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MARCH/APRIL
2022

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

SOUTH AND SE ASIA
Your donations save lives and restore Christians to health

BUILDING LEADERS
Barnabas trains Christians to steer growing global Church

ZIMBABWE
Lives of thousands of hungry Christians transformed by ePap

A light in the midst of tragedy

barnabasfund
hope and aid for the persecuted church

The Barnabas Fund Distinctive

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

barnabasfund
hope and aid for the persecuted church

We work by:

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

We seek to:

- meet both practical and spiritual needs
- encourage, strengthen and enable the existing local Church and Christian communities – so they can maintain their presence and witness rather than setting up our own structures or sending out missionaries
- tackle persecution at its root by making known the aspects of other religions and ideologies that result in injustice and oppression of Christians and others
- inform and enable Christians in the West to respond to the growing challenge of other religions and ideologies to Church, society and mission in their own countries
- facilitate global intercession for the persecuted Church by providing comprehensive prayer material
- safeguard and protect our volunteers, staff, partners and beneficiaries
- keep our overheads low

We believe:

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

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

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Front Cover: Food and practical aid funded by Barnabas is distributed among Nigerian Christians who have fled jihadi attacks.

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We are a people of hope

Death, which in recent generations was "the unmentionable subject", has, since the advent of the pandemic, reverted to being a normal topic of conversation. The reality of death, as an ever-present part of our experience, has re-calibrated Western minds to a more realistic understanding of our humanness. For many, particularly those who do not know Christ, it is a subject fraught with deep sadness, despair and a sense of hopelessness, albeit some welcome it as a release from suffering. But for us Christians, thoughts of death are thoughts of joyous expectation of our entrance into a new, better and fuller life, where there will be no pain or sorrow. At least that is what it should be. A committed Christian, however, once remarked to me that she did not want to die until she had experienced life on earth to the full and enjoyed all it could offer. For that Christian heaven seemed to have little attraction and was relegated to as far in the future as possible. Another committed Christian I know seems to view death with tremendous foreboding, whether his own death or that of his loved ones. He is deeply afraid of being left grieving "alone" on earth. It seems that he anticipates that he will "grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope" (1 Thessalonians 4:13). But is this how we as followers of the Lord Jesus should think?

Each year we mark not just the crucifixion but also the resurrection of Jesus as we celebrate His victory over death on the first Easter Day. His bodily resurrection from the grave is the heart of our faith. Paul wrote to the Corinthian believers about four articles of faith which were of "first importance": that Christ died for our sins, that He was buried, that He was raised, and that He appeared in resurrection to many people on many occasions (1 Corinthians 15:3-7). This is the Gospel by which we are saved (1 Corinthians 15:1-2).

Paul then goes on to write of the importance of Christ's real bodily resurrection. Amongst the early Christians there were those who had a Jewish cultural background and those who had a Greek cultural background. The Old Testament says little about life after death, but sometimes mentions Sheol as the place where the dead went and continued a weak and shadowy existence cut off from the living and from God. There are a very few glimpses of a continuing life of joy in God's presence. Job says, "This body may break up, but even then my life shall have a sight of God" (Job 19:26-27 Moffatt). Some other examples are Psalm 16:9-11 and Psalm 73:24. While some Jewish scholars, including the Pharisees, believed in some kind of life after death, the Sadducees denied it completely. The Greeks feared death but believed in the immortality of the soul; the evil and burdensome body they neither wanted nor expected to have in the next life.

So the teaching that Paul gives in 1 Corinthians 15 is radically different from anything that the early converts to Christianity had believed before they knew the Lord. For this great chapter is all about the resurrection of the body – Christ's body and our bodies. This is the Christian hope.

Since the resurrection, death has no more dominion over Christ (Romans 6:9 AV). We are united with Him in His resurrection (Romans 6:5), and therefore death has no more dominion over **us** either. Death has been swallowed up in victory. It has lost its sting (1 Corinthians 15:54-57).

We are, therefore, a people of hope. Jesus has triumphed over sin and death and we who trust in Him can look forward to our new spiritual resurrection bodies (1 Corinthians 15:42-43). In the words of Robert Lowry's stirring Easter hymn,

Up from the grave He arose,
With a might triumph o'er His foes;
He arose a Victor from the dark domain,
And He lives forever with His saints to reign.
He arose! He arose!
Hallelujah! Christ arose!

DR PATRICK SOOKHDEO
International Director

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how barnabas is helping

"Pocket pastors" take God's Word to Muslim herders in West Africa

The Chebar* are a Muslim-majority people of around 12 million in West Africa. They are traditional cattle herders and many do not like to enter buildings, so most will not go to church. Chebar converts to Christianity are heavily persecuted.

Barnabas has helped fund 14,000 New Testaments (£4/$5.20/€4.60 each) in the Chebar language and 1,600 solar-powered audio players (£16/$21/€18.70 each) with 80 hours of Gospel content. The players are often called "pocket pastors" because many Chebar people have only heard the Gospel that way. Audio players are the centrepiece of scripture listening groups whose members gather around the campfire to hear God's Word. Children especially love singing the Gospel songs that accompany the Scriptures.

An elderly member of a listening group said that, when he dies, he wants to be buried with an audio player because it contains "the word of life" and with it he will enter heaven. His friends and family now want to join listening groups.

*Name changed for security reasons

Two Chebar Christian women listen to their "pocket pastor"

£20,000 *($27,040; €23,965)* **contribution to the project**

Project reference: 00-362 (Bibles and Scriptures Fund)

Displaced converts in Burkina Faso thank God and Christian family overseas for food

More than 440 Fulani Christian families, displaced by persecution in Burkina Faso and impoverished by the impact of Covid, have received three months' food aid from Barnabas. As converts from Islam, the Fulani families are especially likely to be targeted by jihadists who are stepping up attacks across the beleaguered country.

Oumnou is grateful to God for providing food for her and her children through Barnabas. Together with Oumnou's husband, they fled their home in eastern Burkina Faso to the regional capital after jihadists threatened to wipe out Christians from the area. With no money for food or shelter, the family survived on what Oumnou received from begging. In desperation, her husband left the city to find work, but she has heard nothing from him since.

Our project partner said the food aid has encouraged Christians and the church locally to feel part of the bigger Christian family as "they were remembered in their struggle by family members from the UK".

Christians displaced by jihadi violence receive Barnabas-funded food aid

£15,000 *($20,340; €17,965)* **for three months' food for 441 families**

PR1530 (Covid Emergency Fund)

Funding for new school clothes is answer to prayer in Kazakhstan

"I have now lost my job and your help is manna from heaven for us," a parent with three children told us. Another said, "We prayed in our church that God would solve our financial problems ... and then a miracle happened." A disabled mother added, "I thank the Lord and Barnabas. I have a leg injury, so such help for the school year is a huge grace for my family."

These are words of thanks to Barnabas from Christian parents in central Kazakhstan after we provided 105 children, aged between six and 17, with clothes suitable for school that their impoverished parents were unable to afford. Many parents lost their daily wage jobs because of Covid and are struggling to meet their families' needs. Other children are from single-parent households, or from families where a parent is disabled.

"The main thing is that people were able to send their children to school with dignity," said our church partner.

A Kazakh Christian girl with her new school shoes, shirts and tights

£2,440 *($3,225; €2,860)*

Project reference: PR1558

Compassion in action

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

Teaching clips help Christians in Middle East to grow in faith

In the four Gospels, Jesus asks and is asked many questions. Reflecting on such questions – "Who do you say I am?" (Matthew 16:15), "Why do you call me good?" (Luke 18:19), "How can a man be born when he is old?" (John 3:4) – can help to strengthen faith.

Barnabas has helped fund the production of 170 teaching clips for broadcast in the Middle East on social media, YouTube and satellite TV in which a Bible teacher explains the answers to some of these questions. The three-minute clips help Arab Christians, many of whom are isolated and depend on digital channels for discipleship, to grow in their faith. They also present God's message to non-believers.

The clips, which are illustrated with graphics, are in Egyptian Arabic, used throughout the Arabic world. Viewers can also respond via social media and engage with the highly trained project team. A discipleship course has been developed based on the clips.

Filming underway for one of the three-minute teaching clips

£10,000 *($13,240; €11,725)* **to part fund production of 170 teaching clips**

Project reference 69-212

Nepal ministry empowers young Christians to stand firm in the Lord

Nepal Student Ministry, which is supported by Barnabas, empowers Christian high school, college and university students to stand firm in their faith in a country where Christians face hostility from the Hindu-majority population.

The ministry runs training and conferences on discipleship and leadership to build up young believers, as well as supporting Bible study fellowship groups on campuses. "Now I understand the importance of prayers and Bible studies," said a member whose family suffered abuse when they converted to Christianity. "God helped us all to overcome that difficult period," she added.

Bishal's Hindu family became Christians when he was a child but he was not interested in learning about the Bible. This changed when he joined the student ministry, attending its conferences and training courses. "I have gained a lot of courage and have been inspired to work more for God's Kingdom," he said. Bishal, 25, now leads an active student ministry in eastern Nepal.

Bishal says the Nepal Student Ministry helped him build a close relationship with God

£4,215 *($5,615; €4,965)* **for one year's support**

Project reference: PR1514

Ten new Christian schools in Pakistan for children from brick-kiln families

Barnabas is funding the building of ten Christian schools in Punjab, Pakistan for children of poor Christian brick-kiln workers. Five are completed and construction is underway on the other five. Previously the children were taught in makeshift facilities in people's homes or in the open air.

