

Crimes Against Humanity in the Middle East



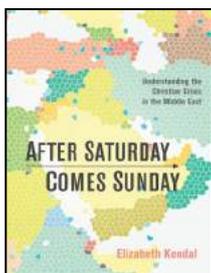
On 14 September, CFF Director of Advocacy, Dr Elizabeth Kendal, appeared as a guest on Ratio Christi's Apologetics Marathon on the Trinity Channel (USA).

The one hour program entitled, "Crimes Against Humanity in the Middle East," was hosted by Ratio Christi's Tony Gurule (above) who was joined in the studio by apologist and Islam expert, Joe Carey. Elizabeth Kendal and US-based Iranian activist, Aynaz Anni Cyrus, both joined the discussion via Skype.

The questions posed are answered in Elizabeth Kendal's new book, *After Saturday Comes Sunday: Understanding the Christian Crisis in the Middle East*:

- 1) Are the Christians of Mesopotamia (Syria-Iraq) merely collateral damage in a civil war or is something more insidious at the heart of their crisis?
- 2) Could Christians and Christianity be eliminated from Mesopotamia and the wider Middle East?
- 3) How are Middle Eastern Christians responding to this crisis? How is it impacting them emotionally and spiritually?
- 4) Why is Mainstream Western Media largely ignoring the Christian Crisis?
- 5) What are Western governments doing for existentially imperilled Christians?

Watch the program: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uknXUbrYL3M>



For more detailed answers to these and other questions: "What is Russia doing in Syria?" – purchase Elizabeth's book through her website: www.ElizabethKendal.com

ISIS Moving from Christian Persecution to 'Extermination'

Dr Georgette Bennett, founder of the **Multifaith Alliance for Syrian Refugees**, warned that ISIS is targeting Christians for extermination. The daughter of Holocaust survivors, she said failing to address the threat adequately would worsen the crisis. "We Jews understand something about extermination. I think we recognise a genocide when we see it." She warned that not rescuing persecuted Christians in Syria, especially children unable to attend school, makes them vulnerable to radicalization. "By leaving millions of people in limbo for years we are creating a population that has nothing left to lose." In light of these dangers, she called on churches to help, believing that given the large population of Christians there is no limit to what they can do. Activists have also warned that genocide could succeed if people continue to be indifferent; that the designation of genocide as the "crime of crimes" against Christians and other minorities should prompt the US and the rest of the world to act. Survivors of ISIS atrocities are now facing a "new genocide by attrition". They cannot secure jobs to provide their family with shelter, medical care, clothing or education. *Christianity Today*

International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church Sunday, November 6th

Please join Christians around the world in prayer for our brethren from many nations, denominations and ethnicities, who suffer for their faith in Christ.

Though separated by distance and circumstances, we are all united in His Body, and precious in His sight.

Consider asking the leader of your church to dedicate part of the service to praying for specific situations, nations or people groups experiencing persecution, imprisonment, displacement, bereavement etc..

Please also pray for the Light of Christ to shine in the darkest places and the darkest hearts, to set the persecutors free from deception that they may turn from wickedness and live.

Consider also appointing someone in the church as an Ambassador, to bring forward regular prayer requests, encourage letter-writing to people in authority, and providing aid to alleviate suffering.

*... "Whatever you did for one of the least of my brethren, you did for me."
Matt 25:40*

"Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you." (I Peter 5:7)

Western Response to the Muslim Persecution of Middle Eastern Christians

Editorial

The **International Day of Prayer** influences the teaching, unites the prayer, and sharpens the focus of churches around the world. It is a privilege to pray for persecuted Christians – to honour their faithfulness and courage, especially when they face death for refusing to renounce Jesus. 1Timothy 2:1 urges “requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone”, including those in authority, that we might live openly as Christians, sharing the Gospel freely.

During this time of increased violence and the threat of the extermination of Christianity from the Middle East, it is imperative to provide prayer support, advocacy and aid – to hear the cries of those who are destitute: who feel abandoned by the comfortable Western church, and utterly betrayed by Western nations which have failed to uphold the International Human Rights Declarations of which they are signatories.

CFF believes that some prevalent attitudes need to be replaced with a better understanding of the depth of God’s love for his people. **Denial and obfuscation** of the severity and scope of persecution allows it to continue unchecked. Moral courage and intellectual integrity are imperative in facing unpalatable truth, and overcoming the fear that drawing attention to persecution may discourage people from becoming Christian.

