

AFGHANISTAN

A new start in Brazil for
Afghan Christian refugees

FOOD.GIVES

A massive step forward in
our fight against hunger

PAKISTAN

Believers helped through
Barnabas-funded health centre

barnabasaid



Christians
in Pakistan
floods

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
- 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.

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Front Cover: Christian boy surveys flood damage in Pakistan.

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The certainty of Christ in an age of uncertainty

I write this editorial from the UK, just a week after the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth on 8 September. Across this country and the world, much sorrow is being expressed. This outpouring of grief is natural for a greatly loved queen who had reigned for 70 years. Most citizens of the UK can remember no other monarch and many have treasured memories of her. I myself was immensely privileged to have lunch with Her Majesty and the Duke of Edinburgh at Buckingham Palace along with a small group of other guests.

We in the UK are now entering a new age with a new king, and some are wondering what lies ahead. Meanwhile the whole global community is faced with issues affecting the very fundamentals of our existence in a world filled with suffering.

On the same day as the Queen's death, 8 September 2022, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) issued its annual human development report; it was entitled *Uncertain Times, Unsettled Lives*. "We live in a world of worry," wrote Pedro Conceição, Director of the Human Development Report Office in his foreword to the report.¹

There is no doubt that we live in a hurting world, disrupted by many factors. There is conflict between human factions and nations, alarmingly destructive weather extremes, a pandemic that is not going away, and an unprecedented number of refugees and other displaced people, with all these factors affecting the mental health of many.

Uncertainty itself is not new but, says the UNDP report, "its dimensions are taking ominous new forms today. A new 'uncertainty complex' is emerging, never before seen in human history."² The report identifies "three volatile and interacting strands" making up the uncertainty complex:

1. Planetary pressures and inequalities
2. The pursuit of sweeping societal transformations to ease those pressures
3. Widespread polarisation between and within countries

Different cultures respond to distress and grief in different ways, but expressing our feelings audibly is often helpful, whether in words or in sighs, groans and tears.³ In Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, this is put into words when Malcolm speaks to Macduff who has just been informed that his wife and all his children have been slaughtered and evidently stands speechless, trying to take it in:

Give sorrow words. The grief that does not speak whispers the o'er-fraught heart and bids it break.⁴

The Bible gives many examples of verbal and physical grief including Jesus Himself who was so moved by the mourning group at the tomb of Lazarus that He shook with emotion (John 11:33, the literal meaning of the last part of this verse which is translated "troubled" in many English versions). He also wept (v.35). His very spirit was disturbed (v.33). He did not stand aloof like the Stoics, unaffected by the situation. In fact, the exact opposite occurred. He felt emotion keenly. Deep and overwhelming grief expressed itself physically.

As we approach a new year, confronted with seemingly insoluble issues impacting on all of us, we cannot stand aloof from the sufferings of others. Just as so many shared corporately in mourning for our beloved Queen Elizabeth, so now as Christians in a dark and broken world we must share the pain that others experience – the pain of the world in general, but especially that of our Christian brothers and sisters.

The Christmas season begins soon, when we celebrate the Incarnation of Jesus, the Light of the world. Let us rejoice that "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:5). He is Christ Jesus our hope (1 Timothy 1:1). He is the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6) who, in our world of worry, says to us, "Do not let your hearts be troubled" (John 14:1).

PATRICK SOOKHDEO

International Director

¹ *Uncertain Times, Unsettled Lives: Shaping our Future in a Transforming World*, UNDP Human Development Report 2021/22, New York, United Nations Development Programme, 2022, p.iv.

² *Uncertain Times, Unsettled Lives*, p.25.

³ I have written more about wordless lamenting in chapter 6 of *The Mystery of Suffering*. Further details on the back cover of this magazine.

⁴ Act IV, scene 3, line 208. The approximate meaning in modern English is: "Put your sorrow into words. The grief you keep inside whispers to your overstressed heart and tells it to break."

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\$111,525



Solar panels fitted on Christian ministry buildings in Lebanon

The electricity supply in Lebanon is subject to frequent cuts as the country's desperate economic crisis intensifies. Generators can keep the electricity flowing, but the cost of diesel to run them is hugely expensive, especially when inflation is spiralling.

Barnabas is funding the cost of installing solar panels on church-run buildings, including a Christian school and a care home for the elderly. The panels will provide a reliable source of electricity at a much reduced price over the long term.



Barnabas-funded solar panels ensure a regular supply of electricity to this Christian elderly care home in Lebanon

Project reference: PRI581

\$79,472
in phase 1



Hungry Christians in drought-hit Kenya thank God for food aid

2,561 hungry Christian households in drought-hit northern Kenya have each received 10kg of flour, 5kg of beans and two litres of cooking oil in phase 1 of a Barnabas-funded aid programme. The majority are converts from Islam. They are often attacked by the region's Muslim majority, and are excluded from receiving aid distributed by the authorities.

A Kenyan Christian missionary said people were joyful as the food was distributed and he heard them whispering in their mother tongue, "God has remembered us." A thankful pastor told Barnabas, "We have nothing to give you, but we ask God to shower you with grace."



Christian women receive their allocation of Barnabas-funded cooking oil

Project reference: 25-359
(Famine Victims in Horn of Africa and Northern Kenya)

\$15,360



Families displaced by conflict in Ethiopia given food and soap

Barnabas provided food and soap for more than 598 families (1,654 individuals) displaced by conflict in Ethiopia's northern Tigray region, where the population is almost entirely Christian.

Each family sheltering in a camp for internally displaced people received 12kg of wheat flour, two litres of cooking oil and two bars of soap. Yeschi, who fled to the camp with her child, said the food gift was "a big surprise of joy" because resources in the camp are scarce.



Yeschi and her child were overjoyed with their gift from Barnabas

Project reference: 13-659
(Victims of Violence in Ethiopia)

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

\$24,769
to cover 54% of the trauma counselling and therapy costs for a year



Eritrean Christian mothers persecuted for faith given trauma therapy

Christian women seeking asylum in the Holy Land are being helped by Barnabas to overcome the trauma of fleeing persecution in their homeland. The women, mainly from Eritrea, endured dangerous journeys to find refuge with their children, having become separated from their husbands.

Women's group sessions are run by a social worker and enhanced by the traditional Eritrean "Bunah" coffee ceremony. The women are also given therapy individually and in groups of two. Mothers and children take part in weekly therapy together with a clinical psychologist and occupational therapist guiding them.



Barnabas-funded therapy sessions help traumatised refugee mothers and their children

Project reference: 12-954 (Eritrean Christian refugees)

\$40,739
covering 19% of the college running costs for a year



Funding for training of new church leaders in Sudan

Barnabas is helping to train church leaders in Sudan where Christians have for many decades been persecuted by the Muslim majority.

A Bible college part-funded by Barnabas provides tuition for almost 300 students at three campuses, preparing them for ministry. Enrolment numbers have exceeded forecasts for its distance learning programmes. The monthly intensive training sessions it organises for pastors and church leaders have expanded to seven cities, drawing an overall monthly attendance of around 275.



Distance-learning students join together for an open air class

Project reference: PR1386

\$13,173



Kyrgyz mother sheds tears of happiness to receive your gifts

Umida, a Christian mother in Kyrgyzstan, wept with joy when she received food from Barnabas. Now she would have a little money left to equip her two children for the school year ahead. Her son is disabled, and requires expensive heart surgery.

A total of 134 of the poorest families (471 people) from 14 churches were given three months' food at a very needy time of year. The majority are converts from Islam who have been abandoned by their relatives because of their decision to follow Christ.



Umida's wages as a school caretaker barely cover her family's basic needs

Project reference: PR1506 (Winter food for persecuted converts in Central Asia)



“Praise God for all He has done through Barnabas”

Vangai and her four children are starting a new chapter of their lives in Brazil

Afghan Christians thank the Lord for safe refuge in Brazil where they can worship freely

“I am so happy to be here,” said “Vangai”, an Afghan Christian mother who, with the help of Barnabas Aid, escaped almost certain death in her homeland to resettle in a safe country, Brazil. “Everyone is so kind at church and they look after us so well.