The new buildings are near to the children's homes giving them safe and easy access to school. They have three classrooms, each with electricity and a blackboard. The classrooms open on to a wide veranda, offering shade in the summer and shelter from monsoon rains, and a secure walled yard. There is a washroom with piped water and a toilet.

The buildings provide teachers and children of primary school age with suitable facilities in which to teach and learn. A father who never had the opportunity to go to school told us, "Our entire village of brick-kiln workers wants to pay their gratitude to Barnabas and promise to take care of their school buildings."

Staff and children have suitable facilities in which to teach and learn

£40,500 *($54,750; €48,430)* **for the first five schools. The initial estimate of £35,000** *($47,290; €41,840)* **rose due to inflation fuelled by Covid**

Project reference 41-1236

Prayers of thanks for the practical aid made possible through your generous donations

Your gifts helping Christians in Nigeria

A LIGHT IN THE MIDST OF TRAGEDY

"This is the Gospel of Christ – to feed the hungry and the vulnerable." These are the words of a pastor in Zonkwa, a town in Zangon Kataf Local Government Area, southern Kaduna State, Nigeria, in response to Barnabas Fund's practical support for the victims of persistent anti-Christian violence.

Like many in Nigeria's Middle Belt, the Christian-majority village communities in Zangon Kataf have suffered greatly from violent attacks. In July 2021, 28 people, including a baby, were killed in attacks on several villages by Fulani militants. The attackers also destroyed homes and attempted to burn down a church building.

Sadly, these atrocities are not unusual. In July 2020, after eleven people were killed in Zangon Kataf, Pastor Stephen Baba Panya, president of the Evangelical Church Winning All, declared: "It is as if the lives of Christians no longer matter."

Yet, if the lives of Christians matter nothing to Fulani militants and other Islamist extremists, your gifts have shown our brothers and sisters that their lives do matter to you.

"The message this has sent is that the Church worldwide is aware of the atrocities going on in Nigeria," says our project partner. "We are excited and thank God for the support that we have received from Barnabas Fund and the incredible difference this is making. It is like a light in the midst of these tragedies."

Practical aid to victims of violence

Barnabas Fund has been able to supply practical aid to victims of anti-Christian violence in several villages of southern Kaduna and Plateau states. For example, one of our project partners is distributing food aid – 100 bags of maize and 100 bags of beans – as well as 100 bundles of roofing sheets, 50 packs of roofing nails, 100 blankets and 100 sleeping mats for those whose homes have been destroyed or damaged.

At the time of writing nine villages have been reached. Food has been distributed to 487 households, an estimated 6,818 people. Distribution is still ongoing.

The security situation remains dangerous, says our project partner. "The Fulani Islamist militias continue their attacks on vulnerable targets. They had attacked the funeral processions of those going to bury their dead soon after an attack."

Because of the ongoing threat, community leaders advised that a date should be set for villagers to travel and collect aid, instead of distributors facing the risks of travelling throughout the affected areas. However, not all of the needy villagers came, "because, we later learned," explains our project partner, "that there were Fulani attackers prowling in the areas who would kill people along the roads or in the bushes."

Bravely, therefore, the distributors set out to take food, blankets and other supplies to the villagers, despite the threat of attack.

The Zonkwa-based pastor expressed the feelings of Nigerian church leaders. Owing to their own poverty, they are unable to help as much as they would love to do. "This is what we would have done if we had the capacity," he said. "This assistance has made our preaching stronger and has given us relevance in the community. We cannot just pray for people without feeding the hungry. Please give our gratitude to Barnabas Fund."

"I am so grateful"

Another way in which your donations have helped our Nigerian brothers and sisters is in the payment of hospital bills. Violent attacks often leave Christians seriously injured and in need of urgent medical intervention. Yet few medical services in Nigeria are free of charge, and impoverished Christians struggle to afford the care they so desperately need.

"I would have died if you hadn't intervened. My children would have been orphans now."

"I am so gateful for what our Christian brothers and sisters have done," said one recipient, hospitalised with a serious leg injury.

Without professional treatment, he explained, there was little hope of recovery. "I would have lost my leg or died of gangrene infections if you hadn't intervened. My children would have been orphans now."

"We do not take anything for granted"

The ongoing instability and disruption takes its toll on the lives of children. As part of the distribution of food and supplies, our project partners have provided notebooks, pens and pencils, and flipchart boards, all of which are needed for Christian children to continue their schooling. A total of 810 schoolchildren have been helped in the Miango and Bassa areas of Plateau State.

"We have over 1,000 children affected by the Fulani attacks that we brought in and formed into classes so that we can give them some education," said a teacher in Miango.

"Above all is the joy that you cared to send this support."

"Some are wearing torn clothes and barely any have shoes on their feet," the teacher continued. "Their parents can't afford a pencil, much less a notebook. They have lost everything. These books are both a great encouragement for the children and a relief for the parents. But above all is the joy that you cared to send this support. Please thank Barnabas Fund for this great sacrifice."

Our project partner explains, "In this part of the world and particularly in these circumstances, any assistance, any funding, could make the difference between life and death … We do not take anything for granted. A few notebooks and pencils make the difference in the encouragement for a child to go to school and the enthusiasm to complete schoolwork."

"We cannot describe the smiles, excitement and laughter on the faces of children as we give school material – and as we leave they follow our vehicle shouting, 'Thank you, sir!'"

Prayers needed for our brothers and sisters

Because there is no designated refugee camp for those displaced by the violence, our project partners have to try to follow the victims to wherever they have sought shelter in order to distribute aid. Continued instability has also delayed progress, though our project partner says, "The security situation has only slowed down progress a bit, but we are on track to complete the project."

"We are asking for prayers for the victims of the attacks," he adds. "We ask for prayers for the pastors and church workers, to never give up hope but to remain the beacons of hope in the communities and villages – to continue to preach Christ with every opportunity."

Thanks to Barnabas Fund financial support school books are distributed to children whose education has been disrupted by violence and instability

Blankets and mats are distributed to those whose homes have been destroyed or damaged

Project ref. 39-772 Victims of violence in Nigeria

Medical equipment funded by Barnabas arrives at a hospital in East Nusa Tenggara province, Indonesia

Christian lives saved, and health restored

Barnabas-funded medical projects bring healing to thousands of believers across South and South-East Asia medical projects

The lives of poor and marginalised Christians across South and South-East Asia medical projects have been saved, and the health of hundreds improved, thanks to medical projects funded by Barnabas supporters.

Christians working in low-paid jobs or reliant on daily wage earnings are unable to afford health care even in normal times. Then came the Covid-19 pandemic that wiped out most of their jobs and incomes overnight, leaving many struggling to afford food, and their malnourished bodies less likely to resist coronavirus or other ailments.

Thanks to your generous donations Barnabas has funded medical projects in Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Indonesia that have restored poor Christians to health, raised awareness of the importance of good hygiene practices and won the Church greater respect in the eyes of the majority populations. These are just a few of many examples of how we are using your gifts to help with Covid-related medical needs of our brothers and sisters in these countries as well as in India. [1]

"The fact that a group [of Christians] from out of the country, that has never even met them, wants to help [Christians] has been a testimony to Christ and the fact that His love, mercy and grace transcends all boundaries," said our project partner in Sri Lanka.

Barnabas brings free health care to Pakistan's brick-kiln communities

In Pakistan's Punjab province, Christian brick-kiln workers are at higher risk of developing chronic respiratory illness because of their exposure to dust and smoke generated during their back-breaking labours, and injuries are common. Women often work alongside their husbands, even when heavily pregnant. There is little ante- or post-natal care and child mortality rates are high. Children who survive are often malnourished because of family poverty.

Barnabas is helping to meet the desperate need for health care among these impoverished Christian families by funding a mobile clinic that brings free medical treatment and health care advice to their doorstep. The service travels around brick-kiln communities and ensures that families can seek help early, before a small health problem turns into a serious issue.

The Muslim brick-kiln owners willingly provide a site for the mobile unit's two staff nurses and a helper/driver to set up a clinic or health "camp" for consultations with patients, who are predominantly Christian.

Thousands of sick Christians receive help

In its first year of operation, the team provided free medicines and treatment to 9,710 people of all ages,

including 1,862 children aged five and under. Thanks be to God, the Barnabas-funded mobile unit is already on its way to match, or surpass, that number in its second year.

Typical problems diagnosed include pneumonia, diarrhoea, infectious diseases and rheumatic disorders. Patients with critical illnesses are taken by the team to a government hospital for treatment.

Sugran, left, thanks God for the medical help her family received from one of the nurses

Brick-kiln worker Chanan was diagnosed with a chest infection after he sought help for a severe cough. He thanked the mobile unit nurses for their great kindness and concern, adding that, without them, he would not have been able to afford treatment or medicine

Before Barnabas set up the mobile unit, brick-kiln workers had little option other than to seek help from small private medical centres locally and take out a loan from their employers to pay for any tests, treatment and medicines. The interest on the loan was then deducted from their already meagre weekly wages, and the debt could take years, even generations, to pay off.

Government hospitals[2] provide free services to the poor; however, the cost of travelling to hospitals far from brick-kiln communities is beyond the means of most workers, and they would still have to pay for medicines, which are very expensive.

Sugran was very worried and upset when she sought the help of the Barnabas mobile health unit. Her children had diarrhoea, rashes and itchy skin. Her husband was ill with hypertension and diabetes, and she had constipation, but the family could not afford to seek treatment. After receiving advice and medicines from one of the mobile unit's nurses, Sugran and her children have recovered and her husband is better able to manage his conditions.