Romanticising persecution with the following soothing statements ensures that gross human rights abuses and their ideological roots will never be effectively addressed.

The statement: “*Persecution isn’t a problem. It’s a blessing*”, seems to attribute the blessing promised in Matt 5:10-12 to those who suffer persecution for the sake of Christ, to the persecution itself. Though persecution may be the crucible in which faith is refined and blessings are bestowed, persecution itself involves the sin of the perpetrators and the intense suffering of Christians – both of which grieve the heart of God. The false perception that persecution is a blessing leading to church growth, undermines the motivation to pray for the persecuted and to speak up for those whose voices have been silenced by fear.

Tertullian’s statement, “*the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church*”, appears to give credit for church growth to persecution, and is routinely used to justify disengagement from those suffering persecution. The North African church in which Tertullian served was wiped out by Islam—the blood of the martyrs sank into the sand, and only now, 1300 years later, is the church re-emerging in the Maghreb.

The ‘seed’ of the Church is the Word of God – the Gospel which we are called to scatter, as Jesus made clear in the Parable of the Sower (Matt 13). While the blood of the martyrs and their faithfulness may help to prepare the soil, growth is dependent upon the Word going forth.

Statements are sometimes made that give the impression that we should thank God for persecution (as though He were the architect of it), but genocide, murder, rape, abduction, torture, and other gross injustices are clearly the work of the evil one, designed to inflict intense suffering on God’s people and prevent the advancement of His Kingdom.

Persecution does, however, provide an opportunity to demonstrate that Christians are united as One Body in coordinated prayer and advocacy on behalf of our suffering brethren. The International Day of Prayer is a clarion call to all who love Christ to respond to urgent need.

Middle Eastern Christian Leaders Protest

The Melkite Greek Catholic Archbishop of Aleppo, Clément Jeanbart, is among many leaders of the persecuted church who are highly critical of the mainstream media, and even of their fellow bishops in the West for ignoring the Muslim persecution of Middle Eastern Christians.

“The European media,” he charged, “have not ceased to suppress the daily news of those who are suffering in Syria, and they have even justified what is happening in our country by using information without taking the trouble to verify it. The Conference of French Bishops should have trusted us – it would have been better informed. Why are your bishops silent on a threat that is yours today as well? Because the bishops are raised in political correctness. But Jesus was never politically correct, he was politically just!”

Cardinal Angelo Bagnasco, the head of the Italian Bishops Conference (CEI), said: “Why, we ask the Western world, why not raise one’s voice over so much ferocity and injustice?”

Syriac Catholic Patriarch Ignatius Ephrem Joseph III Younan appealed to the West not to forget the Christians in the Middle East.

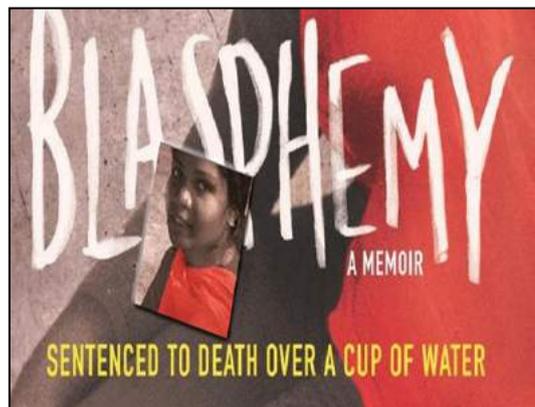
The Melkite Greek Catholic Patriarch Gregory III has also said: “I do not understand why the world does not raise its voice against such acts of brutality.”

Many Western clerics remain silent to avoid offending Muslims as they pursue a fruitless and chimerical ‘interfaith dialogue’ – a false ecumenical fantasy which also enforces silence upon others.

Robert McManus, Roman Catholic Bishop of Worcester, Massachusetts, demonstrated this on February 8, 2013 as he was suppressing a planned talk at a Catholic conference on persecution: “Talk about extreme, militant Islamists and the atrocities that they have perpetrated globally might undercut the positive achievements that we Catholics have attained in our inter-religious dialogue with devout Muslims.” (Witness: 19 Nov., 2015)

Interfaith dialogue has never succeeded in changing any of the verses in the Qurán (the immutable word of Allah) which mandate the death or subjugation of non-Muslims who refuse to convert to Islam. Ed.