“They are like our brothers and sisters and it’s wonderful to worship the Lord with them. I don’t feel alone and I am thankful for all the comfort I have received here.”

The Taliban government in Afghanistan rules by sharia (Islamic law), which demands death for apostates from Islam. It means

first-generation Christian converts like Vangai would be killed for their faith.

On seizing control of the country in July 2021, the Taliban proclaimed that Christians must reconvert to Islam, leave the country, or be killed.

Churches provide for refugee families’ needs

Barnabas has worked tirelessly to help Afghan Christians and their children, who were forced to hide their faith from the authorities, their neighbours and even members of their own family.

We are supporting our brothers and sisters who remain in Afghanistan,

as well as those who have escaped overland to neighbouring countries, where they still face anti-Christian hostility and violence.

Through our Operation Safe Havens, we have flown ten Christian families and some individuals to Brazil where they can resettle permanently and rebuild their shattered lives. God willing, we will fly a second group of Afghan Christians to Brazil in December.

With funding from Barnabas, Brazilian churches are providing the Afghan Christian refugees with homes and food, they are helping adults find work and children settle in school. They have also organised language lessons in Portuguese for the refugees.



Larmina and her husband Isar arrive at the airport in Brazil with their children, aged 18 months to 18, and Larmina's elderly mother

Family tell of escape from Taliban

"Praise God for all that He has done in our lives through Barnabas," says "Larmina".

She and her husband "Isar", a taxi driver, were among the first to arrive in Brazil along with their four children and Larmina's elderly mother.

Larmina recalls how she was led to follow Christ eight years ago. "Jesus appeared to me in a dream and called me by the hand," she says. "When I woke up I went to find out who Jesus was and I fell in love with Him.

"With my heart burning for Jesus, I started to evangelise my family and everyone was reached by Jesus."

After the Taliban swept to power, Larmina fled with her children and elderly mother to a neighbouring country. But once there she and her teenage son and daughter were beaten by local Muslims. "It was a period of great suffering," she said.

Worse was to come. Isar, who had stayed behind in Afghanistan to help other Christians leave, was captured by the Taliban. For many days the family prayed and trusted in the Lord. Finally they heard that through a miraculous act of God Isar had escaped and was on his way to be with them.

Now the family are making their home in Brazil, and thank the Lord that they are able to worship openly, free from threat.

Praise God for His protection

Samim, a pharmacist from Kabul, was introduced to Jesus when he read a Christian page on Facebook. Secretly he began to study the Bible and watch worship services online.

When the Taliban came to power, Samim crossed into a neighbouring country where he was supported by Barnabas. He began to help us find homes for refugees, arrange the documentation for them to travel to a safe country, and risked arrest by going to the Afghan border to help Christians cross.

"God protected me so much," he said. "I am very happy He used me for His service."

"I am so grateful for my God who provided everything for me here"

Now Samim is beginning a new chapter of his life in Brazil. "I am so grateful for my God who provided everything for me here – I can worship God, I can pray, I can be with my God."

Thanks to Brazilian government

Dr Patrick Sookhdeo, International Director of Barnabas, says, "We are deeply grateful to the Brazilian government, and thankful to God, for providing a safe refuge for Afghan Christians. Families in grave danger in their home country are now able to live as Christians and worship freely for the first time, and rebuild their shattered lives."

Barnabas Aid's Operation Safe Havens has helped many Christians over the years.

We have rescued more than 8,000 South Sudanese Christians, by plane and bus, who needed to escape from Islamic northern Sudan. We have also rescued over 1,700 Syrian and Iraqi Christians, helping them to settle in safe Western countries.

Christian convert scarred in acid attack gives thanks to Jesus

Vangai, a Christian convert from Islam, fled Afghanistan when she heard that the Taliban were planning to release prisoners from jail, and she feared her Muslim husband would be among them.

Vangai was sold in marriage at the age of nine to her father's cousin, a man in his 50s. She was only 12 when she became pregnant with the first of her four children, a daughter.

Her husband regularly beat her or hurt her with a knife during their marriage, abuse that culminated in him throwing acid in her face, a terrible attack for which he was jailed.

Imagine his fury if, released from prison, he found out that while Vangai recovered from her injuries, which left her scarred and without the use of her right eye, she had discovered the loving, healing power of Jesus, and become a Christian?

Vangai escaped Afghanistan with her daughter, three sons, mother, brother and sister, who each decided to follow Christ after she shared her faith with them. With the help of Barnabas, they are now living in Brazil.

Vangai learned about Jesus for the first time from a Christian missionary who arranged for her to receive plastic surgery. "I understood that Jesus Christ was the real God," she told us.

"Once I had known about Jesus there was nothing else more important than Him."

She added, "For me having a relationship with God is much more important than getting my face back.

"Jesus is my best friend and I am so happy that He is with me in every difficulty. When I die I want Him to tell me that He is satisfied with me as a true believer."

// Collect all

Food dehydration machine accelerates the fight against global hunger

A food dehydration machine owned and operated in partnership with a Pennsylvania-based Christian charity will allow food.gives to prepare surplus and unused food from the United States for delivery to our hungry brothers and sisters around the world. For the first time Barnabas Aid's food.gives programme has moved into food production, dramatically boosting our ability to provide for our suffering Christian family.

When God warned the king of Egypt in a dream interpreted by Joseph that seven years of plenty would be followed by seven years of famine, He also granted wisdom to Joseph to know how to respond.

“Collect all the food of these good years that are coming,” said Joseph, “to be used during the seven years of famine that will come upon Egypt, so that the country may not be ruined by the famine” (Genesis 41:35-6).

We are not guaranteed seven years of plenty in which to prepare, but in God's gracious providence the Western world currently has food to spare for those now suffering hunger and food scarcity in Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

The mission of food.gives is to collect this food, and to send it to hungry Christians, so that they will not be “ruined by the famine”. That mission has now received a

dramatic boost with the introduction of a dehydration machine.

Dehydration machine a giant stride forward

The dehydration machine – scheduled to go into operation in December 2022, God willing – represents a giant stride forward for food.gives and Barnabas Aid's fight against hunger and malnutrition.

The machine – owned and operated in partnership with Blessings of Hope, a Christian charity based in Pennsylvania, USA – will allow us to take surplus and unused food from wholesalers and supermarkets in the US and prepare it for delivery to our hungry and suffering brothers and sisters in lands of persecution and poverty.

For the first time, Barnabas is moving into food production, dramatically boosting our ability to meet the needs of our international Christian family.

“This is an exciting opportunity,” said CEO of Barnabas Aid USA, Jeremy Frith. “This partnership and the purchase of the dehydration machine is a significant step up in our food.gives programme and our long-term mission to help impoverished believers wherever they need our support.”

It is estimated that the machine can produce a minimum of 525 tonnes of dried food each year. The food processing will be carried out with the help of more than 1,000 volunteers, all of whom will be devoting hours to food production and serving Christ and His Church.

“The purchase of the dehydration machine is a significant step up in our food.gives programme”

“We are grateful for God's continued blessing and provision,” said Barnabas Aid International Director Dr Patrick Sookhdeo. “Now we can do even more to give practical help to the suffering brothers and sisters of Christ.”

Providing a lifeline by minimising waste

Our partners will collect unwanted fresh produce from across Pennsylvania and beyond. This

the food

The Blessings of Hope food warehouse in Pennsylvania, USA. Our food dehydration machine operated in partnership with Blessings of Hope will allow unused food from the United States to be delivered to our brothers and sisters in many lands

includes misshapen fruit and vegetables rejected by supermarkets, unsold items nearing their use-by-date – perfectly edible, nutritious food that would otherwise end up as cattle feed or in the rubbish dump.

The food will then be dehydrated, allowing it to be transported by Barnabas Aid from the US to locations all over the world.

This food will become a lifeline for Christians who would otherwise go hungry. Dried fruit will provide a source of much-needed vitamins. Dried vegetables can be rehydrated or turned into a soup mix that will sustain and nourish.

