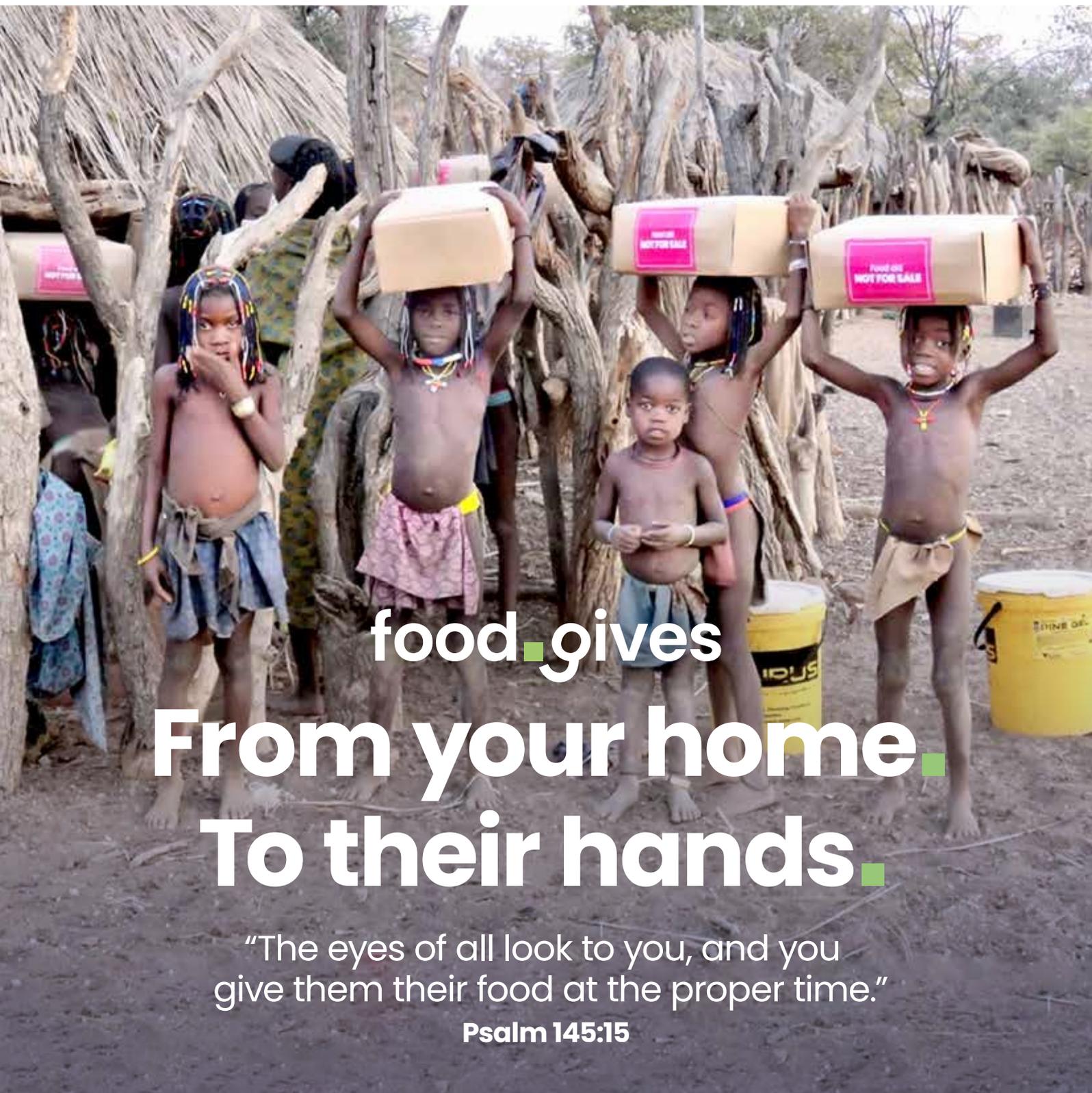


THE SHEPHERD'S ACADEMY
Equipping grassroots
church leaders for service

UKRAINE
Continued aid amidst
winter hardship

FOOD.GIVES
Christian refugees in Jordan
receive boxes of food aid

barnabasaid



food.gives
From your home.
To their hands.

*"The eyes of all look to you, and you
give them their food at the proper time."*

Psalm 145:15

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.

CONTACT

International Headquarters

The Old Rectory, River Street,
Pewsey, Wiltshire SN9 5DB, UK
Telephone 01672 564938
Email info@barnabasaid.org
Fax 01672 565030

New Zealand

PO Box 276018, Manukau City,
Auckland 2241
Telephone (09) 280 4385
or 0800 008 805
Email office@barnabasaid.org.nz

Australia

GPO Box 612, Adelaide SA 5001
Telephone (08) 8117 8079
or 1300 365 799
Email bfaustralia@barnabasaid.org

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Published by Barnabas Aid
1934 Old Gallows Road Suite 350
Vienna, VA 22182, USA
Email info@barnabasaid.org

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Front Cover: Children in Namibia receive boxes of food given by Barnabas supporters in the UK

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When caring is costly

One Sunday evening an elderly Christian man was driving two elderly Christian ladies to their various homes after the church service they had all attended. As he drove, he noticed a cyclist fall off his bicycle, so he stopped the car, got out and went to offer help. In response, the cyclist produced a baseball bat he had been carrying and began to attack the Christian. All this was seen by the horrified ladies in the back of the car. The Christian was so badly beaten that several bones were broken and it was months before he had fully recovered. This happened in a town in southern England in 2022.

The cost of caring can be very high. Because he cared, this Christian suffered appalling injury from the very one he cared for.

Should we stop caring? Or should we go on caring whatever the consequences? Yes, we must care, as Jesus our Saviour cared.

A friend of mine asked, "Why should I care about persecuted Christians far away in Africa? Why should I help them when there are millions of poor people here in my own country who need help?"

My answer to him was that the faraway Christians were his family, his brothers and sisters. That was why he should not neglect them but care for them.

In the New Testament epistles, believers are usually referred to by the Greek word *adelphoi*, which literally means "joined to the [same] womb", i.e. brothers. The context shows that almost always *adelphoi* includes not just the men of the church but also the women, so we could translate it "brothers and sisters".¹

Other groups also used "family language" like this in the first century, for example, Greek trade guilds. It is interesting to note how often Paul started his letters with reference to God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, perhaps to emphasise exactly which family the brothers and sisters he was writing to were part of.

Such family language carries great weight in cultures where it is expected that an individual will care for their relatives, sacrificially if necessary, so that an extended family is a network of loving and practical support which ensures no one is left to struggle on their own.

The loss of this family support is a common experience for converts to Christianity, whose unbelieving families reject them. In Central Asia, Christians normally refer to fellow-believers as "brothers". How deeply meaningful this is for the many who have left Islam to follow Christ!

Perhaps the most well-known verse in the Bible is John 3:16.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

This wonderful verse speaks of the amazing love of God for His creation and for humanity itself. What is so significant about this text is that the greatness of God's remarkable love is seen in that He gave what was most precious to Him. Such was His care for those whom he had created that He gave His only Son, knowing full well that humanity would reject Him, abuse Him and ultimately crucify Him. But this enormous cost did not stop God from caring. As we face an increasingly difficult world, fraught with uncertainty and trouble, there is a growing temptation to draw in upon ourselves and shut out others, to stop caring because caring hurts. But if God so loves the world, we must love those whom He loves, those for whom His Son died. We must go on caring, knowing that caring is costly – for that is what true caring is about.

DR PATRICK SOOKHDEO

International Director, Barnabas Aid

¹ In normal Greek usage, masculine terms and grammar are used for plural nouns when referring either to male or to both male and female. It is the same in several other European languages.

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how barnabas is helping

\$1,392



Shoes and clothes for Albanian children are an answer to prayer

With tears in her eyes, a poor Albanian Christian mother thanked Barnabas for giving her two daughters shoes to enable them to go to school. Her husband is paralysed and she struggles to provide for the family.

