

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



Suffering Church Action
and Awareness Week

SUNDAY NOVEMBER 1 – SUNDAY NOVEMBER 8
19 PAGES OF INFORMATION AND RESOURCES
INSIDE FOR YOU AND YOUR CHURCH

HOPE

IN SUFFERING

*The courage of the
global persecuted
Church*



barnabasaid[®]
hope and relief for the persecuted church

The Barnabas Aid Distinctive

What helps make Barnabas Aid distinct from other Christian organizations that deal with persecution?

We work by:

- Directing our aid only to Christians, although its benefits may not be exclusive to them ("As we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, **especially to those who belong to the family of believers.**" Galatians 6:10, emphasis added)
- Channeling money **from** Christians **through** Christians **to** Christians (we do not send people, we only send money)
- Channeling money through existing structures in the countries where funds are sent (e.g. local churches or Christian organizations)
- Using the money to fund projects which have been developed by local Christians in their own communities, countries or regions
- Considering any request, however small
- Acting as equal partners with the persecuted Church, whose leaders often help shape our overall direction

- Acting on behalf of the persecuted Church, to be their voice - making their needs known to Christians around the world and the injustice of their persecution known to governments and international bodies

We seek to:

- meet both practical and spiritual needs
- encourage, strengthen and enable the existing local Church and Christian communities - so they can maintain their presence and witness rather than setting up our own structures or sending out missionaries
- tackle persecution at its root by making known the aspects of other religions and ideologies that result in injustice and oppression of Christians and others
- inform and enable Christians in the West to respond to the growing challenge of other religions and ideologies to Church, society and mission in their own countries

- facilitate global intercession for the persecuted Church by providing comprehensive prayer material
- safeguard and protect our volunteers, staff, partners and beneficiaries
- keep our overheads low

We believe:

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

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

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Swift Code: UOVMBMYKL

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Front Cover: A South Sudanese Christian refugee in Uganda. Barnabas enabled her and many others to train in vegetable growing and nutrition


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hope and relief for the persecuted church

N A E | National Association of
Evangelicals



Hope deferred

“I have waited for thy salvation O LORD.” (Genesis 49:18, KJV)

We are waiting – waiting for a vaccine to be developed to protect us from Covid-19, waiting for an end to facemasks and lockdowns, waiting to be able to crowd into our church buildings without social distancing and sing God’s praise together, waiting for the world’s economy to recover. We are waiting for God to deliver us from this pandemic and all its repercussions.

The Bible is full of waiting on the Lord, waiting for Him to intervene, to rescue, to restore. Often the waiting time is prolonged far beyond what we had expected.

“The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved.” (Jeremiah 8:20, KJV)

This plaintive cry of the Lord’s people, who had “hoped for peace but no good has come, for a time of healing but there was only terror”, may be ours too as we wait in a deteriorating world situation, with growing hunger, hatred and violence. (Jeremiah 8:15)

But still we must continue to wait, trust and hope, praying for God’s deliverance, no matter how long and hard the day. Even Elijah had to send his servant seven times to look towards the sea, before a little cloud was seen. (1 Kings 18:43-44)

Our trust must be in God and in His divine providence, not in the scientists struggling to produce a vaccine, nor in the politicians and economists puzzling over how to restore livelihoods. The words of a well-loved hymn, written by a young German Christian in the turbulent seventeenth century, remind us to rely solely on God:

All my hope on God is founded:
He doth still my trust renew.
Me through change and chance He guideth,
Only good and only true.
God unknown, He alone
Calls my heart to be His own.
Pride of man and earthly glory,
Sword and crown betray his trust:
What with care and toil he buildeth,
Tower and temple fall to dust.
But God’s power, hour by hour,
Is my temple and my tower.¹

Jeremiah prophesied in a time of national disaster. But he brought to the exiles in Babylon a message of hope:

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” (Jeremiah 29:11)

Jeremiah also modelled this message of hope by very publicly buying a field, as the Lord had commanded him, while Jerusalem was being besieged by the Babylonian army (Jeremiah 32:6-9). In a time of disaster, in a period of great uncertainty as to the future, Jeremiah was called by God to invest in hope.

To many, Jeremiah’s action must have seemed ludicrous. No doubt some said it was an unnecessary risk, and others questioned his motives or his state of mind. Yet God was telling him not to retreat, not to give up, but to believe that there is going to come a time when God would be re-building and that Jeremiah was to be a part of this plan.

So we are called not just to see the tragedies of the present, but to have hope for the future, to believe that God has a plan for us and that in times of great trial His purposes will be fulfilled. For we know that “in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose”. (Romans 8:28)

¹ Joachim Neander (1650-1680), translated from German to English by Robert Bridges (1844-1930)

DR PATRICK SOOKHDEO

International Director

4 Investing in Hope
Barnabas’ priorities for sustaining the persecuted Church in post-covid times

5 Our eternal hope
Clear and supportive spiritual wisdom on the difficult topic of death

6 Compassion in action
Arrival of aid from Barnabas rekindles faith of Nigerian Christian victims of violence



7
Suffering Church Action and Awareness Week 2020

Resources for your church

8-24 Hope in Suffering
See page 8 for an overview of our feature and contents for SCAAW 2020

25 In brief
Hagia Sophia Cathedral reopens as a mosque in Istanbul

26 What did your gifts achieve?
A round up of the wonderful difference to lives your donations made

27 In Touch
Barnabas USA wins special award for second year running

Investing in Hope



Investing in income-generation start-ups. A grant from Barnabas Aid enabled this small business to be established in a south-east Asian country where Christians are greatly persecuted. Good quality chickens are provided to poor rural believers, who can sell the eggs

At Barnabas Aid, we believe that God will protect and keep His people now, just as He did in Jeremiah's time (see page 3). We believe that He has plans to give us a hope and a future, just as He did in a time of disaster 26 centuries ago (Jeremiah 29:11).

We want to **invest in hope** for our persecuted brothers and sisters, in the same practical way that Jeremiah did when he bought a field while Jerusalem was under siege.

It looks as if the coronavirus pandemic will have changed the world permanently even if a vaccine or cure is found (see pages 10-18). This will impact us all, and especially Christians in places of pressure and persecution and those who are already very poor. They suffered severely during Covid lockdown and life will not return to how it was before.

Church leaders are looking for solutions. Rev Ashim Baroi, General Secretary of the Bangladesh Baptist Church Sangha, wrote to Barnabas Aid on July 1:

The future is going to be hard to overcome this situation, because the economic situation will be changed. We need to be thinking for ourselves, how can we sustain our families and the organizations and the institutions and we need to take a wise decision over how we sustain ourselves and we need to build up income generation. We cannot solve this problem alone; we need to build up our big network.

In preparation for post-Covid times, Barnabas Aid is re-structuring our project priorities, in order to strengthen persecuted Christian communities so they can survive into the future. The New Testament practice of local churches being self-governing, self-propagating and self-funding is now essential if they are to continue to exist and witness to our faith.

We want to help churches to become

self-sufficient in the new realities of the post-Covid world. The priorities we see are:

- 1. Investing in leadership training.** We want to invest in Christian leadership, equipping leaders with the theological and other skills that they will need to lead God's persecuted people in post-Covid times. This has always been a priority area for Barnabas Aid but now, with God's help, we are expanding it in a new way. In conjunction with universities in South Africa and the Oxford Center for Religion and Public Life, we are enabling senior church leaders from across Africa, Asia and elsewhere to study, some at masters degree level and others for doctorates. For more junior church leaders we have created the Global Institute for Leadership Development, which provides practical training for ministry through courses which are integrated into their existing daily work for the Lord. All levels of study are primarily by distance learning and therefore unaffected by Covid-19 travel restrictions or lockdown.
- 2. Investing in schools and vocational training.** Barnabas Aid already supports 144 Christian schools providing education for 14,860 Christian children in an average year. This is vital for their future job prospects. But we want to do more, especially in equipping Christian young people with specific skills for employment. Vocational training and apprenticeships will enable them to support their families, give to their local churches and Christian ministries, and educate their own children.
- 3. Investing in income generation start-ups.** As Rev Baroi said, income generation will be more important than ever for Christian communities after the pandemic. Local churches, Bible schools, seminaries and other Christian ministries can then cover their own running costs: they only need some one-off funding to get started. The same applies to poor Christian families – a small grant to pay the initial capital costs

can give a family the dignity and security of earning their living, even in a context where Christians struggle to get jobs due to discrimination.

- 4. Investing in health.** Where Christians live at a very basic level, with just sufficient to cover their normal daily needs, an illness or accident can be a disaster. For they do not have the extra money needed for medical treatment. Regular medication for long-term conditions like diabetes or kidney disease can also be unaffordable. We want to help provide more Christian-run clinics for poor Christian communities, where treatment can be provided at affordable rates.
- 5. Investing in spiritual resources.** We want to continue providing Bibles, Scriptures and other resources to build up the faith of brothers and sisters struggling with so many daily challenges. In addition, we will launch, God willing, a new website called *Barnabas Today*, providing spiritual resources to strengthen and encourage believers around the world, with an emphasis on materials written by and for those in the Global South.
- 6. Investing in help for vulnerable Christians.** The vulnerable will be even more vulnerable in the post-Covid world. We will continue to help victims of anti-Christian violence or injustice, converts from other religions, Christian widows and orphans, the displaced and refugees. We will also strengthen the infrastructure of impoverished Christian communities, e.g. providing safe clean water supplies. When natural disasters strike in places where Christians suffer discrimination or persecution, we will help our brothers and sisters who have no help from other sources.

Please pray with us for God's guidance and enabling, as we wait for His salvation and ultimately for the return of our Lord Jesus.