Because water is needed to rehydrate some of the dried food, such as the vegetable soup mix, Barnabas will also provide water-purifying units to needy Christian communities who lack safe drinking water.

“Sharing the love of Jesus”

The mission of Blessings of Hope is, “Sharing the love of Jesus while accomplishing zero food waste and erasing hunger.” Since 2006 the charity has been working towards achieving this

in Pennsylvania, but wanted to expand its reach beyond the United States.

In early 2022, Jeremy Frith emailed Blessings of Hope to see if they would be interested in partnering with our food.gives initiative to send food to help suffering Christians.

Just as Jeremy was finishing writing the email, the Executive Director of the charity was praying that God would provide a way to do just that. When he returned to his desk, he read Jeremy’s email and marvelled at God’s timely answer to his prayer.

“What an amazing God we serve”

“What clear direction. What providential provision,” said Jeremy. “What an amazing God we serve.”

Now we can do more

Through food.gives – and its sister programme, medical.gives – Barnabas Aid has already reached a million households worldwide with more than 1,000 tonnes of direct aid. Now we can do even more.

Food that would go to waste can now save lives. More than 500 tonnes of

dried fruit and vegetables annually will be added to the tonnes of food we are already channelling to our hungry brothers and sisters. Even more Christians around the world can be nourished and sustained.

The famine is “severe everywhere” (Genesis 41:57), but the Lord’s provision continues. Give thanks to Him and pray that He will bless our continued efforts to serve His people.



Christians in Madagascar are among those suffering terrible hunger. Dried food prepared using our dehydration machine will become a lifeline for desperate believers around the world

You can deliver the gift of health through medical.gives

Impoverished Christians in many parts of the world struggle without the kind of healthcare provision that most in the developed world take for granted.

Some Christians struggle without glasses or hearing aids. Elderly believers may be without much-needed walking sticks, zimmer frames or wheelchairs. Christian clinics or medical centres may be without equipment such as stethoscopes or blood pressure machines, vital for conducting basic health check-ups.

To support our brothers and sisters, Barnabas Aid has launched *medical.gives*, a ministry that aims to transport medical equipment from Western countries to lands of great need and scarcity.

Medical equipment transported to where it is needed most

Through *medical.gives* we are shipping a donation of 1,176 manual wheelchairs in four 40 foot containers directly into Ukraine. This comes in response to statements from the Ukrainian government and the reports of our Christian partners in the country, who have seen an increase in war-wounded patients.

The wheelchairs will be especially valuable to any who have lost limbs in shelling, or suffered wounds and burns that have resulted in amputation.

As well as the wheelchairs, further donations of hospital equipment – including around 200 defibrillators

– from a Western government will be shipped to Ukraine in the coming months.

We have also sent around 50 million pieces of life-saving personal protective equipment (PPE), donated by the Irish government and worth around \$44 million, to Christian hospitals in east and southern Africa (see *Barnabas Aid* September/October 2022, p.21). At the time of writing, distribution of the PPE is ongoing in Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe, and is about to commence in Kenya, while the equipment will shortly reach Christian medical workers in Uganda.

Expanding the *medical.gives* ministry

Our hope and plan is to expand *medical.gives*, allowing you to donate surplus medical items that can be a real blessing to your brothers and sisters around the world.

Perhaps you can donate a pair of reading glasses that are no longer needed? Do you own a walking stick, a zimmer frame or a wheelchair that could be of use to somebody else? Perhaps you even have medical equipment such as a stethoscope or a blood pressure machine that could assist a Christian doctor or nurse to carry out examinations.

At a time when our economy is struggling, and many of us are facing challenges in our personal finances, *medical.gives* is one way that you can still help provide for your suffering Christian family.



Christian medical workers in Zimbabwe are among those who have received much-needed PPE and other equipment through *Barnabas Aid's* *medical.gives* programme

Could you donate any of the following?

- Crutches or a walking frame
- A wheelchair
- Reading glasses
- A blood pressure machine (sphygmomanometer)
- Test strips or glucose monitors for those with diabetes
- A stethoscope

Call 1300 365 799 or email bfaustralia@barnabasaid.org for information about how to make your donation.

* Please ensure when making your donation that the item does not belong to the health service, Red Cross or a medical company

You can also donate financially to support the *medical.gives* shipping costs.

WHY ARE CHRISTIANS PERSECUTED IN ...



Bishop Dr Samuel Ajayi Crowther

IN June 2022 the world's attention was briefly focused on Nigeria, as gunmen – alleged to belong to Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) – attacked a church in Ondo State, killing dozens of Christians. The official death toll stands at 40, though by some estimates the true number of fatalities could be higher than 50.

The massacre led to an international outcry, with the United Nations condemning “in the strongest terms the heinous attack”.

Yet while this attack was certainly horrifying, and unusual in an area as far south as Ondo, it was no isolated incident. In Nigeria's Middle Belt violence against Christians is sadly common. In the same month as the Ondo atrocity, at least 35 Christians were killed in several attacks across Kaduna State, while 37 were massacred in a single Sunday morning attack in Benue State.

“In our country,” lamented a Kaduna church leader, “death has become a daily meal.” Grim predictions less than two years ago of “a Christian genocide” are proving distressingly prescient.

Islamist extremists operate across borders in this increasingly fractious region. Christians have also faced violent repression from jihadists in the Western Sahel¹ nations of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. West Africa is a key battleground in the stated aim of Islamic State (IS – also known as ISIS, ISIL, Daesh) of Islamising the entire African continent.

... NIGERIA AND THE WEST AFRICAN SAHEL?

THE GROWTH OF CHRISTIANITY

Christianity has been present in North Africa (concentrated in Egypt) and north-eastern Africa (centred on the Kingdom of Ethiopia) since the earliest centuries of the Christian era. Many early church leaders were African, including the great theologians Athanasius (from Alexandria in Egypt) and Augustine (of Hippo Regius in modern-day Algeria).

It was not, however, until the fifteenth century that Christianity began to establish a major presence in West Africa after missionaries from Europe arrived in 1420.

A key figure was Samuel Crowther, also known by his given name of Ajayi, who was born in what is now Oyo State, Nigeria, in around 1809. A Christian convert, he was called to serve on a mission with the British Church Missionary Society in what is now the Nigerian Middle Belt in 1841. He was subsequently ordained and began a fresh mission in what is now south-western Nigeria in 1843. Crowther translated the Bible and Book of Common Prayer into his mother tongue of Yoruba. In 1864 he was consecrated as Bishop of West Africa.

Missionary activity eventually yielded much fruit in southern Nigeria, with many converts among those who had previously followed various animist spiritual practices (now referred to as African traditional religions).

In the mid-twentieth century, anti-colonial nationalists in Africa came to view evangelism and missionary activities conducted by Europeans as a form of colonial subjugation. Such accusations were not necessarily fair. The British colonial administration in Nigeria, for example, was often not supportive of missionary activities; missionaries were prevented from evangelising the North.

European missionaries sought to guide the Nigerian Church in becoming self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating. By the time Nigeria gained independence in 1960 the Church was unmistakably Nigerian, and southern Nigeria almost completely Christian.

Nevertheless, Islamist extremists, campaigners for the preservation of African traditional religions and anti-colonialists all argue that Christianity is a Western import, a hangover from the days of imperialism and subjugation. Christians can therefore find themselves the objects of distrust and suspicion for their supposed links to the West.

ISLAM IN WEST AFRICA

Throughout the period of Christian missionary work and until today, northern Nigeria has remained steadfastly Islamic. The same is true of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, all of which were part of the French Empire from the late-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century. An estimated 30% of the population of Burkina Faso is Christian, and only 2% of the population of Mali; in Niger and northern Nigeria the figure may be less than 1%.

Islam has had a presence in the region since the eighth century, linked to trade between the Muslim-

majority Maghreb (Mauritania, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya) and sub-Saharan West Africa. In the early thirteenth century, the Mali Empire (including modern-day Senegal, Guinea, and parts of Mauritania as well as Mali) recognised Islam as its state religion. Muslim practices were often combined with traditional African ones.