The girls were among 30 of the poorest children from Albanian churches given shoes and clothes. "This project was proof that God hears our prayers," said the pastor, who added that congregations were strengthened because "they saw God's care and love for people in need".



Children received a book about Jesus as well as Barnabas-funded clothes and shoes

Project reference: PR1586

\$133,917



Help for desperate Christians in Lebanon

"When I help them, they see the face of Jesus," said our church partner in Lebanon who distributes Barnabas-funded aid to desperate Christians suffering because of the country's continuing economic, social and healthcare crisis. In our latest aid programme we are providing 950 Christian families (approximately 4,100 people) with four months of food and hygiene items.

Families most in need are receiving help with their rent, electricity bills, fuel costs and to buy safe drinking water. Funding has also been allocated for medical items.



Barnabas has helped pay the medical bills of Laurice, an elderly Palestinian Christian woman living in Lebanon

Project reference: PR1533
(Needy Christians in Lebanon)

\$16,265



Safe meeting place for Central Asia converts given new lease of life

A worship hall at a centre used for church retreats in Muslim-majority Central Asia has been repaired with Barnabas funding. The hall, owned by a registered church, is a safe meeting place for thousands of converts from Islam who are members of unregistered churches.

The leaking roof was replaced, new flooring laid and the building redecorated. Air conditioning will allow it to be used all year. Our church partner says the project will expand the capacity of the centre and benefit the whole Church.



Church volunteers carried out much of the hall renovation themselves

Project reference: PR1424
(Church Buildings in Central Asia)

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.

\$126,976



Help for Christians displaced by jihadi attacks in Cameroon

Christians fleeing attacks by Islamist militants in northern Cameroon have been given help by Barnabas Aid to become self-sufficient. One hundred Christian widows received ingredients to make bean fritters to sell, and 100 young women were given 50 sewing machines to start businesses in pairs. "God has answered my prayers," said one of the young women. "This will help me pay for my schooling and that of my little sister."

Under the same initiative 1,327 Christian families (7,962 people) received food and hygiene items.



Pairs of Cameroonian Christian women receive their new sewing machines

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

\$8,700



Christian refugees in Jordan thank you for food.gives boxes

Jordanian Christians and Christian refugees from Yemen, Syria and Iraq send their thanks and prayers to Barnabas supporters for providing them with food.gives boxes filled with food. The refugees have fled conflict and persecution in their homelands to Jordan, where they are among hundreds of thousands of refugees.

Refugees are not allowed to work and the majority of Christian refugees rely solely on aid from churches and NGOs. Barnabas shipped a 20-ft container of food.gives boxes to Jordan from the UK.



A young Yemeni Christian refugee receives a filled food.gives box for his family. The Yemeni refugees are converts from Islam

Project reference: PRI555
(food.gives)

\$99,473



God's light shines as repairs are made to Pakistan hospital

"The light of God with which we reach the people will keep on shining. Thank you." The words of a spokesman for Tank Christian Hospital in Pakistan after Barnabas funded repairs to the hospital, its church and Sunday school hall following devastating floods between July and September 2022. We also replaced damaged medicines and equipment.

The minority Christian community has been encouraged to see the structural repairs carried out quickly. "The hospital does not look damaged, rather it looks regenerated," explained a Christian health worker.



A workman resurfaces a section of the damaged hospital roof

Project reference: 41-919
(Christian flood victims in Pakistan)

Winter in Ukraine

Continued aid and practical support amidst winter hardship

Ukrainian Christians queue to receive one of the wood-burning stoves supplied by Barnabas Aid supporters

By mid-October 2022 there was already snow on the ground in parts of Ukraine and winter temperatures were set to fall as low as -20°C. Ukrainians looked ahead to the cold, harsh winter with deep concern, especially as an estimated 15.7 million remain in need of humanitarian assistance.

Barnabas Aid has continued the work of reaching Ukrainians suffering desperately from the ongoing conflict, helping thousands through the winter hardship.

Thanks to your generous donations, we have delivered wood-burning stoves to provide warmth and a heat source for cooking to those who would otherwise be left in the bitter cold. Food and medical aid continues to be dispatched from our .gives warehouse in Swindon, UK, to meet urgent needs. Yet as this magazine reaches you, the coldest months in Ukraine – January and February – are yet to come.

Providing winter warmth

“We are very, very thankful for all the aid and help that you have given us,” one of our church partners in Ukraine told us.

Our partners have been helping to distribute around 700 stoves that are benefiting more than 1,000 families in need (approximately 4,000 individuals). Because of the widespread power cuts and energy shortages caused by the conflict, many families are now living under the same roof to pool the scarce resources they have.

“Without your help and generosity, most of our brothers and sisters would have had to spend this winter in the cold and dark,” our partner added. “But thanks to your donations, more than 1,000 families will be kept warm and have a source for cooking food this winter.

“Thanks for your love. May God bless you all and give you peace.”

Radu, a local pastor, expressed his gratitude to Barnabas supporters. “From the Church and from all of us that are still living here, we want to thank you for the help that you provide.

“For all this we give thanks to you and to God”

“We thank you for the stoves that are already arrived here, and for all the food packs, and mostly for your sacrificial hearts at these difficult times. For all this we give thanks to you and to God.”

Meeting medical needs

Both the conflict and the onset of winter are leading to an increase in medical needs across Ukraine, and further demands on the Ukrainian healthcare system. Hospitals, under great operational pressure, are further suffering from a shortage of medical supplies and equipment. Through our recently launched medical.gives programme, Barnabas Aid is making a vital contribution to easing this pressure.



Wheelchairs were gratefully received by doctors in Lviv

Our Christian partners on the ground have seen an increase in war-wounded patients with burns and blast injuries requiring amputation. Only a few months ago the Ukrainian Ministry of Health described a real need for wheelchairs.

In response to this need, and thanks to your donations, we have shipped a donation of 1,176 wheelchairs – worth approximately \$387 each – to Ukraine. “We are sincerely thankful,” said the head of one hospital in Lviv. “We are sure that everyone using the donated wheelchairs will be thinking of you with gratitude.”

Thanks to further donations from a Western government, we will soon be distributing another consignment of medical and other vital equipment to Ukraine. This includes 118 first aid kits, 75 defibrillators, more than 1,000 medical sample carriers, 134 battery-powered floodlights, 219 20-litre water carriers, 196 boilers for purifying water, and 160 fire extinguishers. As well as this, three 40-foot lorries filled with hand sanitiser, donated by a UK-based company, will also soon be delivered.



Medical equipment, donated by a Western government, including first aid kits and defibrillators, will soon be sent to Ukraine through medical.gives

Delivering vital supplies of food

Before the onset of winter, almost 350 tonnes of food and other practical aid had already been sent to those suffering from the ongoing conflict, including those displaced within Ukraine and those who had fled for refuge in neighbouring countries.

Aid – including food, clothing, blankets, nappies, sanitary and hygiene products – was delivered to the region from Barnabas Aid donors in Canada, New Zealand and the United States, while our .gives warehouse in the UK was filled with your generous donations that we have delivered by lorry to needy Ukrainians. Through our .gives programmes, Barnabas Aid created a supply line for our suffering brothers and sisters, direct from your home to the warzone.

Now another 11 pallets of food and other aid have been loaded at our UK warehouse and sent on their way to Ukraine. This practical support will prove vital as the long, dark winter continues and further supplies of food are needed.



Thanks to your donations and through our Christian project partners in Ukraine, Barnabas Aid has provided around 700 wood-burning stoves for 4,000 people who would otherwise suffer from Ukraine's plummeting temperatures

It is estimated that 15.7 million people in Ukraine require humanitarian assistance, including 7.1 million who are internally displaced. The Ukrainian government believes that 950,000 people are now living in temporary accommodation having been forced to flee or having had their homes destroyed.

Infrastructure such as heating systems, power grids and water supplies are vulnerable to war damage. Furthermore, problems that arise in winter – such as frozen pipes – that might be easily fixed in peacetime may result in thousands being deprived of basic utilities for weeks or even months.

