

Japan's Superbook

The popularity of a Bible presentation called *Superbook* is growing in Japan, as it airs on television and features in Sunday schools. After only a few months on national television, the animated Bible presentation is rapidly gaining popularity.

Japanese broadcasters do not usually favour religious programs, but after they saw that *Superbook's* animation was of high quality and its stories helped children, they decided to air the program. Recently, 88 churches worked with the publishers of *Superbook* to present it live at a large combined churches' annual event. Many churches are now using the presentation in their Sunday schools.

CBN News

Ethiopia: growth imperilled

In Ethiopia the majority religion is Ethiopian Orthodox, followed by Islam which accounts for about one third of the population. Protestant Christianity, reckoned at 5% in 1974, grew to 18% in the 2007 census and continues to grow at an astonishing rate. Many new Protestants are, like the recently elected Prime Minister, converts from Islam. There is also a growing renewal movement within the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

But this work of the Spirit is gravely imperilled by conflicts among the 87 ethnic groups that make up Ethiopia's 109 million population. Some conflicts are motivated by religious prejudice, but most result from the loss of privilege by certain ethnic groups as a result of the Prime Minister's widely acclaimed social reforms. Christians are praying that the good work being done by the new government will not be destroyed by communal violence or religious extremism. A fierce spiritual battle for Ethiopia is underway.

Religious Liberty

Serbian Bible school

A Bible school that grew out of the Serbian-Croatian conflict of the 1990s now has 360 graduates serving God across the region. One form of outreach is Christian camps, some of which have been arranged to cater for those who have special physical needs. This requires teams of carers as well as a suitable camp program. In Serbia, many of those with special needs are hidden away, so a camp run especially for them speaks powerfully of grace. Local evangelists also reach out to the Roma people (gypsies), who are often disregarded in society at large.

Oak Hall

Malawi: holistic ministry

"We look after sixteen orphans but now we added to them some widows, because they have no one to help them and they must go into town begging foods. All of them they don't have shelters to live, so I invite them each week to come to my house four days for a meal. Five of them now sleep in our house.

"But my first priority is the gospel. We received the Bibles money and we will buy more than 24 Bibles, some for churches here in Malawi and some for those in Mozambique. Through outreach in an area full of Muslims we have planted a new church. It is hard to start a church in a Muslim area."

Bridgeway

Assyrian and Armenian Christians

The Assyrian and Armenian Christians of Iran (descended from Christians who came to Iran many centuries ago) worship in languages not understood by the Muslim majority. Up till now they have not suffered official harassment as have Christian converts from Islam, but in recent months this has changed. They have now become targets for anti-Christian actions by the government and its agents. Churches have been raided and visible symbols of Christianity forcibly removed.

Barnabas Fund

Myanmar man transformed

When the keeper of a local Buddhist shrine in Myanmar began listening to radio broadcasts in his own language, his interest grew and he began to read the Bible and learn about the gospel. Eventually he became a believer and his life was transformed. Today he pastors a growing church.

FEBC

Evangelism in Ghana

"I was in the village to show the 'Jesus' film and 550 people gathered to watch. From these, 25 adults gave their lives to the Lord. These new converts will be nurtured in the Lord by a local brother.

"I also slotted in 15 minutes to campaign against the spread of the deadly HIV AIDS disease. I encouraged everyone to abstain from pre-marital sex, and be careful of blades, toothbrushes and needles. This is what I do any time I get a crowd like this, so that I can educate people to know that absolute trust in the Lord is the only real solution to all these undisciplined behaviours."

Bridgeway

Bethlehem school

A Christian school in Bethlehem that began sixteen years ago with 15 pupils now has 660. In an environment that is hostile to local Christians, the subsidised fees mean that even the poorest Christian families can afford to send their children to school. The school also provides jobs for more than 60 Christians who otherwise would find it difficult to get employment.

Barnabas Fund

Pakistan today

Pakistan's Christians, who are mostly poor and downtrodden, constitute a mere 2% of the population. They are vulnerable not only to Islamic activists but also to people who use the country's blasphemy laws to get rid of any they see as competitors in the workplace, educational institutions and sporting teams.

Two successful cricketers have been imprisoned because 'blasphemous' messages were found on their phones. But the sender of the messages, a Muslim who wanted all Christians excluded from cricket teams, was not even charged. In another case, an illiterate married couple have now been in jail five years because of allegedly blasphemous messages sent from their phones. More than 200 Christians are currently in prison for 'blasphemy' offences, forty of them on death row.

While the new government will not change the blasphemy laws, it is at least trying to 'de-radicalise' and 'mainstream' the country's 35,000 madrasas (Islamic schools). The plan is to introduce secular subjects such as English and Maths and bring all madrasas under the control of regional offices. Any that refuse to cooperate will be closed down.

The problem is that hard-line Islamic parties have such 'street power' and 'fear factor' that whenever their demands conflict with government objectives, it is usually the government that backs down.

Religious Liberty

An overcomer in Bhutan

A local pastor writes: "Thank you for the books. We are not having such books here in our country. We have about fifty full-time pastors and leaders in Bhutan to whom these books can bring a good impact. We have no Bible Societies or Christian publishers in Bhutan, but I am starting a centre for such ministries near the border of Bhutan and India."

Bridgeway

The Bible in Cuba

Every Sunday morning, the pastor of a small church in a remote part of Cuba took a piece of chalk and wrote a passage of Scripture on a chalkboard. The Christians then carefully wrote the verses in their notebooks, thereby adding to the only copy of Scripture they owned. They were committed to learning God's Word, even without an actual Bible. Then, one Sunday, a man arrived with two boxes packed with 100 Bibles – more than enough to ensure that each member received a copy.

Bibles have historically been hard to obtain in Cuba. Even if a believer found one on the black market, the cost was often prohibitive. Owning a Bible not only gives immediate access to God's Word but also creates a sense of freedom. 'Otherwise,' said one Christian, 'Communism controls everything we read.'

The ruling Communist Party exerts tight control over all religious activity. Harassment, intimidation and persecution have escalated markedly since a constitutional referendum earlier this year deemed evangelical Christians to be 'counter-revolutionaries.'

VOM



Dangerous Somalia

In Somalia, one of the world's most dangerous places to be a Christian, rulers pursue a policy of getting rid of all Christians. While Al-Shabaab terrorist groups hunt down and execute Christian converts, citizens in general suffer from brutality, corruption, civil war and famine.

Hundreds of thousands of Somalis have fled into neighbouring Kenya, where they soon meet aid workers and teachers, among whom are many Christians. Al-Shabaab suspects these aid workers of influencing the refugees against Islam and so targets them for elimination. Hundreds have been killed. A small but vulnerable ethnic Somali church is taking root inside eastern Kenya as well as in Somalia itself, though any covert Christian work done to help it is highly dangerous.

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