians 4:9; 1 Thessalonians 5:23; Hebrews 13:20). He is the Son of the God who makes wars cease (Psalm 46:9), the God who hates those who love violence (Psalm 11:5), the God who brought a mighty flood to destroy the earth because it was filled with violence (Genesis 6:13).

The rather rare Greek word used in Matthew 5:9 for “peacemakers” was usually applied to emperors. But, far better than being an earthly emperor, we are co-workers with God when we engage in peacemaking.

The title “sons of God” is bestowed on us by God Himself. In the wonderful affirmation of 1 John 3:1 we are called “children of God”, using the Greek word *tekna*, meaning offspring or children. But in the seventh beatitude, the word is *huiioi*, meaning sons (which we can understand to include daughters too). *Tekna* carries the nuance of tender affection, but *huiioi* indicates dignity and high standing.⁴ When God calls us His sons and daughters, He is honouring us for sharing in His work of peacemaking. He is appreciating our efforts. He is recognising that, in our peacemaking, we are reflecting His Son Jesus. This unbelievable honour fills us with joy.



The blessing in this beatitude is for *peacemakers*, not necessarily for peace-lovers. Passive peace-lovers might ignore problems and evade issues, perhaps in order to perpetuate a superficial peace. But there should be no peaceful coexistence with evil.

The promised happiness of the accolade from God is for those who actively try to create peace where there is hostility, mistrust, oppression, violence or other conflict. It is for those who are willing, if necessary, to give up their own peace in order to bring peace to others.

To be a peacemaker is a high and noble calling, a privilege granted by God to His anointed ones, and “sons of God” is a high and noble title. Yet it is something to which every Christian is called, and a title of which every Christian should be worthy.

If we are not peacemakers, we are not reflecting the character of our Lord Jesus Christ. Are we, then, His disciples at all? We are defined by what we do. Jesus warned that false prophets will be known by their fruit, continuing:

Not everyone who says to me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?” Then I will tell them plainly, “I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!”
(Matthew 7:21-23)

Christians should stand out as different from non-Christians. We are in the world but not of it. We cannot dwell comfortably with discord, hatred, anger or bitterness, which all spring from sin in the hearts of

human beings. Satan is the destroyer (Revelation 9:11) but our God is the Creator. He is the author of peace (1 Corinthians 14:33 NKJV). He humbled Himself and came into the world to make peace by dying on a cross (Philippians 2:6-8); peace between each of us and God (2 Corinthians 5:19) and peace between His followers (Ephesians 2:13-16).

We do not and should not fit the world’s mould or think the world’s way. As Christians, we are not called to deliver judgment, for judgment lies in the next life and in the hands of God, who alone knows the heart. We are not meant to be agents of division, fomenters of conflict, or encouragers of hatred. These are the actions of peace-breakers, and are all too easily achieved, even by something as seemingly trivial as a little gossip (Proverbs 16:28; 26:20).

We have seen that human violence was the sin most abhorred by God in the time of Noah. We have seen that peacemaking is the one named action in the Beatitudes, so we may consider it the “good deed” He most wants us to perform. From this we know that we are called to bring into every situation Jesus, the Prince of Peace, and His reconciling love, forgiveness and grace.

The disciples of the Prince of Peace should be active peacemakers, no matter what it costs. God will honour them by calling them His sons and daughters and they will know superlative joy in their hearts.

DR PATRICK SOOKHDEO
International Director, Barnabas Aid

1 Alfred Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew*, 3rd edition (London: Robert Scott, 1911), p.67.

2 Richard Chenevix Trench, *Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount, drawn from the Writings of St. Augustine with Observations* (London: John W. Parker, 1844), p.16.

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4 R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel* (Minneapolis, Augsburg Publishing House, 1943) pp.193-4.

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Please be aware that this article contains details of torture.

Laying down their lives for each other and for the Lord in the forests of North America

Scene 1: Between Lake Huron and Lake Simcoe (modern-day Canada), 1634–1642

The Huron¹ people were good warriors as well as farmers, hunters and fishermen. But all their fighting skills could not protect them against European diseases like measles, flu and smallpox from which about half the Huron community died between 1634 and 1642. And all their farming skills could not prevent frequent bad harvests during those years. They also had to contend with the fearsome Iroquois² people to the south-east who attacked and enslaved them. During this tumultuous period, French missionaries lived among them, sharing their hardships and sharing the Gospel. One of these was the gentle Isaac Jogues.

