

Muslims: the fanatics, the disillusioned and the transformed

While Islamic fundamentalism continues to create worldwide havoc, this Islamic revival is not the world's only religious trend. The phenomenal growth of evangelical Christianity in the non-Western world has seen Christianity become the most widely evident global faith, and within it is an unprecedented trend of Muslims leaving Islam and becoming Christians.

Since the initial Islamic resurgence of 1979, various Islamic revivals have promised much but delivered little. Many Muslims feel not just harassed and helpless, but disillusioned. Breaking into this context is the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is available in local languages for download to a hand-held device. Also available in translation is the Quran, which many Muslims are reading in their own language for the first time. While some Muslims are radicalised, others recoil at what they are now finding out.

One Christian leader observes, "We are in the midst of the greatest turning of Muslims to Christ in fourteen centuries of Muslim-Christian interaction. More than 80% of all the Muslim movements to Christ in history have occurred in the past two to three decades, a period that coincides with the modern prayer movement for Muslims." Worldwide the number of baptisms of converts from Islam number in the thousands and an increasing number of new worshipping communities are being born.

Religious Liberty

Detroit, USA

The Good News Gang is an inner-city ministry whose mission is to rebuild some of the roughest neighbourhoods in the US city of Detroit. In an environment where many children and youths grow up in and out of foster care, the Good News Gang works to bring young people to Christ and equip them to become leaders of the next generation. The outreach program majors on building one-on-one relationships through home visits, summer camps and a weekly program of using vans to pick up needy people around town.

Faithwire

China's crackdown intensifies

New religious affairs laws are now being enforced right down to the municipal and district level offices, though the level of enforcement varies from province to province. Official and unofficial churches are affected. Many house churches have been forced to close and children/teenage programs are not allowed. Beijing's largest 'house' church (1,500 people) has been forcibly closed after it rejected a government order to install surveillance cameras – though the church is resisting the closure by meeting outside.

Over 2,000 crosses and steeples have been ripped from Beijing's church buildings, and at least one mega church has been dynamited. In Central Henan Province two-thirds of churches have closed and more than 7,000 crosses demolished. There are reports of thousands of pastors arrested, beaten, tortured or sentenced to years in prison.

With the personality cult around President Xi Jinping growing stronger, he is now being lauded as the Great Leader – terminology not heard since the Mao era. The government's drive to control what Christians can do, what they can believe, where they can go and what they can say is an indication that it sees the growth of Christianity as a threat to its grip on society.

Christianitytoday/World Watch/FEBC

From a pastor in Tanzania:

"These books help my ministry and help needy pastors. We baptized 56 people last month, those who had accepted Christ as their Saviour, and we have opened three new preaching points. We are also taking care of orphans and widows, about twenty people, in their homes or in our home. It is a sorry thing to see these orphans and widows sleeping without food and blankets, yet they are human beings in the image of God. After Bible study with them every day we pray and worship the Lord and share the small food we have in the family. Please pray for these as the going is getting tough."

Bridgeway

Israel outreach

An evangelistic ministry among Jews has reached more than 200,000 Israelis on social media with a message to trust in Jesus Christ. An on-the-ground outreach in Jerusalem resulted in five thousand conversations with citizens about Jesus, and about 200,000 accessing relevant social media posts. During the four-week outreach, 58 Israelis said they wanted to embrace Christ as Saviour, and more than 1,700 indicated they would like to know more.

In addressing social ills that plague Jerusalem, the ministry is also feeding the poor, cleaning up parks and renovating houses – a demonstration that Jesus wants to heal the broken and needy.

The Christian Post

Uzbekistan

Christians in Uzbekistan are the most severely persecuted of all in the Central Asian region of the former USSR. During the Soviet era, atheism was state policy and religion was suppressed, but Islam has now reasserted itself and represents 93% of the population. Russian Orthodox account for about 4% and Protestant Christians less than 1%.

Christians from a Muslim background suffer the most. Churches are infiltrated by spies, believers' homes are raided by police and Christians can lose their livelihood if their faith becomes known. The government is trying to improve its image by giving an impression of religious tolerance and increased openness, but in reality nothing has changed. Persecution has not decreased and many Christians have become discouraged and fled the country.

On the positive side, the first Bible in the Uzbek language was released last July. This was done with official permission, though only 3,000 copies were allowed to be distributed. Local Christians are praying for permission to print and distribute more.

Religious Liberty/ Barnabas Fund

Italy's Christians

The people in Italy are culturally Catholic but increasingly cynical about the Church. Secularism and materialism ensnare many, and occultism is so widespread that Italians are more liable to dabble in New Age practices than read the Bible.

Although many Protestant congregations are small and insular, there are some notable exceptions. Rising immigration has brought global awareness, as congregations of Romanians, Africans, Asians and Latinos are opening the eyes of traditional churches to a more vibrant form of Christianity. Italian Bible colleges are equipping a new generation for mission to regions where Italy has had long-standing interest such as Albania and the Balkans.

Operation World

Hand-held, solar-powered

MegaVoice is a hand-held solar-powered electronic device with the capacity to hold many books and Bibles. It is becoming increasingly available to millions of people in more than 160 countries. In a distribution drive in Papua New Guinea (pictured), hundreds of units were sold or otherwise distributed, and hundreds of would-be buyers have put in orders. The PNG government has given customs exemption for a new arrival of a thousand units.

CRMF



From a church leader in Burundi:

"Burundi is a French speaking country colonized by Belgium, but more of us Burundians now speak English. First, those who speak English are more marketable in the world of jobs, and second the government is promoting English in schools to make us more competitive in East African Community. Please do not hesitate to send me more Bridgeway books, because many of the leaders are saying that these books are amazingly understandable to every reader. In our churches, we have a new rising generation of better educated people who are very interested in reading."

Bridgeway

The church in Iran

In Iran, historic Assyrian and Armenian Christian minorities, who have their own languages, are permitted to meet together, but Farsi-speaking Christians (mostly converts from Islam) are often targeted by security forces. Meetings of Christian converts are raided by authorities, who confiscate Bibles, hymn books and other Christian literature. Arrested believers are often detained without charge for lengthy periods and sometimes tortured. The state refuses to recognise their conversion.

Persecuted Church

Worsening conditions in Nigeria

Nigeria is Africa's most populous country and more than half its people are nominally Christian, yet violent attacks by Islamists continue across the central and northern states without any intervention by the nation's president (a Muslim). Hundreds of churches have been destroyed, whole villages wiped out, thousands of Christians killed, and more than a hundred thousand left as refugees within their own country.