Hygiene habits changed for the better

The mobile health team has brought about other beneficial changes in the habits of brick-kiln communities. Hygiene measures in homes have much improved and more people are wearing face masks and using hand wash to prevent Covid infections. Fewer pregnant women and sick people are resorting to traditional practices, preferring instead to consult the qualified health-care team. Awareness has also been raised of the benefits of the government childhood immunisation programme protecting against potentially deadly and disabling conditions such as diphtheria, polio and tetanus.

Furthermore, the project has consolidated relations between local church leaders and their congregations as pastors helped to encourage people in need to consult the health team.

In the wider Pakistani community, the Church has gained a positive reputation among the majority Muslim population, some of whom have benefited from the health team's skills. A church leader told us that Muslims are impressed that "a Christian organisation is providing free health care services to the poor, needy and deserving people without any religious, social or political issues".

Barnabas provided £10,465 ($14,265; €12,550) to cover the cost of setting up the mobile health unit and its operating costs for a year. Funding for the second year is less, at £8,370 ($11,475; €10,025), because there are no start-up costs.

Innovative home care scheme provides help for Christian Covid sufferers in Sri Lanka

In Sri Lanka, Barnabas provided funding for an innovative home care scheme for poor Christians suffering from Covid. It was set up by a group of Sri Lankan Christian healthcare professionals who saw the dire conditions in which many people were struggling to survive after a surge in Covid cases overwhelmed hospitals.

Church volunteers brought comfort and aid to Covid patients in Sri Lanka

A mother cradles her child during treatment by a nurse from the Barnabas mobile health unit

A Christian woman tests her pulse oximeter under the watchful eye of a church volunteer standing a safe distance away

The church volunteer makes sure instructions on Covid care are fully understood

Among the most in need were the many Christian daily wage earners who lost their livelihoods because of the pandemic, and could not afford to feed to their families, let alone pay for medical care.

Taking their inspiration from the picture of restoration in Isaiah 61, the team of doctors and psychologists mobilised volunteers at eleven churches in three provinces of Sri Lanka to provide home care for Christians with Covid.

Each of the volunteers is trained to make home visits to Covid patients (observing strict quarantine rules). The volunteers explain to families how to look after their sick loved ones and give them a care pack containing vitamins, medicines to relieve symptoms, a pulse oximeter and an instruction leaflet. This also contains telephone numbers for government emergency health services, a medical advice line and the church volunteers' contact details.

Each church was also given an oxygen concentrator – a machine that purifies the air and produces oxygen for needy patients – to help the most acute cases.

Project is "answer to prayer"

"These resources have been nothing short of life changing," our project partner told us. "And we believe it to be life saving as well.

"We believe this was an answer to prayer and that Barnabas Fund and all those involved will be blessed for wanting to help so many people in this way."

"Shiyani", a teacher at a school on a tea plantation, was among more than 380 Covid patients visited by the church volunteers during the scheme's first ten weeks of operation. "Due to this help, I regained my strength and recuperated," she said. "I thank God and those who provided the support."

Retired plantation worker "Arun" and his wife didn't know where to turn for medical help when they contracted Covid and were relieved to receive a care pack and advice from the church volunteers. "They kept calling over the phone and checked on our welfare," said Arun. "I can say we lived because of their support."

"I can say we lived because of their support"

Volunteers reduce burden on health system

The project has empowered the churches taking part because they have been able to help their suffering brothers and sisters. It has also been valued by health authorities locally for helping to reduce the burden on an overstretched health system. Once case numbers fall, the oxygen concentrators will be given to a Christian palliative care centre.

Barnabas provided £19,640 ($26,645; €23,510) to the home care scheme to fund medical equipment (pulse oximeters and oxygen concentrators) and medicine packs.

Barnabas responds to appeals for help from Indonesia

Indonesia was described by the Red Cross as being on the brink of catastrophe in June 2021 after the Delta variant of Covid-19 raced through the population.

Covid in Indonesia is an "emergency and uncontrollable," wrote a Christian leader to Barnabas. "We pray, and pray for His mercy."

Another message pleaded, "If Barnabas Fund would consider to do something meaningful and strategic to the Christian hospitals and patients … this is indeed the Kairos time of God."

Thanks to the donations of our supporters we were able to respond to our brother's appeal for help by providing £35,660 ($48,810; €42,751) of personal protective equipment and other medical items to seven hospitals treating Christian patients on the archipelago. These included three hospitals in East Nusa Tenggara, a mainly Christian province that is very poor, remote and under-resourced by the government.

The consignment included face shields, surgical masks, hand sanitiser, surgical gowns, goggles and gloves as well as antigen test kits and multivitamins. ■

Project references: PR1534 (Health clinics in Pakistan), PR1530 for Sri Lanka and Indonesia (Covid Emergency Fund)

1 Read more about how Barnabas has helped medical ministries in India respond to the Covid crisis in *Barnabas Aid*, January/February 2022 or at www.barnabasfund.org/magazine/helping-and-healing-our-brothers-and-sisters-in-india-s-covid-crisis/

2 In January 2022, the government introduced a health card in Punjab that provides every family with between £250 ($340; €300) and £4,100 ($5,600, €4,950) of free treatment per year at government and private hospitals, for a range of specified medical conditions. However, the cards do not cover the cost of diagnosis, treatment and medicine from small private clinics near brick-kiln families – the only ones to which the families can afford to travel. As such the Barnabas mobile health clinic is still vitally important. Nevertheless, our project partners are encouraging brick-kiln workers to apply for the health cards.

WHY ARE CHRISTIANS PERSECUTED IN

For Christians in all parts of the world, opposition and persecution are a fact of life. The Church is under constant attack, physical and political. The Gospel message seldom goes forth freely. Those who belong to Christ face darkness and difficulty – in this world they have trouble (John 16:33).

When we read of persecution we should be shocked, but never surprised. The Bible is clear that persecution will come upon the Church, and that the Lord's people will suffer for being identified with Christ. Those who follow Christ are told that others will "insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you" (Matthew 5:11).

The ultimate reason why the world persecutes the Church is because the world hates Christ. "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first," says the Lord Jesus to His disciples. "If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also ... They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the one who sent me" (John 15:18, 20b-21).

There are also secondary reasons why the Church is opposed. Persecution takes place in particular cultural, political, ideological and religious contexts. Governments, terrorists, or just ordinary members of communities – including the families and friends of Christians – will have their own personal reasons for hating Christianity, while their actions may also be shaped by factors of which they themselves are not fully aware.

In this series we will examine some of these reasons, focusing on the particular contexts of several countries or world regions in which the Church faces opposition and persecution.

... THE WEST?

PERSECUTION IN THE WEST DOES EXIST

It may seem strange to begin with the West. The Western world – including Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the US, the UK and western Europe – is the region of the world where Christians enjoy the most freedom and peace.

The Western Church has enjoyed unprecedented freedom to worship and practise the Christian faith over the last two centuries, to the extent that some will deny that persecution in the West is a reality. Certainly, persecution in the West is overall as nothing compared to that endured by believers in the Islamic world, under communist rule, or in other contexts where religious nationalism has the upper hand. But that does not mean that persecution does not exist.

In December 2019 street preacher David McConnell was arrested in Huddersfield, West Yorkshire, UK for "a hate-related public order offence" and held in police custody for around six hours, simply for sharing the Gospel. Passers-by had falsely accused him of making hateful and deliberately offensive remarks. Thankfully McConnell was released without charge, and West Yorkshire Police admitted that they had acted unlawfully.[1]

In another country, McConnell may not have been released. The authorities certainly would not have admitted liability. In North Korea or Eritrea, McConnell would still be in prison. Put bluntly, he might well be dead. Yet can anyone say that his experience was not a form of anti-Christian persecution?

THE POST-CHRISTENDOM WEST

It is common for Christians around the world – as well as the opponents of Christianity – to think of the West as a Christian civilisation, or of particular Western nation states as Christian nations.

We should not, however, be too quick to assume that the Western world is purely Christian. We need to take into account the non-Christian philosophies and concepts that have shaped Western culture, and – in a process that has its roots in the Enlightenment – are transforming the West into a post-Christendom context.

These philosophies and concepts include: secularism, progressivism, individualism and materialism.

SECULARISM SETS THE STAGE FOR PERSECUTION

A secular society, according to the UK's National Secular Society, is one that does not privilege religion or religious points of view. This includes not having any established religion or church, nor viewing religious voices as any more worthwhile than non-religious. A secular society provides – in theory – freedom of belief and equal treatment for both religious and non-religious.

Western society is largely secular. Religion usually does not – despite the protestations of humanists and atheists – have a privileged position when it comes to policy-making or agenda-setting, even in the United States where the influence of Christianity remains strong, or in Denmark, Norway or the UK where there remain established churches rather than any constitutional separation of church and state. Some countries, such as France, self-consciously repudiate any role for religion in public life.

There are elements of secularism with which some Christians would agree – perhaps, for example, equal standing before the law regardless of a person's religious belief.

Yet secularism's claim to create a value-free public space is deeply flawed. Consider, for example, recent US Congressional hearings where appointees with conservative Christian views were not treated with neutrality but with overt hostility. Supreme Court nominee Amy Coney Barrett, for instance, was told by Senate Judiciary Committee leader Dianne Feinstein, "The dogma lives loudly within you. And that's of concern when you come to big issues that large numbers of people have fought for for years in this country."[2]

Secularism aims in theory for a value-neutral space, but usually results in hostility towards religion

Secularism might aim at a religiously neutral public space, but it tends towards a public space actively hostile towards religion in general and Christianity in particular, especially as public discourse and policy-making comes to be possessed by the West's new dominant ideology: progressivism.

