

Central Asian Republics of the former USSR

Much of Central Asia was for 1400 years ruled by Islam, before enduring half a century under a tyrannical Communist regime that suppressed all religion. But following the breakup of the Soviet Union, a new church was born, made up not just of Russian-speaking Christians from former underground churches but of converts from other people groups that had no Christian presence before. Today, in regions where poverty is rife and persecution normal, good numbers of people continue to turn to Christ.

Previously, some countries were particularly difficult for Christians (e.g. Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan) and others more tolerant (e.g. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan), but now all countries of the region seem to be equally difficult. The governments, which are all Muslim, enact harsh laws 'to prevent religious extremism', but in their eyes this includes evangelical Christians. Churches are branded 'destructive religious movements' and are being increasingly driven underground because of the impossible criteria that governments set for official registration.

Barnabas Fund

Faith at work in Spain

Civic authorities in many Spanish cities are meeting with evangelical leaders to recognise the work of churches in addressing society's needs. In former times, the Protestant church in Spain had been marginalised, often persecuted, but this is changing as Spanish society recognises what Protestants are doing to help people in need.

Civic leaders have praised the work of evangelical churches and associations in helping families with few resources or at risk of exclusion. Churches have used the celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation to show the impact that right belief has on practical action.

Evangelical Focus

Malawi and Mozambique

An evangelist writes: "Last year I have distributed more books and Bibles to people, especially in Zomba and Machinga because these districts are full of Muslims. My aim is to win their souls and to plant churches in those areas. In Zomba we planted two churches through crusades and door-to-door ministry, as well as in Machinga we planted one church. Now we have 23 churches. Three of our churches in Mozambique are affected because of civil war, so some of our brothers and sisters have gathered Luwani refugees at the camp in Mwaza. They all need Bibles in Chichewa language."

Bridgeway

Honduras: church and society

In Honduras, five decades of evangelical growth has seen the numbers grow from 32,000 to 1,750,000, which is 23% of the population. Sadly, much of this progress is marred by division into countless denominations and much rivalry. Yet many churches still reach out, especially to the marginalised poor. Garbage dump children are more prevalent in Honduras than in other nations in the Americas. Street children are cleaned out by ruthless groups in the name of 'social cleansing.' Powerful youth gangs are violent and ruthless through their association with drug cartels. The challenge is still there for the country's large church population.

Operation World

Vietnam initiative

A ministry across northern Vietnam, called the Butterfly program, brings together pastors and their wives from rural areas to train and equip them for better evangelism and practical aid in their isolated regions. More than a thousand churches are now involved.

VOM

From a radio broadcaster in Zimbabwe

"With an average radio audience of about two million people, this program is a great door for effectual work which the Lord has opened for me, though there are many who oppose. I continue to enjoy widespread positive comments for taking a staunch position on matters of faith, but often I enter into debatable, polemical dialogue with false teachers, Muslims, civic leaders and academic pundits on biblical topics of moral, spiritual and ethical importance. Your books are my dependable inspiration, so that I can confidently tackle any topic related to the Bible."

Bridgeway

Christian refugees in Indonesia

Because Indonesia is not a signatory to the 1951 U.N. Convention on refugees, it functions as a point of transit until refugees are resettled in a third country. The waiting time in refugee camps could be up to ten years.

One Muslim-background believer, when he arrived in Indonesia, began a radio program in the Farsi language to reach out to Iranians in detention centres and prisons around Indonesia. Many Iranian and Afghan listeners in detention centres and prisons have turned to Jesus and been baptised within the institutions where they are held captive. On-air teams take prayer requests and visit those who are in spiritual need, teaching the Scriptures and encouraging people to build their relationship with Christ.

The broadcasts and visitation are supported by practical aid packages collected through radio appeals and church donations. Afghans are now the largest ethnic group receiving aid through this ministry, though Iranians are the ones responding more openly to the gospel. One report suggests that Iranian refugees are one of the fastest growing church populations in Indonesia. FEBC

Women

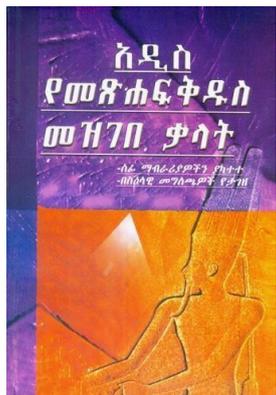
In many of the contexts where Christians suffer marginalisation and persecution, women suffer further vulnerability because of their gender. Christian women whose husbands are imprisoned or even killed because of persecution are often left with little or no income to support themselves and their children.

Some Muslims consider that all Christian women are 'immoral' and that they actually deserve abuse. Women suffer appalling treatment at the hands of groups such as Islamic State, who auction them off to men or award them as trophies to soldiers. Christian women in Islamic countries need our prayers. *Persecuted Church*

From an evangelist in Ethiopia

"Two books that are a good blessing to Ethiopian churches are Bridgeway Bible Commentary and Bridgeway Bible Dictionary in Amharic language. These books have been printed by Globe Publishing Company and reprinted many times. They are trustful and helpful to thousands of pastors and churches, because we did not have such books in our national language before. O, I am proud of you. These books help us see that the Bible is a book worth studying, which gives us a life worth living."

Bridgeway



Bible translation

Across the world, the work of Bible translation is speeding up. It is likely that within a generation the Bible will be available in every spoken language on earth. There are now more languages where translation work is in progress (2,584) than languages where no start has yet been made (1,636). AMT

Libyan peril

The Christian presence in Libya is mainly limited to foreign migrant workers and refugees. There are very few indigenous Libyan Christians. Whatever their origin, Christians are targeted by Islamists for killing, kidnap, forceful conversion, or sale in what the U.N. has called 'modern-day slave markets.'

Most refugees come from West African countries or Eritrea and are trying to reach Europe via Libya. In 2016, Islamic State abducted more than 500 Christian refugees, and sold at least 63 of the women after forcefully converting, raping, and enslaving them. The previous year they beheaded 21 Egyptian Christians on a Libyan beach. *Persecuted Church*

Australian Aborigines

Various reports have been published about many aboriginal people in Arnhem Land, the central-north part of Australia, turning to Christ in unusually large numbers. The reports range from the positive to the sceptical, but through the efforts of a high-profile aboriginal and his colleagues, a number of communities are experiencing a response to the gospel that has caught the public's attention.

In an environment where governments and indigenous groups are promoting traditional religious beliefs, those professing faith are in need of good nurture and biblical teaching to make them true disciples of Jesus and evangelists to their own people. *Eternity*