Although fiercely opposed by the “medicine men” of the local animist religion, about a hundred Hurons

became Christians, mainly the sick and elderly. Warriors, on the whole, had nothing but contempt for Christianity, but among the warriors who did convert was the renowned Ahatsistari who took the name Eustache at his baptism.

Scene 2: Paddling upstream on the St Lawrence River from Quebec towards the Huron homeland, 1642

In August 1642 a group of Christian Hurons (including Eustache) and a few French missionaries (including Isaac), travelling together in four canoes, were attacked by some warriors of the Iroquois people. Not only were Iroquois hereditary enemies of Hurons but also the Iroquois were incensed by those who had abandoned their traditional tribal religion to follow Christ. Half the Christian group fled into the forest. The remainder

commended themselves to God and tried to mount a defence but were soon overwhelmed by the Iroquois who outnumbered them nearly six to one. Eustache, the other Hurons and a missionary called René Goupil were taken prisoner. Isaac had not run. Nor had he been captured. Wanting to share the peril of his brothers in Christ, Isaac surrendered himself voluntarily to the astonished Iroquois.

When they met again as prisoners, Eustache said to Isaac, “I praise God that He has granted me what I so much desired – to live and die with you.” Isaac was speechless with emotion, when at that moment they were joined by another missionary, Guillaume Cousture. Guillaume had fled into the forest and outrun his pursuers. Then he realised that Isaac was not with him and must be in the hands of the Iroquois, so had immediately returned and offered himself as a prisoner.

Thus began several weeks of intense suffering for the captured Christians, both Huron and French. They were beaten with sticks, bitten, stabbed and burned. Their nails were pulled out, fingers cut off, hair and beards torn out. They were forced on a long journey, with very little food, initially by canoe, but then on foot and carrying heavy burdens despite their festering wounds. On the eighth day they encountered a group of about 200 warriors on their way to attack a French fort, who paused on their warpath in order to torture the missionaries and the Huron Christians. They cut off both Eustache’s thumbs and thrust a skewer up his left arm as far as his elbow.

Scene 3: South-east of Lake Ontario, 1642–1646

At each Iroquois village the captives were brought to, a stage was built on which they were displayed to the villagers, most of whom who had never before seen anything as outlandish as a Christian Huron or a European. Sometimes the captives were compelled to sing. At one village, a Christian woman from the Algonquin people, who had been captured and enslaved by the Iroquois, was forced to cut off Isaac’s left thumb. As for Guillaume, an Iroquois tried to saw through one of his fingers with a shell, but it was not sharp enough, so he simply wrenched the finger off. It was one of the times when compassionate villagers tried to ease the suffering of the Christians, and someone sheltered Guillaume in his own hut for two days after this.

Many Hurons were killed. Eustache was burned to death. Instead of crying from the flames for his death to be avenged, as would have been expected in his pre-Christian warrior days, Eustache entreated the watching Hurons that the memory of his death should never cause them to attack the Iroquois.

Another Huron martyr whose name has been preserved was Paul Onnonhoaraton. He would boldly declare his hope of a better life after death, which therefore held no fear for him. At one point on the journey, when the Iroquois were approaching Isaac to inflict another cruel torment on him, Paul offered

himself in Isaac’s place and thus his martyrdom came about.

The missionary René was killed by a few blows of a tomahawk, but Isaac and Guillaume were gifted to Iroquois families.³

Isaac later wrote a long letter describing the year he lived with “his” family. Despite constant insults, threats and various attempts on his life, a strange sort of routine developed in which he cooked for the family, fetched their water and tended their fire. He had spare time in which he could pray. He made himself a little wooden cross and repeated the Scriptures he knew by heart or others that he remembered in paraphrase. His dreams at night were full of crosses and persecution.