PROGRESSIVISM SEEKS TO DISMANTLE CHRISTIAN ETHICS AND BELIEFS

Progressivism is a very broad term that encompasses a number of theories, ideologies and beliefs, including liberal views on marriage and sexuality, gender identity and medical ethics. Those who hold to these views tend to oppose religion in general, and Christianity in particular, for what they would see as its outdated views on these matters.

In a secular West it is progressive ideas that proliferate. As Barnabas Fund International Director Patrick Sookhdeo argues, "Behaviours that are contrary to God's laws and Christian values are at first permitted, and then celebrated."[3]

Theologian and historian Carl R Trueman demonstrates that progressive movements seek to overthrow Christian ethics, because such ethics represent "repressive sexual codes" that destroy individual freedom and – crucially – individual identity.[4] Put simply, the progressive view is that individuals can only be free when Christianity is dismantled.

Progressivism thus goes further in its stated aims than secularism alone. In a purely secular model, a street preacher such as David McConnell should be allowed to present the Gospel in public – but because his perspective should not be privileged, others should also be allowed to criticise his beliefs and present their own. Progressivism, however, will denounce McConnell as an oppressor, accusing him of hate speech and calling upon the authorities to lock him away. "Christians who hold conservative views," says Sookhdeo, "are seen as dangerous to society."[5]

Tolerance, argues Trueman, is no longer held to be sufficient. A Christian may hold the personal view, for example, that homosexuality is sinful, but genuinely feel no animosity towards gay people, nor wish to criminalise their behaviour. Yet such a stance is nowhere near good enough for today's progressives. "The politics of sexual identity [has] become so ferocious that any dissent from the latest orthodoxy is greeted with scorn and sometimes legal action."[6]

As such, progressives conclude that Christian ethics and beliefs must not only be pushed into the private sphere, but eliminated altogether. Only in this way can "oppression" be stopped.

INDIVIDUALISM, MATERIALISM AND THE MODERN "SELF"

The definition of oppression has come to be broadened to include simply the fact that there are people who disagree with your beliefs or your behaviour. This is because of the importance that our modern age attaches to identity – particularly sexual orientation or gender – and one's sense of self.

The most common argument in favour of abortion is the bodily autonomy of the individual

Believing, for example, that Christianity is true and other religions or philosophies false isn't just to disagree with another person's belief – in progressive ideology it is to deny their personhood, to consider them less than human.

An example of this is that, increasingly, Christians who oppose abortion are accused of doing so because they do not believe that women are fully human beings. An opinion piece in the *New Republic*, for example, asserted that the anti-abortion activists are in no way concerned about unborn children, but rather treating women as non-persons. Abortion, it is argued, should be freely available because "a woman is a person".[7]

The modern sense of self is derived in large part from the values of the Enlightenment – the eighteenth century turn towards rationalism, materialism and liberalism – and in particular the individualism that dominates Western thought.

The Western commitment to the value of the individual is not necessarily a bad thing. Indeed, in part it is derived from a Christian ethic, particularly the Protestant view of the individual having communion with God through Christ without any earthly mediator. Christians who would wish to return to pre-Enlightenment days would do well to dwell on the denial of individual worth that underpinned both the slave-holding and feudal societies that preceded it.

Yet while as Christians we affirm the value of each individual, regardless of their lifestyle or belief (after all, we are all sinners) individualism itself is not always healthy. The Western view – in both left-wing and right-wing thought – is too often that the individual should be utterly free to do what pleases himself or herself.

In progressive ideology this morally autonomous individual is, as Trueman puts it, the "modern self" – an individual who is oppressed if not allowed to live according to his or her own truth, his or her subjective judgement or feelings about what sort of self to be. "With the focus on self," argues Sookhdeo, "comes the worship of self"[8] – and progressives view any disruption of this self-worship as, again, an act of oppression.

The Bible, however, denies that the subjective "truth" of the self is in fact the truth. A person cannot simply choose his or her own lifestyle and have it acknowledged as good and right. He or she is obligated to obey God and commanded to repent of failing to do so.

The Western worldview is also shaped by a materialism explicit in Marxist theory – and in today's progressivism, derived in part from Marx – as well as implicit in the free-market theories associated with neo-liberalism and libertarianism. This world is all that there is. Without any acknowledgement of a law-giver or source of morality that transcends the created world, what is there to prevent us judging right and wrong by our bodily sensations, or by which course of action helps an individual make the most money?

French political theorist Chantal Delsol explains, "Our Western contemporaries no longer believe in a beyond or in a transcendence. The meaning of life must therefore be found in this life itself, and not above it, where there is nothing."[9] This, she argues, is a reversal of the process by which Christianity replaced paganism as the source of norms and values in the West and a reversal of fortunes in which paganism is once again ascendant.

PERSECUTION SET TO INCREASE

On current trends persecution of the Church in the Western world is set to increase. The Gospel is in permanent opposition to the worldly values of any time and place, but it is clear that there is a significant rupture between the Christian message and the prevailing ethic of the West. "The West," says Sookhdeo, "is not merely passively post-Christian and indifferent to Christianity; it is now actively anti-Christian and profoundly intolerant of the Christian faith."[10]

Secularism, progressivism, radical individualism and atheistic materialism combine to ensure that Christianity will always be cast in the role of hate-filled oppressor, damaging the self-worth and self-esteem of those who – so it is argued – are only trying to live according to their own truth and their own identity.

Christianity is returning to the situation of the early Church in the Roman Empire. Believers will be required to, figuratively speaking, make their sacrifice of incense to the Emperor and the pagan gods, or face the consequences if they do not. Secularism marks the return of the Roman situation in which the state was the arbiter of morality and religion a purely private matter. Progressivism goes further, aiming at the elimination of Christianity and anything else deemed oppressive of the modern self. Christians will be a persecuted minority who either sadly capitulate or remain at odds with the prevailing culture.

CHRISTIANS MUST REMEMBER FIVE THINGS:

1. Respond with grace. Without Christ we are no less sinful and no more discerning than anybody else.
2. Beware taking sides in a Western culture war. The errors of the Left should not push us carelessly to embrace the values of the political Right, or vice-versa.
3. Before we rush to criticise governments and cultures across the world, we need to remember the fallacious nonsense prevalent in own culture.
4. Be prepared to sacrifice possessions, money, safety and even our lives for the cause of Christ – as our brothers and sisters are called to do around the world. Have we forgotten that Christians are called to take up their cross daily (Luke 9:23)? Are we in danger of being conformed to this world (Romans 12:2)?
5. While the West might be slipping away from Christian influence, it is not our home. "Here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come" (Hebrews 13:14, ESV).

The Church in the West, and across the world, may decline or even disappear from view. Yet the Kingdom of Christ will continue, and all the world will be brought under His authority and rule.

Patrick Sookhdeo's The New Civic Religion *(2016) and* The Death of Western Christianity *(2017) are available from our online bookshop www.barnabasfund.org/resources/books*

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2 "Should a Judge's Nomination Be Derailed by Her Faith?", *The Atlantic*, https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/09/catholics-senate-amy-barrett/539124/
3 Patrick Sookhdeo, *The New Civic Religion: Humanism and the Future of Christianity* (McLean, VA: Isaac Publishing, 2016), p.10.
4 Carl R Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism and the Road to Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), p.51.
5 Patrick Sookhdeo, *The Death of Western Christianity: Drinking from the Poisoned Wells of the Cultural Revolution* (McLean, VA: Isaac Publishing, 2017), p.10.
6 Trueman, *Modern Self*, pp.50-1.
7 Laurie Penny, "The Criminalization of Women's Bodies Is All About Conservative Male Power", *The New Republic*, https://newrepublic.com/article/153942/criminalization-womens-bodies-conservative-male-power
8 Sookhdeo, *Death of Western Christianity*, p.25.
9 Chantal Delsol, "The End of Christianity", *Hungarian Conservative*, Vol 1, Issue 3 (2021), para. 27.
10 Sookhdeo, *Death of Western Christianity*, p.99.

The Suffering God

We have already looked at various responses to suffering in the Old Testament book of Job, which teaches us to draw comfort from remembering God's transcendence and infinite wisdom. The Old Testament also teaches that suffering is usually the painful result of sin, whether Satan's activities since the Fall, or a Divine punishment for an individual or community, or as simple cause and effect. It can also be a God-ordained test.

But is God Himself able to suffer? Is He moved by our suffering?

Theologians and philosophers have grappled with this question for thousands of years. The ancient Greeks believed that God could never suffer or change in any way, and this idea profoundly influenced both Jewish and Christian theology from the first century AD for about 1900 years. The general consensus was that, although God was loving, compassionate and actively intervened to relieve suffering, He Himself could feel no pain or sorrow.

Various Biblical passages emphasise that God does not change, for example:

> *You remain the same (Psalm 102:27)*
>
> *"I the Lord do not change ..." (Malachi 3:6)*
>
> *the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows (James 1:17)*

From verses like these, some argued that it is impossible for God to have emotions that come and go in response to situations; therefore He cannot suffer. Others argued that it is impossible for the Creator to depend on those He created for any part of His happiness; therefore He cannot suffer. Although His Word seems to speak of God's "emotions" they would say these are not like human emotions and that God has graciously expressed Himself in terms that are familiar to us although He does not really suffer.

The one exception, for the Christian theologians, was when the Son of God suffered on the cross, not only physical agony but also spiritual agony, as He, though sinless Himself, took on the sins of the world.

The doctrine of Divine suffering

However, from about 1890 onwards, a stream of Christian theologians began to argue for a doctrine of Divine suffering. Some called it the doctrine of the infinite sorrow of God, or the doctrine of tragedy within the Divine life. The Japanese Lutheran theologian Kazoh Kitamori later called it the theology of the pain of God.