You can help!

Through Barnabas Aid you can provide food, warmth and health care to many of our brothers and sisters who are among those suffering from this long and drawn-out conflict.

Could you donate towards the cost of supplying a wood-burning stove for a family home or a communal shelter? Can you give dried food that will be a lifeline for hungry Ukrainians as the winter draws on? Could your financial gift contribute towards the costs of delivering urgently needed medical supplies to hospitals and emergency services?

For more information, please visit:
barnabas.aid.org/countries/Ukraine

Project references:
Food and basic needs for Christians in Ukraine (96-1196)
food.gives (PR1555)
medical.gives (PR1566)



Equipping for service at the grassroots of the global Church

The Shepherd's Academy and other Barnabas Academia leadership training

Grassroots church leaders attend a tutorial at The Shepherd's Academy study centre in South Sudan

This course is very relevant in my life. I am experiencing a transformation within me. The course will go a long way to helping me in ministry to dispense the Word accurately with correct spiritual meaning that will edify the Body of Christ.” These were the words of a church leader from South Sudan, describing his experience of studying with The Shepherd's Academy.

It is estimated that around five million of the church planters and pastors ministering throughout the Global South have had no opportunity for training. This can limit the effectiveness of even the most faithful under-shepherds of the Lord's flock. There is a desperate need for leadership training in order to provide guidance to the global Church. Strong and well-equipped leaders help to strengthen and build the faith of

all Christians. Furthermore in some countries it is required by law that church leaders have appropriate formal qualifications in order to engage in ministry.

Responding to this immense need, Barnabas Aid created The Shepherd's Academy (TSA) to provide grassroots church leaders with relevant skills and knowledge to empower them in their ministry.

Strengthening grassroots leaders to build up the global Church

As well as equipping grassroots church leaders with skills and knowledge, the TSA course also guides church leaders in their personal spiritual growth and in the formation of a Christ-like character and integrity, reflecting the Good Shepherd after whom the Academy is named. These qualities are no less important to fruitful ministry than a deep knowledge of theology.

“I am experiencing a transformation within me. The course will help me dispense the Word accurately with correct spiritual meaning that will edify the Body of Christ”

The training programme is accessible for those who cannot afford the fees for seminaries or theological colleges. Students are able to continue with their church ministries while they study. They are not uprooted from their homes and their service for the Lord is not disrupted. The study method combines online classes with face-to-face tutorials which keeps costs low, and many students receive scholarships with funds from Barnabas.

At the end of 2022 there were 418 students from 16 countries (Cameroon, DRC, Ghana, Guyana, India, Kenya, Liberia, Mozambique, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, South Sudan, Spain, Uganda, UAE and Zambia) studying with TSA. Most of these students were doing short courses but 97 were studying for a degree. God willing more than 600 will have commenced their studies by the end of 2023.

So far there are five TSA study centres – one each in Cameroon, Nepal, Pakistan, South Sudan, Zambia – each with its own regional coordinator. Running costs are kept low by using the facilities of existing theological colleges or Bible colleges for the TSA study centres. The TSA course material is being translated into Chinese, Russian and Tamil, with further translation into Arabic and Bengali to follow.

One of the TSA short courses – “Unveiled: A Christian Study Guide to Islam” – aims to help Christians understand the differences between Islam and Christianity, how Islam has spread and is spreading across the world, and how to share the Gospel effectively with Muslims. More than 200 students are enrolled, with 16 having successfully completed the course and another 41 close to completion.

This course responds to a great need facing Christians in the Global South, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, where Islam is growing rapidly, often at the expense of Christianity. When professing Christians convert to Islam, at root it is because they have not fully understood Christianity. They do not know their faith and do not recognise how it is different from Islam. Muslim missionaries are trained to demolish the Christian faith but Christians and their leaders are often ill-prepared to face this situation.

Preparing to meet the challenge of Islam

Because of the urgent need to strengthen the Church to face the challenge of Islam, Barnabas Aid’s academic wing, the Oxford Centre for Religion and Public Life (OCRPL) has created a master’s-level course on Islamic studies, which equips church leaders

to understand and repudiate Muslim arguments against Christianity. There are 31 students registered on this course, nine of whom are expected to graduate soon. Other OCRPL master’s-level students also receive training in this area, while a master’s course in Comparative Religions that will also focus on Islam is scheduled to begin in June 2023.

These courses will “train a new generation of Christian leaders to better understand Islam so that they can teach pastors, evangelists and their people the fundamental differences between the two as well as to know how they should engage with Islam and relate to Muslims”, explains Professor Patrick Sookhdeo, Executive Director of OCRPL.

“All this prepares our students for more effective ministry among Muslims,” adds Dr Anna Bekele, who leads the master’s programme. “They are also better equipped for teaching at the seminaries and training other Christian leaders for engaging with Muslims in a thoughtful, insightful and well-informed way.”

It is hoped, says Professor Sookhdeo, that in “major Bible schools and theological colleges, Islamic departments will be set up, well resourced by materials provided by Barnabas Aid, and with teachers and instructors who have been trained by OCRPL.”

There are OCRPL master’s-level students in Angola, Bangladesh, Burundi, Ethiopia, Guyana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan, South Sudan, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Some are recently married with young children, while others are already grandparents. Most are currently serving as church ministers and pastors alongside their studies, while some teach in seminaries.



Godwin Adeboye from Nigeria was the first student to graduate from OCRPL’s master’s programme. He is now a Ph.D. student and works as a regional co-ordinator for The Shepherd’s Academy

A theology of harmony

In 1983, Zechariah Manyok was one of tens of thousands of Sudanese boys displaced by the second Sudanese Civil War. Now the Bishop of Wanglei, South Sudan, Zechariah was among the first Ph.D. graduates from OCRPL.

The story of Bishop Zechariah is just one wonderful example of how the work of OCRPL is transforming not just the lives of individual Christians, but also equipping Church leaders across the Global South for service.

Bishop – and now Dr – Zechariah, like many others in war-torn Sudan, had no opportunity for formal education in his youth. But when that opportunity came in later years, he pursued it with enthusiasm, gaining a diploma, followed by a bachelor's degree, and then two master's degrees.

Bishop Zechariah credits the commitment of OCRPL teaching staff in helping to make possible the completion of his Ph.D. studies: “Each one of our professors would make sure that we learned from his or her expertise. Research seminars that OCRPL organised annually were useful in giving us even more information.”

The aim of OCRPL's doctoral programme is to help church leaders make vital contributions to the life and work of the church in their particular contexts. This is certainly the case for Bishop Zechariah's forthcoming book, *Church, State and the Ethical Imagination*, which provides principles for leadership in both secular government and the Church.

“South Sudan has good laws on paper,” argues Bishop Zechariah, “but implementation differs from what the law stipulates.” The main example of this is Article 8 of South Sudan's constitution, which stipulates the equal treatment of all religions. “Yet,” he continues, “the state provides special treatment to Islam by giving it funds for building Islamic schools and for annual pilgrimages to Mecca. Other religions do not get the same treatment.”

It is Barnabas Aid's hope and prayer that the numbers of students at TSA and other levels of OCRPL will increase, equipping even more of those called to feed Christ's sheep. Can you help fund the vital work of training pastors, ministers and church planters in order to provide sound teaching, wisdom and guidance to Christians facing challenges of many kinds across the Global South?

OCRPL in numbers:

418 students from **16** countries registered with TSA

42 current master's students from **14** countries

6 students have completed the master's programme

48 current Ph.D. students from **17** countries

6 students have completed Ph.D.s

Bishop Zechariah sets out a “Christian way of helping individuals and groups resolve different types of conflicts” – a way that could help prevent civil wars and conflicts in the future. The Church, he argues, must hold forth a “theology of harmony which has its foundation in God [and] reflects the Oneness of the Trinitarian God”.