Our eternal hope

Death is the unmentionable subject. People often view their future death with fear or resentment. As it draws nearer, they rage against it, saying they have not enjoyed their lives enough yet, have not accomplished everything on their “bucket list”, or will miss their loved ones.

Death is the only great certainty in life, apart from the fact of our birth. Just as we remember our birthday every year, when our earthly lives began, so we should remember regularly that there will be a day when our earthly lives come to an end. As Christian believers, we could look on that day as our second birthday for, in the words of Bede in eighth century England, “Christ is the morning star who when the night of this world is past brings to his saints the promise of the light of life and opens everlasting day.”¹

In a glorious passage on the resurrection of the dead, the apostle Paul writes repeatedly of death as “falling asleep”, after which we are raised imperishable and immortal, for death has lost its sting. It is so exciting one can hardly wait. (1 Corinthians 15:12-57). Small wonder that Paul wrote elsewhere of his great desire to depart this life and be with Christ (Philippians 1:21-24).

Death is the gateway to our heavenly life in our resurrection bodies. It opens the way to blessed rest from our troubles, sorrows and afflictions and from the weary spiritual battle of life in a fallen world. C.S. Lewis called death a “farewell to shadowlands” and the “beginning of Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on for ever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.”²

Instead of shrinking from the thought of death, we should follow the example of Christians who lived in times far more uncertain than this present era of coronavirus, times when early death from illness, accident or violence was always likely. These Christians thought often of death and kept themselves in a state of readiness. The Welsh non-conformist minister Matthew Henry (1662-1714) wrote: “It is good for us to think familiarly of dying, to think of it as our going to bed,

that by thinking often of it, and thinking thus of it, we may get above the fear of it.”³

What habits of thought can we embrace so as to make ourselves comfortable with the knowledge of our mortality?

1. Death is like retiring to the privacy of our own bedrooms to lie down for a night’s sleep. Every morning we rise from our beds and go out to mix with people again. In the same way, death is a solo experience, but we shall meet our loved ones again in the morning of the resurrection. When we say goodbye to them on earth, it is only like saying “good night” in the evening, knowing that we will greet them again next day.
2. At death we leave behind our earthly bodies, just as we take off our clothes to sleep. Some of us have bodies that are a great burden, whether through sickness, frailty, failing faculties or disability. Some of us also have mental illnesses that distress us and weigh us down. At death we leave behind all such hindrances, just like taking off cumbersome, scratchy, badly-fitting clothes. What a joy and relief! In the morning we shall find a beautiful new set of clothes in which our souls can dress for eternity. (Job 1:21; 2 Corinthians 5:2-4)
3. At death we shall lie down in the grave as we lie on our beds, but – being forgiven sinners – we shall rest in peace (Isaiah 57:2). There will be no tossing and turning, no nightmares. The grave is a bed of spices (Song of Songs 6:2). We shall rise from it, completely refreshed, to meet our soul’s Beloved and be with Him for ever.

So we could follow the example of some of the saints of old and use these three nightly events – going to our bedroom, undressing, lying down – to remind ourselves of death, that it is inevitable, that it might come tonight, and that it is the gateway to heaven. Before falling asleep we could prayerfully commit ourselves into God’s hands, as if it were our last prayer.

DR PATRICK SOOKHDEO



What the Bible says

- I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. (John 11:25-26)
- I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end He will stand on the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me! (Job 19:25-27)
- For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. (Philippians 1:21)
- Then I heard a voice from heaven say, “Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.” “Yes,” says the Spirit, “they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them.” (Revelation 14:13)



A prayer in the hour of death

In this hour of my death
I entrust myself into Your loving care.
Release me, O Lord,
From all fear and anxiety.
Give me that confidence
To embrace You, my Lord.
Give me that faith to see
The heavenly kingdom that awaits me.
To You I commit now my soul.
Forgive me my many sins and failures
By Your great mercy.
Take my hand,
O my beloved Lord,
And lead me Home
So that when I awake
I awake with You.
Amen

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¹ From Bede’s commentary on the book of Revelation

² C.S. Lewis, *The Last Battle* (1956), Harmondsworth: Puffin Books, 1964, pp.155,165.

³ Matthew Henry, “Directions for Daily Communion with God” (1712), in *The Miscellaneous Writings of the Revd Matthew Henry*, London: John M’Gowan, 1838, p.165.

how barnabas is helping

Arrival of aid rekindles the faith of attack survivors in Nigeria

“The Scripture says when you see your brother is in mourning you also mourn with him. Barnabas has mourned with us and we are so grateful.” These were the words of a church leader after Barnabas delivered essential supplies to Hura village in Plateau State, Nigeria, where nine Christians were killed in an attack by Fulani militants in April.

At the time of the attack, the village was sheltering hundreds of Christians who had survived previous Fulani onslaughts in nearby villages and many households were accommodating around 25 people. Barnabas provided one month's food in the form of maize, beans and rice for 58 households as well as sleeping mats, blankets and buckets. We also gave roofing sheets for 24 houses damaged in the raid.

Expressing his thanks to supporters, a pastor said, “What you [Barnabas] have done is rekindle the faith in our people that indeed God cares and is always with us in our suffering.”



Food supplies arrive to help attack survivors in Hura

\$7,670

*Project reference: PR772
(Victims of Violence in Nigeria)*

Self-sufficiency of pastors helps rural churches to grow in Sierra Leone

This year Barnabas has helped to empower 40 rural pastors in Sierra Leone, a Muslim-majority country still recovering from years of civil war. Each pastor received training in good farming practice and was given seeds and tools to grow food to support their families in their remote ministries. They were also given a bicycle to enable them to carry out pastoral work.

Pastors not only became self-sufficient but also received extra income from selling surplus produce that they used to meet family and ministry needs. Numbers attending churches rose because pastors used their bicycles to visit more church members and organize outreach programs.

One pastor said, “I now feel confident that God who told me to leave my comfort zone to come to this community and serve his people is faithful in his promise. I had no idea he was going to provide these blessings.” Barnabas has funded this project for nine years, empowering 360 pastors.



A pastor waters the crops in his garden

\$8,680 for one year

Project reference: PR851

Food, comfort and prayers amid the rubble of Albania quake

Hundreds of Christians in Albania received food and spiritual comfort from Barnabas Aid following a double earthquake that claimed 51 lives and destroyed more than 1,100 homes in November 2019.

Every month for four months, our church partners visited 99 Christian families (about 500 people) to deliver bags of food essentials and to join with them in prayer as they struggled to overcome the trauma of the quake. One Christian family lost nine loved ones. “The situation was very difficult,” said a church volunteer. “They needed advice, for someone to listen, and we were there for that.”

The volunteer continued, “There were those believers who were the only Christians in their family and it was difficult for them. But when other members saw the love shown by the church, they were challenged, and this led them to ask more about Jesus. Some of them believed.”



Smiles from an Albanian Christian family as they receive a Barnabas food parcel

\$14,770

*Project reference: PR634
(Disaster Relief Fund)*

Compassion in action

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 oppressed Christians.

Handicraft classes boost incomes of women converts in Kazakhstan

Handicraft classes funded by Barnabas have transformed the meagre household budgets of Christian converts in Kazakhstan, where Muslim-background believers are viewed with distrust and struggle to find work because of discrimination against them. The six two-day workshops teaching crafts such as soap making and candle making were aimed at the wives of pastors or workers from poor rural churches, but four men (all church workers) joined the 35 women who took part.

Participants used their knowledge to make soaps and candles at home to sell, and taught the craft to their Christian friends. As family budgets grew, so did their financial support for the church. Their success also encouraged other Christians, whose faith was tested by financial problems.

Mother-of-three “Gulya”, the wife of a church worker, said the masterclass was a “big blessing” for her family, explaining that now she could support the family with her earnings while her husband ministered fulltime.



Christian friends get busy making soap back home

\$6,290

*Project reference: PR1464
(Livelihoods in Kazakhstan)*

Help for Christian refugees facing hostility and discrimination in Thailand

Thousands of Christians fled from Pakistan to Thailand but, instead of finding refuge, they face hostility and discrimination from the immigration authorities. Refugees have little hope of getting a job and struggle to meet their families’ needs. The constant threat of arbitrary arrest or random house raid by the authorities leaves many refugees in a state of anxiety.

A recent grant from Barnabas provided regular food aid for 220 refugees for eight months, gave medical assistance to 13 families and enabled 52 Christian children to receive an education. Refugees helped organize the distribution of food parcels and helped with teaching the children, which raised their self-esteem.

A Christian father-of-four said he had encountered “so many problems” since arriving in Thailand six years ago. “I am very thankful to you [Barnabas] who helped us with food and medical,” he said. “God be with you. We are praying for everyone who is helping us.”



Pakistani Christian children sing out in church in Thailand

\$23,850

Project reference: PR1276

Bible school equips new Central Asian church leaders for ministry

Christian converts from Islam were equipped with the practical skills and Bible knowledge they need for the challenges of their church ministry during a six-month leadership course, partly funded by Barnabas. The 20 students came from Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, countries where the practice of Christianity is restricted to varying degrees and converts are subject to hostility from the majority-Muslim population.

The course, based at a church in Kyrgyzstan, included both classroom-based study and practical experience at local churches. Experienced church leaders from across the former Soviet Union tutored students on subjects including Christian doctrine, evangelization in a Muslim context and practical Christian life, giving a range of knowledge that students could not receive in their own churches.

The Christian convert community in the former Soviet Union countries of Central Asia is only about 25 years old. The growing convert churches are in need of leaders and this Bible school trains new believers who want to dedicate their lives to serving Christ in church ministry.



A student leads a discussion within the class

\$3,945

*Project ref: PR1099
(Training for church leaders in Kyrgyzstan)*



“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, ... “plans to give you hope and a future.”
(Jeremiah 29:11)

Be a part of Suffering Church Action and Awareness Week as we stand with our suffering family in looking to our bright hope in Christ amid global crises.