The suffering of God is an awesome and holy mystery, a concept that is beyond human words or understanding. But we will now, with reverence, consider it.

Rabbinical insights

Simultaneously, some leading Jewish theologians of the twentieth century were arguing for the same thing. Rabbi Abraham Heschel (two of whose sisters died in Nazi concentration camps) described Jeremiah 2:31-32 as "the voice of God Who felt shunned, pained and offended".[1] Heschel argued for the Divine *pathos*, meaning that God in His nature has the capacity to feel pain and to suffer. Indeed, he sees this as the most important part of His nature.

> *The reality of the divine is sensed as pathos rather than power, and the most exalted idea applied to God is not infinite wisdom, infinite power, but infinite concern.*[2]

Rabbi Jacob Immanuel Schochet also writes of the Divine *pathos*, drawing attention to Scriptural texts such as "He will call on me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble" (Psalm 91:15) or in some translations, "I will be with him in distress."

Twentieth-century Christian theology

Some twentieth-century Christian theologians also argued from the Old Testament that God suffers *with* His people and *because of* His people.

> *In all their distress he [the LORD] too was distressed. (Isaiah 63:9)*

In the following verse we read of how the people's rebellion "grieved his Holy Spirit" (Isaiah 63:10). So there were two separate causes of God's suffering: He was distressed by His people's distress and He was saddened by their rejection of Him when they rebelled.

In Hosea (11:1-9) we read of God apparently grieving over His people's disloyalty to Him, yet His heart recoils from any anger and His compassion "grows warm and tender" (Hosea 11:8 ESV).

The psalmist Asaph also writes of God's grief, caused by His people's behaviour, for example during the Exodus:

> *How often they rebelled against*
> *him in the wilderness*
> *and grieved him in the wasteland!*
> *(Psalm 78:40)*

To this Christian theologians added God's suffering *on behalf of* His people, arguing that in the incarnation the Son of God suffered not only as man but as God. Furthermore, at the crucifixion, not only did the Son suffer the loss of His Father (Mark 15:34), but also the Father suffered the loss of His Son.

Dinsmore, reflecting not only on Old Testament texts (such as Isaiah 53), the incarnation and crucifixion but also on "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8 AV), wrote:

> *Christ, the self-expression of God in time, must have suffered from the foundation of the world, and he will suffer so as long as men sin. Every human affliction is felt by Christ. We endure in our person and fortunes the recoil of our own transgressions; but Christ is really taking upon himself the sins of the world. He is being wounded today for our transgressions; he is being bruised by every one of our iniquities. The chastisement of our peace is upon him, and by his stripes we are healed. In Jesus of Nazareth the Eternal Word felt the pangs of the cross. But that three hours' pain was not a spasm ending in unbroken joy. It was symbolical of a perpetual feeling. What Jesus experienced in spiritual revulsion from sin, and his suffering on its behalf, is a revelation of an unchanging consciousness in God. As the flash of the volcano discloses for a few hours the elemental fires at the earth's centre, so the light on Calvary was the bursting forth through historical conditions of the very nature of the Everlasting. There was a cross in the heart of God before there was one planted on the green hill outside of Jerusalem. And now that the cross of wood has been taken down, the one in the heart of God abides, and it will remain so long as there is one sinful soul for whom to suffer.*[3]

Campbell Morgan, also embracing the thought of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, wrote that without Divine suffering it would have been impossible for sinful humans to be saved.

> *That which we see in the Cross did not begin at the point of the material Cross. The Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world. In the moment in which man sinned against God, God gathered into His own heart of love the issue of that sin, and it is not by the death of a Man, but by the mystery of the passion of God, that He is able to keep His face turned in love toward wandering men, and welcome them as they turn back to Him. Had there been no passion in His heart, no love, no suffering of Deity, no man could ever have returned to Him. Had He been none other than holy and righteous, and had there been no emotion, no tenderness, then He might have vindicated His holiness by the annihilation of the race. To know what God is we listen to some of the verses of the Old Testament. Go back to the beginning of beginnings and hear the voice in the dark, "Adam, where art thou?" My beloved and revered friend, Dr. Henry Weston, said: "That is not the call of a policeman; it is the wail of a Father over a lost child." Hosea, out of his own heart's sorrow, expressed the feeling of God's heart concerning the wandering. "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim?" That is God's attitude toward all sinning men. He has gathered up into His own Being, not by mechanical effort, but by the very necessity of His nature, all the suffering which issues from sin.*
>
> *Men did not know it, and could not understand it; and therefore God came into human form and human life, to the actuality of human suffering, on the green hill and upon the rugged Cross, working out into visibility all the underlying, eternal truth of the passion of His love, that men seeing it, might understand it and put their trust in Him.*[4]

As the century progressed – rocked by genocide, world wars, the Holocaust, atomic bombs, terrible suffering in Stalinist Russia and more – the importance of feeling that God was a fellow-sufferer increased.

Such theologians agree with Heschel that Old Testament texts describing God's emotions should not be sidelined as meaning something different from what they seem to say. It is not that we "make" God

resemble ourselves by projecting our traits on to Him, but that He made us to resemble Himself. Where there are similarities between God and humans, it is because humans are made in the image of God. Human reason is a reflection of God's wisdom. Human desire for justice is a reflection of God's overwhelming concern for justice. When the prophets were moved with feeling, they were reflecting the emotions of God; they were identifying with the Divine *pathos*.

But we should recognise that the Divine *pathos* is ultimately beyond our understanding. God's feelings are a mystery to us in the same way that God's thoughts are a mystery to us. Heschel says that the famous words of Isaiah 55:8-9 about God's thoughts can equally be applied to His *pathos*:

> For My pathos is not your pathos, neither are your ways My ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My pathos than your pathos.[5]

The pain of God

Kazoh Kitamori (1916-1998), likewise, saw great significance in the Old Testament prophets and what they revealed of Divine suffering. Having lived through the suffering of war, including the devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, followed by the crushing shame of defeat (an unbearable humiliation in Japanese culture), Kitamori published his famous book *Theology of the Pain of God* in 1946.

Kitamori derives the phrase "the pain of God" from Jeremiah 31:20. The Hebrew word *hamah*, used many times elsewhere in the Old Testament about human anguish, is in this verse applied to God. Many English translations are along the lines of "My heart yearns for him" but a more literal translation is the AV/KJV's "My bowels are troubled for him" or in modern metaphorical language "My heart is troubled for him" (KJ21). But Kitamori points out that when *hamah* is used of humans its meaning is often much more extreme than "troubled", so Jeremiah 31:20 is better expressed in the Japanese Literary Version which gives "my bowels are in pain". He also commends Luther's German translation in which God says His heart is breaking.[6] Calvin writes of God in this verse attributing to Himself human feelings of "extraordinary pain" and "great sorrow". Kitamori concludes that Jeremiah is speaking in this verse of "the pain of God".[7]

This pain of God, says Kitamori, "reflects his love toward those turning against it". God's love and His pain come together at the cross.[8] Kitamori says that "love rooted in the pain of God" forms "the entire message of the Bible".[9]

The cross, the Trinity and ultimate joy

Also writing from a war-ravaged and defeated country, German theologian Jürgen Moltmann (born 1926) published *The Crucified God* in 1972.[10] In this he argues that

> *a God who cannot suffer is poorer than any man … the one who cannot suffer cannot love either. So he is a loveless being.*[11]

Moltmann, like Kitamori, sees the cross as the decisive event of Divine suffering. He also sees it as essentially related to God's Trinitarian nature. On the cross, the dying Son suffered the agony of abandonment by His Father, and the Father suffered grief for the death of His Son. But they were still united in their love for each other, that is to say, their painful separation was bridged by the Holy Spirit's love, a love which reaches out from the crucifixion to godforsaken humankind.

It appears that for Moltmann the cross is an act of Divine "solidarity with 'the godless and the godforsaken', in which the Son of God actually enters into their situation of godforsakenness".[12] This Divine solidarity with sufferers transforms the character of suffering, for it heals the godforsakenness which is the deepest pain of human suffering.

Also, says Moltmann, the crucifixion cannot be separated from the resurrection and ultimate eschatological joy. The message of Divine suffering is also the message of Divine victory over suffering. God took suffering and death on Himself in order to heal, liberate and give new life.