PAKISTAN – Appeal Against the Death Sentence of Asia Bibi Deferred



Christians around the world are praying that the death sentence imposed on Asia Bibi will be overturned by appeal to the Supreme Court of Pakistan. Asia's final appeal has been adjourned as one of the judges is not impartial and has recused himself. Overturning the death penalty would endanger presiding judges, as 150 Islamic leaders have called for her to be hanged, regardless of the outcome of the appeal.

The high profile case of Asia Bibi, a Christian mother of five falsely convicted of blasphemy in 2009, arose from a dispute following the refusal of fellow workers to share water with her – a despised 'infidel'. They accused her of blaspheming against Islam when she allegedly said, *"My Christ died for me, what did Muhammed do for you?"*

Asia has now spent seven years on death row, and has consistently denied the charge of blasphemy. If her appeal fails, her only chance of avoiding execution would be through a Presidential Pardon which could be granted under Article 45 of Pakistan's Constitution.

After Pakistan gained independence from Britain in 1947, its founder, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, dreamt of a secular state, but was opposed by Islamists, the media, law makers and law enforcers who hijacked the country – now one of the top ten nations in the world in which Christians are most intensely persecuted. Pakistan's blasphemy law was codified in 1985 by President Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq to solidify his power by appeasing Islamist factions. Asia is among 1,400 people indicted under this law, 50% of whom are from minorities though they comprise only 3% of the population.

The day she was condemned to death, Asia said, *"I cried alone, putting my head in my hands. I can no longer bear the sight of people full of hatred, applauding the killing of a poor farm worker. I no longer see them, but I still hear them, the crowd who gave the judge a standing ovation, saying: 'Kill her, kill her! Allahu Akbar! The court house was invaded by a euphoric horde who broke down the doors, chanting: 'Vengeance for the holy prophet. Allah is great!' I was then thrown like an old rubbish sack into the van... I had lost all humanity in their eyes."*

Asia has suffered physically and emotionally, her health deteriorating in the squalid prison conditions. As other prisoners and even guards have tried to kill her, she is kept in solitary confinement, and only members of her immediate family are allowed to see her. Human rights organizations, the international media and Christians all over the world, including Pope Benedict XVI, have highlighted her suffering and petitioned for her release. An international petition with 572,240 signatures was submitted, but the Pakistani government remains indifferent. Rather, it has placated those who demand that she continues to suffer in prison until her execution. However, her lawyers report that her faith has remained strong during this prolonged ordeal.

Grossly unjust blasphemy laws, often used to settle personal disputes or as a pretext to appropriate property, have caused intense suffering, condemning many to life imprisonment. Men of influence and courage who have tried to help have also become the victims of hatred. In 2011 Shahbaz Bhatti, Christian Minister of Minority affairs in the Pakistani Cabinet, was murdered for supporting Asia, and the Governor of Punjab, Sulman Taseer, a Muslim, was killed by his own body-guard for advocating law reform. Naeem Shakir, a lawyer who has acted for Asia said, *"Political actors are not concerned... to deliver justice... They do not want to distress their constituencies by disturbing the religious extremists."*

Violence against human rights activists is increasing. Masih Gill, a leading Christian human rights lawyer and founder of the Legal Evangelical Association Development has escaped many attempts on his life. Defending high profile blasphemy cases incite death threats and violence, and forced him and his family to seek asylum in Sri Lanka.

Khalil Tahir Sindhu, the Minister for Human Rights and Minority Affairs in the Punjab who has defended Asia said: *"I don't feel any fear because I have a faith in God. They can kill my body but not my soul."*

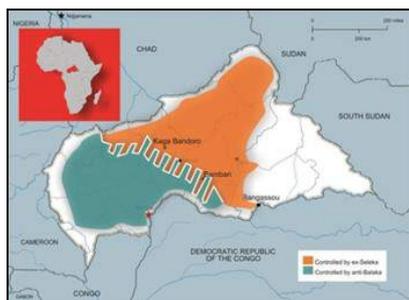
Christians around the world are praying that the Supreme Court will withstand pressure from Islamic fundamentalists and release Asia; that Pakistan's government will have the compassion, courage and political will to airlift her and her family to safety in another country – beyond the reach of Pakistan's vigilante mobs and hate-crazed assassins who have destroyed so many lives with impunity.