The nineteenth century marked a shift away from this syncretistic combination. This move was exemplified by the jihad fought by Usman dan Fodio, an Islamic scholar from the Muslim-majority Fulani ethnic group, lasting from 1804 to 1808. Dan Fodio overthrew the tribal rulers of the Hausa ethnic group and replaced them with Fulani emirs who ruled over an Islamic state, the Sokoto Caliphate. This caliphate covered most of modern-day northern Nigeria, as well as large sections of what is now Niger and Cameroon.



A young believer in Mali receives a French-language children's Bible funded by Barnabas Aid. Mali – along with Burkina Faso, Niger and northern Nigeria – has retained an Islamic culture for many centuries

Lord Lugard, appointed High Commissioner of British Northern Nigeria in 1900, opted to rule through the existing Islamic structures of governance – the Sokoto emirs – as a means of avoiding conflict, even while southern Nigeria remained under direct British rule. The Islamic character of northern Nigeria was thereby preserved.

TENSION AND PERSECUTION

This Islamic character is the main source of anti-Christian persecution in Nigeria. Many violent attacks on Christians take place in the Middle Belt, where Christians and Muslims are roughly equal in number. These tensions can be traced back to the British plan to grant Nigeria independence as a single entity, realising Lugard's vision of a "forced union of marriage" between North and South.

The Muslim North was at first opposed to Nigerian independence, fearing the establishment of a Christian nation. In turn northern Christians were concerned about attempts by Muslim leaders to assert the Islamic character of the North in response. These concerns seemed to be realised when Ahmadu Bello, Premier of Northern Nigeria (1954-66), styled himself Apostle of Islam and declared his aim to be the conversion of non-Muslims.

Muslim fears of Christian dominance were

not realised – politics came to be dominated by northern Islam, illustrated by Nigeria taking up full membership of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (then known as the Organisation of the Islamic Conference) in 1986. Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger are also members.

In 1999 the governor of Zamfara State, Ahmad Sani Yerima, announced the implementation of sharia (Islamic law). By the end of 2000, 11 other states in the North had also adopted sharia. In some states sharia punishments include flogging or amputation – or even the death penalty, for example in cases of blasphemy. In theory sharia is only supposed to apply to the Muslim population, but the Christian minority often feel compelled to comply.

These issues remain divisive in Nigerian politics. Presidential candidates are expected to choose a vice-presidential running mate from the other religious community; however, All Progressive Congress candidate for the 2023 presidential election Bola Tinubu, a Muslim, announced earlier this year Kashim Shettima, another Muslim, as his running mate. The so-called Muslim-Muslim ticket has sent a shockwave through Nigerian politics, and was denounced by the Christian Association of Nigeria as “a declaration of war”.

ISLAMIST EXTREMISM

In May 2022 a Christian student in Sokoto State, Deborah Samuel, was stoned to death by a mob of Muslim extremists after being accused of making “derogatory comments” about Muhammad, the prophet of Islam, in a WhatsApp message. The attackers then set her body on fire. When two arrests were made in connection with the murder, Muslims rioted, attacking church buildings.

Community violence against Christians in northern and Middle Belt states is a result of Islam’s cultural sway. In these regions schools and universities are dominated by Islam, employment opportunities for non-Muslims are limited, and hate preachers on street corners and in market places denounce Christians as infidels who threaten Islam. Christian girls are abducted and forced to convert to Islam. The authorities do little.

“There are no rights for Christians in the North,” says a Barnabas contact in Nigeria. Some Christians adopt Muslim names in order to try to survive in an Islamic society. Others feel they have no choice but to leave.

JIHADI TERRORISM

Islamism has deep roots in West Africa. In the 1970s the Muslim World League – funded by Saudi Arabia – poured money into northern Nigeria, distributing Islamist literature, setting up Islamic schools and offering scholarships for religious universities in Saudi Arabia itself. This campaign led in 1978 to the founding of the Izala Society (the Society of Removal of Innovation and Re-establishment of the Sunnah).²

The Izala movement was committed to Wahhabism – a Saudi ideology that seeks a “purer” form of Islam.

It remains virtually impossible to achieve rank or office in northern Nigeria without links to Izala. A key figure in the rise of Izala was Abubakar Mahmud Gumi, who argued (in line with sharia) that Muslims should never accept the rule of a non-Muslim – an argument that helped to persuade the northern states to adopt sharia after a Christian, Olusegun Obasanjo, became president in 1999.

Another key figure in Izala was Ahmed Idris Nasreddin, a highly successful Eritrean-born businessman based in Jos, Plateau State, who with the help of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood channelled funds from Nigeria to various Islamist causes, including to Osama Bin Laden and Al Qaeda before and after 9/11.



Aid funded by Barnabas is distributed to the victims of Islamist violence in Nigeria’s Plateau State

The Izala movement provided the ideological and financial basis for the rise of Boko Haram,³ the Islamist militant group that originated in Maiduguri, north-east Nigeria. Boko Haram gained international attention after the abduction of more than 270 schoolgirls from Chibok, Borno State, in 2014.

Boko Haram pledged allegiance to IS in 2015, but split the following year with one section forming ISWAP and a separate Boko Haram movement remaining independent of IS. After the death of Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau in June 2021, however, reports indicated that some Boko Haram fighters were giving their loyalty (*baya*) to IS.

Terrorist groups are also active in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, including Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Jama’a Nusrat al Islam wa al Muslimeen⁴ (JNIM) and Islamic State of the Greater Sahara (ISGS). All three have roots in the Algerian Salafist Group for Call and Combat, and have benefited from the illegal traffic of weapons and explosives looted from Libya since the fall of Muammar Gaddafi in 2011.

Borders between countries in this region are porous, and little respected by the jihadists. Boko Haram, for example, has issued threats and launched violent attacks against Christians in Niger, Cameroon and Chad from its stronghold in north-eastern Nigeria.

Islamist groups hold a great deal of authority in the western Sahel owing to the weakness of national governments. AQIM, for example, has in the recent

past controlled areas of northern Mali, including in 2012-13 the city of Timbuktu. Mali is at increased risk of Islamist insurgency since the withdrawal of French soldiers in August 2022.

FULANI EXTREMISM

Many raids and violent attacks against Christians in the Nigerian Middle Belt are conducted by Fulani extremists. The Fulani are a Muslim-majority tribal group, the majority of whom live in West Africa – there are an estimated 13 million Fulani in Nigeria, plus another four million across Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. The Sokoto Caliphate was ruled by the Fulani.

While not all Fulani Muslims are extremist, there are many Fulani Islamist gangs operating in northern and Middle Belt Nigeria. These are often herdsmen, who seek land for their cattle, and launch attacks against Christian farming communities in rural areas of states such as Kaduna and Plateau. The dynamics of this herder-farmer conflict have led to some observers – including political figures in Nigeria and in the West – to dismiss the situation as simply a dispute over land.

This, however, fails to take into account that attacks are launched against Christian communities, seldom if ever Muslim ones. It overlooks that the extremists often strike church services and meetings – Christian villagers in the Kajuru Local Government Area of Kaduna State, for example, moved their Sunday service to 7am for safety reasons, only to find that gunmen began their armed assault a few minutes after 7am. The farmer-herder narrative also ignores the ideological and logistical links that Fulani extremists have with IS and Boko Haram, as well as Islamist movements further afield.

In March 2022 a report – co-authored by Baroness Cox, a Barnabas Aid patron – concluded that “the growth of Islamist extremism across the Sahel” is behind the increase in Fulani extremism.

AN ENCOURAGEMENT AND AN EXAMPLE

In a recent edition of its official publication *al-Naba*, IS called for Muslims from around the world to migrate to African countries as part of a campaign to Islamise the continent. In a poster campaign IS boasted of killing 190 Christians and burning down 13 church buildings across the continent in June and July 2022, as part of what they termed their “Harvest of African Christians”.