Isaac managed to learn the language of his captors and began to preach and discuss matters of religion with them. He would travel to other villages and minister to Huron, Algonquin and French captives, especially those about to be tortured and killed. Noting all this, his captors called him Ondessonk, meaning “Indomitable One”.

Isaac was freed when Dutch traders paid his ransom. After some months in France, he returned to evangelise the Hurons again, who were now becoming Christians in large numbers. In October 1646 he was captured by Iroquois warriors, who blamed him for the caterpillars which had devoured the crops that year, causing great

hunger, and for a recent epidemic. Near modern Auriesville (New York State, USA), the warriors killed him with a tomahawk. The next day they killed his two companions: a Frenchman called Jean de Lalande and a Huron whose name is unknown.

Isaac managed to learn the language of his captors and began to preach and discuss matters of religion with them.

Scene 4: Gnadenhütten (near modern-day Lehigh, Pennsylvania, USA), 1755

In 1755 Britain and France were embroiled in a conflict with each other that extended to North America and dragged in the indigenous Americans to fight on both sides.

A group of missionaries, mainly German, were living near modern-day Lehigh, Pennsylvania, in a settlement called Gnadenhütten (“Tents of Grace”). As Moravians, they were pacifists. Nearby they had built a settlement for indigenous American Christians, which was soon populated by Mohican Christians who had fled persecution elsewhere and by local Delaware⁴ people responding to the evangelistic work of the missionaries.

In November French-supported indigenous Americans were launching attacks in the area, but the missionaries stayed put, ready to die rather than abandon their mission post. Most of the indigenous Christians were away from Gnadenhütten because it was the season to go hunting in the forests. On the evening of 24 November a band of indigenous Americans attacked the missionary settlement, killing ten adults and a toddler. Four missionaries escaped and one was captured.

Scene 5: Gnadenhütten (modern Ohio, USA), 1781–2

By 1781 there was another conflict in progress, as white American colonists sought independence from British rule. Again the pacifist Moravian missionaries were neutral (and therefore viewed with suspicion by both sides). Again the indigenous Americans were caught up in the conflict.

There was also another Gnadenhütten. Since the events of 1755, a group of Moravian missionaries and indigenous American Christians had moved west into Ohio. Delaware people there began to turn to Christ, and some settlements were established for the growing numbers of indigenous American Christians. One of these, with more than 200 inhabitants, was called Gnadenhütten in memory of the martyrs of Gnadenhütten, Pennsylvania.

Like its namesake, this new Gnadenhütten was to suffer a grievous attack resulting in many Christian martyrs. Professor Craig D. Atwood compares the two events:

In Pennsylvania, white Moravians were killed by Native Americans. In Ohio, their Native American brethren were killed by white Americans. In both cases, the martyrs were men, women, and children who tried to follow the way of Christ in a violent and dangerous time, looking past differences of skin color, language and customs to call one another brothers and sisters. They were prepared to sacrifice their own lives rather than take the lives of others.⁵

When war broke out between Britain and the colonists, most of the indigenous Americans sided with Britain so that they could attack the colonists who had treated them harshly. The British, assuming the Moravians were pro-colonists, prompted indigenous Americans to attack them.

In September 1781 the European missionaries and indigenous Christians in this part of Ohio were evicted from their homes and forced to walk north for 125 miles (200 km). After a month they reached

Sandusky, where they were left to fend for themselves in an unwelcoming landscape with little food to be found.

Winter came. Snow fell. Cattle and some children died of hunger. Yet back in Gnadenhütten, their crops sat unharvested. Early in 1782, a group of indigenous Christian families nervously set off to journey back to their former homes. On the way they were encouraged by news that the white Americans were now friendly. For weeks they worked in their old fields, harvesting the weather-beaten crops and preparing to carry food to the starving believers in Sandusky. But then a group of colonist militiamen arrived at Gnadenhütten; they were seeking revenge for the massacre of several white families by indigenous Americans allied to the British. Promising protection and pretending to be very religious, the militiamen easily took prisoner the trusting Christians. They told the innocent, peace-loving indigenous Americans they must die.

In their warrior days, the Gnadenhütteners would have put up a strong defence, but now, being Christians, they simply requested from their captors time to prepare themselves for death.