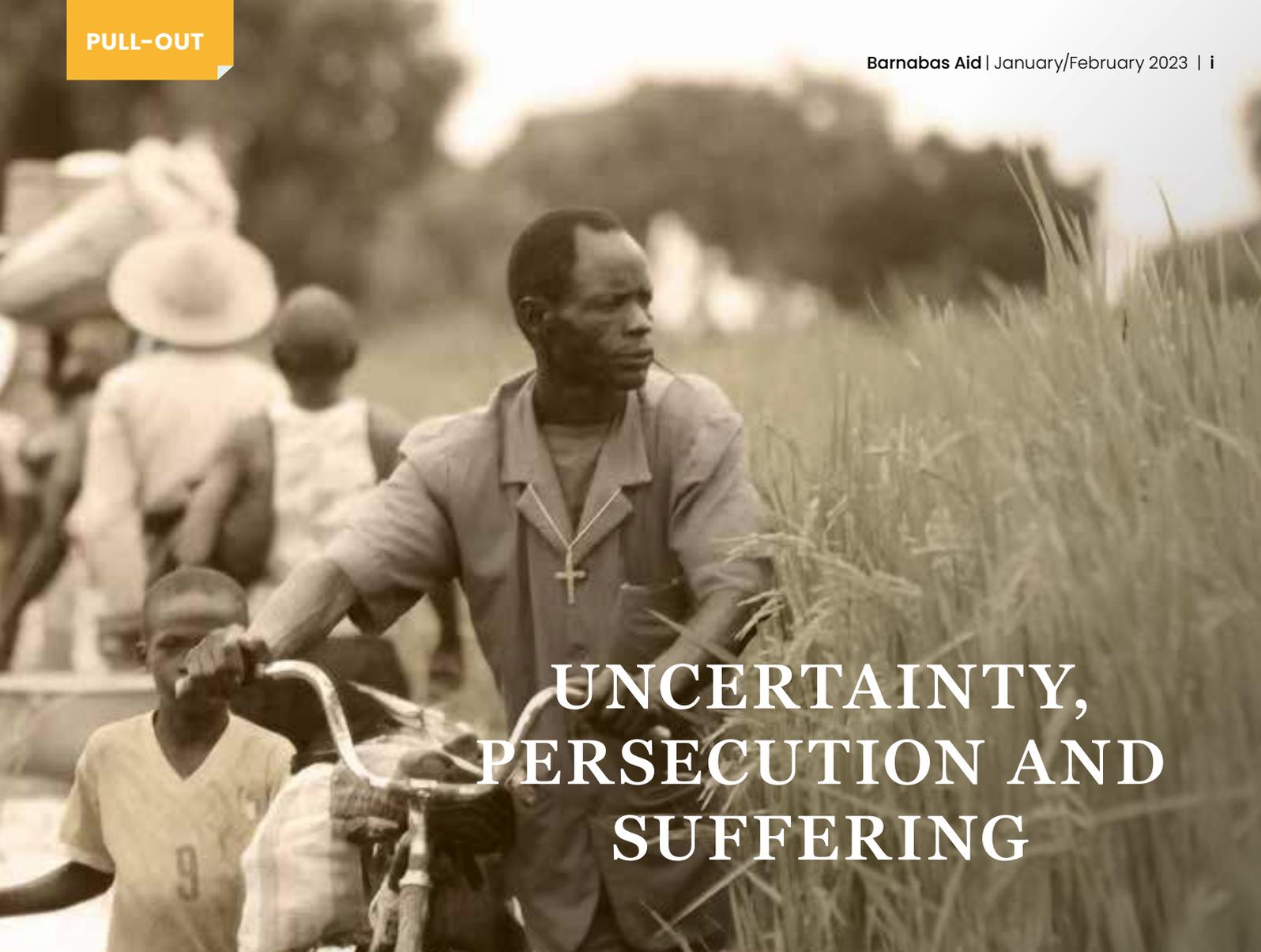
Bishop Zechariah's research, which he hopes will have applications in contexts other than South Sudan, is just one example of the important work being undertaken. Six students have already graduated, and there are currently 48 researchers from 17 countries – Antigua, The Bahamas, Canada, Cyprus, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Kenya, Malaysia, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, South Sudan, Uganda, UK, USA and Zimbabwe – enrolled in the Ph.D. programme.

Some of the topics 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. God willing this work will provide even greater wisdom and guidance for the global Church.

The monthly costs for one student are:

- The Shepherd's Academy (degree level) **\$34**
- Master's with OCRPL **\$153**
- Ph.D. with OCRPL **\$300**

PR1499 (The Shepherd's Academy)
64-1118 (Oxford Centre for Religion and Public Life)



UNCERTAINTY, PERSECUTION AND SUFFERING

The world today seems a far more tumultuous, dangerous place than it did even just a short time ago. In a report – *Uncertain Times, Unsettled Lives* – published in September 2022, researchers described an “uncertainty complex” of overlapping difficulties, including:

1. disasters such as extreme weather events, the Covid-19 pandemic, economic crises;
2. the “sweeping” changes that are made in an effort to overcome these difficulties;
3. “widespread polarisation” that causes divisions and hostilities, both within societies and between countries.¹

The result is widespread anxiety – at times, even panic. “We live in a world of worry,” states the report.

AN AGE OF ANXIETY

This sense of anxiety is present even though by many measures life is easier and more fulfilling than ever before, especially for those who live in the relatively prosperous West. This is not to deny the reality of suffering in all parts of the world – this suffering, as we shall examine below, is very real. Yet it must also be acknowledged that at the beginning of the twenty-first century, wars are fewer, medicine and healthcare has advanced dramatically, and life expectancy is longer than ever before (a global average of 73 years – compared, to choose one example, to 32 years for the UK cities of Liverpool and Manchester in the 1850s).²

Yet the sense of uncertainty is magnified, partly because of the interconnectedness of our world. The effect of a disaster moves swiftly around the globe, affecting many more societies, families and individuals than in earlier centuries. One example is the conflict in Eastern

Europe, which has led to shortages of food and fertilisers across Africa, Asia and the Middle East, and may yet result in an energy crisis in Western Europe.

Even where the effect of a disaster does not touch us, we are more aware of events around the world than ever before through online news and social media – channels of communication that thrive on chaos and bad news. “If your social media feeds and home screens serve up a steady stream of calamities,” writes Max Fisher for *The New York Times*, “they can feed an overwhelming – if sometimes misplaced – sense of threat, as if the world itself were caving in.”³ Alongside news media, authors and film-makers create compelling fiction about a world hurtling towards disaster – towards an apocalypse – adding to the sense of fear and anxiety.

In films, novels and news coverage, however, the overall theme or underlying assumption is so often that the world is devoid of hope, meaning or purpose. As Christians we know that this is not the case. Perhaps journalists and writers are unaware that they are referencing the Biblical book of Revelation, alongside other apocalyptic sections of Scripture. Yet while these describe frightful difficulties and terrible suffering, they also reassure us that our Heavenly Father is not caught off guard, nor is He distant, nor is He helpless. Furthermore, He reveals in His Word what must take place in the age between Christ’s resurrection and His return so that we will not be led astray by either false hope or faithless hopelessness. The sixth chapter of Revelation is one place where we can see described the troubles of previous centuries, of today, and – unless the Lord first returns – of ages to come.



Christians in Pakistan are among believers around the world – and indeed people of all faiths and none – suffering from what researchers have called the “uncertainty complex”

THE WHITE HORSE OF CONQUEST (REVELATION 6:1-2)

Conquest is a recurring feature of human history, creating huge empires that rise and fall, often giving way to yet another empire. This pattern can be clearly seen in the dream of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (Daniel 2). The statue dreamt of by the King represented his own empire in the head of gold (Daniel 2:38) and all the empires that would follow in its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, and its feet of iron and clay.