In the words of Campbell Morgan,

> *The lonely mystery of the pain of God is apart from us, but out of it flows the river, and of that river we drink and live.*[13]

DR PATRICK SOOKHDEO
International Director Barnabas Fund

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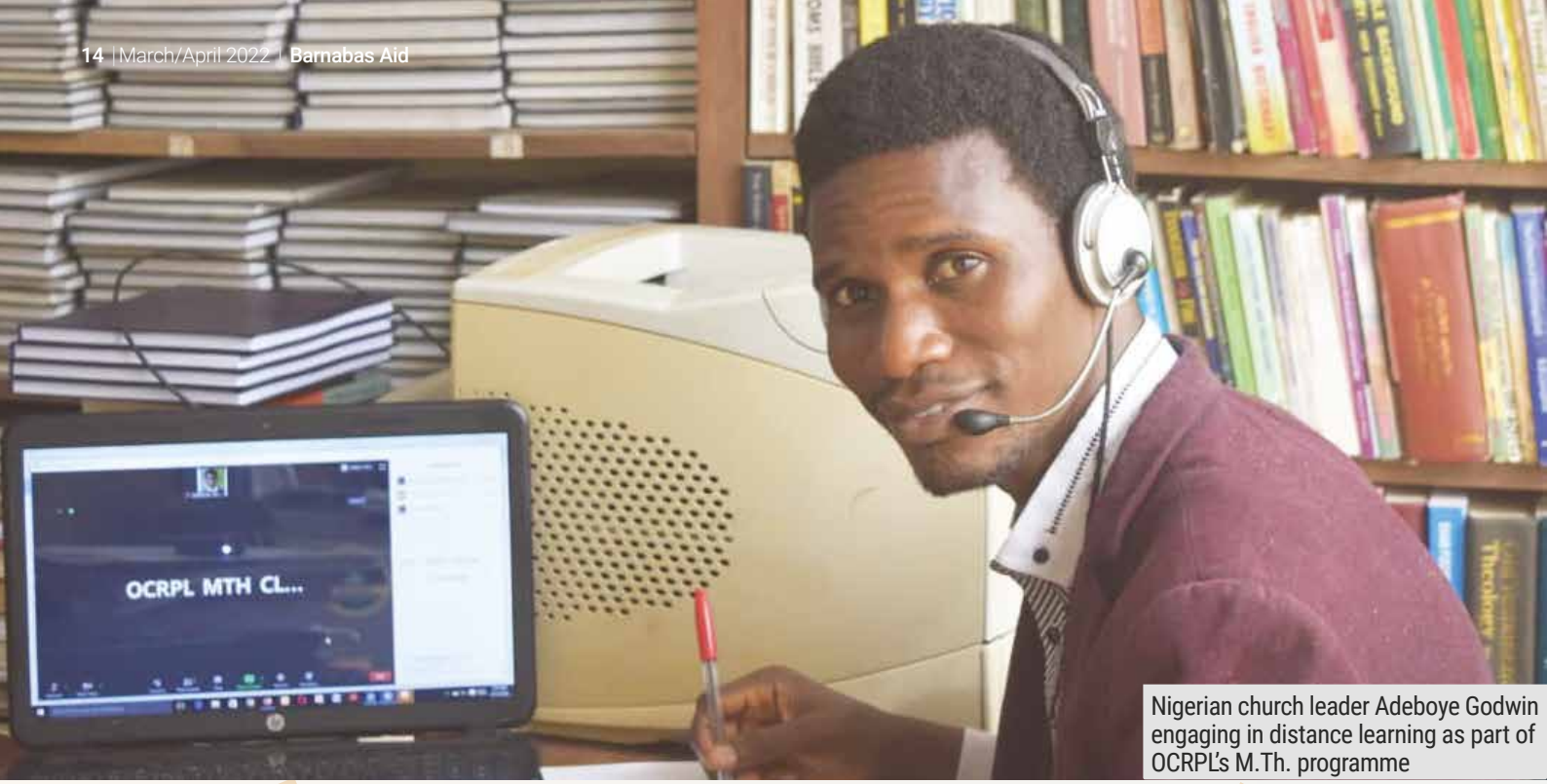
11 Jürgen Moltmann. *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, trans. RA Wilson and John Bowden, SCM Press, 1974, p.222.
12 Richard Bauckham "'Only the Suffering God Can Help'. Divine Passibility in Modern Theology", *Themelios*, vol. 9, issue 3 (April 1984), p.11, summarising Moltmann.
13 Campbell Morgan, p.57.



Nigerian church leader Adeboye Godwin engaging in distance learning as part of OCRPL's M.Th. programme

Building Christian leadership across the world:

Educational opportunities with the Oxford Centre for Religion and Public Life

Christianity continues to defy the expectations of secular Western commentators who predict the decline and fall of our faith. In the midst of suffering, opposition or persecution, the number of churches and believers across Africa, Asia and Latin America rises.

Church growth is so rapid that the development of Church leaders struggles to keep pace. Many pastors and evangelists in the Global South lack formal training. Some new converts find themselves in leadership positions just months after coming to faith. Barnabas has therefore made it a priority to train Church leaders who otherwise might have no opportunity to undertake the studies that would better equip them in their God-given calling.

"As Christianity grows in the Global South, we find ourselves at an unprecedented historic moment," says Professor Patrick Sookhdeo, International Director of Barnabas Fund and Executive Director at the Oxford Centre for Religion and Public Life (OCRPL). "Especially in a context of growing anti-Christian pressure, equipping the Church and her leadership becomes crucial."

OCRPL – also known as Barnabas Academia – is a research and training institution that provides opportunities for Christian leaders to undertake formal education and work towards higher degree qualifications. Three have already gained their doctorates. There are currently 43 masters level and 51 doctoral students from as many as 28 different countries studying with OCRPL.

"Training the trainers"

The building up of Christian leadership is vital in any context, but Christians in different times and locations each face their own unique set of issues. Churches in the Global South, says Dr Prasad Phillips, Deputy Executive Director at OCRPL, "are facing several challenges and need training that is relevant in addressing issues of persecution, suffering, poverty, the resurgence of nationalism and religious fundamentalism, environmentalism, and ethical issues."

Dr Prasad also notes the challenge of Western secularism, which in a globalised world has an impact on Christian communities in Asia, Africa and the Middle East.

Church leaders must therefore be equipped to provide appropriate teaching and guidance to those under their care. "We are training the trainers," explains Dr Prasad, "developing scholars and academics who will train others, building strong and resilient Christian communities."

One key aspect of OCRPL is that students are not uprooted from their local context. Online and part-time learning mean that Christians do not have to leave their countries or even their homes to study, neither do they have to pause their ministries.

Educational opportunities that would not otherwise exist

Barnabas Academia is made up of several sections, including the OCRPL Ph.D. and Master of Theology (M.Th.) programmes. The Ph.D. programme allows researchers to make a significant contribution to the development of theology in their

own contexts, as Canon Dr Chris Sugden, OCRPL's Ph.D. Programme Leader, explains: "All our researchers have a passion to discover Biblically grounded knowledge to enable their churches to engage with their situations faithfully and with integrity."

Some of the topics currently being explored include political marginalisation of Christians, theological and physical conflict between Christians and other religious groups, the impact of the Gospel on low-caste and poor people, the ethics of work, Christian education, women in the Scriptures and domestic violence.

Basilius Kasera from Namibia recently completed his doctoral studies with OCRPL. Basilius – now Dr Basilius – explains that his research "seeks to provide the Church with a way of having dialogue in the public sphere on matters of social justice". This is important in Namibia, where there is "an obvious resistance against the Church having a say in public issues of governance and justice". Dr Basilius' work aims to help the Church be an influence for good, as well as "a faithful and present witness of God's Kingdom".

OCRPL students meet for a seminar at Barnabas Fund's International Headquarters in the UK

The M.Th. programme is geared mainly towards helping Church leaders develop a fuller understanding of Islamic theology and practice, in areas where the Church is under pressure from Islam.

Adeboye Godwin, a recent graduate of OCRPL's M.Th. programme from northern Nigeria, explains, "I have come to realise that any proper Christian response to Islamic mission in Africa must be predicated on sound knowledge of Islam and research, not on emotion and baseless arguments." Islam, according to Adeboye's research, has a better record of engaging the social context and making its message appear relevant to people in Nigeria and across Africa. This shows where the Church must improve.

Adeboye's knowledge of Islam is now being put to use with the development of a guide for African Christians on how to witness to Muslims and disciple Muslim-background believers.

"At no point did I feel that I was doing this all by myself." The structure of the programme "allowed for participating in society while I'm studying, and I didn't have to leave my family behind."

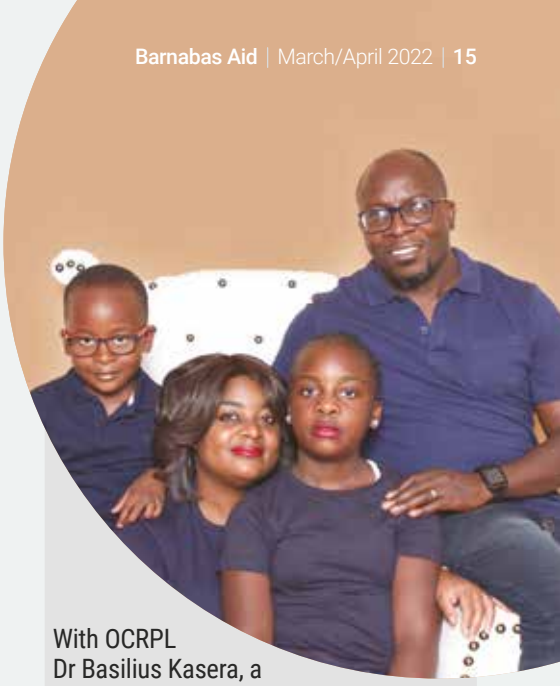
Neither Basilius nor Adeboye would have had the opportunity to undertake their studies without OCRPL. Basilius earlier had to drop out of a Ph.D. programme owing to lack of funds. OCRPL was able to offer him a two-year scholarship.

As well as providing the means, OCRPL also provided the support. "The technical support from OCRPL is one thing I appreciated the most," says Basilius. "At no point did I feel that I was doing this all by myself." The structure of the programme "allowed for participating in society while I'm studying, and I didn't have to leave my family behind".

Adeboye adds, "I have not heard of any opportunity to undertake Islam with academic objectivity and contextual relevance apart from OCRPL."

"Shepherds of their flocks"

OCRPL is also setting up undergraduate-level opportunities for impoverished church leaders across the Global South with The Shepherd's Academy (TSA).



With OCRPL Dr Basilius Kasera, a Namibian church leader, did not have to leave his family behind

The Covid-19 pandemic in particular, explains Dr Prasad, "has meant that theological training is increasingly becoming a luxury. Many Church leaders have lost their incomes and are struggling to feed their families, let alone undertake theological training." The high death toll in some countries – for example India – means that believers are being thrust into positions of leadership long before they feel themselves properly prepared.