Then asking pardon for whatever offense they had given, or grief they had occasioned to each other, they kneeled down, offering fervent prayers to God their Savior – and kissing one another, under a flood of tears fully resigned to his will, they sang praises unto him, in the joyful hope that they would soon be relieved from their pains, and join their redeemer in everlasting bliss.⁶

Next day they were attacked by mallet, tomahawk and scalping until 62 adults and 34 children lay dead.

As Chief Tecumseh summarised later,

the Jesus Indians of the Delawares lived near the Americans, and had confidence in their promises of friendship, and thought they were secure, yet the Americans murdered all the men, women and children, even as they prayed to Jesus.⁷

You can read more about these martyrs in Patrick Sookhdeo's book of daily devotional readings on Christian martyrs, *Heroes of Our Faith*, Vol. 2, pp. 14, 89, 313, 350 (Isaac Publishing, 2021, ISBN 978-1-952450-15-0). To purchase this book please go to barnabasaid.org/resources/books or contact your nearest Barnabas Aid office (addresses on inside front cover) or write to sales@barnabasbooks.org

1 Outsiders called them Huron, but they called themselves the Wendat.

2 Outsiders called them Iroquois, but they called themselves the Haudenosaunee.

3 Guillaume was not martyred. His courage under torture and his skills as a carpenter and a marksman earned him such respect among the Iroquois that they invited him to sit on one of their councils. In 1645 they released him from servitude in a prisoner exchange and he helped negotiate peace between the Iroquois and the French colonial powers. After two more years of missionary work among the Hurons, Guillaume settled near Quebec, married a Frenchwoman and had ten children. He became the main administrator, captain of militia and chief magistrate of his settlement (later called Lévis). He died in 1701 at the age of 83.

4 Outsiders called them Delaware, but they called themselves the Lenape.

5 Craig D. Atwood, "The Jesus Indians of Ohio", 4 July 2021,

<https://www.plough.com/en/topics/faith/witness/jesus-indians-of-ohio> (viewed 29 December 2023). Originally published 1 June 2016 in *Plough Quarterly*, no. 9.

6 John Heckewelder, *A Narrative of the Mission of the United Brethren among the Delaware and Mohegan Indians, from its commencement in the year 1740, to the close of the year 1808. Comprising all the remarkable incidents which took place at their missionary stations during that period, interspersed with anecdotes, historical facts, speeches of Indians, and other interesting matter*, Philadelphia: M'Carty and Davis, 1820, pp.318-319. Heckewelder (1743-1823), born in England, was a Moravian missionary in Ohio.

7 Speech made by Chief Tecumseh of the Shawnee people to William Harrison, governor of the Indian Territory, 11 August 1810. Quoted in Elizabeth Cobb and Edward J. Blum (eds.), *Major Problems in American History, Vol. 1 To 1877 Documents and Essays*, 4th edn. (Boston: Cengage Learning, 2017) p.187.

Islamists kill 295 in wave of Christmas attacks in Plateau State

NIGERIA

An estimated 295 Christians were killed in a wave of well-coordinated attacks spanning Christmas Eve, 24 December 2023, in Bokkos and Barkin Ladi Local Government Areas of Plateau State.

The dead were mostly women and children including physically challenged people who were unable to run and were burnt alive.

The attacks by Fulani Islamist militia groups began on the evening of 23 December and finished on the morning of Christmas Day.

Twenty-five remote and widely scattered villages were targeted. At least 1,500 homes were burnt, eight churches destroyed, many hundreds of people injured and 30,000 displaced.

Two pastors were killed. One of them, Rev. Jonathan Daluk, in Tudun Mazat village, fled with his family but realising that his mother and brother were still in the village, went back for them and all three were killed.

“We do not and will not go for any reprisals or attacks ... The Lord is our help and our refuge,” said a pastor in Bokkos.

Plateau State Governor, Caleb Mutfwang, emphatically rebuffed suggestions that the attacks simply represented clashes between herders and farmers, saying, “Let us call a spade a spade; this is simple genocide!” He announced a week of mourning from 1 January to 8 January 2024 to honour those killed in the Christmas Eve attacks.