The Babylonian Empire was replaced by that of the Medes and the Persians, which again in turn was replaced by the Macedonian Empire of Alexander the Great. There followed the Roman Empire, which dominated the Mediterranean world from approximately 27 BC to 480 AD. The age of Islamic conquest began in the time of Muhammad, the prophet of Islam, who conquered and unified the tribes of the Arabian peninsula. This conquest continued after Muhammad’s death – at its greatest extent the Umayyad Caliphate (661-750) covered more than four million square miles, making it the largest empire the world had yet seen.

The rise of European colonialism led to several empires, most notably the British Empire that at its height was more than three times as large (13.7 million square miles) as the Umayyad Caliphate and covered a quarter of the globe. It can be argued that the Soviet Union constituted a Marxist-Leninist empire that dominated Russia, Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, while the United States effectively leads a Western empire that, since the end of the Cold War, has been largely unchallenged in its governance of the world as a whole. It remains to be seen whether China or any other power can challenge the position of the US.

The Christian knows, however, that all these empires – whatever form they take, however powerful they seem – are temporary. Eventually the political empires created by human conquest will be brought to an end by the appearing of the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, pictured in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream as a rock not cut by human hands (Daniel 2:44-5). The end of history is not communism as Karl Marx predicted, nor a liberal democratic world order as political theorist Francis Fukuyama supposed, but the reign of Christ over all (Isaiah 9:6-7; Psalm 2:6-9).

THE RED HORSE OF STRIFE AND WAR (REVELATION 6:3-4)

Violent conflict has characterised humankind ever since Cain murdered his brother Abel (Genesis 4:8). At the time of writing, the Global Conflict Tracker managed by the Council on Foreign Relations lists 26 wars, armed conflicts or areas of instability across the world.⁴ By some definitions the total could be more than twice as high as this.

Many countries are heavily armed, including nine states in possession of nuclear weapons. The United States – still the only country to have used nuclear weapons in war – has an estimated 750 military bases in at least 80 countries, and approximately 173,000 troops deployed in 159 countries.⁵ It has the largest military force and accounts for more than a third (38%) of the world's military spending.⁶ In his farewell address, President Dwight Eisenhower (in office 1953-61) warned against the power and influence of “the military-industrial complex”.⁷ The 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, the possibility of China taking military action in order to unify with Taiwan, armed tensions between North and South Korea, and the persistence of armed terrorism, often Islamist, around the world all demonstrate that we live in a world of war.

The Christian believer has the God-given assurance that one day wars will cease (Psalm 46:9). The nations “will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore” (Isaiah 2:4). The reign of the Prince of Peace will be a reign of peace.

THE BLACK HORSE OF FAMINE (REVELATION 6:5-6)

The world is currently experiencing a global food crisis that may become one of the worst disasters ever to face humanity. According to the *2022 Global Hunger Index*, published in October, at least 828 million people are undernourished.⁸ Of these 345 million are “facing acute food insecurity” and 50 million are “teetering on the edge of famine”.⁹ David Beasley, Executive Director of the World Food Programme, predicted in September 2022 “chaos all over the world ... famine, starvation and destabilization of nations”.¹⁰

The main causes of the global food crisis are, firstly, extreme weather events and environmental disasters, such as droughts, floods and cyclones. Parts of the Horn of Africa have suffered drought for several years. Plagues of locusts that destroy crops were at their worst for many decades in 2019-20 in parts of Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

The Covid-19 pandemic prevented many from farming owing to lockdowns and quarantines, as well as sickness and death. The pandemic also made it more difficult to import food. The continuing economic fallout from Covid has contributed to inflated food prices.

The situation in Eastern Europe has also had a catastrophic effect on food distribution. Together Russia and Ukraine export on average 53 million tonnes of wheat annually, estimated at between 23% and 33% of the global total.¹¹ The two countries are also leading exporters of other grains, seeds and vegetable oils, as well as much-needed fertilisers. The economic shocks caused by sanctions and global uncertainty also contribute to rising food prices, even in those countries not directly reliant on imports from Russia and Ukraine.

As Christians we should be concerned about this situation, in the sense that we should prayerfully make plans to provide for ourselves and our families, and, if we can, other vulnerable people, especially those who share our faith (Galatians 6:10). Yet we must also rest in the promise of God to provide for His people and supply all of their needs (Philippians 4:19). In the new Heavens and the new Earth, there will be no shortage of food, for the Lord Jesus Christ promises that those who shelter in His presence will never again hunger or thirst (Revelation 7:15-16).

THE PALE HORSE OF DEATH (REVELATION 6:7-9)

All of the tragedies brought about by the horses of conquest, war and famine bring death in their wake, but there are far more causes of – humanly speaking – premature death, including natural disasters and disease.

Researchers estimate that an average of 45,000 people die in natural disasters each year.¹² In June 2022 a terrible earthquake in Afghanistan caused the deaths of around 1,200 people. The devastating floods in Pakistan (July-September 2022) have, at the time of writing, killed at least 1,717 people.

The global death toll from Covid-19 is reckoned to be more than six million.¹³ In 2019 around nine million people died from ischaemic heart disease while millions more died



Christians in Myanmar take refuge in a camp for internally displaced persons, having been forced from their home by armed conflict

from other cardiovascular diseases. Nearly two million deaths were caused by Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia.¹⁴

Action can be taken against disaster and disease, but ultimately death cannot be abolished by humanity, for "it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment" (Hebrews 9:27, ESV). Death, says the Apostle Paul, is "the wages of sin" – "but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). One day death will be abolished for all of God's people (Revelation 21:4).

PERSECUTION (REVELATION 6:9-11)

After the four horsemen, when the Lamb opens the fifth seal, the Apostle John is shown the souls of Christian martyrs who are told that more of their brethren must lay down their lives for the Name of Jesus Christ. Persecution of Christians has been a feature of the Church's experience since the very beginning. It continues to be a feature of our world today, even though in the West at present it is minimal compared to other times and places.

Unlike the other factors mentioned above – conquest, war, famine and death – in which believers share in the common suffering of the world, the kind of persecution spoken of by Scripture is that which Christians suffer at the hands of the world. There are five main sources of anti-Christian persecution: (1) the governing authorities at national and local level; (2) religious leadership; (3) local communities; (4) friends; (5) family.

Ultimately this is the work of Satan, the implacable enemy of Christ and His Church since he was cursed by God for his act of deceiving Eve (Genesis 3:14-15). Satan likes to cause harm of any kind, but with Christians his main aim is to destroy their faith; persecution is, along with temptation to sin, one of his main methods. Yet the cursing of Satan also includes the promise that eventually the seed of the woman – the Lord Jesus Christ – will crush the serpent's head. At the end of the age Satan will be "thrown into the lake of fire and sulphur" (Revelation 20:10, ESV) while the Lord makes all things new for those who have, by His grace, endured to the end.



Believers in Chad are among those suffering from flooding which killed at least 600 people in West Africa in 2022

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International Headquarters

The Old Rectory, River Street, Pewsey, Wiltshire SN9 5DB, UK

Telephone 01672 564938 **Email** info@barnabasaid.org

Fax 01672 565030

South Africa

Office 301, 3rd Floor, Eikestad Mall, 43 Andringa Street,

Stellenbosch 7599 **Telephone** +27 21 808 1668

Email bfsa@barnabasaid.org

Registered charity number 1092935

Company registered in England number 04029536

Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland

Office 101, Russell Business Centre, 40-42 Lisburn Road,

Belfast BT9 6AA Please send post to our UK office address.

Telephone 02891455246 **Email** ireland@barnabasaid.org

UK

Unit 23, Ash Industrial Estate, Kembrey Park, Swindon SN2 8UN

Telephone 01793 744557 **Email** info@barnabasaid.org

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In Your wrath remember mercy

Patrick Sookhdeo

There is no such thing as religion in England... If anyone speaks about religion, everybody begins to laugh.”¹

“An open and professed Disregard to Religion is become ... the distinguishing Character of the present Age... Christianity is ridiculed and railed at with very little Reserve: and the Teachers of it, without any at all.”²

“It has come to be taken for granted that Christianity is no longer a subject of inquiry; but that it is now at length discovered to be fictitious. And accordingly it is treated as if, in the present age, this were an agreed point among all persons of discernment, and nothing remained but to set it up as a principal subject for mirth and ridicule.”³

These comments were made about England in the 1730s, but how well they apply today not only in England and the rest of the UK but also in many other Western nations!