Violence against Christians in Nigeria has increased rapidly – since 2015 an estimated 10,000 believers

have been killed by Islamists. Islamist violence is also increasing in the Sahel, with 2022 set to be the



A Christian in Burkina Faso gives thanks for Barnabas-funded aid that was distributed to 152 extra-vulnerable believers threatened by Islamist violence

deadliest year on record in both Burkina Faso and Mali. The withdrawal of French troops from Mali and the Muslim-Muslim ticket in Nigeria threaten to further destabilise this vast region, creating a vacuum for Islamism to flourish and thrive.

Christianity is by far the strongest in southern Nigeria, but here churches can fall under the influence of the so-called prosperity gospel, a message of material health and wealth that leaves believers ill-prepared for suffering and focused on seeking individual status and success. Furthermore, the prosperity gospel seems to confirm in the minds of critics the link between Christianity and the accumulative, individualistic West.

Yet the churches of Nigeria and the western Sahel are filled with believers who have much to teach the West about remaining faithful through suffering, responding wisely to adverse circumstances, and praising God even in the midst of enemies. Furthermore, there are always accounts of churches growing and more people turning to the Lord. May the witness of our West African brothers and sisters continue to be an encouragement and an example.

1 The word Sahel is derived from the Arabic *Sahil*, meaning coast or shore. It refers to the southern border area of the Sahara desert, where North Africa meets sub-Saharan Africa

2 The Sunnah are the words and actions of the Islamic prophet Muhammad which are seen by Muslims as a way of life on which they should model their own lives

3 The phrase “Boko Haram” means literally “books are forbidden”, and is understood to mean “Western education is forbidden”. The group’s official name is Jama’atu Ahl as-Sunnah li-Da’awati wal-Jihad (Group of the Sunni People for the Calling and Jihad)

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PREPARING FOR PERSECUTION

PATRICK SOOKHDEO



Very early in His earthly ministry, the Lord Jesus began preparing His disciples to face persecution (Matthew 5:10-12). Right at the end He was doing the same (John 15:20-21).

The Apostle Peter tells believers to prepare themselves for persecution by practising self-discipline and focusing on the Christian hope (1 Peter 1:13).

Suffering for Christ is not only a service we give to God but also a gift from God to us (Philippians 1:29). It can have many benefits. Like any suffering, it can teach us to be humble and heavenly minded. Our suffering can bear fruit in others' lives. The Apostle Paul understood his suffering as intrinsic to his mission, not impeding it.¹ His sufferings had positive missiological benefits, bringing salvation and life (2 Corinthians 1:6; 4:10-12) and he saw them as an extension of the sufferings of Christ (2 Corinthians 1:5; 4:10; 13:4). Suffering not only purifies individuals but also purifies the Church as some fall away from the faith, but those who remain are encouraged in their walk with the Lord and grow in love for each other.

FOREWARNED AND PREPARED SO THAT WE CAN STAND FIRM

God often forewarns His people of coming suffering, whether in public messages through the prophets or one-to-one as He warned Noah (Genesis 6:13) and Abraham (Genesis 18:17).

Jesus forewarned of the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple that took place some 40 years later as well as of the terrible events at the beginning of the end of the age, such as wars, earthquakes, famine and pestilence (Luke 19:41-44; 21:6-27; Matthew 24; Mark 13). Before these catastrophes will come the persecution of His followers (Luke 21:12).

Jesus helps us prepare for this by warning of false prophets and even false Messiahs who will preach false messages (Matthew 24:11,24-25; Mark 13:22; Luke 21:8). Some will offer ungrounded hope and some will create unjustified fear.

Jesus, however, wants us to have realism and resilience. If we are prepared by Jesus' words, painful persecution should not undermine our faith but should strengthen it

(John 16:1,4). He tells us not to be troubled or alarmed (Mark 13:7; Luke 21:9), that the time of distress will be shortened (Matthew 24:22) and that “the one who endures to the end will be saved” (Matthew 24:13, ESV). We should note that the promise of being saved is a promise about our souls, not our bodies, for he also says that some of us will be persecuted to death (Matthew 24:9; Luke 21:16-19).

Even if no specific Divine warning is given, we can expect calamity if, for example, we see in our nation arrogant godlessness, materialism, immorality, neglect of the poor or other sins for which God has previously punished other nations.

John Flavel, a Presbyterian minister in 17th-century England, suffered persecution, sickness and bereavement. He was convinced that Christians must proactively prepare for suffering if they are not to be overwhelmed when it comes. This matches the findings of modern psychologists. “Prepare for a storm,” wrote Flavel, “and provide for yourself an ark, a hiding-place in Christ and the promises.”²

Paul had evidently been pondering the persecution he might encounter in Jerusalem (Acts 21:13) and could face it more calmly than could the Christians of Caesarea.

None of us knows how we would react to severe persecution unless we have already experienced it. If we are inexperienced at being persecuted we must prepare ourselves so that, if put to the test, our faith will not fail.

LOVING HIM ENOUGH TO STAND FIRM

Willingness to suffer for Christ is a sign of our love for Him. Sometimes the willingness itself is enough and God does not bring us to the point of actually suffering. Abraham did not have to kill his son Isaac (Genesis 22:12). But Christians who are ill-prepared for suffering may sin or fall away when adversity comes, as did many of Jesus’ early followers (John 6:66. Compare Matthew 24:9-10).

If we are to stand firm when suffering comes we must be true disciples, born again (John 3:3), fully committed to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Loving Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, we will cling to Him no matter what happens. A Christian at peace with their Saviour can suffer for Him with joy (Romans 5:3). This joy and the strength it brings are a powerful witness to unbelievers.

FAITH THAT ENABLES US TO STAND FIRM

The shield of faith (Ephesians 6:16) is one of our greatest protections when the evil one sends suffering upon us. Faith assures us of God’s presence with us as we suffer (Psalm 23:4; Isaiah 43:2; John 14:18; Hebrews 13:5). Faith helps us to turn our eyes upon Jesus so that “the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace”.³ Faith enables us to wait confidently for His deliverance (Micah 7:7; Psalm 34:4; Isaiah 28:16) drawing on the strength of almighty God (Psalm 61:2). By faith, we can endure persecution with unwavering obedience, resisting temptation (Hebrews 11:24-26).

Faith enables us to compare our sufferings with those of others, which may show ours to be less than we had thought. For sure, if we compare them with Christ’s sufferings, as He carried the sins of the world, our own will seem a trifle.

Through the eye of faith, we can “count our blessings” and find good things in the midst of our difficulties. We can give thanks in all circumstances (1 Thessalonians 5:18). We can be grateful that the Lord loves us enough to discipline us so that we can grow in holiness (Hebrews 12:7-11).

Faith enables us to view our afflictions, no matter how grave or prolonged, as “light and momentary”, leading to eternal glory (2 Corinthians 4:17). We know that “in a very little while” our suffering will come to an end, either through our death or through the Lord’s return (Hebrews 10:32-37).

What can we do to build up our faith in preparation for persecution? We should be diligent in gathering for worship and hearing the Word preached, taking the Lord’s Supper if possible. We should pray fervently for more faith (Mark 9:24) and remind ourselves of what God has done in our lives already. We should resolve not to worry about how we will defend ourselves if we are arrested (Matthew 10:19-20; Luke 21:14-15).

DEVELOPING HOLY COURAGE AND FORTITUDE

Jesus said: “Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid” (John 14:27). We may think this is a command we cannot obey, because it is about feelings. But feelings can be trained and Jesus tells how: by trusting Him (John 14:1-2). As we build up our faith, we will also develop “holy courage” and fortitude – an inner strength enabling us to endure prolonged danger or suffering – and we receive His peace (John 14:27).

Holy courage, flowing from faith, is the antidote to the fear that can lead us to fail the Lord in times of danger or hardship. It will enable us to bring Him glory and keep our own hearts at peace. Courage is catching: other Christians will be emboldened if they see us facing difficulties bravely. How can we develop fortitude and holy courage?

1. Make sure we are right with God.

Unconfessed sin and a guilty conscience are hindrances to persevering in times of suffering. We must be at peace with God in order to reap the harvest of blessings that suffering can bring (Romans 5:1-5). Confidence that we are in the place and ministry where God wants us to be also gives “staying power”.

