

Persecution faced by Christians today



In the past 100 years, there has been more religious persecution than at any other time in history. In some countries it is difficult, or even against the law, to be a Christian. People of all religions have suffered persecution, and sometimes people are persecuted for believing in no religion.

Open Doors is an organisation that has been campaigning for over 60 years to stop the persecution of Christians around the globe. They explain their task as 'Open Doors are an international ministry serving persecuted Christians and churches worldwide. We supply Bibles, leadership training, literacy programmes, and livelihood support and advocacy services. We also seek to mobilise the church in the UK & Ireland to serve Christians living under religious persecution.'

They try to organise protests and petitions to help those who are persecuted. They compile 'The World Watch List', an annual profile of the countries of the world where the persecution of Christians is worst, so that people can pray about it and campaign against it.

One Afghan Christian who has experienced persecution explained why he thought that Christians are persecuted, saying 'We are not afraid but strong and hopeful. We know he (Jesus) will come again. That is why there is so much pain and suffering. That is why there is persecution. He is coming back and those who do not know him need him in their lives. For now, we – his followers – need to live with thankful, prayerful hearts.'

One of the men who worked to help the persecuted church was Brother Andrew, who smuggled Bibles to believers. He said, 'God invites us to influence our community, our nation, and the world to literally direct history while we're on our knees.'

Some Christian organisations provide help to Christians facing persecution today. Barnabas Fund helps to feed Christians who are temporarily in need because of their faith. The support can also be needed long-term. For example, Christians in Pakistan and Egypt are often trapped in grinding poverty because of discrimination. Receiving regular food parcels from the Barnabas Fund can transform their lives. If they know they will be able to eat, they can use what they would have spent on food to pay for school fees or on starting a small business.

Another organisation is Aid to the Church in Need. Its activities include providing financial support in 140 countries, including to rebuild the homes of returning refugees, and moral support for those who are being persecuted.

Why might Christians support charities like Barnabas Fund and Aid to the Church in Need?

Use the World Watch List to find out about four countries where Christians are being persecuted. What is happening to them? In which of the countries you looked at was the persecution most serious?

What is more important to Christians facing persecution, practical help from organisations like Barnabas Fund or spiritual help from reading passages like Psalm 7?

Are Christians persecuted in Britain today?

It can feel as if Christians are being persecuted in the UK today. For example, when we're made the subject of humour or mockery. What people say to Christians and about Christians can be mean, rude or intolerant, especially on social media.

It's important to many Christians that we can wear the symbols of our religion, but our right to do so is sometimes questioned. For example, you hear of people being prevented by their employer from wearing a cross at work. Occasionally, this even leads to legal cases.

We shouldn't say that Christians are persecuted in the UK today. Most Christians can follow their faith freely. Where there are obstacles, they are minor compared to what some people suffer. Saying that Christians in the UK are persecuted devalues what happens to people in other countries who do suffer real persecution.

The country is changing, becoming more multi-faith and more secular (non-religious). Fewer people describe themselves as 'Christian', but there is still an emphasis on Christianity in our culture, which can be seen in how we mark events such as Remembrance Day.

Some people argue that Christians have too much power in Britain in their influence on politics. For example, the House of Lords has twenty six bishops from the Church of England among its members and they do not reflect the number of Christians in the country. Saying this is unfair isn't the same as persecution.

Society's views on moral issues have changed, and some things which our interpretation of the Bible tells us that are wrong are seen as acceptable. If Christians say that marriage should only be for heterosexuals, they are sometimes given a hard time for expressing their beliefs.

'Christians are not persecuted in Britain.' Do you agree with this statement? Give evidence from two different points of view and then reach a conclusion to support or oppose it, or to say that it is partly right and partly wrong.