Locusts, coronavirus and devastating floods have swept the globe in 2020, adding immeasurably to the suffering of persecuted Christians. Before these disasters, so many of our brothers and sisters were already marginalized, attacked, kidnapped, raped and even killed simply because they are Christians.

Hope in Suffering focuses on the courage and resilience of the persecuted Church. Through our suffering family, be inspired to find strength today in the face of pressures and struggles, as we look to the bright hope Jesus promises us for tomorrow. Join with us to lift up our persecuted brothers and sisters in prayer, take practical action to help them, as well as raise awareness of their plight.

“Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.”
Romans 12:12

Suffering Church Action and Awareness Week (SCAAW) is an opportunity for us to stand alongside our suffering brothers and sisters, in every corner of the globe, and demonstrate Christ’s love to each one of them, whatever they are facing.

With this magazine and the free inspirational SCAAW Resource Pack, there is a range of resources to help you, your prayer group and your church participate in Suffering Church Action and Awareness Week. We suggest November 1 - 8, but these resources can be used at any time that suits your church’s calendar. Here is a guide to what resources are available and how you could use them. For further supplies and more information, please contact your local Barnabas office (see inside front cover for details).

Inside this special issue of Barnabas Aid

9	HOPE IN SUFFERING POSTER A poster to publicise your SCAAW event or meeting
10	FINDING HOPE IN SUFFERING Find out about the challenges facing the global persecuted Church in the post-covid era
19	INSPIRATIONAL HYMN FOR SCAAW 2020 Find hope and encouragement with our new SCAAW 2020 hymn: “My hope is sure and certain”
20	SERMON OUTLINE Notes for a sermon on the theme: <i>Hope in Suffering</i> (Romans 12:9-21)
22	SMALL GROUP BIBLE STUDY Rejoice in Hope: a thought provoking Bible study on Romans 12:12
23	ACTIVITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE Ideas and games for children and young people
24	GETTING INVOLVED WITH SCAAW More ideas and resources for your SCAAW event or meeting



SUFFERING CHURCH ACTION AND AWARENESS WEEK
SUNDAY NOVEMBER 1 – NOVEMBER 8

SCAAW 2020
Hope in Suffering
inspirational resource pack

Our resource pack contains the following items. **Please tell us the quantities you would like of each – all free of charge** (go to barnabasaid.org or contact our US office, details inside front cover):



Posters to promote your Suffering Church Action and Awareness Week service or event (a cut-out poster is also on the opposite page).



Eight-day devotional booklet to help you pray for suffering Christians during SCAAW week



Praying for the Persecuted Church booklet covering 39 countries



SCAAW 2020 **prayer bookmark**

Let us know if you would like extra copies of the following:



This SCAAW issue of *Barnabas Aid* magazine, **Eight-day Devotional booklets** and our **SCAAW 2020 Prayer Bookmark** to hand out at your event

A range of digital media resources will be available to download from our website:

A SCAAW overview video to encourage your church or group to get involved

Powerpoint sermon outline with images

Printable PDFs of: *Bible study, Sermon outline, Poster, Barnabas Aid* magazine *Praying for the Persecuted Church* booklet

To access these resources visit www.barnabasaid.org/scaaw where you can also order extras of any of the items listed above.

And enclosed with your magazine:

EIGHT-DAY DEVOTIONAL BOOKLET

NEW 2020 PRAYER BOOKMARK



HOPE

IN SUFFERING

What we're doing for Suffering Church Action and Awareness Week

What

When

Where



barnabasaid.org/scaaw



Suffering Church Action and Awareness Week



FINDING HOPE IN SUFFERING

*the courage of the global
persecuted Church*

*“... We also glory in
our sufferings, because
we know that suffering
produces perseverance;
perseverance, character;
and character, hope.”
Romans 5:3-4*



TEN CHALLENGES FACING THE GLOBAL PERSECUTED CHURCH IN A POST-COVID ERA

The global tide of persecution against the Lord's people is rising higher and higher, but so is their eternal hope in Christ! Persecuted Christians around the world have endured a huge added burden to their suffering this year as multiple disasters of locusts, coronavirus and devastating floods have swept the globe in 2020. But, before these disasters, so many of our brothers and sisters were already marginalized, violently attacked, kidnapped, raped and even killed simply because they follow Jesus Christ. Yet in the midst of this are glimpses of the marvelous hope we have in our Savior and the inspiring resilience of the suffering Church.

The threat of the coronavirus pandemic is beginning to recede in many regions; some drugs are proving effective, a vaccine may be found or humans may gradually build immunity to the virus. But the global impact of the Covid-19 crisis looks set to change our world forever. In this article we explore ten significant geopolitical and social changes likely to have a major impact on the global Church and especially on persecuted Christians.

1 The rise of authoritarian governments

Coronavirus is an emerging disaster on a fully-global scale we have not seen before. Some governments have responded by imposing harsh regimes on their citizens. Many of these restrictions were necessary in the short term to control the virus. However, will governments be ready to relinquish the extra powers they have enjoyed in recent months? Or will they seek to consolidate these far-reaching controls over our daily lives and even enshrine them in permanent laws? If so, there is the risk that such powers could be used against religious minorities, and particularly Christians.

Around the world, Christians are often at the sharpest end of pressure and persecution in countries ruled by authoritarian regimes and governments. Under the dictatorial rule of Kim Jong Un, North Korea is routinely ranked as the most dangerous place in the world to be a Christian. Believers have been executed just for owning a Bible, or face a life sentence in a harsh labor camp if they gather to worship together.



Police in China wrestle a Christian to the ground as they break up a worship service at a church in Xiamen city in May 2020, as part of the communist government's escalating authoritarian oppression of Christians

Christians are under increasing pressure in China, where the communist government has been cracking down on Christians, and other groups, under Xi Jinping's increasingly totalitarian presidency. In Iran and Saudi Arabia, governed under strict sharia (Islamic) law, Christians, and especially converts from Islam, face harsh restrictions and punishments.

Emergency situations give a reason, or excuse, to governments to assume greater powers than in normal times. This often happens in wartime and also in times of natural disaster. This century opened with world-altering cataclysm when the World Trade Centre was obliterated and the Pentagon attacked in a coordinated national-level terror attack on the USA, unprecedented in modern times. This and subsequent Islamist terror attacks brought understandable security restrictions that have encroached on travel and other aspects of life ever since.

2 Growing nationalism, leading to racism and even xenophobia

As the stress of prolonged lockdown continues, we are seeing societies turning in on themselves. National identities, shaped by religion, culture and history, are reasserting themselves leading to nationalism. This is "worship of nation" that takes the view: "My nation right or wrong. My nation exists at the expense of all others." Patriotism is a love of one's country, which all people should have. But to worship one's country leads to destructive nationalism.

Since the times of the early Church, Christians have been like a "third race", neither Jew nor Gentile, but God's new creation. Nationalism is based on an idolatry that makes each nation its own god. But as Christians, we believe there is only one God, the universal Triune God who has created *all* humanity.

We have seen in many countries state-sponsored suppression of Christians, who are viewed with suspicion by governments for following a "foreign" religion and perceived to be a threat to stability in their homeland. This rising tide of nationalism could place Christian minorities in greater danger of being seen as not belonging to their societies and therefore being marginalized, discriminated against and persecuted more widely.

3 Electronic surveillance

Outbreak containment measures to "test and trace" the contacts of someone suffering from Covid-19 led to the rapid deployment of new systems of digital surveillance. In the UK, for example, a special app was rolled out that everyone was urged to put on

their phones. These systems are increasingly being used, not just to control the virus, but also to control the populations of certain countries, particularly in China and India.

Intrusive technologies that monitor who meets whom pose a clear risk to underground churches and Christians living in places of extreme persecution. Even in countries where Christians enjoy freedom of worship at the moment, there is the concern that such systems, if not kept in check, could be misused to target Christians and other minority groups in the future.



The machete-wounded young survivor of an attack by Fulani militants in May 2020, in which 17 Nigerian Christians were killed in Kaduna State. Attacks on Christian villages soared in recent months as extremists took advantage of the Covid-19 lockdown that kept villagers close to home and diverted government security resources elsewhere

4 Rise in religious extremism

Many people have interpreted the Covid-19 world event through the prism of their own religious objectives. Some Islamist militant organizations, such as the Somalia-based terror group Al-Shabaab, declared Covid-19 to be Allah's punishment to unbelievers. Their spokesman called on Muslims to rejoice in the "painful torment" inflicted on non-Muslims by Covid-19. He mocked the Somali government's lockdown measures, which included closing mosques and Islamic seminaries. Islamic State and Al-Qaeda also celebrated the virus, describing it as a "small soldier of Allah" sent to attack his enemies. According to reports, some even believe that fighting by jihad will guarantee protection from becoming infected with the virus.

Attacks on Christians in Nigeria's Middle Belt soared during lockdown, as extremists exploited the fact that the authorities had diverted security resources to combatting the virus and Christians locked down in their homes were a sitting target.



Barnabas provided emergency aid to 3,936 Christian families in Bangladesh during Covid-19 crisis. "Thank you Lord for Barnabas' help in this difficult time," said a grateful pastor

5 Conspiracy theories

As Christians, we follow One who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. It is very sad when Christians naïvely believe falsehood and then disseminate it to others. As Jason Mandryk, of Operation World, writes:

Having faith in the unseen does not excuse us from the responsibility to be mature in our thinking. Anticipating a new heaven and new earth does not give us license to endorse the destruction and suffering of this one. Understanding that the world system and the powers and principalities operate beyond the mundane does not mean that every wild speculation is true!¹

Current events can be interpreted from a spiritual and eternal perspective, but Christians must maintain their testimony as people of truth and love. Christians believing and circulating unfounded conspiracy theories can damage the reputation of the Church.