A Christian woman, widowed in an Islamist attack ten years ago, recovers in hospital from bullet wounds inflicted in one of the Christmas Eve attacks in Plateau State

Judge acquits illiterate Christian widow of ‘blasphemy’ charges

PAKISTAN

Musarrat Bibi, a 46-year-old Christian widow, along with Mohammad Sarmad, a Muslim man, have been acquitted of “blasphemy” charges relating to their work at the Government Girls’ Higher Secondary School in Arif Wala city in the Pakpattan District of Punjab (see *In Brief*, July/August 2023).

On 15 April 2023 they were asked to clear a storeroom and discarded and burnt some wastepaper. As both employees are illiterate, they did not know what was written on the pages.

Four days later, they were arrested and charged with “blasphemy” for desecrating the Quran, which their accusers said they had been burning pages from. The charge is punishable with life imprisonment, but intent must be proven to secure conviction. Musarrat and Mohammad were both granted bail on 13 May.

The judge at the Court of Additional Sessions in Arifwala, Pakpattan, ruled on 8 December that both employees were innocent of the charges.

German church minister released one year after abduction

MALI

German church minister Hans-Joachim Lohre has been set free from captivity at the hands of Islamists in Mali.

Hans-Joachim, 66, failed to appear for a service he was scheduled to conduct on Sunday 20 November 2022. He was kidnapped by the Islamist extremist group Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin, which has close

He was immediately flown back to Germany to be reunited with his family and to recuperate

links to Al Qaeda. There have been several instances of kidnapping of foreign missionaries by such groups in Mali in recent years.

Hans-Joachim was released on Sunday 26 November 2023 after just over a year in captivity. He was immediately flown back to Germany to be reunited with his family and to recuperate.

Hans-Joachim had lived in Mali for more than 30 years.



Hans-Joachim Lohre was held captive by Islamists for just over a year [Image Credit: Ordensgemeinschaften in Deutschland]

Last Bethel Baptist school student released after two years' captivity

NIGERIA

The final Bethel Baptist High School pupil held captive by gunmen was released on 2 November 2023 after more than 800 days in captivity.

Treasure Ayuba was 12 years old when he was abducted along with 120 others in the early hours of 5 July

"Thanks be to our unfailing God. Thank you also very much for your prayers and numerous support"

2021 from the Christian boarding school in Chikun Local Government Area, Kaduna State.

"Thanks be to our unfailing God. Thank you also very much for your

prayers and numerous support," Rev. Dr Israel Akanji, President of the Nigeria Baptist Convention, said in a statement confirming Treasure's release.

Treasure received therapy in the care of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) as he recovered from his ordeal and has been reunited with his family. Pastor John Joseph Hayab, Chairman of the Kaduna branch of CAN, described Treasure's captivity as "an infinite time of agonising pain until God intervened".

The kidnappers freed the students in batches, the last of which occurred in January 2022, leaving Treasure as the sole captive for more than 18 months.



Treasure Ayuba received a thorough medical check-up after being reunited with his family [Image Credit: Premium Times]

Four killed, 50 injured as Islamist militants bomb church service

PHILIPPINES

Four people were killed and 50 others injured when a bomb was detonated at a church service in the southern Philippines at around 7.30 am on Sunday 3 December 2023. Islamic State (IS, ISIS, ISIL, Daesh) militants claimed responsibility for the attack at the service held in a university gymnasium in Marawi on the island of Mindanao.

Government forces arrested one of the suspected perpetrators on 8

December and released names of two further suspects.

Marawi is one of the largest Muslim cities in the Christian-majority Philippines. In 2017, it was besieged by IS militants for five months during which time churches were destroyed and Christians held hostage. The city is part of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, effectively an Islamic sub-state within the country.

Senior church leader's sentence reduced with further appeal pending

ALGERIA

A senior church leader in Algeria has seen his original sentence reduced on appeal. Pastor Youssef Ourahmane was charged with allegedly holding an unauthorised religious meeting in a building not permitted to be used for religious worship.