Masih Gill and family Photo: Courtesy

Saif-Ul-Malook, Bibi's Supreme Court lawyer, told ICC, *"The standard of evidence required to prove [this] offence is not available in this case. Therefore, I am optimistic that the honourable court will acquit my client."*

More Christians Massacred in Central African Republic (CAR)



In March 2013 France and the West stood back and watched as Central African Republic (CAR) – which is French-speaking and 76 percent Christian (mostly Protestant) – fell to Seleka, a well-armed and funded alliance of mostly Arabic-speaking local and international Islamic jihadists.

The invasion and conquest involved massive looting, destruction, killing and sexual violence targeting Christians. Thousands were killed and around one million displaced. Local Muslims sided with the rebels, looting the homes of their Christian neighbours, shattering trust and destroying decades of peaceful co-existence.

Local village defence militias (the “anti-balaka”) – originally designed to protect villages from balaka/machete-wielding criminals – went on the defensive. Only when anti-balaka militias started driving the mostly-immigrant Muslims out of the capital, Bangui, did French and UN peacekeepers intervene to stop the killing. Ever since then, CAR has been divided, with nearly half the state under the control of Islamic militants.

Violence and insecurity persist, especially on the “front-line”. For Christians whose towns and villages are now in rebel-held territory, security is tenuous. The Islamic rebels are demanding that CAR be formally partitioned so the north might become an independent Islamic State. Determined to preserve the de-facto partition, Islamic militants are undermining all the government's efforts to promote reconciliation.

On the evening of Friday 16 September, 2016, Seleka fighters swept through the village of Ndomete, in north-central CAR, going door-to-door killing Christians. Nineteen villagers were slaughtered while dozens were injured. The next day militants clashed with Christians in the nearby market town of Kaga-Bandoro; at least five more were killed. The Islamic militants rampaged, looting businesses and aid agencies, as well as the Church of the Nativity which hosts and supports a large population of displaced Christians. United Nations peacekeepers were deployed to the area. Having separated the parties, they are now keeping the “peace”.



Local Christian leaders are sceptical. “If the government is not going to beef up the security, then we are going to defend ourselves,” one church leader told *Morning Star News*. “We shall not keep quiet as our brothers are dying.” The Catholic Archbishop of Bangui, Bishop Dieudonne Nzapalainga (pictured) has appealed for calm and for help.

Elizabeth Kendal

MAP: CAR's Muslims hail from the far north, from the triangle between Sudan and Chad. The foreign rebels are mostly Chadian and Sudanese. (Orange = Seleka; Green = government. The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) operates in the east)



SUDAN – NGOs Urge UN Human Rights Council to Take Action

36 African and International NGOs and individuals have called on the UNHRC to take stronger action to address widespread, grave human rights violations in Sudan which targets civilians in South Kordofan, Blue Nile and Darfur, severely repressing civil and political rights. The group calls for strengthening of the mandate on Sudan, urges the adoption of a strong, action-orientated resolution under agenda item 4; the mandating of a Special Rapporteur to monitor and report on human rights violations, and recommend concrete ways of ending violations.

It also condemns the government's crackdown on protests, restrictions on human rights defenders, and on freedom of religion. Since December there has been an increase in arbitrary detentions of church leaders, several of whom have been held incommunicado. Reverend Abduraheem who helped to provide medical treatment for a Darfuri student who suffered severe burns in a demonstration, Reverend Shamal and Mr Abdumawla are accused of national security crimes, including waging war against the state and espionage which carry the death penalty. Rev Kuwa is apparently implicated by his senior position in the Sudanese Church of Christ, and his association with Reverend Abduraheem.

Fresh Inspiration for Christian Faith and Freedom



The redesigned logo incorporates the cross in the second "f" – with the blood of Christ and the martyrs at its base, ascending through the Crown of Thorns to the radiance and glory of the Risen Christ.