We must remember, too, that minorities are often scapegoated in conspiracy theories, just as Christians were falsely blamed by Emperor Nero for the Great Fire of Rome in 64 AD, which he may have actually started himself. Ultimately, what is important is what Jesus calls Christians to be and do. And the wildest of conspiracy theories make no difference to that, whether they turn out to be true or not.

¹ Jason Mandryk, *Global Transmission Global Mission: The Impact and Implications of the Covid-19 Pandemic*, Operation World, April or May 2020, Section 24

6 Rising conflict and fading civility

With the great stress of lockdown, deadly illness and the related pressures, cracks can occur in societies, leading to internal conflict and even violence. When people turn in on themselves, under extreme pressure, overreactions make small issues seem to take on gigantic proportions. Anger can erupt and unrest can rise in communities. Where societies are under pressure, historic ethno-religious loyalties and values can come to the surface. Then minorities, such as Christians, are vulnerable to blame and attack. Even if they are not directly targeted, Christians can be caught in the middle of a conflict between others.

7 Weaponising aid

Sadly, withholding humanitarian aid as a form of geopolitical control is not new. But global crises give considerable scope for this. While it is normal and expected in many parts of the world that each religion will care for its own, governments should help all their citizens. Barnabas Aid received many reports of Christians being discriminated against and excluded from Covid-related food aid. This often takes place at a local level at the point of distribution.

In certain Indian states where the BJP party holds power, for example, distributors refused to give food to Christians and especially pastors. There have been similar incidents in Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Nigeria with some Christians unable to access food aid meant for everyone.

8 Growing mental health issues

Many are predicting a significant rise in mental health issues due to the stress of lockdown. Most Westerners are not suffering the existential difficulties of being locked down with no food in the house, but huge numbers are facing economic crises, loss of jobs, domestic abuse, depression, anxiety and even panic attacks about the virus or about the future in general. For many, bereavement has been made worse by being unable to say goodbye to dying loved ones in hospital or attend their funeral. Home-schooling their children for months has been an added stress for many, and can easily lead to family tensions.

The World Health Organization has drawn attention to the psychological impact of Covid-19 across the world in terms of elevated levels of stress and anxiety. This stress is leading to an increase in suicides.

In many countries, Christians and others have been experiencing the trauma of making life-or-death decisions about whether to stay at home and starve or go out and seek food but risk death from Covid-19; in some countries going out also involved a risk of being shot by the police for breaking the lockdown or curfew.

Furthermore, many Christians are struggling to make sense of what is happening to them at this time, whether it be Covid-19, natural disaster, hunger or violence.

For Christians who might normally look to their local church for love, care and acceptance when struggling to cope, this support may be unavailable due to lockdown.



Elderly Kachin Christian grandmother, four times displaced by military bombardment in Myanmar (Burma), carried to safety by her grandson in 2018, as they fled yet another attack on their village

9 Transition fatigue

A particular kind of mental health issue known as transition fatigue has become an increasing concern. This comes when the rapid pace of change or disruption in our lives becomes more than we can easily process or adapt to. This affects, for example, people who have been violently displaced multiple times, from villages and then even from the camps they end up in. Basic levels of social stability become very difficult and people tend to become passive and hopeless.

“YOU ARE THE ANSWER FROM GOD”

Pastor Jeton spent a sleepless night outside because his house was left uninhabitable by the terrible earthquake that shook Albania in November 2019. Despite his own struggle, the pastor had continued to support his flock of believers through the disaster, giving them courage and strength. But that day he was tired and his own hope was gone. That is the moment when a Barnabas partner met with him and told the battle-weary pastor, “We will help you”. “In those moments God gave me a new strength,” said Pastor Jeton. “I was praying for an answer and you are the answer from God.” Jeton’s hope was revived and he became “stronger in heart” after they prayed together. He was ready to encourage others once again. He told us, “When I saw you, my eyes were opened. I thank Barnabas for the help. I am thankful to God for you!”



An Albanian pastor surveys earthquake damage to the ceiling in a Christian’s home. While still recovering from the devastation of the double earthquake in November 2019, Albanian Christians were then struck with the coronavirus crisis

Barnabas provided four months of food aid for 99 Christian families suffering in the aftermath of November 2019 earthquake in Albania

Albanian Christians were only just beginning to recover from the devastation of the earthquake when the coronavirus pandemic struck early in 2020. Around 76% of the population were left struggling to feed their families, as employment leapt by 10%. Christian leaders called for prayer for Christian communities, especially for the emotional recovery of many younger children who are stressed after being doubly impacted by the earthquake and the pandemic.



A young Albanian Christian, still living in her earthquake damaged home, receives a food parcel from Barnabas during the covid lockdown

The rate of technological progress in the past 20 years has rightly been described as “dizzying”. But in 2020, in just a couple of months – not a couple of decades – our lives suddenly changed out of all recognition, socially, culturally, financially and in many other ways. We were told to await a “new normal” in post-Covid times. In other words, our present routines will soon change yet again. The accelerating rate of change we have lived with for a generation has suddenly gone supersonic.

Most of us are suffering from transition fatigue to some degree, often without even realizing why we are struggling to cope. Many leaders of churches, ministries and Christian institutions are perplexed by the rapidly changing situation and are concerned about how their work and ministry will survive, especially given the complexity of the multitude of pressures that they face.

10 Economic crisis

Covid-19 has created a devastating setback to economic growth across the globe. The financial impact is likely to be far greater than the 2008-9 recession. Although some predict a “V-shaped recession”, with economies quickly bouncing back, others estimate that trillions of dollars will be lost and it may take decades for the world to recover. Some industries may be irreparably damaged. As this disaster plays out, the rich are getting richer and the rest are being left behind.

In lockdown situations, where people are out of work and congregations around the world are restricted in how they meet, church incomes have rapidly dwindled. This has had a knock-on effect on giving to Christian organizations and institutions. Christians in very vulnerable situations will be doubly impacted, not only by a drop in their own incomes but also by the dramatic fall of economies in the West who will no longer be able to send support at the same levels.

We do not know how many churches and Christian institutions may have to close in the coming months because of lack of funding due to lockdown. But we do know this possibility is most marked in places where Christians are being discriminated against and persecuted.

A new era of global persecution?

Five future trends for the persecuted Church

Are the post-Covid challenges affecting Christians, and the rising tide of pressure on the Church, converging toward a new era of persecution? The following highlights five key future trends emerging for the global persecuted Church.

1. An emerging era of growing global persecution

The increasing pressure from scarcity alongside tensions from growing nationalism in many regions is polarizing and dividing formerly peacefully co-existing communities. Racism, and even xenophobia, look set to rise in post-Covid times. In societies, we are seeing more general intolerance and incivility, which breeds an increase in persecution of Christians, so often seen as strangers and distrusted outsiders in their own countries.

“FAITHFUL UNTIL DEATH”



Jihadists killed 58 people in three separate attacks in Burkina Faso on May 29 and 30. One attack was on a convoy taking food to a camp of displaced villagers, mainly Christians, who had fled previous jihadi violence. A survivor, who had been travelling in an ambulance, recalled how the attackers had left that particular vehicle alone, not because it was an ambulance but because the driver had shouted: “Forgive, forgive, we are also followers of the prophet Muhammad.” One of the gunmen turned to his fellows saying, “They have the same religion as us,” and the ambulance was left unharmed.

“I send my thanks to Barnabas who hurried to our aid; although they do not know us physically, but they know us by the compassion of God.”

Pastor Yonli, Burkina Faso

Extremist anti-Christian violence has escalated in the past several years and has been especially vicious in West Africa. The UN described an “unprecedented” rise in terrorist violence across the Sahel and West Africa with more than 4,000 deaths reported in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger in 2019, compared to 770 three years earlier. Burkina Faso, which is about 30% Christian, emerged as one of the worst-affected with the number of deaths jumping from about 80 in 2016 to over 1,800 in 2019. Around half a million people were internally displaced by violence in an escalating humanitarian crisis.

2. Interacting disasters and complex crises

The way we have seen coronavirus, locusts and floods overlapping and coinciding in 2020 to generate complex crises is likely to become a more frequent scenario. In East Africa in April and May, two tragedies landed on top of the coronavirus crisis, making three simultaneous disasters, impacting each other. The huge numbers of displaced people complicated the Kenyan government's efforts to prevent the spread of coronavirus. At the same time, borders closed in the fight against coronavirus, delayed the delivery of pesticides to locust-affected areas in the region.

In the future, plagues of various kinds and other natural disasters will increasingly intersect, bringing multiple pressures on already marginalized Christians.



Ugandan children affected by the floods that began in April. Locusts had already devastated crops during the previous months, while the coronavirus crisis brought further economic hardship

3. Increase in anti-Christian violence

Several Islamist militant organizations have seen Covid-19 as a green light, both theologically and practically, to intensify their persecution of non-Muslims. Christian communities in Nigeria, for example, left vulnerable by absent security and stay-at-home curfews faced a spike of merciless attacks by Boko Haram and other terror groups. In India, where the lockdown suffering has been perhaps the worst in the world, it is likely that militant Hindus will become more violent towards Christians. The violent backlash against a minority seen as “non-Indian” seems likely to continue and worsen.

4. Diminishing religious freedoms in the coming surveillance age

The surveillance technology that has been rolled out for Covid-19 “test and trace” measures will not be rolled up again and put away when the virus is under control or even if it is eliminated. States will continue to have these powerful technological tools at their disposal to monitor anyone and anything with pinpoint precision if they so wish. Countries like China and India already have a head start in the targeted surveillance of their citizens. Their current governments are very keen to suppress Christians, as well as other minorities. It is not difficult to imagine that Christians will be one of the main targets in post-Covid monitoring, which is heading towards increasing use of biological, and even genetic data, for profiling. Artificial intelligence and biometric technology will become commonplace in what is being called a “Fourth Industrial Revolution”, with one billion cameras expected to be installed globally by 2021.