2. Wean our hearts from worldly pleasures and comforts.

Many Christians live today in luxury in societies that prize physical wellbeing. We do not necessarily need to give these things up ahead of time, but we need to prepare our hearts to be ready to do so without it being too painful a wrench. We must wean our hearts even from the love of liberty, so that we can face unperturbed the possibility of imprisonment.

3. Understand our enemy.

He is not as powerful as our God. He wants to damage us spiritually more than he wants to damage us physically. His principal method is temptation. Especially in the context of persecution, he may present us with new temptations we have not encountered before, or temptation from new and unexpected sources such as a beloved spouse (Genesis 3:6; Job 2:9), Christian

friends (Acts 21:13) or even a Christian preacher or pastor. Persecution may also create the subtle temptation to spiritual pride. From what God has revealed to us of the battles in the heavenly realms, it seems that Satan's priority is to bring down those who are closest to the Lord. So any of us under severe attack can draw comfort from the thought that perhaps Satan has targeted us because we are such a challenge to him.

4. **Develop a habit of remembering the presence of God** in every situation. We should pray as much as we can. Not only is it an outlet for our feelings of distress but also spending time with Jesus makes people brave (Acts 4:13). We can cry to God for deliverance but we cannot demand that He answers with miracles. He may deliver us or He may not. If He does, He may do it supernaturally or naturally. Our heavenly Father knows best. We can also pray that our faith will not fail and that we may respond to all our trials in a Christ-like way: this we can be sure is praying according to His will.
5. **Be careful not to use "prudence" as an excuse** for cowardice. Distinguishing prudence from cowardice can be very difficult. It requires great discernment, Christian maturity, an understanding of our own hearts and a sensitivity to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Equally we must beware the temptation to seek personal glory or the thrill of adventure by "courting danger" unnecessarily; we must not put God to the test (Deuteronomy 6:16; Luke 4:12). May God guide each one of us.
6. **Appreciate the inner effects of suffering**, especially suffering for Christ. Some Christians have found their time in prison or laid aside with sickness to be filled with blessing and joy as they were able to focus on the Lord more than when they were free and busy, or healthy and busy, even if they were busy in His service. We could emerge from a time of testing with our characters like gold (Job 23:10).
7. **Think of the example of other brave and persevering believers.** Jesus encouraged His disciples that they would be following in the footsteps of the prophets of old when they later faced persecution (Matthew 5:12. See also James 5:10 and Hebrews 12:1).
8. **Remember the heavenly reward that we are promised**, better than anything in this life (Hebrews 10:34) and far more glorious (2 Corinthians 4:16-17). This can help us to accept and even embrace suffering more readily. We know that we will have to die one day, so how much does it really matter if our earthly life is cut short a little? We have desired so long to gaze on His beauty (Psalm 27:4) but can see only a dim reflection (1 Corinthians 13:12). The sooner we pass from this

life to the next the sooner we shall see God's face (Revelation 22:4).

9. **Love and forgive our enemies and persecutors.** Those who persecute us are not to be hated but to be loved and forgiven as our Lord commanded (Matthew 5:44) and did (Luke 23:34). By doing this, many have found that their pain and suffering are assuaged and healing, peace and wholeness come.
To prepare for persecution, we must sharpen our loving and forgiving "skills". We can practise them by loving and forgiving whoever is most difficult to love and forgive in our lives at present. Then we will be well equipped, with the right habits of thought, if the greater challenge of loving and forgiving cruel persecutors arises.
10. **Nurture our love for the Lord Jesus** so that it will inspire us to endure for His sake. We could read the Gospels, meditate on the cross, sing Christ-centred hymns and songs, or simply rest in His presence.

STANDING FIRM WHEN GOD SEEMS FAR AWAY

Typically, Christians experience the presence of the Lord in a deeper way when they are suffering, especially if they are suffering for Him. This is very precious and helps to sustain them. But sometimes He seems – for a while – to stand aloof and leave us struggling alone, even if we are following Him faithfully. We must be ready even for this form of suffering.

BE ALERT FOR ANGELS, BUT DEPEND ON CHRIST ALONE

When Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, He was in mental agony, struck with terror, almost dying of sorrow (Luke 22:44; Mark 14:33; Matthew 26:38, Amplified Bible) but God sent an angel from heaven to strengthen Him (Luke 22:43).

Scripture also records other times God has sent angels to the aid of His people in their times of greatest distress (Daniel 6:22-23; 1 Kings 19:1-7; Acts 5:19; 12:6-11). Early Church traditions record many other supernatural interventions to help faithful Christians, especially those facing torture or painful martyrdom. We cannot demand that God sends angels to help us, but He might.

Ultimately, we should depend on Christ – not on ourselves; not on our own strength or abilities; not on other Christians around us; not on the preparation we may have undertaken to face persecution; not on the hope of angels; not even on whatever gifts or other blessings the Holy Spirit has given us. We must depend on Christ alone.

A longer version of this article appears as chapter 7 of Dr Patrick Sookhdeo's new book The Mystery of Suffering. Turn to back cover for details of how to order a copy.

1 Kar Yong Lim, "A Theology of Suffering and Mission for the Asian Church", in Timoteo D Gener and Stephen T Pardue, *Asian Christian Theology: Evangelical Perspectives*, Carlisle, UK, Lanqham Publishing, 2019, p.186.

2 John Flavel, *Preparation for Sufferings*, 1681. This quotation is from an edition revised by Jennifer Adams, *Preparation for Suffering*, Forest VA, Corner Pillar Press, 2011 p.41.

3 A quotation from Helen Lemmel's hymn "O soul, are you weary and troubled", 1922.



Medical centre brings hope and healing

Barnabas-funded health clinic provides treatment for poor Pakistani Christians

A patient receives treatment at one of the Hope Clinic's medical camps

The sign on the door welcomes impoverished Christians to the Barnabas Hope Clinic. It's a fitting name for the new Barnabas-funded medical centre in Pakistan, and it was chosen by some of the thousands of poor Christians who have benefited from its service.

Without the Hope Clinic, the health of many Christians would have suffered, and some would have died.

Hope Clinic “has proved to be a huge relief and a great hope for the poor and deserving Christian patients of the region’s parishes”, our church partner told us.

Quality healthcare provided for free

Another church leader described the clinic’s opening as “a moment of joy for all the community”, adding it was the “most celebrated” event of the year.

Poor Christians struggle to access medical treatment in Pakistan. Even a check-up or examination can be beyond their means. Medicines are expensive –

and some “medicines” issued by unscrupulous or unqualified staff at private clinics can cause harm.

Barnabas Hope Clinic in Mirpurkhas, Sindh province, employs qualified Christian medical staff who provide quality healthcare to patients for free.

As well as treating the sick, they provide ante- and post-natal care for women and their babies, and run awareness sessions on the prevention of bacterial, communicable and waterborne diseases.

Barnabas covered the set-up costs of the clinic, providing furniture, beds, and medical equipment, including blood pressure monitors, stethoscopes, drip stands and a generator in case of power outages.

The on-site dispensary stocks a wide range of medicines, from antibiotics and anti-malarial drugs to diabetic medication and painkillers, which are issued free to patients in need.

The overwhelming majority of the clinic’s patients are Christian, mainly converts from a Hindu background.

The clinic opened during the Covid pandemic in November 2020 at a time when state-run hospitals were struggling to cope. Private clinics were turning away anyone they suspected of having Covid, or charging huge fees for treatment – fees that few Christians could afford in normal times, let alone in lockdown when they had no work or wages.

It was the Hope Clinic that welcomed poor Christians for “immediate treatment with prayers, care and post-treatment follow ups”, said our church partners.

In its first year the clinic treated 6,890 patients, almost double the 3,600 patients that were predicted. Demand has remained high in its second year, especially after the province of Sindh bore the brunt of the floods that devastated Pakistan in August and September.

The clinic building was partially damaged and, at the time of writing, had shut because patients were struggling to reach it through the flood water. Instead, the medical staff travelled to their patients, many of whom were suffering from illnesses caused by contact with infected water such as diarrhoea and eye infections.

Medical camps open with prayers

The clinic organises awareness sessions and medical camps offering diagnosis and treatment to patients in outlying villages, for which extra Christian medical staff are hired temporarily.