The CFF Mission Statement now reads: *"We advocate and defend freedom to proclaim and practise the Christian faith, and we pray, speak up for and help those suffering persecution."*

We do this by –

- * Encouraging the Church to pray, speak up, and provide aid for persecuted Christians;
- * Urging governments to defend and uphold the provisions of Article 18 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights;
- * Urging governments to intervene to protect freedom to proclaim and practise the Christian faith, and those suffering religious persecution;
- * Building strong relationships with people and organisations that stand against violation of Christian freedom;
- * Disseminating news and analysis of issues concerning religious freedom and persecuted Christians; and
- * Sending aid received from donors.

CFF National Director, Dr Roy, has recently presented CFF's ministry to leaders of the Christian and Missionary Alliance – one of the world's largest missionary-sending organisations – at seminars in Sydney, Brisbane, Perth and Melbourne, with one scheduled for Canberra in November. Roy has also been invited to share this very important message at churches, at a pastors' retreat, and at a Bible College in Singapore. This strategic development expands the scope, and strengthens the influence of CFF, as it establishes the link between mission and persecution to encourage dedicated prayer, stronger advocacy, and influence at government level to ensure greater protection for Christians and the freedom to proclaim the Gospel.



For more news, please visit our redesigned website: www.christianfaithandfreedom.org

INDIA - Hindu Radicals Use "Siege" Tactics to Drive Out Christianity

Since the Hindu nationalist BJP rose to power under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, radical Hindu groups have felt free to harass Christians across the 'world's largest democracy', recently using 'social boycotts' to force Christians to reconvert to Hinduism. International Christian Concern (ICC) reports that Hindu villagers in Nachandih in Chhattisgarh state refuse to allow 16 Christian families to participate in social events, graze their cattle, cultivate their farmland, or even live in their homes because they refused to surrender their Christian faith. Since most are farmers, these boycotts utterly destroyed their livelihood. The families embraced Christ in 2012, after God performed healings and other miracles, and until recently, freely worshiped and prayed together. That changed on March 14, 2016 when leaders of the militant Bajrangdal manipulated the village council to issue this ultimatum: *"Christians should not be in this village, only Hindus have the freedom to live in the village, because India is [a] Hindu country. Those who have accepted the Christian faith must be reconverted back to Hinduism."*

The Christians refused, and filed a complaint with authorities, but the police sided with the Bajrangdal leaders, and refused to protect Christians from intimidation, death threats and theft. Pangu Markham, a Christian, said: *"There were about 300 people [on] one side and we, the small community of believers, were on the other side. The Hindu radicals threatened to kill us and take possession of our properties if we did not reconvert. Hindu radicals destroyed my house and later kidnapped my one and a half-year-old daughter. They are not allowing me to rebuild my house."*

Others say: *"It is increasingly hard for us to continue as Christians. We are watched by the leaders. Because we are totally cut off from the village, we sometimes do not have enough food to eat. We are constantly harassed for no other reason than our Christian identity. This month we are not even allowed to bury our dead in the village."*

By May, Hindu radicals grew tired of waiting, and forced eight of the Christian families to attend a mass reconversion at a Hindu temple. One of the Christians, Themra Salam, said: *"Out of compulsion and fear, I participated in the re-conversion ceremony. The Hindu radicals destroyed my house, stole my land and house deeds, and threatened to either kill me and my family or drive us out of the village. Inwardly, I follow Jesus and worship him. I want to continue as a Christian openly."* Each re-convert was forced to pay a fine. Salam had to pay 20,000 rupees as the last person to renounce Christianity while the other seven families each paid 1,000 rupees. Currently, Christians are persecuted in over 50 villages in Chhattisgarh state alone. The freedom of Hindus to break the law with impunity is a worsening trend. India's elected representatives must protect the rights of all citizens, regardless of religious identity.

Christian Martyrs Honoured



Candles of remembrance were lit by traditionally dressed representatives of the Armenian, Assyrian and Greek communities

Sunday, August 7th—Assyrian Martyrs' Day, organised by the Assyrian Universal Alliance and the Assyrian Australian National Federation, was commemorated in Sydney at the Assyrian Genocide Monument in Bonnyrigg. Hundreds gathered to lay wreaths and pay their respects, including representatives of the Armenian, Greek, Coptic, Jewish, Vietnamese, Mandaean, Christian and Assyrian organisations, drawn together by a shared compassion for those persecuted for their faith and ethnicity. Members of State and Federal Parliament included the Hon Fred Nile MLC who paid special tribute to the Assyrian Martyrs. The vibrant colour and life of the beautiful flowers placed at the monument was a stark contrast to the bleak death faced by those whose memory is honoured—and those who are suffering in the present genocide unleashed in Iraq and Syria.