CHINA’S “BRAVE NEW WORLD”:

chilling scope of “Skynet” surveillance system emerges



Surveillance cameras at Tiananmen Square in 2009. In 2019, Comparitech reported that 8 out of 10 of the most monitored cities in the world are in China

The Chinese government is obtaining blood samples from up to 70 million – 10% of all men and boys – as the high-tech surveillance state builds a “DNA Skynet” of the country’s 700 million males. Any individual who refuses to give blood samples risks their family being barred from benefits such as travel, fast internet connection and hospital treatment.

The powerful genetic mapping tool, which is being compiled from samples collected since 2017, will join up with China’s existing countrywide video-surveillance network. The system will be capable of tracking every male relative of any individual man just from a sample of his genetic material, such as skin or hair. Only 5-10% of the male population needs to be sampled in order to build a complete genetic map, because one sample unlocks the identity of all related males.

5. Increasing numbers of “fatherless and widows”

In a world of increasing persecution, and life-threatening disaster, the most vulnerable within our Christian family will be in even greater need than before: those displaced by violence, those who have lost everything in a natural disaster, those trapped generation after generation in grinding poverty. Widows, and their children, face great hardship and are extremely vulnerable in many societies. In Pakistan they are triply despised for being women, widows and Christians. God especially commands us to care for “the fatherless and widows” and uphold them which, as He has given us in His Word, must be a priority.

“Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.” – James 1:27

“They know us by the compassion of God”

“There are people who are far away from us and who heard the news of our plight. And this news touched them to the point where they reacted quickly by helping us with the food that is here,” said Pastor Yonli, National President of the Evangelical Church in Burkina Faso, at the distribution of food aid from Barnabas to Christian victims of violence in early 2020.

“I send my thanks to Barnabas Aid who hurried to our aid,” he said. “Although they do not know us physically, but they know us by the compassion of God. They sympathized with our pain, in prayer and in financial support. The bags of corn and rice you see are a sign of this compassion.”

Christians became sitting targets

In 2020, the coronavirus pandemic left Christian communities even more vulnerable to extremist attack in West Africa, as countries’ limited security resources were deployed to battle the virus and lockdown restrictions meant Christians became sitting targets. These factors were exploited ruthlessly by jihadists, who even celebrated the suffering caused by Covid-19. In June 2020, the UN reported that more than 30,000 refugees, many of them Christian, fled extreme violence in north-eastern Nigeria since April, during Covid-19 lockdown in the region.

Violent persecution is rising in India

India has also seen a troubling rise in anti-Christian attacks and mob violence in recent years.

“If anything happens to my pastor, I will not fear. I will take charge of pastor’s work and serve the Lord!” This brave declaration was made by Samaru Madkami, aged 14, from Odisha State, India. He had good reason to expect his pastor to die, as Christians in their area face hostility and violence from extremists in the Hindu majority. Samaru’s father, a church elder and convert to Christianity, had received death threats.

But it was Samaru himself who was abducted and brutally murdered by the extremists, not long after he had made his courageous pledge. He went missing on June 4 and his body was found two days later. The gang who killed him also tried to seize a cousin of Samaru’s but, being older and stronger, the cousin managed to get away.



Kanwal felt so loved and blessed by God when Barnabas food aid arrived to feed her children who were growing weaker and weaker

“My children were becoming weaker and weaker day by day,” said Kanwal, a widowed mother-of-three in Pakistan. Their growing weakness was because the family had so little to eat. Kanwal’s job as a restaurant cleaner had stopped when lockdown began. Her church gave the family a small amount of cooked food each day until lockdown grew stricter and this was no longer possible.

“I tried my best to register myself in the different schemes of relief and support but for unknown reasons I was never selected or qualified for receiving any relief through the government’s schemes,” Kanwal explained. Then she received a package of food and hygiene products, funded by Barnabas. “I feel myself so loved and blessed by God for receiving such timely support ... in the ongoing most difficult time in my life,” she said.

In the last year Barnabas Aid helped 26,000 Christian victims of violence and injustice in 19 countries, including*

Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ethiopia, India, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Mali, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Tanzania, Thailand and Uzbekistan.



Courageous young Indian Christian, Samaru, was murdered by Hindu extremists in Odisha

“Samaru was a passionate Christian,” said his pastor, recalling how the boy had energetically shared the Gospel with other young people and children in the village.

Crackdown on Christians becoming like Mao’s “Cultural Revolution”

In June 2020, a widowed Chinese Christian in her 60s had her government support subsidy terminated after she refused to remove Christian pictures from her home and to “stop believing in God”. She was told by government officials that her only means of support would be removed if the images were not taken down. “Because the Communist Party feeds you, you must only believe in it, not God,” said the official. Two months later the woman’s benefits were cancelled because she refused to remove the images.

A believer who was facing similar threats from officials in Henan said, “What should I do without my income? How can I reason with them? It’s just like the Cultural Revolution.”

Under sinicisation (making Chinese) rules introduced since 2018, religious symbols and Scriptural texts have been removed from display in church buildings by authorities and replaced with the

Chinese flag, portraits of president Xi Jinping and Chinese Communist Party slogans.

The continuing nationwide crackdown on the Church by authorities in China has seen hundreds of “house churches” (i.e. unregistered congregations) and “three-self” (i.e. state-registered) churches forcibly shut down. Increasingly repressive measures have included violent police raids, thousands of arrests and detentions, imprisonment of pastors and forced installation of surveillance cameras inside some churches.



Alice receiving help from Barnabas, distributed by her church. Her prayer is: “May the Lord God who is the husband to the widow and father to the fatherless greatly reward the church and all her partners.”

Praying to God, “the husband to the widow and the father of the fatherless”

Alice used to work on a flower farm in Kenya, earning \$2.35 a day but all the employees lost their jobs when the Covid-19 lockdown came. Widowed Alice had four school-aged daughters to support, some of them sick. She was in desperate need when the help from Barnabas arrived.

“I have received support from the church in the form of maize and wheat flour, fresh maize, beans, vegetables, cooking oil ... and pray to God to bless the hand that gave support for us the needy,” said Alice. 🙏

*April 1, 2019, to March 31, 2020.

My hope is sure and certain

Tune: Bonnie Mary of Argyle, based on an arrangement courtesy of Mozart Allan

Andantino (not too slow)

(Capo on 3) G C D G

Oh, my hope is sure and certain For I hope in Jesus Christ Who has

6 C G D G Em
con - quered death and Satan And will bring me home at last. And there'll be no pain or

11 B Em A D
fe - ar Or sorr - ow in that place, And God will dry our te - ars And

16 D G C Am D
we shall see His face And its trees will heal the nations And the Lamb will be its

21 G D G
light. This my hope is sure and cer - tain For I hope in Je - sus Christ

1. Oh, my hope is sure and certain
For I hope in Jesus Christ
Who has conquered death and Satan
And will bring me home at last.
And there'll be no pain or fear
Or sorrow in that place,
And God will dry our tears
And we shall see His face
And its trees will heal the nations
And the Lamb will be its light.
This my hope is sure and certain
For I hope in Jesus Christ.
2. Yes, my hope is sure and certain,
Yes, I hope in Jesus Christ,
For He takes our sins and burdens
And He gives eternal life.
There'll be glory, glory, glory,
For God lives in that place.
His name is on our foreheads
And we shall see His face.
It's a feast, a holy mountain,
It's a city like a bride.
This my hope is sure and certain
For I hope in Jesus Christ.



IN SUFFERING

This sermon outline can be used at a Suffering Church service or meeting. It can be read out as it stands or you can add illustrations of your own or take some from the information on pages 10-18. You might also find helpful material in the small group Bible study on page 22 or the eight-day devotional booklet included with this magazine. Alternatively, the outline can be used as a framework for your own ideas and applications.

Romans 12:9-21

Introduction

Hope and suffering are two constant realities in the Christian life. Suffering in this earthly life is a reality of Christian experience, and hope in our eternal heavenly home is a reality of Christian faith.

What is suffering?

1. Pressure

In Romans 12:12, Paul uses the word *thlipsis*, often translated as “tribulation”. It is derived from verbs meaning to crush, compress, squeeze or break. *Thlipsis* is not mild discomfort but great crushing difficulties, as if a heavy weight were placed on the chest pressing our very life from us.

2. Persecution

Persecution was normal for the early Christians; its scars were seen as badges of honor. Those who were persecuting (*diokontas*, v.14) were pursuing the Christians and hunting them down, like a hound following a scent. Such persecution is also normal for many Christians around the world today, who know that they say goodbye to earthly comfort and security

when they make their decision to follow Jesus.

Even where persecution does not occur, the disciples of Christ are always misfits in mainstream society and will suffer in that way. If we do not feel at least a little uncomfortable, alien and out of place in the world, are we really following Christ?

3. Pain

Suffering can bring pain and weeping (v.15). Not everyone is persecuted, but we all experience the physical, mental and emotional pain which is common to human existence. This year the Covid-19 virus has traversed the whole planet, causing sickness, death, loss of livelihoods, fear and anxiety on a global scale, adding to the suffering of all.