At his appeal hearing on 19 November 2023 Pastor Youssef's sentence of two years' imprisonment was reduced to one year, although the accompanying fine \$1,331 remained the same, amounting to more than five times the minimal monthly wage in Algeria. Pastor Youssef has issued a second appeal to a higher provincial court and is awaiting a date for a further hearing.

The allegations stem from March 2023, when he supervised a number of Christian families who stayed at a church compound which includes a chapel that has been sealed by the authorities. At the latest count, at least 49 church buildings in Algeria have been forced by the authorities to close, leaving only about seven still open.



Pastor Youssef Ourahmane's prison sentence has been reduced by half [Image Credit: CNE/Pastor Youssef Ourahmane]



Food for persecuted Christian converts in Kyrgyzstan



"Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven." (Luke 6:22-23)

Marat", a Kyrgyz Christian convert from Islam, will not forget the day that his best friend, a Muslim, discovered he had become a follower of Jesus Christ.

The friend rounded on Marat declaring, "If I had a gun I would be the first to shoot you because you believe in Jesus Christ. I would put a gun to your head."

Marat and others among the small but growing number of converts in Central Asia endure daily hostility and rejection from the majority Muslim society in which they live.

Believers are ostracised by their closest family, neighbours and communities because of their decision to leave Islam. Anti-Christian hostility can cost converts their homes, jobs and livelihoods.

"When we pray for overcoming such adversities, the Lord God listens"

Yet far from being downcast, Marat is strengthened and uplifted in his faith, taking comfort in prayer and the Word of God, in particular from Luke 6:22-23, quoted at the beginning of this article.

"In those moments, when we pray for overcoming such adversities, the Lord God listens, answers, directs and protects our prayers," said Marat.

He and his family are among 150

impoverished Christian convert families (about 700 individuals) living in a harsh and remote mountainous region of Kyrgyzstan who thank God and Barnabas for providing them with food parcels during the bitter winter.

The parcels contained staples such as rice, pasta, buckwheat, flour, vegetable oil and tea, which sustained them for three months, when temperatures plummeted to -20°C. Not having to buy these food basics, the families had money to buy coal for heating, winter clothing and other essentials.

Food parcels were distributed through churches to families most in need. Many of the beneficiaries were unable to get work because Muslims refuse to employ Christians. Others were struggling because of the loss of a parent and breadwinner, or because of age or disability. All have endured hostility and discrimination because of their decision to leave Islam.

Grace to endure



Kyrgyz Christians receive Barnabas-funded food

The gifts strengthened the churches and gave hope to the Christian community, who took comfort from the knowledge that they were supported by the wider family of believers.

Believers must worship in private houses

"The moment villagers find out that you are a Christian they turn away and refuse to accept your greetings when you meet them," a pastor explained. "It is very difficult when your closest family, friends, neighbours and colleagues separate themselves from you and stop talking."

Convert church congregations are small, typically made up of around 20 to 40 adult Christians. It is impossible for them to meet the legal criterion for official church registration that requires churches to have at least 200 members.

As a result there are no registered church buildings in this region, and congregations must gather illegally in private houses to worship.

"God told us 'do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul'"

Furthermore, Muslims have refused to allow Christians to bury their loved ones in local cemeteries, despite a requirement for space to be allocated

for all religious groups. Kyrgyzstan has a few Christian cemeteries, but they are not within easy reach. On some occasions Christians have had to resort to burying their loved ones in fields.

Grace overcomes suffering

"Nurbek" acknowledges that the relentless persecution sometimes makes him angry. His family ran a small shop but it was impossible to

trade because Muslim leaders turned the community against them.

Yet he remains steadfast in his faith. "God has heard our prayers many times," said Nurbek. "We overcome with great patience the suffering of such persecution through His grace and the help provided."

Zhumashbek's parents cut all contact with him when he and his wife and their children became followers of the Lord. Like Nurbek, Zhumashbek has become accustomed to verbal abuse and the threat of physical violence against him.

"Ten men from the Muslim community came to me and threatened that if I did not stop talking about God they would throw me in the river," he recalled. "It happened four or five times. In every possible way these people threatened me."



Yet Zhumashbek was not downhearted. “God told us ‘do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul,’” he said, referencing Matthew 10:28.