Distinguished speakers who addressed the commemorative ceremony included Mr. Stavros Stavridis, a researcher of the Greek-Turkish war 1919-23 and its impact on minorities in the Ottoman Empire and Middle East, and Dr Panayiotis Diamadis, Director of the Australian Institute for Holocaust and Genocide Studies, University of Technology, Sydney, who highlighted the heroism of Australian servicemen who rescued an estimated 60,000 to 80,000 Assyrians in 1918. The dedicated research of Assyrian and Armenian scholars has provided invaluable, verified evidence of the genocide of Christian and other communities which is being sought by the Center for the Study of Political Islam in the USA for inclusion in the proposed "Tears of Jihad" Museum.

Assyrian New Year Festival

The New Year Festival in April marked the beginning of the Assyrian year 6766. It was a vibrant and joyful celebration of a rich, ancient culture, and the unity of spirit of a Christian community which has overcome great hardship to rebuild their lives and contribute their creative energy to their adopted land. Mr Hermiz Shahen of the Assyrian Universal Alliance, and Mr David David of the Assyrian Australian National Federation, are dedicated and highly valued advocates of the rights of all religious and ethnic minorities, supporting Assyrian and Yazidi demands for international protection, and the restoration of their ancestral land. CFF admires their knowledge of Middle Eastern history and politics, and the passion for justice which they contribute to Australian public policy.

Two Members of Parliament, the Hon Philip Ruddock MP, and Reverend the Hon Fred Nile MLC, were among those honoured for their highly valued services and close relationship with the Assyrian community.

The 2016 Friend of Assyria Award was presented to Mrs. Karen Bos, Board Vice President of Christian Faith and Freedom. The award was granted "in recognition of her devotion to helping persecuted Christians throughout the world, for raising awareness about the plight of persecuted Assyrians in Iraq and Syria through newsletters, speaking engagements, conferences and human rights dialogues, great efforts in informing politicians and diplomatic representatives about the extent of religious and ethnic persecution against Assyrians."

Karen spoke of her profound admiration for the Assyrian people, for their dedication to Christ, and their belief in the intrinsic value of every human life which undergird their quest for a safe heaven for ethnic and religious minorities. Interviewed on AUA Radio Voice of the Alliance, she paid tribute to the courage and grace of the Assyrians, and the importance of their experience of tyranny to alert all Australians, and all Australian authorities to the imperative to prevent the erosion of freedom.

Her commitment to CFF was initially strengthened by exposure to a horrifying video of the execution of two young Assyrian men in Iraq. Violence of verses from the Qur'an were emblazoned across the screen, and the executioner was audibly berated for 'defiling a Muslim floor with Christian blood'. The Peace of God which rested visibly on the young Assyrians contrasted starkly with the demonic frenzy which held their persecutors in its thrall, and she realised the urgent need for prayer, advocacy and aid for Christians – and for the transforming power of God to set their persecutors free from violence and hatred.



Hermiz Shahen, Karen Bos and David David

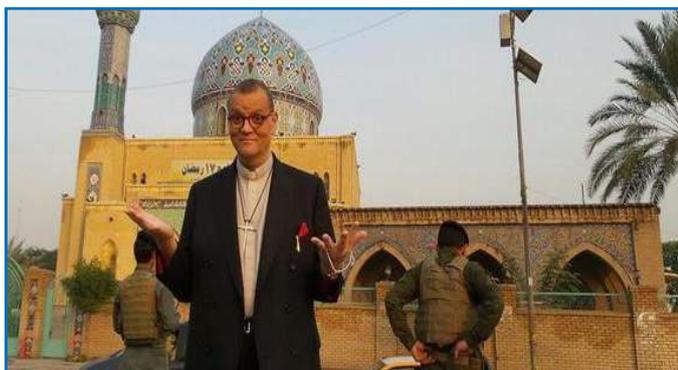


Torchbearers for Christ – Overcoming Persecution to Shine His Light in Dark Places

“Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in Heaven.” Matt 5:17

Canon Andrew White – ‘The Vicar of Baghdad’

“Blessed are the Peacemakers for they will be called sons of God” (Matthew 5:9)



Faith Under Fire

Canon Andrew White’s remarkable ministry in the turbulent and dangerous Middle East is widely and highly acclaimed. He created the Foundation for Relief and Reconciliation in the Middle East (FRRME) to help people living in war torn parts of the world like Iraq. His role as peace-maker has been acknowledged with at least 16 international awards, including the 2014 Wilberforce Award, and the Freedom Prize - usually awarded to Presidents and Heads of State.