Responding to suffering

1. Love

i. Sincerity of love (v.9)

Love is central to the Christian life. Our love must be genuine, not playacting, and with no ulterior motive.

ii. Goodness of love (v.9)

We must love what is good, and with that comes a hatred of evil. We must hate evil with an intensity so great that we shudder and turn away in revulsion. As we shrink in horror from evil we must turn to what is good – good morally, spiritually and savingly – and hold firmly to it as if fixed with superglue.

iii. Family basis of love (v.10)

In verse 10, Paul uses a word that occurs nowhere else in the New Testament: *philostorgos*. This is the deep, tender, heartfelt affection that close relatives naturally have for one another. The word *philostorgos* also carried the idea that the love was shown in practical acts of generosity towards the one loved.

iv. Honoring each other in love (v.10)

Not only must we love one another, but we must honor one another. Paul says we should strive to be the first to honor any other believer who deserves it, almost as if trying to

outdo each other in showing respect and esteem.

v. Love for enemies (v.14, 17-21)

We must also love those who persecute us and pray for them that they may repent and that God may pardon them. We should live as peaceably as possible with everyone, even our enemies and persecutors (v.18). So we must not retaliate when we are hurt (v.17). Rather, we must respond to evil with good. Our loving actions and our prayers could change our enemies, leading them to repentance.

2. Hope (v.12)

Paul commands us to rejoice in hope. “Hope” has a specific meaning in the Bible. It is used *objectively* to mean the situation for which we hope, a situation glimpsed in many beautiful passages of the Scriptures, when we shall experience the fulfilment of all God’s promises of salvation, when we shall be free at last of the unsatisfied needs and wants of this life, when sin will no longer hinder us. “Hope” is also used *subjectively* in the Bible to mean the feeling of confident assurance and sure expectation that these things, which God has promised, truly will be ours one day.

But how can we rejoice in hope during suffering or tribulation?

i. Character

We can rejoice in our sufferings because of the fruit that will be produced in our characters (Romans 5:4).

ii. Counted worthy

The apostles rejoiced that they had been counted worthy to be disgraced for Christ (Acts 5:41), and all through the centuries believers have rejoiced in the honor of suffering for their Lord.

iii. Christ

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul, who was at the time a prisoner, commanded: “Rejoice in the Lord always.” Whatever our outward circumstances, when we turn our thoughts to Jesus, how much there is to cause our hearts to thrill with joy.

3. Patience

Paul writes that we must be “patient”. This is a positive and active response, not passive endurance. It is a “brave patience”, which perseveres in bearing the load, whatever it is; which refuses to weaken, complain or be discouraged; and refuses also to try to slip out from under the load.

4. Prayer

How can we find the strength to bear our afflictions like this? The number one answer is prayer, for prayer is the refuge and resource of every Christian in time of suffering. Therefore we must be faithful, steadfast and constant in prayer, both with others and on our own.

5. Service (v.11-13)**i. Be zealous (v.11)**

There is no room for lethargy in the Christian life. The world is a battleground between good and evil, and our short earthly lives are a preparation for eternity. We must be diligent and zealous.

ii. Be aglow with the Spirit (v.11)

“Aglow” and “spiritual fervor” as some translations put it, are rather muted versions of what Paul actually wrote in verse 11. For he says we should be spiritually boiling!

iii. Serve the Lord (v.11)

Verse 11 finishes with a command that literally reads:

“As regards the Lord – slaving.” The key thing about “slaving” in the first century was that everything done was directed by the master’s will. As Christians we are all slaves of Christ our Master and must do His will in everything.

iv. Generosity (v.13)

“Share with God’s people who are in need,” commands Paul. The literal translation is: “As regards the needs of the saints – fellowshiping!” For it is a version of the word *koinonia* that Paul wrote to mean a practical financial contribution.

Koinonia is often used in the New Testament to indicate other kinds of sharing and participation, and the word “fellowship” is often used in twenty-first century churches to mean a congregation or getting together for a cup of coffee after the Sunday service. But let us remember that Paul saw fellowship as including practical help for needy believers.

v. Hospitality (v.13)

From giving money to needy Christians, Paul now moves to giving them hospitality. It was a kind of hospitality the Christians in Rome knew well — the hospitality offered to fellow-believers, whether travelling preachers, messengers, or those fleeing anti-Christian persecution, some of whom were destitute.

As strangers and pilgrims in a hostile world, first century Christians *had* to care for each other. It is still a necessity in our day, as Christians in many parts of the world are fleeing persecution and in desperate need. When militants attacked the Christian village of Hura in Plateau State, Nigeria on April 14, 2020, it was already hosting survivors from other attacks on nearby Christian communities so that each household in Hura numbered between 17 and 26 people. Twenty-eight homes in Hura were burnt, making hundreds of Christians homeless, many for the second time. After burying their dead, the villagers and their visitors fled to a nearby town to seek refuge.

6. Empathy (v.15)

Paul tells us to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep. Our tears bring great comfort to the suffering one. Christians should not be people who shrink from the pain of empathy with those who are suffering.

Conclusion

As we have seen, Christians must endure their persecution and suffering with patience. But this does not mean that there will be no justice, that wrongs will remain unrighted and that cruelty will be forever enthroned triumphant.

God Himself will act. We can place all the injuries and injustices that we suffer into the hands of the Judge of all the earth (Genesis 18:25). What a relief to pass over to Him that responsibility, for He alone knows all the circumstances, past and present, and the deepest thoughts and intentions of each heart. He can judge more justly than we ever can.

In verse 19, Paul writes of God’s wrath, and quotes the Lord’s words: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay.” (Deuteronomy 32:35). We must step aside and not presumptuously interfere as He deals out His perfect justice in His perfect time.

Finally, in verse 21, Paul holds out to us a glorious prospect. If we can continue rejoicing, loving, forgiving and hoping, then evil has not conquered us, no matter how great our suffering. And, if we respond by good, we can conquer evil itself.

Rejoice in Hope

(ROMANS 12:12)

READ ROMANS 12:9-21

1. In this passage, Paul expresses himself in a rapid stream of short, sharp staccato phrases, and sprinkles his message with unusual and striking words. What do you think is the reason that Paul writes like this, so differently from his normal style of long complicated sentences?
2. Paul commands us to love (v.9-10) and uses three different Greek words for love. In verse 9, he writes *agape*. This is the love which he describes in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. The same word is used for love in Matthew 5:44 and John 3:16. How does the love described in 1 Corinthians 13 apply in the other two verses?
3. In verse 10 Paul uses two more words for love: *philadelphia* (brotherly/sisterly love) and *philostorgos* (devotion or tender affection as naturally occurs between close relatives). This is the only place in the New Testament where the word *philostorgos* appears. Why do you think Paul uses it here?
4. Part of loving is to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep (v.15)? Which of these do you find easier to do?
5. Paul tells us to hate evil (v.9). How do you feel about being commanded to hate?
6. What can we do to be keep our spiritual fervor (v.11)? The word that Paul uses is sometimes translated “aglow” but it literally means “boiling”. What do you think it means to be “spiritually boiling” and how is that different from being merely aglow?
7. Paul also commands us to rejoice (be joyful) in hope (v.12). How can we obey a command to be joyful, especially if we are suffering? (Hint: the following three verses give three different reasons for rejoicing in the midst of suffering – Romans 5:4; Acts 5:41; Philippians 4:4 – and maybe you can think of more.)
8. Why do you think Paul’s mind moves from rejoicing in hope to being patient in affliction and then to being faithful in prayer?
9. In verse 13 Paul uses a familiar word, *koinonia* (fellowship), in an unexpected way. He uses it to mean meeting the practical needs of other Christians. What are the implications of Paul using this word?
10. Paul was writing to Christians for whom enduring persecution was an everyday part of Christian living (v.14). What experience do you have of suffering for Christ? Does the world hate you (John 15:18-19)? Are you at home in the world or are you a stranger here (1 Peter 1:1)? Where is your true home?

This study looks at the same Bible passage as the sermon outline (pages 20-21). It can be used before or after hearing the sermon. If it is used without the sermon, it may be useful for the group leader to read through the sermon outline beforehand. You may also like to read the SCAAW 2020 eight-day devotional booklet, which is enclosed with this magazine and can be ordered from the Barnabas Aid office (details inside front cover).

The section headed “Digging Deeper” is for those who would like to explore the theme in more depth.

11. Is it possible to live in harmony with all our fellow-Christians, as Paul commands (v.16)? Does this happen at your local church? If not, how could greater harmony be achieved?
12. Is it possible to live at peace with everyone (v.18)? Did Jesus live at peace with everyone? In what kind of situations might His followers be unable to live at peace with some people?
13. What does Paul tell us in this passage about the way we should relate to people who harm us or seek to harm us – our enemies? How does this compare with the way we actually do relate to our enemies?
14. What does it mean to be overcome by evil? What does it mean to overcome evil with good (v.21)? Have you experienced either of these situations?

DIGGING DEEPER

1. Evil (*poneros*) means more than a morally inferior character; it means an active, malignant evil, causing effects of destruction, sorrow and pain. It is the same root as the Greek word for the evil one, Satan. Do you hate evil itself, or just the consequences of evil? Paul is describing an intense and passionate hatred, a shrinking in horror, a shuddering with revulsion. (v.9b) How strongly do you hate evil?
2. *Poneros* is the opposite of *chrestos*, the gracious kindness that is part of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22). Is your life characterised by *chrestos*?
3. As we turn away from evil, we turn to what is good – morally, spiritually and savingly (v.9b). Many English translations of the Bible say that we should “cling” or “hold fast” to what is good. What Paul actually wrote is that we should be joined firmly and permanently to what is good. If he had known of superglue, he would probably have used the word here. It is not something we do ourselves, but something that is done for us. Who does this for us? What difference does it make to you to know that this is something that is done for us, rather than something we do for ourselves?
4. What does it mean to honor someone (v.10)? How is honor shown in the society in which you live? Is honoring someone part of loving them or something separate? Is it related to the commands in v.16?
5. Paul says we should be eager to show honor to our fellow Christians, almost competing to outdo each other in showing respect and esteem. Are there any exceptions to this?