Each session begins with prayers and hymns in local languages. For many non-Christians, who gather around the medical camps and listen to the awareness sessions, it is the first time they have heard the Word of God.

“The services of the clinic have brought many ... Christian families closer to God and strengthened their faith”

Some Christian families have offered what little money they can to cover the clinic’s ongoing costs, such as stationery, cleaning and maintenance.

“The services of the clinic have brought many existing and new-born Christian families closer to God and strengthened their faith,” said our church partner.

Church leaders, patients and their families are hugely thankful to Barnabas and our supporters for providing them with the services of the clinic.

“They send their best wishes to Barnabas Aid, whose sincere commitment and support work made this project possible,” said our church partner.

Barnabas is also funding a mobile health clinic that provides free treatment and healthcare advice to impoverished Christian families working in the brick kilns of Punjab, Pakistan. See Barnabas Aid May/June, page 8.



A little girl receives treatment at the Barnabas Hope Clinic

Lives saved by the Hope team

Christian widow Parveen was suffering from a severe chest infection. Her family sought help from three private clinics but all refused to treat her because they said she had Covid. The family tried to convince them that she hadn’t got the virus, but the clinics refused to listen.

Then one of her sons saw a sign for the Barnabas Hope Clinic. Parveen received two weeks’ treatment and medicines that healed her chest infection free of charge. The staff visited Parveen at her home three times and prayed with her.

Her family thank the Lord and Barnabas for the quality health care they received. They told their church friends about Hope Clinic and, as a result, 20 more Christian patients sought treatment.

Shanti was weeping when she took her very sick son Sahil to the Hope Clinic. Sahil, who has special needs, had been suffering from diarrhoea for a week, had a high temperature and was extremely dehydrated.

Shanti told staff she had nothing to pay for Sahil’s treatment. Her husband, a labourer, had no work and they had already sold the few household items they had to provide food for Sahil and his siblings.

The couple were amazed and relieved to be told that treatment was free at Hope Clinic. Sahil remained at the clinic until his condition stabilised, and afterwards the team visited him at home for a week until he fully recovered.

Shanti and her husband thank the medical staff for saving Sahil’s life when, they say, “there was no hope left for him”. They thank Barnabas supporters for making the clinic possible.

Special investigators follow up on church attack in India

INDIA

Police in Sikh-majority Punjab state, India appointed a three-man special investigation team to look into an attack on a church in the Tarn Taran district.

Four masked men broke into the church building in

the village of Thakarpura on 30 August, taking a security guard hostage at gunpoint and tying his hands.

The intruders also vandalised church property and set the pastor's car on fire.

Several other anti-Christian attacks were reported in Punjab on 30-31 August.

Persecution of Christians by Sikhs is rare, however, and the Punjab authorities acted swiftly to protect the Christians. Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann said that the incident was “unpardonable”, adding that the “severest action must be taken against the perpetrators of this heinous crime”.

The Most Reverend PK Samantaroy, a senior church leader in Amritsar, Punjab, said that anti-Christian sentiment had been stoked by an earlier “reckless and completely unsubstantiated statement” by Giani Harpreet Singh, the

acting head priest (Jathedhar) of Akal Takht, the Sikh temple in Amritsar.

Giani had claimed that Christians, funded “by foreign forces”, were seeking to gain converts from the Sikh and Hindu communities “by alluring them fraudulently”. He has also called for Punjab – which is around 58% Sikh, 38% Hindu and less than 1.5% Christian – to adopt an anti-conversion law.

There is a growing number of Christian converts from Sikhism in the village of Thakapura, but no evidence that any of these conversions were the result of force, fraud or allurement.



Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann (pictured during his confirmation ceremony, March 2022) called for the “severest action” to be taken against the attackers

Libyan Christian convert sentenced to death for apostasy

LIBYA

A Christian convert from Islam has been sentenced to death by the Court of Appeal in Misrata, Libya.

The man became a Christian around four years ago, and has been arrested several times since then by Libyan militias who act as law enforcement in the disordered country.

The death sentence for apostasy was applied as a result of his refusal to return to Islam.

Libya's General National Congress (the GNC, which sat from 2012 to 2014) passed a law stating that apostates from Islam who refuse to recant will be sentenced to death. All laws passed by the GNC were subsequently abolished by its replacement, the Libyan House of Representatives.

However, the Libyan Supreme Court in Tripoli has ruled that the House of Representatives is illegal, allowing courts to continue to apply laws passed by the GNC, including the death penalty for apostasy.

The Maliki school of Sunni Islam – which is dominant in Libya – teaches that the death penalty is mandatory for sane adult male and female apostates from Islam and gives three days for the apostate to return to Islam.

Very few Islamic countries include the death penalty for apostasy in their national laws. Even those who have it rarely sentence anyone to death and of those who are sentenced very few have actually been executed.

Three “Chibok girls” found eight years after kidnapping

NIGERIA

Three Nigerian Christian women kidnapped as teenagers by Boko Haram Islamist terrorists from a school in Chibok town eight years ago have been found.

The Nigerian Army recovered them with their children during operations against Boko Haram in Borno State between 27 June and 25 July.

Ruth Bitrus, 24, and her child were rescued from the terrorists' camp in Sambisa Forest. Hanatu Musa, 26, and her two children, and Kauna

Luka, 25, with one child, were recovered in Bama Local Government Area.

Boko Haram abducted 276 girls, mostly Christian, from the Government Girls Secondary School, Chibok in April 2014. Around 165 girls have subsequently escaped, been rescued or released. Girls reported being whipped by their captors to force them into marriage, while a group of Christian girls experienced a mock execution for refusing to convert to Islam.



The three rescued Christian women with their children [Image credit: Vanguard]

Egyptian Christians perish in church fire

EGYPT

Egyptian Christians mourned the loss of 41 people, including 18 children, killed when fire broke out at a church in the city of Giza, near Cairo. At least 45 others were injured.

Five families are known to have lost all their children in the disaster. In one case three five-year-old triplets, Mohrael, Youssef and Philopator Bassem Amir, all died.

The fire, which was caused by an electrical fault, started during a service on Sunday 14 August.

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi offered his condolences to the bereaved families and pledged to provide financial support for them and reconstruct the church building.

Christian father and son shot by Islamist terrorists while working in fields in Sinai

EGYPT

A Christian father and son were shot dead in the Sinai peninsula by Islamist terrorists on 30 August.

The shooting happened outside the village of Gelbana, near al-Qantara Sharq in mid-west Sinai. Salama Moussa Waheeb and his son Hany were working in fields belonging to their family farm when they were shot by jihadists from Islamic State (IS, ISIS, ISIL, Daesh).

Salama was father to five children, two sons and three daughters. Hany, 40, leaves behind a wife and two daughters.

Islamist terrorists have been active in the Sinai since 2011, concentrating their attacks in Egypt on the region.



Salama Moussa Waheeb and his son Hany were shot dead while working in their fields [Image credit: Wataninet]

Supreme Court bails three Christians charged with “blasphemy”

PAKISTAN

The Supreme Court of Pakistan in Islamabad has taken the unusual step of granting bail to three Christians charged with “blasphemy” in separate cases.

Salamat Mansha Masih was bailed on 23 August. Defence lawyer Abdul Hameed Khan Rana refuted the claims of four Muslim students that a Christian booklet Salamat gave them in February 2021 contained any sacrilegious material.

The bench of two judges ruled that the accused should be protected until the allegation was proved, emphasising the state’s special responsibility to ensure protection of those accused of “blasphemy”. It is common for those accused to be subject to mob violence, often forcing them into hiding.

Patras Masih and Raja Waris were each granted bail on 24 August, having been charged in separate instances over

allegedly offensive material on social media.

Preaching Christianity “is not a crime”

The judges also issued a nine-page opinion that highlighted several concerns around enforcement of the “blasphemy” law, such as false and malicious accusations, the lack of credible evidence in many cases, and the mob violence with which the accused person is often threatened.

