

The changing face of Brazil

Catholicism came to Brazil with the European colonisation of the 1500s. Protestantism began to take root in the 1900s. This provided a base for the movements that exploded in the 1970s, among evangelicals in general but especially among the Pentecostal and comparable groups. With the Catholic Church in decline, many who leave it are attending the newer Protestant churches. Recent research has revealed that 54% of Brazilians who were raised Catholic now identify as Protestant. Although some characteristics of Pentecostalism align with traditional beliefs and preferences of many Brazilians, these newer churches are not only evangelising with the gospel but also running rehabilitation programs for drug addicts and other vulnerable people.

This drop in Catholic followers and rise in Protestant followers is present in other countries of the region. In Central American countries such as Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and El Salvador, one third of the population now identify as Protestants.

Snyder

The Gambia

The tiny West African country of Gambia has a population of only two million, mostly Muslim, but agitation from Islamic elements in its government have created tensions on a number of issues, both internationally and within the country. The 9% Christian portion of the population has been increasingly marginalised, and some Christian schools forced to adopt Muslim practices. Christians are understandably concerned about where their country is heading.

Barnabas Fund

Yemen’s marginalised Christians

Christians in Yemen are not allowed to be buried in the capital, Sanaa, unless they have first accepted Muslim names. Three years ago a Christian cemetery in Aden was desecrated, the damage including the graves of sixteen Christians murdered in an attack on a Christian care home.

Persecuted Church

New Testaments for Ukraine

In response to pleas from a Christian military commander in Ukraine, 30,000 New Testaments have been supplied, mainly to his troops, who reportedly have shown ‘great gratitude.’ Half the NTs are in Ukrainian and half in Russian. Internally displaced Ukrainian Christians have also been grateful recipients of the New Testaments. Radio broadcasts are a constant source of sustenance to scattered and isolated Christians.

Threat to Cameroon

Statistically, Cameroon is a majority-Christian country, but violent Boko Haram forces have advanced across the border from Nigeria with the aim of taking over the far northern region and combining it with northern Nigeria and other parts of West Africa to form an Islamic caliphate. People have been killed, villages burned, homes looted, livestock killed and food supplies destroyed. The UN estimates that 170,000 people, mostly Christians, have fled the violence, seeking refuge in mountain hideouts or larger ‘safe’ towns.

Barnabas Fund

Laos still lagging behind

The Communist government of Laos, one of Asia’s poorest and least developed nations, allows comparative religious freedom to the majority Buddhist population, but is bitterly opposed to Christians. It sees them as allied to America – still hated from the Vietnam war days. Churches must have government approval to conduct services and import printed or electronic literature. But such approval means little to local officials who arbitrarily close churches and drive Christians from villages. Lao editions of Bridgeway books, which, along with Bibles, circulate widely through underground networks, are among the few local-language resources available to Christians.

Bridgeway



Penetrating Tibet

China tries to make sure that Tibet is insulated against the inroads of Christianity, but has not been able to stop Christian radio broadcasts beamed in from outside. Even Buddhist monks in Tibet’s monasteries have, through their responses to the radio broadcasts, shown interest in the Christian message.

FEBC

Australia's children

A novel idea of the Bible Society in Australia was to celebrate the Society's bicentennial by offering a toddler's Bible for children born in 2019 and then following up with annual birthday cards for five years, at which time the child will receive a full children's Bible.

So far 6,500 children have received Bibles and a further 2,000 are being added as more people learn of the program. This and similar initiatives are welcomed in a country where most children grow up with no knowledge of the Bible or Jesus Christ.

Bible Society

Ethiopia: Enriched through books

"Oh, words can't explain how much I appreciate the books you send, both Bridgeway and the used books. They drove me to my knees and greatly challenge my prayer life. I can't imagine missing them in my Christian life personally and as a minister of the glorious gospel. I am continually amazed at how blessed and sweet each used book is – uplifting, fully encouraging, presenting the living truth, convincing my heart to respond to the heart of God with an appetite to know him better. I praise the Lord from the very depths of my heart for his measureless grace. Please, keep on sending me books and any useful materials."

Bridgeway



Improvements in Morocco

Estimates of the number of Christians in Morocco vary widely, from 3,000 to 50,000. Christian converts, who are mainly ethnic Berbers, face social, family and cultural pressures. Authorities tend to ignore Christians as long as they remain 'invisible' and keep their gatherings discreet.

Although Islam is the state religion, identity cards no longer record a person's faith. Voluntary conversion from Islam, while stigmatised, is not illegal, but 'enticing conversion' is punishable by up to three years in prison. The New Testament has been translated into Moroccan Arabic and the Old Testament translation is scheduled to be completed in 2021.

The National Coalition for Moroccan Christians is continuing to press for more religious freedoms, including official recognition of churches, the right to have Christian cemeteries and the right to give Christian names to children.

Pakistan's ongoing injustice

Christians in Pakistan may number as many as 3.5 million, about 3% of the population, but they are despised and discriminated against by most of the Muslim majority. As a result, many Christians live in poverty and are restricted to dangerous, dirty, low-status jobs such as cleaning sewers. Violent attacks, once rare, have increased in the last two decades.

Christians seldom get justice, because police usually discriminate against them. Even in the courts the testimony of Muslims will override that of others, in accordance with *sharia*. Social injustice is so widespread that an estimated 700 Christian women and girls are kidnapped each year and forced to marry Muslims.

Persecuted Church

Living in isolation

The COVID-19 pandemic is causing many Christians in the free world to experience – possibly for the first time in their lives – what many persecuted Christians in the non-free world experience every day of their lives: the menacing reality and uncomfortable closeness of suffering and death.

The difference is that Christians in the free world who test positive for COVID-19 have a supportive state doing everything it can to help them. But Christians in the non-free world who are persecuted for their faith rarely receive any support from their state. They may be despised as infidels, rejected as untouchables, condemned as state enemies and routinely denied medical care, even when their lives depend on it. Furthermore, threatened Christian communities now face the prospect that hostile state and non-state actors will exploit security vacuums opened up by COVID-19 to advance their own agendas.

As Christians in the free world gain insight into what it is like to live under the shadow of suffering and death, may it help them to pray for their persecuted brothers and sisters with genuine empathy and unifying, sanctifying love.

Religious Liberty