ACTIVITIES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Our daily lives have been very different this year as we have adjusted to the new rules brought in because of the coronavirus pandemic. It has been an anxious and uncertain time for many children and young people. Some have been separated from family and friends by lockdown. Perhaps you have even lost someone in your family?

Around the world children and young people suffered the isolation of lockdown, but for many the hardship was even worse. Some were already hungry, thirsty and sick because they are persecuted just because they are Christians. Many found there was no money for food because their parents lost their jobs overnight when lockdown was announced and, in some cases, food aid supplied by the government was not given to them because they are Christians. At the same time, people in other parts of the world suffered a terrible invasion of locusts, which ate their crops, and floods, which ruined their homes.

Your life might be different from theirs, but we are all brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ, no matter where we are.

“I urge you, brothers and sisters, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me.”

ROMANS 15:30

MEMORY VERSE CHALLENGE – FIVE VERSES OF HOPE

Have you ever seen a friend or relative seem sad or upset and wondered how you could help them? Do you know any hopeful Bible verses by heart that you could easily remember to share with your upset friend or recall for yourself in times of difficulty? We have selected five verses of hope for you to memorize for our SCAAW *Hope in Suffering* memory verse challenge. You can do this with your friends and/or family and set a target date that suits you to memorize all five verses. If you would like to raise funds to help our suffering brothers and sisters around the world you could consider getting sponsored for every verse you memorize. Ask your friends, relatives and neighbors to sponsor you. Ask your friends to join in the memory verse challenge!

1. Jeremiah 29:11

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

2. 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.

3. Psalm 46:1

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble

4. Romans 8:28

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose

5. Psalm 33:22

May your unfailing love be with us, LORD, even as we put our hope in you.

RAISE AWARENESS THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

It is easy to help suffering Christians by just sharing our Facebook page with your family and friends on social media. And ask them to do the same. Our Facebook page is [facebook.com/BarnabasAid](https://www.facebook.com/BarnabasAid)

On Facebook, you will find the SCAAW post pinned to the top of our page. Please like our page and share the SCAAW post with your friends and family – ask them to do the same.

TO HELP YOU PRAY

You can use the *Barnabas Prayer* leaflet – enclosed in this magazine and available on line [barnabasaid.org/prayer-diary](https://www.barnabasaid.org/prayer-diary) – to guide you or your youth group as you pray. Look in the *Prayer Diary* with this magazine at the prayers that specifically relate to young people and children (p8, September 28; p9, September 30; p12, October 15 and p13, October 21).

BIBLE KNOWLEDGE QUIZ



1. What was the sign of hope brought to Noah by a dove? (Genesis 8:11)



2. What did Hannah hope and pray for? (1 Samuel 1:11)



3. What promise did God make to Abraham? (Genesis 12:1-2; Romans 4:18)

4. What three encouraging things are produced by our sufferings? (Romans 5:3-5)

5. The angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and said Jesus would save His people from what? (Matthew 1:21)

Answers to the quiz

1. Answer: An olive leaf
2. Answer: A son
3. Answer: A great nation
4. Answer: Perseverance, character and hope
5. Answer: Their sins

Getting Involved with

SUFFERING CHURCH ACTION AND AWARENESS WEEK



Sunday services or group meetings

Among the resources that may be helpful for your *Hope in Suffering* themed service or group meeting, whether held in person, by livestream or video conferencing, are our sermon outline (p20-21) with a PowerPoint presentation available to download from our website, the overview feature *Finding hope in suffering* (p10-18), suggested hymns and songs (p24), and also our hymn for SCAAW 2020: *My Hope is Sure and Certain* (p19). Your service could be on Sunday November 1 or Sunday November 8 (or any another Sunday that suits your church calendar).



Hymns and Songs for your Hope in Suffering church service or virtual meeting:

There is a Hope that Burns Within my Heart

By Mark Edwards and Stuart Townend (2007)
Ancient and Modern 803

My Hope is Built on Nothing Less

(On Christ the solid rock I stand)
By Edward Mote (1834)
Trinity Psalter Hymnal 459

Faithful One

By Brian Doerksen (2002)
Ancient and Modern 625

Christ is Surely Coming, Bringing His Reward

Christopher Idle (b.1938)
Complete Mission Praise 75

All my Hope on God is Founded

By Joachim Neander (1650-1680),
Translated by Robert Seymour Bridges (1844-1930)
Ancient and Modern 584

"Hope is the Anchor of the Soul" When Stormy Billows o'er us Roll

By Cyrus Hurlbut and JH Rosecrans (1899)
Beautiful Songs of Zion, a Collection of New and Old Songs 75



Show love for your suffering brothers and sisters

There are many ways to show your love for persecuted Christians around the world this Suffering Church Action and Awareness Week. You may wish to commit to praying regularly for a project (some examples can be found on pages 6-7), a country, or Christians in contexts of persecution (explored on p10-18). Every *Barnabas Aid* magazine includes a *Prayer Diary* to inform and inspire your prayers each day.



Show your love in a practical way with a church offering

If you wish to give to a particular need, such as helping persecuted converts, your church could make a donation to a specific project (see p6-7 for some examples). Look out for our 12 Needs Challenge 2020 badges to check off on your giving card (enclosed with *Barnabas Aid* January/February 2020). Alternatively, you could give to our General Fund and we will use your gift wherever the need is greatest. This funding enables us to react quickly to emergency situations, and to meet needs that are too sensitive to publicize.

Consider asking your church leadership about taking a collection for suffering Christians at your SCAAW church service or meeting. For Zoom and other virtual meetings you can share our website link:

barnabasaid.org

Or you might like to fundraise by holding sponsored events such as a walk, cycle ride or Bible memorization challenge.



A Prayer for the Suffering Church

Bring hope, O Lord,
To Thy suffering people.
In their anguish and pain,
Be Thou their hope.

Bring hope, O Lord,
To Thy persecuted people.
In their despair,
Be Thou their hope.

Bring hope, O Lord,
To Thy needy people.
In their hunger and thirst,
Be Thou their hope.

Bring hope, O Lord,
To Thy dying people.
In the hour of their death,
Be Thou their hope.

In the Name of Jesus our hope,

Amen

© Patrick Sookhdeo, 2020



Order your Hope in Suffering inspirational resource pack

Barnabas Aid offers free resources to help you plan a Sunday service or Bible study session. See page 6 for a list of resources that you can request from Barnabas Aid free of charge.

Church leaders in India call for investigation into deaths of three Christians

INDIA



Missionary Munshi Dev Tado leaves a wife and four young children, three of whom are pictured [Credit: AsiaNews]

Church leaders in India have called for a full investigation into the deaths of an Indian Christian missionary found murdered in July, and a Christian father and son tortured to death in police custody in June.

Missionary Munshi Dev Tado was martyred on July 10 by suspected Maoist Naxalites who had previously threatened him twice for sharing the Gospel in western Maharashtra State. The 28-year-old was taken to a forest near his home and shot.

Munshi was a former member of the militant communist Naxalite group. He converted to Christianity, left the Naxalites and began Christian ministry.

P Jeyaraj, 59, and his 31-year-old son Emmanuel Benicks were tortured to death in police custody in Tamil Nadu State. They were arrested on June 19 on a charge of breaking Covid-19 lockdown regulations by keeping their mobile phone store open outside permitted hours.

The pair were savagely beaten by police and Hindu extremists, and were bleeding profusely when they were taken before a magistrate on June 20. Ignoring their injuries, he remanded them back into police custody. Emmanuel died in hospital on June 21, and his father died the next morning.

CCTV footage showed that all the shops in the locality were open at the time of their arrest and that neither father nor son appeared to have any prior injuries.

Five police officers have been arrested.

Thirty Christians arrested at wedding ceremony in Eritrea

ERITREA

Eritrean authorities arrested and detained 30 Christians as they attended a wedding ceremony in the capital, Asmara, in the last week of June.

In April, also in Asmara, fifteen Christians were arrested during a service and taken to a prison camp.

Eritrea is one of the worst countries in the world for Christian persecution. Since the introduction of religious registration policies in 2002, only three Christian denominations are legally permitted – Eritrean Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Lutheran – as well as Sunni Islam.

At least 54 Christians killed in Nigeria attacks

NIGERIA



Women mourn the 21 Christians killed in a Fulani militant attack at a wedding celebration in Kaduna State in July

At least 54 Christians were killed and more than 2,000 displaced in Kaduna State, Nigeria, in a series of attacks by suspected Fulani militants in the first three weeks of July. Describing “daily onslaughts” on Christians in the state, a church leader said, “It is as if the lives of Christians no longer matter.”

At least 142 people were killed by jihadists in separate attacks targeting Christians in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burkina Faso and Mali at the end of May.

Hagia Sophia Cathedral reopens as a mosque

TURKEY

Christian symbols and decorations at the historic Hagia Sophia Cathedral in Turkey, which reopened as a mosque on July 24, will be covered with curtains during Islamic prayer.

The Hagia Sophia was built 1,500 years ago as a cathedral, but was converted into a mosque in 1453 after the Ottoman armies conquered Constantinople (now called Istanbul). It was converted to a museum in 1935 on the orders of Kemal Ataturk, founder of Turkey’s secular republic.

Repression of religious minorities is increasing in Muslim-majority Turkey, particularly under Islamist President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who has been outspoken about his desire to re-establish the Ottoman Empire.

Sudanese Christians rejoice at the abolition of the Islamic apostasy law

SUDAN

Sudan has abolished its apostasy law, which carried a death penalty for leaving Islam.

The Miscellaneous Amendments Act ended long-standing restrictions on freedom introduced under the 30-year regime of former dictator Omar al-Bashir, ousted in April 2019.