TSA currently includes 70 students from seven different countries, each linked to one of five study centres in Cameroon, Nepal, Pakistan, South Sudan and Zambia. God willing the number of students will rise to 250 in June 2022, and to 500 in 2023, with expansion into Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Nigeria and Kenya. Additionally, course material has already been translated into Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, Russian and Tamil.

"Our vision is to train up 10,000 grassroots Christian leaders in the next five years," says Dr Prasad. "Some will join our full bachelors (undergraduate) programme; others will take certificate or diploma courses, or standalone courses, that address the gaps in their ministry training."

Dr Sookhdeo concludes, "It is our sincere prayer that through The Shepherd's Academy we would be able to address the leadership challenge faced by the Church before it becomes a crisis, and that the leadership of the Church will be properly trained in their role to be shepherds of their flocks." ●

Christian children in Zimbabwe drinking ePap porridge transported by Barnabas Fund's food.gives from South Africa

food.gives

... the widening vision

Barnabas Fund's food.gives initiative is starting to make a major difference in the lives of needy Christians in the heart of Africa. Thanks to your donations we are buying and transporting ePap from South Africa to hungry Christians in the needy Matabeleland region of Zimbabwe.

ePap is a maize porridge containing soya protein, vitamins and nutrients that brings health to the malnourished and those trying to survive on maize alone.

The ePap delivery in November 2021 enabled families to receive sufficient provision for the Christmas break. At the time of writing 63 tonnes of ePap out of a planned total of 81 tonnes have been delivered to Zimbabwe, with further deliveries in early 2022 scheduled to cover the period to the end of the lean season when the next harvest is due.

Onward transportation of ePap by donkey in Matabeleland, Zimbabwe

Life-giving nutrients bring healing

The testimonies of healing from the nutrients received are truly remarkable.

A church elder whose eyes were operated on to remove cataracts has also seen huge improvement in his general health and eyesight since he started receiving ePap. One lady's son was unable to walk but she reports that ePap has strengthened his bones so that he can walk now. A single mother of twin boys rejoiced that their "hidden hunger has disappeared" now that they receive the necessary intake of vitamins.

A young lady suffering from chest pains testified to major improvement since taking ePap. Another lady had cracked feet, but since she began receiving ePap the cracks have closed. A disabled lady testified to being able to live a more independent life because of the strength supplied by ePap.

"Thank you to the Church and pastors, the donor and the delivery team for this delicious porridge," said one recipient. "It is so easy to make and tastes great. Without this we would not have enough to eat."

A community health worker added, "We especially want to thank Barnabas Fund for their continued support in Jesus' Name."

On the move

Elsewhere, the first shipment of 18 tonnes of ePap reached Madagascar in January with a second, larger shipment scheduled for February. A container full of dry foodstuffs from the UK arrived in Karachi, Pakistan in the first days of January and further updates on this consignment will follow.

Will you help us release hope and relief to many who do not know when their next meal will be, and cannot provide for their families in such trying circumstances? Please visit www.food.gives to sign up for more boxes, or a starter pack and we will equip you to give packets of rice, lentils, chickpeas and more to help our suffering Church family.

We have received over 1,600 food boxes since launching food.gives in the UK with many waiting to be shipped. So far 146 churches have signed up to give food together as congregations. Nearly 1,000 Barnabas supporters have registered with food.gives. Our Swindon warehouse is constantly being re-stocked with boxes. We are immensely grateful to over 20 volunteers who have sacrificed their time to get involved in packing and transportation, often driving many miles to deliver food boxes directly to us.

Supporters from Penyrheol Free Pentecostal Church, Caerphilly, Wales, make a delivery of dry foodstuffs donated by church members to our warehouse in Swindon, Wiltshire

Eight Iranian Christian converts acquitted but Roksari Kanbari faces jail again

IRAN

An Iranian court in the south-western city of Dezful has acquitted eight Christian converts accused of "propaganda activities in favour of anti-regime groups".

On 30 November, the judge ruled that "religious conversion" is not criminalised in Iran's Islamic Penal Code. Esmaeil Narimanpour, Mohammad Ali Torabi Shangari, Masood Nabi, Alireza Varak-Shah, Hojat Lotfi Khalaf Juy, Mohammad Kayidgap, Mohsen Saadati Zadeh and Alireza Roshanaei Zadeh were found not guilty.

The judge's verdict concluded that while conversion from Islam was against Islamic law (sharia) and would be met with punishment in the afterlife, it was not illegal according to Iranian law.

In a separate case, Roksari Kanbari, a 64-year-old Iranian Christian convert from Islam who has already served time in prison for "propaganda against the regime", has been summoned to answer the same charge again. She was ordered to appear before a prosecutor in her home town of Karaj by 19 January.

Roksari served four months of a one-year sentence before being released in March 2020 as part of measures to halt the spread of Covid.

She is concerned for her 71-year-old husband Fathalli's health, for whom she is the primary carer, in the event of further imprisonment.

Following her release from jail, Roksari was forced to attend "re-education" classes with an Islamic cleric for several weeks, and further contact with any Christians was forbidden.

From left: Iranian Christian converts Mohammad Ali (Davoud) Torabi Shangari, Mohammad Kayidgap, Esmaeil Narimanpour and Alireza Varak-Shah [Image credit: Mohabat News]

Moments before Roksari Kanbari reported to jail in October 2019 she said, "May the persecution and imprisonment that I endure glorify the name of Jesus Christ" [Image credit: Article 18]

Three further students released by kidnappers in Kaduna State, Nigeria

NIGERIA

Kidnappers in Nigeria have released three more students from Bethel Baptist High School, Kaduna State, leaving one student still held after many months in captivity.

Pastor John Joseph Hayab, chairman of the Christian Association of Nigeria in Kaduna State, said one student was freed on 28 December 2021 and the other on 1 January 2022.

Kidnappers also released the school's head boy on 26 November on health grounds. The 17-year-old had previously refused to join other students who were released, stating that he would not come home as long as any one of the 121 pupils abducted by gunmen was still being held.

"That boy is worth celebrating," said Pastor Hayab. "If at his age he can display that kind of leadership, we are so impressed."

The pastor also praised Kaduna police after two of the alleged kidnappers were arrested during a raid on one of the gang's hideouts.

The students were abducted on 5 July 2021 when gunmen stormed the Christian boarding school. Kidnappers freed other students in batches, beginning with the release of 28 pupils on 25 July.

Chinese government imposes clampdown on online religious activities

CHINA

The Chinese government has introduced measures to restrict Christian online activities. On 20 December the State Administration of Religious Affairs announced restrictions that will take effect from 1 March 2022.

It will no longer be possible to conduct religious activities online without government authorisation.

Organisations and individuals wishing to provide religious information online must apply to the provincial Department of Religious Affairs. Sermons, religious ceremonies and training activities may be broadcast online only after obtaining a special licence.

> ***It will no longer be possible to conduct religious activities online without government authorisation.***

Online communications must also not "induce minors to become religious, organise them or force them to participate in religious activities". The measures also ban foreign organisations and individuals or organisations established by foreigners from operating online religious information services within China.

The government's aim is to further promote the "sinicisation" of religion. The clampdown comes amid increasingly restricted access to digital and printed Bibles. In October 2021 Christian software company Olive Tree Bible Software was forced to remove its Bible app from the Apple App Store in China after failing to gain government authorisation.

In summer 2021 several Christian accounts were removed from WeChat – China's main social media platform – while Christian search terms such as "Christ", "Bible" and "Gospel" were also blocked.

Christians in Russia charged with administrative offence as armed officers disrupt conference

RUSSIA

Several dozen armed officers from Russia's Federal Security Service disrupted a Christian conference in Ramenskoye, near Moscow, on 2 December, confining attendees in the conference building for around ten hours.

Officers from the Centre for Combating Extremism burst into the building wearing bulletproof vests and armed with machine guns.

Most attendees were charged with an "administrative offence" – an act considered to violate "the rules and norms" of the Russian Federation – because the Christian ministry that had organised the event had been declared an "undesirable" foreign organisation. Such offences carry a potential fine of 5,000-15,000 roubles (£50-£150; $68-$204; €60-€180).

> ***Officers from the Centre for Combating Extremism burst into the building wearing bulletproof vests and armed with machine guns.***

The officers forced the attendees – including women and children – to lie face down on the floor. Some pastors were kicked while on the floor, despite offering no resistance.

A Barnabas contact who explained that the conference had been organised entirely lawfully described the armed men as "loudly speaking with obscene language".

"We are extremely concerned about this event, as we have not done anything illegal," he added. "We, as citizens of Russia, are interested in the legality of our actions. We pray for and bless Russia – we want to serve for the good of our country."

Abducted Christian missionaries escape from Haiti kidnappers

HAITI

The remaining twelve members of a group of 17 Christian missionaries and children abducted by an armed gang in Haiti escaped from their captors on 15 December.

"At times they felt God prepared a path before them," said Deston Showalter, spokesman for the US-based Christian Aid Ministries.

The escapees, who included a 10-month-old baby, travelled for two hours through "woods and thickets, working through thorns and briars", said Showalter. The baby was wrapped in a blanket to protect her from thorns. Towards morning the group contacted the authorities and were flown back to the US on 16 December.

The missionaries and their driver were abducted by the notorious 400 Mawozo gang on 16 October, shortly after leaving an orphanage where they ministered to children. The Christian group comprised 16 Americans and one Canadian and included five children.

Five members of the group had already been released, on separate occasions in November and December.

Myanmar Army accused of "Christmas massacre" as 35 charred bodies found in Kayah State

MYANMAR

The charred bodies of at least 35 civilians shot by Myanmar Army troops were found in a Kayah State village on Christmas Day.