Lives changed through Christ

Subsistence farmer Rahat and his family came to Christ in 2000. “The coming of Jesus changed our lives,” he states, “and the peace of God came to our family. Jesus forgave my sin.”

Yet Rahat and his family were rejected by their community. “The whole village tried to drive me away,” he said, “not giving me water for my garden, not letting me graze my cattle.

“At that time the leaders of my church and our brothers in Jesus were praying and inspired the parish. Eventually the chase subsided. The Lord Jesus gave me strength ... yet there are still opponents.”

The hostility that these faithful servants of Christ endure is replicated in many communities around the globe where our persecuted brothers and sisters live as a minority. Yet their trust in the Lord enables them to endure.

The mission of Barnabas Aid is to carry out what we are instructed in Galatians 6:10, “Let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.”

Kyrgyz shopkeeper Nurbek echoed the same verse when he thanked Barnabas supporters for funding the food parcels that helped his family, and his brothers and sisters in Christ.

“There are many people all over the world who, like us, suffer in the name of Jesus,” he said. “They suffer persecution and lose their lives, family, housing and land.

“Barnabas Aid provides comprehensive support and assistance to those who suffer in this way. They have helped the believers in our village, including our family, with food they need every day. Thanks be to our God too. May His Name be glorified everywhere.

“We sincerely thank Barnabas Aid. May your rewards be from heaven. God bless your services.”



New law proposes to tighten restrictions on Kyrgyz churches

The Kyrgyzstan government is seeking to tighten still further the restrictions on churches.

Its proposed new law on “Freedom of Religion and Religious Associations” is, at the time of writing, being considered by the country’s parliament, having been through a month-long period of public discussion.

If passed into law without any changes, religious organisations would still need to be registered, and this would only be for a maximum of five years. When this period expires, the organisations would have to apply to re-register.

Under the new law, organisations would need to have at least 100 adult founder members living in the same district, 500 adult members in the same oblast (region) and 3,000 adult members living “proportionately” in at least five of the country’s nine regions.

The current Religion Law requires organisations to have only 200 adult founder members living anywhere in Kyrgyzstan.

*Project reference: PRI506
(Winter food and fuel for needy Christians in Central Asia)*

In Touch



Christian survivors of jihadi attacks in Nigeria receive Barnabas-funded sleeping mats and blankets

Could your church take up an offering for Barnabas Aid this Easter?

This Easter, as we remember the crucifixion and glorious resurrection of our Saviour Jesus Christ, could your church take up an Easter offering for Barnabas Aid, to bring hope and support to believers around the world who are suffering because of their faith in Christ?

As we are reminded in Hebrews 13:16, "Do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased."

For suffering believers, the knowledge that Christians around the world are praying for them and supporting them is a great encouragement.

"God, You see and You hear the cries of Your people. You send help and You show Your love all the time," said a Nigerian believer, as he sang and danced in joy, praising God for the arrival of Barnabas-funded food and practical aid for Christian survivors of attacks by Islamist terrorists in Kaduna State.

"Thank You for Your servants Barnabas Aid for their care and perseverance in helping your suffering community," he added.

Your gifts will enable us to help more members of our suffering Church family around the world. Thank you.

Praying for the Suffering Church

The Apostle James teaches Christians that "blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life". (James 1:12).

The 2024-25 edition of our annual booklet, *Praying for the Suffering Church*, is included with this *Barnabas Aid* magazine. It provides information on 39 countries where Christians persevere under trial, enduring persecution, discrimination or poverty because of their faith. There are associated praise and prayer points to help you intercede for our brothers and sisters in each country.

For those who are using the booklet for Lent 2024, in preparation for Easter, a schedule of readings and prayers is suggested, starting on Wednesday 14 February.



Thank you for answering our "Fill a Pack for Pakistan" call at New Wine & Festival One!

Thank you to all our supporters who took up our "Fill a Pack for Pakistan" call at New Wine Camp & Festival One in January 2024.

Many church groups and individuals attending New Wine & Festival One have committed to filling their food.gives packs with donations of split peas, lentils, rice, salt and sugar to send to Pakistan. At New Wine, some even went to the local grocery store and filled their packs right away!