Various Christian heresies were fashionable among the upper classes in 1730s England such as Arianism, Pelagianism and Socinianism. Other people put nature on a pedestal, like a religion, while anything to do with Christ Himself was rejected. Many clergy knew little of the Bible, and ordinary people gave themselves up to vice of every

kind, largely unaware that what they were doing was sinful in the eyes of God.

The Evangelical Revival

Some Christian leaders saw what was happening and cried out in anguish of spirit. Yet the Church remained teetering on the edge of a precipice until John Wesley and his associates began their ministry, urging people up and down the country to read the Bible and gather together to pray.

What followed has become known as the Evangelical Revival, often dated (as regards England) from Wesley's own conversion in 1738 and reckoned to have continued until about 1815.⁴ Personal faith thrived. Gospel truth was taught in churches and became widely known and believed.

And the effect of this revival on society at large? While many of its sinful practices continued, there was a gradual move towards valuing virtue again. A God-fearing and devout attitude became more generally acceptable. Nevertheless, John Wesley himself, in an article published in 1782, wrote:

What is the present characteristic of the English nation? It is ungodliness... By ungodliness I mean, first, a total ignorance of God; Secondly, a total contempt of him.⁵

Evangelicalism in the West today

What remains of the Evangelical Revival today?

A 2022 survey by Ligonier Ministries and LifeWay Research found that many American evangelical Christians held non-Biblical, even heretical, beliefs, especially about the nature of God.

- 73% agreed with the claim that Jesus is the “first and greatest being created by God”.
- 55% believed the Holy Spirit is a force but not a personal being.
- 44% said that Jesus was a great teacher, but He was not God.
- 38% considered that “religious belief is a matter of personal opinion; it is not about objective truth”.⁶

A separate survey, also conducted in the USA in 2022 but this time by the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University, looked at the beliefs of pastors. Among the evangelical pastors surveyed:

- 39% considered that there is no absolute moral truth and that “each individual must determine their own truth”.
- 37% said that having faith in general is more important than the question of in what or in Whom that faith is placed.
- 30% did not agree that their salvation was based only on having confessed their sins and accepted Jesus Christ as their Saviour.⁷

It is clear that the Church in the West stands once again on the brink of destruction. But what happened to bring her there?

The de-Christianising process

The British theologian and scholar CS Lewis, speaking in 1954, described a “Great Divide”, which he considered “the greatest of all divisions in history”, that had begun to open in the middle of the nineteenth century, separating the Christian age of the previous 18 centuries from the post-Christian age. The process of de-Christianising Western society could be seen, he said, in politics, the arts, religion and technology, and the chasm was continuing to widen.⁸

Lewis’s almost exact contemporary, the American preacher and scholar AW Tozer (1897-1963), wrote:

I see the time coming when all the holy men whose eyes have been opened by the Holy Spirit will desert worldly Evangelicalism, one by one. The house will be left desolate and there will not be a man of God, a man in whom the Holy Spirit dwells, left among them.⁹

Tozer said that he would like to live to see the time when holy and spiritually enlightened Christians separated themselves from the sinking ship of evangelicalism and formed themselves into a “a new ark to ride out the storm”.

A vortex that is pulling us down to destruction

Now in the 2020s we are at a stage where Christianity in the UK and much of the West is once again a laughing stock, as it was in 1730s England. This is due partly to the failures and corruption of its own leaders and partly to the arrogance of society’s leaders, two factors which perhaps intensify each other in a vicious circle.

With the Church’s authority lost, the moral framework that once underpinned Western society has gone, its value systems have collapsed, and the notion of absolute truth is widely rejected. Westerners have largely turned away from God, seeing Him as irrelevant and unnecessary for their happiness and fulfilment. In this view, humankind has matured and become master of its own destiny, no longer having need of any supernatural Being.

However, we see that nature appears to have turned against humanity, while humans have turned against fellow-humans. We are caught in a vortex that is pulling us downward to destruction. God says, “Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall” (Proverbs 16:18). Thus, human pride will be our undoing. The Church in the West, so favoured by God for many centuries, may now feel His wrath and be at the receiving end of His judgment.

“Man’s extremity is God’s opportunity”

If God were now to abandon the West, how could we complain, given that we have pushed Him contemptuously away so often, so publicly and so shamelessly? But let us not despair. It has been said that “man’s extremity is God’s opportunity”. The challenge facing Wesley and his associates in the eighteenth century must have seemed just as great as the challenge facing us today. What if we apply again the same remedy? Repentance, prayer and Bible study were the channels that God in His mercy used in the eighteenth century to bring England back from the brink. Maybe He will use them again.

George Barna, Director of Research at the Cultural Research Center, noted that their survey data showed that the beliefs of pastors were correlated with their spiritual routines. Pastors who held the most Biblical beliefs tended to be those who followed a consistent daily routine of Bible reading, prayer, worship and confession.

God could still revisit His people in the West. But we must repent and pray for His mercy again, remembering that there is no such thing as a Christian nation and that we cannot presume on His grace. We cannot look at the greatness, glories and triumphs of the West's past and assume it is our right to be blessed in this way again.

“Those who revered the LORD spoke with one another”

The prophet Malachi describes a society in which people were still going through the motions of organised religious worship, but half-heartedly, offering their lame and sick animals to Him (Malachi 1). They considered that struggling to serve God was pointless, given that evildoers were so visibly prospering (Malachi 3:8-16). But some in that society still loved God and honoured His commandments; they must have been greatly distressed by what was happening around them. Let us read in Malachi's words what that faithful remnant did, what God did in response and what He promised them for the future:

Then those who revered the LORD spoke with one another. The LORD took note and listened, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who revered the LORD and thought on his name. They shall be mine, says the LORD of hosts, my special possession on the day when I act, and I will spare them as parents spare their children who serve them. Then once more you shall see the difference between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him. (Malachi 3:16-18 NRSV)

Even if we are the only one in our family or church or town reading the Bible and praying humbly to Jesus, He will take note and listen. But, if we can, let us gather with like-minded others to speak together, pray together and study the Scriptures together, thus helping one another to remain true to the Lord.

“You are mine and I am Yours”

Wesley managed to transform the drunken revels of Bristol coal miners every 31 December into the thoughtful “watch-night” worship services with which

Methodists see in the new year. Furthermore, in 1755 he began the custom of “Renewing the Covenant” on the first Sunday of the year, when believers solemnly re-affirm their commitment to the Lord. The Methodist Covenant Prayer, which many other churches have now adopted, runs:

I am no longer my own but yours.
Put me to what you will,
rank me with whom you will;
put me to doing,
put me to suffering;
let me be employed for you,
or laid aside for you,
exalted for you,
or brought low for you;
let me be full,
let me be empty,
let me have all things,
let me have nothing:
I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things
to your pleasure and disposal.
And now, glorious and blessed God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
you are mine and I am yours. So be it.
And the covenant now made on earth,
let it be ratified in heaven.

So, as 2023 begins, let each one of us recommit ourselves to the Lord, and determine to make the new year one in which we give priority to prayer and Bible study, walking humbly with our God, and asking Him:

LORD, I have heard the report about you;
LORD, I stand in awe of your deeds.
Revive your work in these years;
make it known in these years.
In your wrath remember mercy!
(Habakkuk 3:2, CSB)

DR PATRICK SOOKHDEO

International Director of Barnabas Aid

For further information see Patrick Sookhdeo's books *The New Civic Religion* (2016) and *The Death of Western Christianity* (2017). To purchase please visit barnabasaid.org/resources/books

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Headteacher Tjambiru Uapeutjunda and his family at Ondjije Unit, a mobile primary school, rejoiced at the timely delivery from food.gives

food.gives

God sends His “ravens” to drought-ridden region



The food.gives boxes shipped from the UK are unloaded on their way to remote Christian communities in Kunene region

“Overwhelming was their joy when we called them,” our project partner relates. “The LORD’s ravens have brought them food! To God be the glory!”