The remains, including a child, were discovered near the village of Mo So, Hpruso Township, a predominantly Christian area within Buddhist -majority Myanmar.

Analysis of 31 of the bodies suggested that the villagers were shot before being burned on Christmas Eve. At least four bodies were too badly burned for investigations to be conducted.

The bodies were found on 13 burned vehicles, including five motorbikes and several trucks and cars. A funeral for 33 of the victims was held on 29 December.

UK-based charity Save the Children announced that two of its staff were among those shot and burned. A statement from the charity, which has suspended its operations in the region, explained, "The military forced people from their cars, arrested some, killed many and burnt the bodies."

Vehicles set alight near the village of Mo So, Kayah State on Christmas Eve [Image credit: Radio Free Asia]

In Touch

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

This Easter, as we remember Christ's own sufferings and His joyous resurrection, could your church take up an Easter offering for Barnabas Fund, to bring hope and aid to believers who are celebrating in the midst of persecution because of their faith in Christ?

As Paul wrote to Christians in Corinth, whose enthusiasm to help the early Church he held up as an example to others, "Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7). For suffering believers the knowledge that help has come from fellow Christians around the world is a great encouragement.

"We are humbled and thankful that Christians from far away are helping us with so much food," said a mother from Burkina Faso to Barnabas Fund recently. She had received food aid after her husband forced her out of her home, with her children, following her conversion from Islam to Christianity. "He told me to choose between my home and my faith," she said. "Not being able to deny my faith, I decided to be faithful to my Lord."

Brother and sister encourage us all through their generosity and care

"Through the praise of children and infants you have established a stronghold" (Psalm 8:2). The words of the psalm came to mind when we read a message from Beth, a Barnabas supporter from New South Wales in Australia, who wrote to encourage everyone at Barnabas with a story about her nine-year-old son Danny and eleven-year-old daughter Emily.

Danny and Emily's combined gifts of A$20 will buy enough ePap to provide two months of ePap for one child of their age and one younger child (under seven). After two months of daily ePap, the children will have become properly nourished

Beth wrote, "This evening at bedtime I was reading to my son and daughter about the widow of Zarephath who, though she herself had so little, shared sacrificially with the prophet Elijah during a famine (1 Kings 17:7-16). My son noticed that in the picture Bible, the widow's son's shoulder blade protruded unnaturally. He asked about it, and I explained that when kids don't have enough to eat, their bones stick out like that.

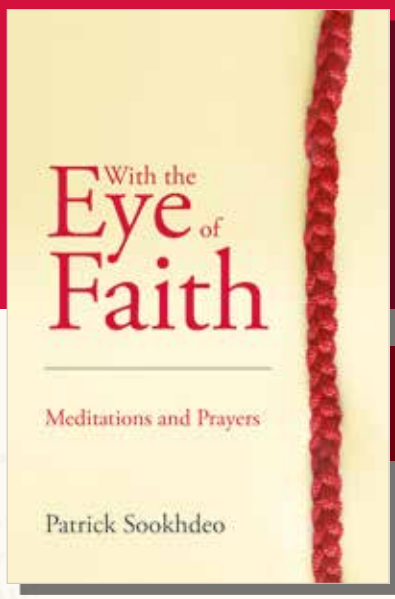
"I said that right now, because of a drought and the pandemic, lots of kids in Madagascar don't have enough to eat and look like that. He was distressed and said, 'I can barely cope if I don't get three meals a day!'

"Then he said, 'Mummy, can I give A$10 (£5.40, US$7.20, €6.40) to help them?' My daughter chimed in, 'I want to give A$10, too!' I told them that we could donate their money to Barnabas Fund, who would give food to the people who need it. Then my son said, 'Mummy, please hurry and finish the story so that you can donate the money *right away*. I don't want them to die!' It brought tears to my eyes."

Thank you to Danny and Emily for your generous gift and to Beth and her husband, who have also made a donation. Your loving care for sick and starving Christians in Madagascar has touched us all at Barnabas. Your gifts will help save lives in the drought-ridden country where Barnabas is providing 234 tonnes of nutritious ePap porridge to 79,735 hungry Christians over two years.

Save the date: Saturday 11 June

Our next Barnabas Fund Supporters' Meeting, entitled **Facing the Future with Confidence and Hope**, will be held on Saturday 11 June 2022, so please save the date in your diary. Details of the time and venue will be announced nearer the day.

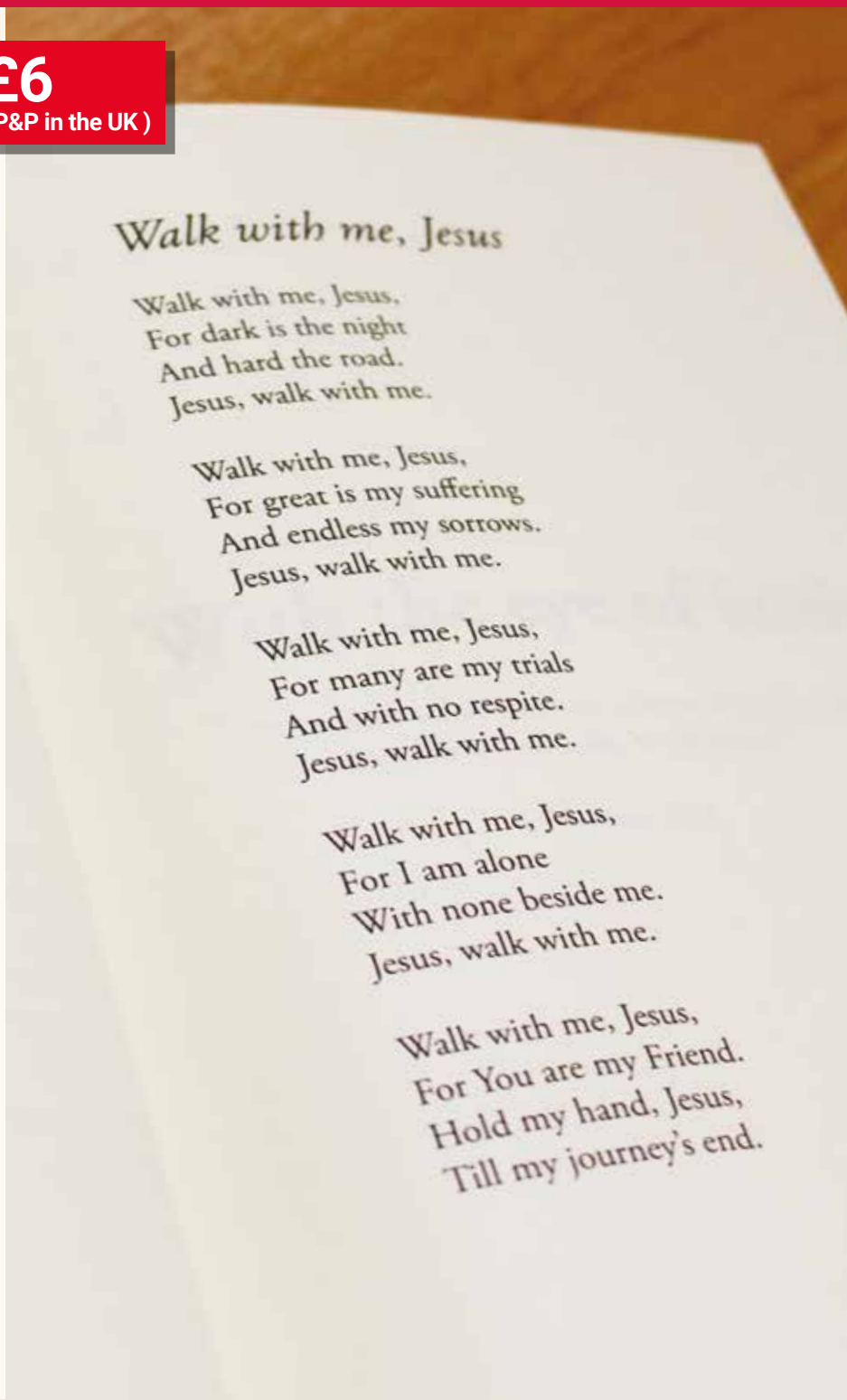


Prepare for Easter

With the Eye of Faith

by Patrick Sookhdeo

£6
(including P&P in the UK)



Many Christians prepare themselves spiritually for some weeks before the celebration of our Lord's resurrection. Patrick Sookhdeo's book *With the Eye of Faith* is a great resource for this period. It takes us into the realm of the spirit, where we encounter God and His love in a variety of situations, whether loneliness, rejection, despair, imminent death or intense and thrilling joy and overwhelming peace.

With 98 Christian meditations and prayers between its covers, there are enough to read one each morning and one each evening from now until Easter Day. Two of the meditations are specifically for Good Friday.

"As I read through the pages I was so refreshed and touched that I felt a choke in my throat as if to cry; the words were so true, sincere ... I wish every believer would have the chance to read it" – a Syrian Presbyterian pastor

"I've already found it a real blessing, particularly the section on Fear" – Rev Rico Tice, Senior Minister (Evangelism), All Souls Church, London

"I was singing all the time the worship song written by Dr Patrick Sookhdeo* Walk with me, Jesus*, particularly when at night I woke up..." – Mrs Azra Imran, Pakistan, describing how she encouraged herself when she was sick with Covid

ISBN 978-1-952450-04-4

To order, please go to **barnabasfund.org/resources/books** or contact your nearest Barnabas Fund office (addresses on inside front cover) or write to **sales@barnabasbooks.org** UK cheques should be made payable to "Barnabas Books".

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