The court also confirmed that the preaching of Christianity “is not a crime, nor can it be made into one”, as laid down in the country’s constitution. The document gave a clear and comprehensive denunciation of how the country’s “blasphemy” laws are misused. The court’s welcome and courageous judgment underlines the right

of followers of all religions to share their beliefs openly.

“Blasphemy” laws in Pakistan are often used to make false accusations in order to settle personal grudges. Christians are especially vulnerable, as simply stating their beliefs can

be construed as “blasphemy” and the lower courts usually favour the testimony of Muslims, in accordance with sharia (Islamic law). Judges are often reluctant to acquit those accused of “blasphemy” for fear of reprisals.



Patras Masih, pictured with lawyer Aneeqa Maria, was 18 when accused of “blasphemy” in 2018 [Image credit: The Voice Society]

Relief aid arrives swiftly for flood victims in Pakistan



Food and other aid is distributed at a church in Sindh. Thank you for helping us to help our Pakistani Christian family.



One result of the flooding is that sources of safe drinking water have been contaminated, leading to increased risk of dehydration and of disease resulting from drinking infected water. Barnabas has supplied safe drinking water, hygiene items, medicines and mosquito nets to alleviate the suffering of our Christian family.

Barnabas Aid acted swiftly to help Christians who lost their homes, farms, crops and livestock in the floods that devastated Pakistan in August and September.



Many families, having seen their homes damaged or destroyed by the flood waters, have been forced to make shelters on roads or other patches of higher land. Barnabas has provided plastic sheets to help families who are in this situation make temporary shelters. In the weeks and months ahead, thanks to your donations, our partners in Pakistan can begin the work of repairing and rebuilding homes.

The floods displaced more than 33 million people, among them many of our brothers and sisters. Homes, schools, hospitals and church buildings were either damaged or completely destroyed.



“Chand”, left, 55-year-old tenant farmer living with his family in a remote village, saw his cotton and rice crops destroyed by the flood. Chand thanked Barnabas Aid and our project partners for journeying into the remote and flood-affected region to bring food for him and his family, rejoicing that God had sent aid “to His people through His people”.



This family stand for a photo with their Barnabas-funded food aid on the table in front of them. The Christians who live in the house behind them, like many local Christian families, have painted a large cross on their wall to show their faith.

Barnabas provided food, hygiene items, medicines, tents, mosquito nets and supplies of drinking water to sustain thousands of Christian families in the worst-affected province, Sindh. We also funded repairs at Tank Christian Hospital, where the floods damaged the building and its facilities. As the flood waters recede, we will be helping repair homes of Christians.

In Touch

Aileen's floral greetings cards help persecuted Church

Barnabas Aid supporter Aileen Hampel is using her talent for making greetings cards decorated with pressed flowers to raise money for suffering Christians around the world.

Aileen, from Tumby Bay, South Australia, uses flowers from her own garden or wild flowers gathered nearby.

She finds opportunities to sell her greetings cards at various venues during the year.

In a three-month period she has raised \$70 for Barnabas Aid. Thank you Aileen for your support towards our work helping the persecuted Church.



Aileen Hampel displays a selection of her lovely hand-pressed greetings cards

Bless our suffering Church family with a Christmas offering

Soon we will be joining together with Christians from all over the world to celebrate the birth of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

This year so many of our already marginalised brothers and sisters endured additional hardship because of conflict, natural disasters such as drought, floods and storms as well as the continuing impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Could your church or group take up a special Christmas offering to make a difference to the lives of our persecuted Church family who need our help?

Thank you to food.gives supporters in SA

Our thanks go to congregations in Naracoorte, South Australia, for their generous support for our food.gives initiative.

In three months they have filled 35 food.gives boxes with dry foodstuff, such as chickpeas, lentils, rice and flour, which we will ship to hungry Christians in other parts of the world.

Judy, who worships at Naracoorte Uniting Church and is helping to coordinate collections, says local Christians are keen to support food.gives.

"People want to help but are unsure what they can do about such huge problems as poverty and famine," explains Judy.

"food.gives offers them the opportunity to be generous and realise that their little can help a lot."



Judy, pictured with her granddaughter at Naracoorte Uniting Church, says Christians are eager to support food.gives

Remember our brothers and sisters on Giving Tuesday

Giving Tuesday on 29 November is a perfect opportunity to remember Christians less fortunate than ourselves.

As we enter Advent and prepare for the coming of our Saviour into the world, Barnabas Aid is encouraging supporters to send a special Giving Tuesday gift to our Armenian brothers and sisters.

Many are struggling to meet their daily needs in the historic Armenian Christian enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh, which was invaded by Azerbaijan in 2020.

We are helping our Armenian brothers and sisters to support themselves financially

through small farming ventures, like raising sheep and pigs or producing honey.

A gift of \$20 could pay for the transport of five beehives to one family.

- \$136 could buy one piglet.
- \$189 could buy one sheep.
- \$200 could buy one beehive with a swarm of bees.

Please make a gift to our persecuted Christian family on Giving Tuesday via our website barnabasaid.org, by post (address on inside front cover) or by phone 0800 587 4006, quoting the project reference PR1576 (Livelihoods in Nagorno-Karabakh).

Get involved with SCAAW

30 Oct – 6 Nov

Please remember our persecuted brothers and sisters around the world during Suffering Church Action and Awareness Week (SCAAW) from Sunday 30 October to Sunday 6 November.

Barnabas has a range of inspirational materials for you, your prayer group

and your church to enable you to get involved in SCAAW through prayer and practical action.

These resources are available free of charge to download at barnabasaid.org/scaaw or can be ordered from your local Barnabas office (details on the inside front cover).

NEW TITLE

The Mystery of Suffering

BY PATRICK SOOKHDEO

“A resource to educate and equip the Church worldwide now and for many years to come.”

Canon Dr Vinay Samuel

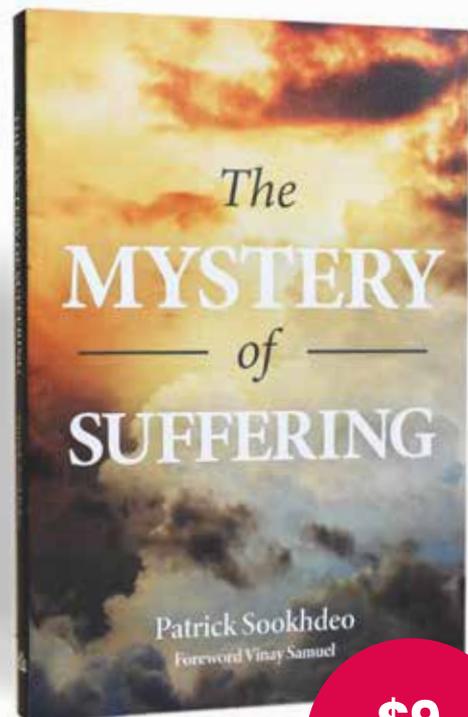
Founder Chairman of Divya Shanthi Ministries, Bangalore, India
Founder of the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies

We live in a world of suffering. Those who glide peacefully through their entire lives, untouched by sorrow, worry or pain, are few. Yet we know that God is good and that He is omnipotent. Why, then, is the world He made so wracked with suffering? Why does He not at least protect from suffering those who love Him dearly? Does God Himself suffer when He sees our distress? And how should we as Christian believers respond to suffering, whether our own or others? What should we do? How should we pray?

“Suffering is a profound mystery,” writes Dr Patrick Sookhdeo in the introduction to his new book. “God has lifted a corner of the curtain and allowed us to understand a little of the mystery from His Word. But He deals with each of us individually. In the following chapters, I have tried to share what I myself have learned and what has strengthened and sustained me, hoping that it will help others too.”

The Mystery of Suffering looks at the issue of suffering Biblically, theologically, pastorally and devotionally. The Fall, the role of Satan in causing suffering, and Jesus’s ultimate triumph through His suffering on the Cross are interwoven with chapters on Job and whether God Himself can suffer. The final two chapters deal with “Coping with suffering” and “Preparing for persecution”.

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\$9
(including
P&P)

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

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bringing hope to suffering Christians