“Don’t Take Care, Take Risks for the Kingdom!”

As a high profile ‘Ambassador for Christ’ – wanted ‘dead or alive’ by terrorists everywhere, he is no stranger to danger. With an astronomical price on his head, his flak jacket became almost as much a part of his ministerial attire as his clerical collar and the silver Cross of Coventry he wears around his neck.

Andrew claims that he was never converted – that he was a Christian from infancy, drawn into a relationship with Jesus by devout parents who taught him simply that, “Jesus loves you”. He clearly loves Jesus back. He fulfilled both of his childhood ambitions and became a doctor, graduating from St Thomas hospital, London, in 1985, and an Anglican minister with theological qualifications from Cambridge and Jerusalem. His appointment as the Archbishop of Canterbury’s Special Envoy to the Middle East involved him in a diplomatic, political, and spiritual ministry of reconciliation, bringing together Christian, Jewish and Muslim leaders to whom he extended the unconditional love of God. It also involved him in extreme danger, living with the constant threat of violent death. He recalls being kidnapped several times, held at gunpoint; and being thrown into a room with many people whose amputated fingers and toes littered the floor.

As the Vicar of the Anglican Church of St George in Baghdad, he ministered to a Christian community which was severely persecuted. His greatest anguish was the loss of life amongst those he loved. Over 1,200 of his parishioners were killed during those years, and though it

was hard, and he suffers from MS, he never gave up.

The rise of ISIS cells in Baghdad inflamed further violence against Christians, and those who could, fled north to Nineveh—to the ancestral homeland of the Assyrians who first heard about God from the reluctant missionary, Jonah. They embraced Christianity when the Apostle Thomas arrived to tell them that the Messiah they had been awaiting had arrived. From that time on, Holy Communion was celebrated every Sunday in Nineveh until ISIS began the slaughter, kidnap, torture, and rape of Christians, and the destruction of their homes, their livelihoods and culture.

Andrew speaks of ISIS forcing Christians to convert to Islam by threatening to kill their children, until they by-passed the adults and began directly ordering the Christian children to renounce their faith in Jesus. They replied, “We love ‘Yesua’, we talk to him everyday”. All the children were summarily shot and decapitated. As Andrew grieved, he said other children gave him ‘hope in the darkness’ by telling him that they had seen the children ‘dancing with Jesus in Heaven’.

Andrew has been at the forefront of this battle for years, has intimate knowledge of the political situation, and is personally acquainted with many of the religious and ethnic leaders of Iraq and Syria—knowledge which he shares with those called to ministry in the Middle East. He has valiantly tried to build bridges of peace, even inviting ISIS leaders to dinner. “We will come”, they said, “But we will cut off your head.”. “Nice of them to tell me”, he remarked.

After all the bloodshed and suffering, Andrew sees no signs of an end to the conflict – no hope of reconciliation. Now living in Jerusalem and Jordan, he places his hope in ministry to the refugees and children who fled from Iraq, for whom his charity has provided schools, a hospital and a clinic. He was recently suspended from his role as President of FRRME until he is cleared of an accusation that he paid money to ISIS to redeem Christian and Yazidi girls sold into sex slavery. He says the slaves were freed by a friend, but he was involved in restoring, rehousing and helping them.

Andrew White is the author of at least 14 books relating to his unique experience of the grace and power of God as a beacon of light in the darkest places. He appeals passionately to all Christians in the churches he speaks at to see themselves as “seriously empowered by the Holy Spirit” to act on behalf of their persecuted brothers and sisters – to see them as part of their own family which is dying, but still “standing strong for Jesus”.

The Christian family of nine whom CFF airlifted from threatened death in Iraq, to safety in Beirut, were members of Andrew White’s congregation in Baghdad. By God’s grace, this family may arrive in Australia for Christmas!