Our partner was describing the joyful response of a faithful Namibian Christian couple to the arrival of supplies from Barnabas Aid’s food.gives programme. The couple were reminded powerfully of God’s miraculous provision for Elijah in 1 Kings 17:4, when ravens brought bread for the prophet to sustain him in his exile.

In total 20 tonnes of food and other aid were delivered to 6,000 Christians in this drought-ridden African country. This was a lifeline in a region that is especially vulnerable to harsh weather patterns.

“God is faithful and He will provide for his children in need for those who trust in Him!” our partner rejoices.

Vital aid to combat growing food insecurity

The couple who received Barnabas Aid’s help with such joy belong to the marginalised Himba – an indigenous people with an estimated population of

Children in the Himba community are amongst the most deprived in Namibia



about 50,000 people living in Kunene in northern Namibia.

Aid from food.gives reached Opuwo, the regional capital of Kunene, ready for onward delivery to needy communities scattered across the region. Progress along rough tracks was laborious in this most underdeveloped corner of Namibia.

As they travelled, the ravages of drought were plain for our project partners to see. In many places there was a severe shortage of maize or vegetables to harvest. Over three days they were able to visit Christian leaders in seven locations and supply them with food boxes to distribute to their communities.

Each box contained 6 kg of rice, 2 kg of chickpeas, 2 kg of green lentils, 1.5 kg of salt and half a kilogram of bath soap.

“God is faithful and He will provide for his children in need for those who trust in Him,” says our project partner. Quoting Psalm 145:15 he adds, “The children of God in northern Namibia can testify that, “The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food at the proper time.””

Drought and failed harvests

“These donations came at the right time,” agrees Tjambiru Uapeuotjunda, the head teacher of a mobile primary school. The Himba people are semi-nomadic, moving across the region throughout the year in search of water,

so that even schools must be ready to travel from place to place.

“The school was still waiting for food from the government,” added Tjambiru. For three days he and his wife had had no maize meal (a staple in southern Africa that can be eaten like porridge) to give to the children. So severe was the crisis that they had sent the pupils home.

Namibia is the driest country in sub-Saharan Africa. The sub-tropical High Pressure Belt, with its frequent clear skies, provides more than 300 days of sunshine per year, leaving the country particularly prone to drought.

The lack of water is not for want of trying. More than 100,000 boreholes have been drilled in Namibia over the past century, but one third of these boreholes have now dried up and can no longer provide water.

About half of the population depends on agriculture (largely subsistence farming) for its livelihood, but Namibia must still import some of its food, and global insecurity has diminished the country’s ability to import wheat while drought leads inevitably to failed harvests.

“My wife and I are devoted Christians that keep the Word of our living God alive in this remote area,” Tjambiru says. “It is hard but what shall we do? Refuse to obey the Lord’s will? No! We serve him wholeheartedly.”

A humanitarian report in 2022 estimated that 750,000 people in Namibia are food insecure – a huge proportion of the country’s population of 2.5 million – and this situation is similar to many countries across Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

Another report published this year states that globally at least 828 million people are undernourished. Almost half of these – 345 million – are “facing acute food insecurity”, and of these 50 million are “teetering on the edge of famine”.

In September 2022 researchers calculated that one person dies of hunger every 4 to 12 seconds.

“The present global food crisis may become one of the worst disasters ever to face humanity,” said Barnabas Aid International Director Dr Patrick Sookhdeo.

You can help! Through food.gives Barnabas Aid is sending food and other practical aid from the UK, USA, Australia and New Zealand to hungry and impoverished Christian communities around the world. Please visit www.food.gives to see how you can help provide food and nourishment to our brothers and sisters.

Christian convert Naser Navard Goltapeh released from jail

IRAN

An Iranian Christian convert from Islam has been released mid-way through his ten-year prison sentence.

Naser Navard Goltapeh, 61, has served nearly five years in Evin Prison for “acting against national security with the intention to overthrow the regime”.

Naser was told on 17 October 2022 that he had been pardoned, and he has now returned home.

His conviction was a result of alleged links to churches and Christian groups outside Iran, as well as his role in running a “house church”.

Naser was arrested during a police raid on a church meeting in July 2017, and began his prison sentence in



Naser Navard Goltapeh was convicted of “acting against national security” for his role in running a church [Image credit: Article 18]

January 2018. Four requests for a retrial were all rejected by the Iranian authorities.

Evin Prison – in the Iranian capital, Tehran – is notorious for mistreatment of prisoners. Naser’s family

have said that he was kept in solitary confinement for two months while undergoing gruelling interrogation.

It is not known whether Naser’s release is linked to the fire that killed at least eight

people and injured dozens more at Evin Prison on 15 October. None of the Christian prisoners at Evin are reported to have been harmed in the blaze.

Farsi (Persian)-speaking Christians, like Naser, are converts from Islam and therefore punishable as apostates according to Islamic law. Unlike the historic Armenian- and Assyrian-speaking Christian communities they are not permitted to hold church services or worship freely.

Farsi-speaking congregations are regularly raided and members charged with offences such as involvement in an “illegal group”, “acting against national security”, or spreading “propaganda contrary to and disturbing to the holy religion of Islam”.

Eight Christians killed, churches and homes razed, in jihadi attacks

MOZAMBIQUE

At least eight Christians were killed by Islamic State (IS)-affiliated terrorists in attacks across northern Mozambique in September.

Six were killed in three attacks in three days in Nampula Province.

On 6 September 2022 terrorists from IS-affiliated organisation Ahlu Sunnah Wa-Jama, known locally as Al Shabaab (not the Somali-based group of the same name), killed one Christian by shooting her in the head.

In separate statements Al Shabaab claimed responsibility for two further attacks in Nampula, saying that one Christian was killed and a church building burned on 7 September, and four Christians killed along

with 120 houses and two church buildings burned on 8 September.

The Islamist group also reported the killing of two other Christians in separate attacks further north in Cabo Delgado Province.

Al Shabaab has been highly active in Cabo Delgado since 2017, subjecting both Christians and moderate Muslims to a campaign of terror.

The militants work strategically, launching attacks in one area to draw in security forces and leave other areas defenceless. They make about two attacks every week, burning houses, killing people, raping women and kidnapping boys to serve as child soldiers.

Two more “Chibok girls” rescued after eight years

NIGERIA

Two young Nigerian women kidnapped as teenagers by Boko Haram Islamist terrorists from a school in Chibok, Borno State, eight years ago have been found.

The Nigerian Army recovered them with their children in separate operations against terrorists in the state.

Yana Pogu was found on 29 September 2022 with four children, two boys and twin girls, in Mairari village, Bama Local Government Area (LGA). Rejoice Sanki was rescued with two children on 2 October in Kawuri, Konduga LGA.

The women and their children were undergoing medical examination before being passed over to the care of the Borno government.

Boko Haram abducted 276 girls, mostly Christian, from the Government Girls Secondary School, Chibok, in April 2014. Yana and Rejoice were among the Christian girls taken captive that day. An estimated 167 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.

In earlier operations against Boko Haram in Borno State in June and July 2022 five former Chibok schoolgirls and their children were found, including three young women whose recovery was reported in *Barnabas Aid* (“In Brief”, November/December 2022).

Pastor among 11 killed by militants linked to Islamic State

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO



In a video released on 1 April 2022, ADF leader Musa Baluku renewed the group's pledge of allegiance to Islamic State

Islamist militants killed 11 people in an attack on Christian-majority north-east Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) on 4 October 2022.

A pastor was among the dead as Islamists from the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), which is linked to Islamic State (IS, ISIS, ISIL, Daesh), raided the village of Vido in North Kivu province.