All these donations will be included in a container that will be heading out to Pakistan shortly to help our suffering Church family. Thank you!



Supporters deliver their food.gives donations for Pakistan at New Wine

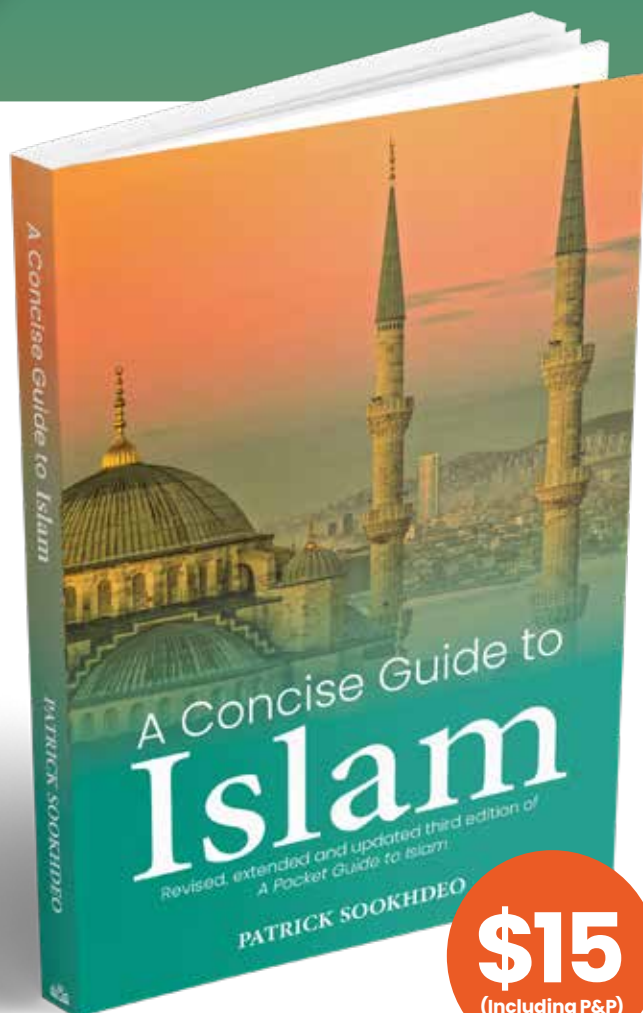


Young food.gives supporters at Festival One

New Publication

A Concise Guide to Islam

PATRICK SOOKHDEO



\$15
(Including P&P)

In just 117 pages, this new title* provides a guide to the complex and diverse religion of Islam, aiming to give non-Muslims an insight into its worldview, practices and history. The author's hope is to enable readers to understand their Muslim friends and neighbours better and avoid some of the pitfalls and miscommunications that can occur when non-Muslims seek to build relationships with Muslims.

Topics covered include Islam's sacred books and sources, articles of faith and compulsory religious observances, sharia (Islamic law), how Muslims relate to non-Muslims, and the place of women in Islam. The book also traces the history of Islam from its beginnings in the seventh century until the present day. The final chapter looks briefly at the diversity of beliefs to be found within Islam, including Sunni, Shia, Sufism, folk Islam, radical Islam and modernist Islam.

Many quotations from the Quran are included and there is an index to the Quran references as well as a general index.

Additional resources include:

- Glossary of over 140 Islamic and Arabic words and phrases
- Year-by-year chronology of the life of Muhammad, the prophet of Islam
- Diagram of the historical development of the main Islamic sects
- List of the chapters of the Quran by name, number, and whether Meccan or Medinan
- Bibliography of other recommended books on Islam that are currently in print

* Please note: this book is a revised, extended and updated third edition of Professor Sookhdeo's best-selling *A Pocket Guide to Islam*.

Professor Patrick Sookhdeo PhD, DD is the Founder and International Director of Barnabas Aid and Executive Director of the Oxford Centre for Religion and Public Life. He is Honorary Professor and Research Associate in the Department of Religious Studies at the Faculty of Theology and Religion at the University of Pretoria, South Africa.

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

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