While apostasy had already been criminalized under Sudan’s previous criminal code, al-Bashir’s regime brought the country’s legal system closer to an ultraconservative interpretation of sharia (Islamic law).

Islamists in Sudan have called for the government to be overthrown in an angry backlash against the penal code reforms. Sudan is one of the few countries in the world where people have been officially executed for apostasy in modern times.

What did your gifts achieve?

We helped over **600,000** Christians affected by Covid crisis and/or locusts

and in the last year*...



Education of 14,000 children supported in 138 schools/institutes in 15 countries



Theological and other leadership training support for 30,000 individuals in 22 countries



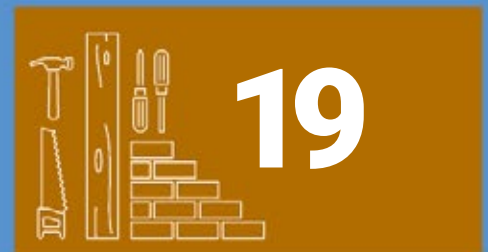
Christian literature: Total of 196,000 items, including 13,000 Bibles and 117,000 New Testaments, in 18 countries



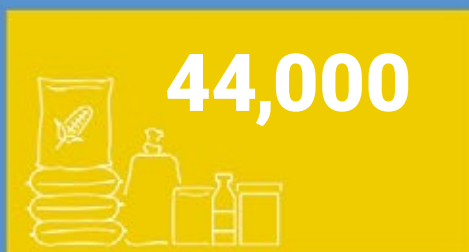
320 full-time Christian workers (213 pastors and 107 evangelists) supported in 16 countries



12,000 individuals helped with small business livelihood projects in 12 countries



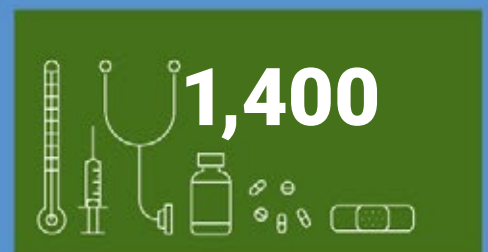
19 church buildings (including renovation and repairs) helped in 7 countries



Regular feeding programs assisted 44,000 individuals in 17 countries



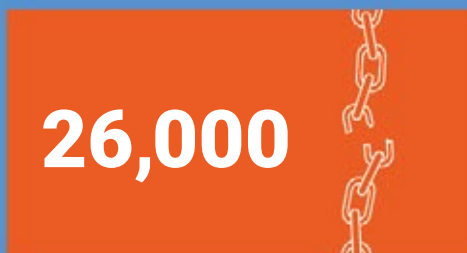
Supported 69,000 victims of natural disasters in 11 countries



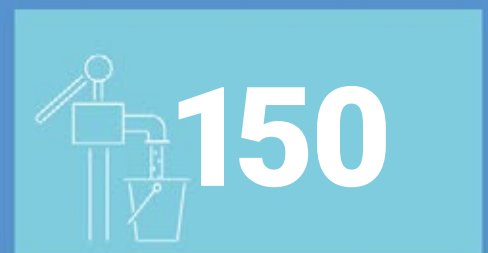
11 medical projects to help about 1,400 individuals in 8 countries



2,000 converts helped in 11 countries



Victims of violence and injustice: 26,000 individuals assisted in 19 countries



150 water projects in 5 countries

*April 2019 to March 2020.

Warning: where compassion abounds, so too (sadly) does possible fraud

Barnabas Aid has become aware of a number of supporters who, through their kindness and love, have responded financially to requests they have received in unsolicited emails and Facebook messages from men and women in "ministry" who ask for donations to help their cause.

Whilst some of these requests may indeed be legitimate, it is clear that a significant number of these requests are, in fact, fraudulent and scams.

With this in mind, we would urge extreme caution if you are contacted by an unknown person(s) by email, Facebook or other social media, especially if they are asking you to send them money by any method.

Some supporters have contacted Barnabas Aid to ask us to check whether a request they have been sent is genuine. We are now receiving an increasing number of such enquiries, but unfortunately, we do not have the resources to perform this time-consuming and delicate task on such a scale. Thank you for your understanding that we can no longer assist with such enquiries. However, we can put it on record that almost all of those we did check in the past turned out to be fraudulent.

Barnabas puts unwanted cell phones to good use

Barnabas Aid is delighted to receive unwanted cell phones, in working order, which we then recycle and the proceeds go towards supporting our persecuted brothers and sisters around the world.

If you have a phone that you no longer use, please mail it to us (see address inside the front cover) but please remove any icloud or passcode lock that is on the phone, and make sure the phone is switched off.

We recommend that you reset the phone to the factory setting (this option is usually found in the General Settings). It is also a good idea to remove the SIM card as well.

Contact us by phone (703 288 1681) or email (usa@barnabasaid.org) if you have any questions regarding this.



Barnabas Aid uses the proceeds from recycling old cell phones to help persecuted Christians

Barnabas Aid wins award for second year running for work helping suffering Christians

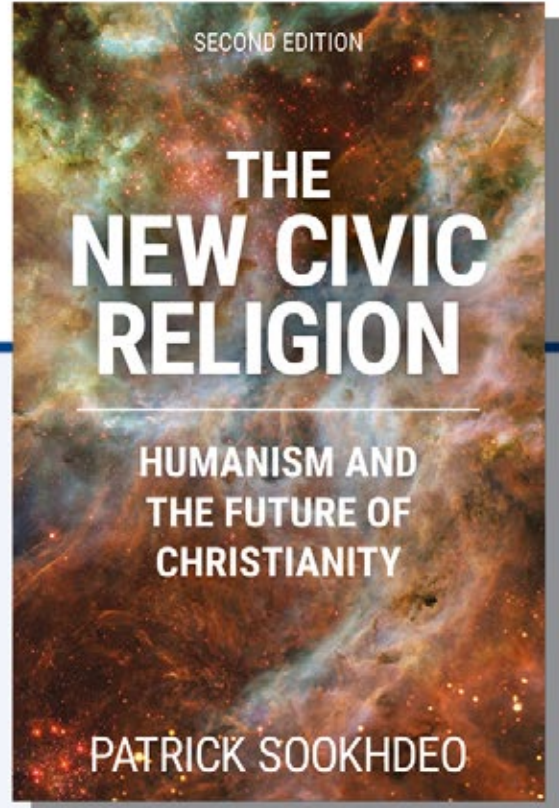
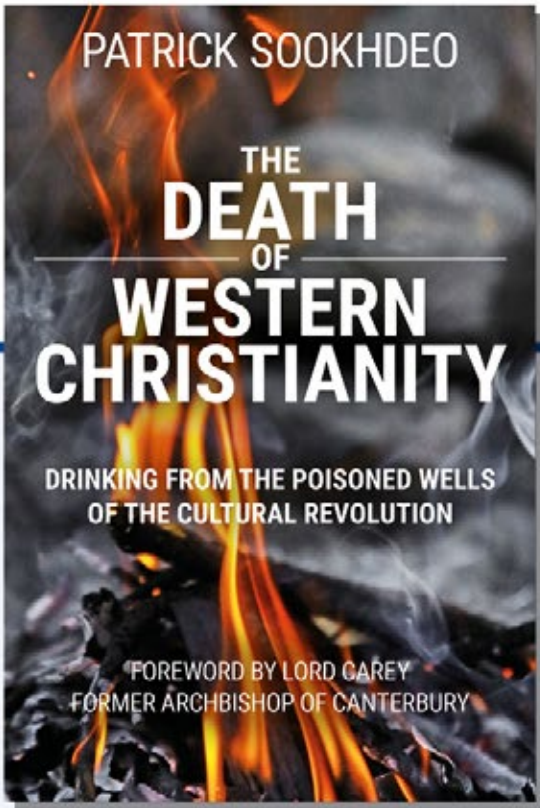
Barnabas Aid was named, on June 15, winner of the *2020 Best of Lancaster Award* in the Religious Organization category for our work helping persecuted Christians around the world.

Jeremy Frith, CEO of Barnabas Aid, which is based in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, said he was thrilled to win the regional award for the second year running. He said, "This award reflects both the growth that has been achieved, by God's grace, and the efforts we have made to raise awareness of the many needs and challenges facing persecuted Christians."

The Lancaster Award program recognizes the best of local businesses and organizations in the Lancaster community in the US. In August last year, Barnabas Aid received the Best of McLean Award. McLean, Virginia had been the previous home of Barnabas Aid.



The Lancaster Award presented to Barnabas Aid



The Death of Western Christianity

Drinking from the poisoned Wells of the Cultural Revolution

The Death of Western Christianity surveys the current state of Christianity in the West, looking in particular at how Western culture has influenced and weakened the Church. It looks also at how Christianity is increasingly under attack in Western society, and becoming despised and marginalized. It points out how faithful Christians are being targeted by legal and other means and advises how they should prepare themselves for greater persecution to come. This is a prophetic book, which is timely.

ISBN: 978-0-9977033-4-4 Number of Pages: 224
Cover: Paperback RRP: \$20.00

\$16
(plus S&H \$3.49)

also available as eBook

The New Civic Religion

Humanism and the future of Christianity

A new civic religion poses a serious challenge to the Church today. In this important new book Dr Patrick Sookhdeo charts the rise of this aggressive secularism based on humanist beliefs. He outlines how Christians need to respond to this dogmatic and hedonistic religion with a properly informed 'Christian mind'. This is ideal for group study.

ISBN: 978-0-9977033-3-7 Number of Pages: 208
Cover: Paperback RRP: \$17.99

\$15
(plus S&H \$2.99)

also available as eBook

To order, please contact your nearest Barnabas Aid office (703 288 1681), visit our website barnabasaid.org or email: usa@barnabasaid.org.

barnabasaid.org


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hope and relief for the persecuted church