An additional 20 people were unaccounted for

following the raid, while local officials said that 25 houses had been burned.

In May 2022 at least 24 villagers were killed by ADF terrorists in another area of North Kivu, which borders Uganda. Many have fled across the border to escape ongoing violence.

Along with neighbouring Ituri province, North Kivu remains under a state of emergency (known as a “state of siege”), which was imposed in May 2021.

Karnataka becomes eleventh state to pass anti-conversion law

INDIA

Karnataka became the eleventh Indian state to pass an anti-conversion law that criminalises religious conversions solicited through force, fraud or allurement.

The law, known formally as the Protection of Right to Freedom of Religion Bill, was passed by the state legislature's upper house on 15 September 2022.

The passing of this law makes permanent the provisions of a temporary anti-conversion ordinance announced in May 2022.

The law carries a punishment of five years' imprisonment and a minimum fine of 25,000 rupees \$532 for those who solicit religious conversions using “force, undue influence, coercion, allurement or by any fraudulent means” or “by a promise of marriage”.

An attempt to convert a minor, a woman, or a person belonging to the Scheduled Castes (those viewed as having the lowest status according to the Hindu caste system) is punishable with a maximum of ten years in prison and a fine of 50,000 rupees.

Anyone who wishes to

change religion must inform the authorities of the reasons for their conversion 30 days before making the change.

Opposition parties and Christian leaders argued that the bill violates Article 25 of the Indian constitution, which guarantees freedom of religion.

Meanwhile, activist Ashwini Kumar Upadhyay made a request for the country's Supreme Court to direct the federal (central) government to implement a nationwide anti-conversion law. His submission to the court – known as a petition – argues that religious conversions coerced using force, fraud or allurement are “a nationwide problem”.

The court on 23 September asked the federal government to submit a response to the petition.

A previous petition to the Supreme Court by Upadhyay for action to be taken against religious conversion failed, as the court held that persons above the age of 18 had the right to choose their own religion. A similar petition from Upadhyay in the Delhi High Court was dismissed for lack of evidence in June 2022.



The Karnataka Legislative Council (upper house of the state legislature) [Image credit: The Hindu]

What your gifts have achieved in the last year*

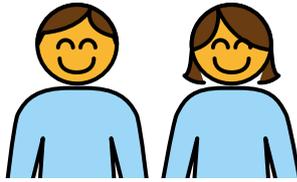
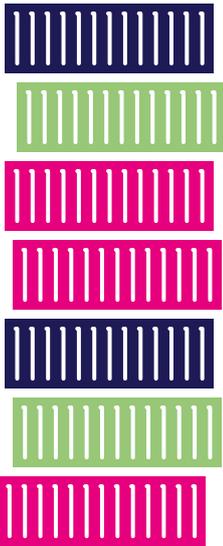
We are thankful to the Lord and to all our supporters for their generous gifts of finance and food to help suffering Christians around the world. Here are some headlines and highlights from the last year, for which we praise God.

More than 1,200 tonnes

of direct aid sent by food.gives and medical.gives

76

forty-foot containers



10,366 Children

Education

Schooling for **10,366** children in **126** Christian schools

126

Christian schools



1,451 apprentices, of whom 425 have already completed their training

34

twenty-foot containers



47,000



47,000 Bibles and other Christian literature distributed

8,746



8,746 small business livelihood projects supporting around **43,730** Christians

50,000,000



medical.gives

50,000,000 pieces of COVID PPE delivered to Christian hospitals in five African countries, benefiting **1,000,000** health workers



12,730,000

meals of ePap delivered across Zimbabwe and Madagascar

12,730,000

*1 November 2021 to 31 October 2022

In Touch

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Barnabas has freed 1,475 Christian families from bonded labour in Pakistan's brick kilns

Barnabas frees Pakistan Christian brick-kiln families from bonded labour

Barnabas Aid's Regional Coordinator for Pakistan, Wilson Saraj, spoke at a number of churches in New Zealand in October about our work helping marginalised Christians in South Asia.

In particular he described how Barnabas has freed 1,475 impoverished Christian families from the yoke of bonded labour in Pakistan's brick kilns. The project started in 2017 and has taken place in 17 phases. God willing, we will release many more families in phase 18.

Brick-kiln workers are low paid and families live at survival level. If someone falls sick, or another family crisis occurs, they have to take a loan from their employer, the brick-kiln owner. Interest on the loan is then deducted from their meagre weekly wages, and this can go on for years, even generations.

Almost like slavery

As long as the debt remains, families are bonded to the brick kiln, unable

to leave or get another job. It's almost like slavery.

Thanks to the generosity of Barnabas supporters, and by God's grace, we have been able to free many hundreds of families by paying off their debts, ranging in size from about \$330 to \$4,668. Our project partners in Pakistan then show families how to save regularly, so that they never have to get into debt again.

Barnabas supporters Robyn and Bert Jackson, from Hamilton, were thrilled to have attended one of Wilson's talks, which were held in Whakatane, Hamilton and Auckland.

The couple have freed three brick-kiln families, and supported other Barnabas projects, over a number of years by staging fundraising art exhibitions and sales, with the help of their friends in the art community.

"It was great to hear so much from Wilson about the people we have been blessed to help in Pakistan," said Robyn, a talented artist in her own right.

"Knowing brick-kiln families are still debt free and progressing is wonderful."

The couple's most recent art sale was a painting by artist Sue Evans. Proceeds from the sale are already helping to free another poor Christian brick-kiln family.

International Directors of Barnabas tour NZ

"Understanding the Times" was the theme of a New Zealand tour by Barnabas Aid's International Directors in November.

Dr Patrick Sookhdeo spoke about the impact that war, natural disasters, famine, disease and persecution are having on the global suffering Church. Caroline Kerslake, International Director of Projects, gave an update on how the gifts of Barnabas supporters are supporting Christians in need around the world.

The directors visited churches in Auckland, Tauranga, Hamilton, Palmerston North and Waikanae, and ended with a Zoom meeting connecting supporters from across New Zealand.

Due to Covid restrictions, the directors had not been able to visit New Zealand for three years. "We were very excited to have them back to tell supporters about the wonderful work that Barnabas Aid continues to do for the suffering Church," said Barnabas' New Zealand CEO Stephanie Johnston.

Help us to celebrate Barnabas Aid's 30th anniversary

In 2023 Barnabas Aid is celebrating its 30th anniversary. Please watch this space for details about the special events we will be holding to celebrate with all of our wonderful supporters (you!). God willing, we hope to have a big event in November 2023.

In the meantime, it would be great to hear how some of you have been blessed by the ministry of Barnabas Aid over the years. If you would like to share your story, please visit barnabasaid.org/30years - we would love to hear it.

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

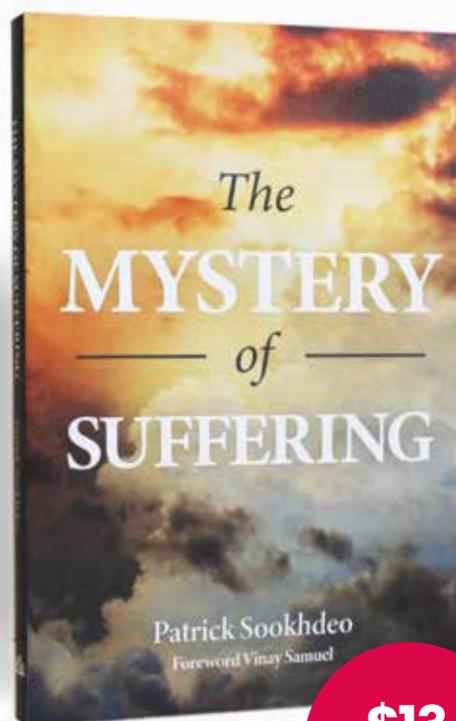
Founder Chairman of Divya Shanthi Ministries, Bangalore, India
Founder of the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies

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”.

ISBN: 978-1-952450-16-7
Cover: Paperback



\$13
(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