RUSSIA – Anti-Mission Measures Signed into Law

On 7 July, Russia's President Vladimir Putin signed into law a controversial 'anti-terror' package which includes anti-mission measures that eviscerate religious freedom. In signing the 'Yarovaya Law', President Putin defied the advice of business leaders, church leaders, human rights advocates and even his own advisors. It is a difficult decision to understand and is disappointing beyond measure.

Geopolitics has an impact on religious freedom that should never be underestimated. The Russian government is not inherently anti-Christian. However, the denominations which will be impacted most seriously by the new legislation are non-Russian Orthodox denominations, in particular Protestants, who in times of extreme East-West geopolitical tensions can be unfairly viewed with suspicion.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told journalists: "If the law produces any undesired outcomes, the government will introduce measures accordingly by presidential decree."

American Pastor, Donald Ossewaarde (55) and wife Ruth have been ministering openly and freely in Russia since 1994, and have lived there since 2005. Ossewaarde was arrested while leading worship, found guilty of illegal missionary activity and fined on Sunday 14 August. On September 30th a Russian court rejected his appeal. He is one of at least seven people to fall victim of the law since it came into force. Confident he has not stepped outside the Russian constitution, Ossewaarde says he will press the appeal all the way to the highest court if he has to, believing it could play a role in restoring freedoms. It is certainly stirring debate. These are days for renewed prayer for Russia.

Pakistan – Religious Hatred Taught in Schools

A report by Pakistan's National Commission for Justice and Peace (NCJP) says the government has failed to keep its promise to eradicate "hate material" from school textbooks.

When a Taliban attack on the Army Public School in Peshawar in Dec., 2014 caused the death of 141, including 132 students, it led to a policy change. The government introduced a 20-point National Action Plan to discourage religious extremism and promote religious harmony, promising an "end to religious extremism: [the] protection of minorities will be ensured". However, the NCJP report, "Freedom from Suffocating Education", claims that no curriculum reforms have been adopted. This backs up the findings of a report by the US Commission on International Religious Freedom, which concluded: "The trend toward a more biased curriculum towards religious minorities is accelerating. These grossly generalized and stereotypical portrayals of religious minority communities signal that they are untrustworthy, religiously inferior, ideologically scheming and intolerant."

These attitudes fuel threats against, and intimidation of, human rights defenders in Pakistan by both state and non-state actors which CSW highlighted in a report to the UN Human Rights Council in 2015.

NIGERIA – Boko Haram Targets Christians

Following the declaration of war against Christians by BH leader, al-Barnawi, Christians in the Chibok area have been murdered during attacks in two consecutive weeks. Militants also destroyed homes and food supplies. NGOs urge greater protection for the most vulnerable, especially Christians living in Nigeria's northeast.

International Christian Concern

21 Kidnapped Chibok Girls Released!

More than two years after the kidnapping of 276 Chibok schoolgirls by Boko Haram in April, 2014, the Nigerian government, with help from the International Red Cross and the Swiss government, has negotiated the release of at least 21 of the girls. They have reportedly been moved from Maiduguri to Abuja, and handed over to the Nigerian government in exchange for four Boko Haram prisoners.

Following the kidnapping, Boko Haram released photos of the school girls, all wearing Islamic dress and looking extremely apprehensive. At least the photos provided evidence that some of the girls were still alive, giving hope to some of the families of an eventual reunion with their daughters. 57 of the girls subsequently escaped, but 218 remained in captivity until a Nigerian vigilante group rescued Amina Ali Nkeki on May 17 this year.

ICC has worked closely with the Chibok families, and is close to the community, sharing the rejoicing of those whose daughters have been returned. There is also the realisation that a difficult journey awaits them. They were taken away as girls and return as traumatized women and even mothers. There also remains the daunting task of rescuing the 196 girls who are still in captivity, and returning them to a community wary of the possibility that some may have been radicalised.

Proposed Legislation Aids Islamic Expansion

A proposed amendment to the Nigerian Constitution to expand the scope and jurisdiction of Islamic Sharia courts passed its second reading without debate on 19 May, with apathetic Christian lawmakers waving it through. Christian and Muslim students have protested in Abuja against the government's move to divide and Islamise Nigeria.

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