

Suffering for Their Faith

A Special Report: We cannot remain silent about the plight of persecuted Christians. Believers in China, Indonesia, Pakistan and Sudan shared with Charisma their accounts of harassment, torture and imprisonment.



*Ayub
Masih.*

I heard those words from the pastor of a small, oppressed underground church in Warsaw, Poland, in 1955. It was my first trip behind the Iron Curtain. At the time I didn't know there was a persecuted church. Little did I realize then how often I would hear that sentiment expressed in various ways throughout the next 46 years of ministry in restricted-access areas.

As you read this, for an estimated 200 million Christians, persecution is still the order of the day. Countless other believers face injustices that most of us have never even thought about, much less experienced.

Shageldy Atakov, 38, a jailed Christian in Turkmenistan, told his wife in early February that he did not expect to survive the brutal treatment he was suffering in a labor camp. He could barely walk and frequently lost consciousness. A Muslim convert to Christ, Atakov had become too effective in his ministry to the ethnic Turkmen population, which is almost exclusively Muslim. He was jailed on trumped-up charges.

In Colombia, the ongoing internal war has displaced 2 million people, 75 percent of whom are women and children. The capital city of Bogota bulges at the seams with about 1,000 new refugees arriving daily. Many are Christians targeted by the various warring factions because, in their loyalty to Christ, they refused to choose sides.

I'm thankful that Christians in the West are becoming aware of these atrocities. But living on an island of liberty and prosperity has silenced us. We want to believe that the whole world is like ours. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Why are we so tolerant of regimes and religions that are so intolerant themselves? We hear about forced Islamization in Sudan and Indonesia and about other crimes against our brethren, yet we do not interfere. Is it because of our economic interests? Then we're hypocrites. As soon as it costs us something, we go silent.

And we have been silent for much too long! Even worse, our silence has caused a breach in the body of Christ. Have we forgotten 1 Corinthians 12:26? "And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it" (NKJV).

If we cannot feel the suffering, maybe we should ask ourselves if we really are part of the body of Christ. The self-destructive wave of wealth and prosperity that threatens to destroy the evangelical movement can only be withstood by a far deeper identification with the persecuted church. We can measure our relationship with God by the oneness we feel with those who suffer for His name.

Look at your Bible. Both Moses and Paul were strong intercessors and leaders. Both had a faith and a love that knew no limits: They were willing to be blotted out of the Book of Life if only their people would be saved! Moses would not have come to that place had he not identified with the suffering of Christ (see Heb. 11:26).

Both prayed a strong prayer that greatly influenced their life and ministry: "That I may know You" (see Ex. 33:13 and Phil. 3:10). Paul, who had personal knowledge of the persecuted church, linked his request to the fellowship of Jesus' suffering. We seem to prefer leaving that part out, ending our

prayer instead with the more convenient “and the power of His resurrection” (see Phil. 3:10).

But we will see no demonstration of the power of Jesus’ resurrection unless it is coupled with reaching the suffering church. The persecuted church cannot survive without us, nor can we survive without them. The breach in the body of Christ must be healed for His sake and for the kingdom of God.

In many ways we are not that different. As an unregistered house church leader in China said recently, “The biggest problem in China today is not that too few Chinese are becoming Christians, but that too few new Christians are becoming mature Christians!”

It reminds me of the story of the chicken and the pig: “We can do something to help the problem of world hunger,” the chicken told the pig. “You and I could feed them! I will provide the eggs. You can provide the bacon.”

“I’m not so sure that’s a good idea,” the pig replied. “For you that would be a me that would be total sacrifice.”

Has Christianity failed? Of course not. I say it has not yet been tried, even in the so-called “Christian nations.” We must move from “making a contribution” to “total sacrifice.” And in our sacrifice we must remember that God has the last word, not the persecutor.

My prayer is that you will identify with the persecuted church. Remember Shageldy Atakov in that prison cell in Turkmenistan. Pray for Christian families in Colombia who have been forced from their homes because they refuse to deny Christ.

Write to political leaders on behalf of believers being forced to convert to Islam in Sudan and Indonesia. Support strong ministries in these difficult areas. Go and encourage those who suffer for their faith.

Millions of persecuted Christians still feel as if they are alone in their struggles. Like us, they desire peace. But there will be no peace without justice, and justice will only come for those who suffer for Christ when we stand with them.

Brother Andrew is

author of the best-selling book *God's*

Smuggler and founder of Open Doors,

a missions agency that has provided Bibles, training and encouragement to

persecuted Christians worldwide for more than 45 years.

Contact Open Doors at

(888) 5-BIBLE-5 or .

Persecution in China

Hiding From the Dragon

By J. Lee Grady

Imprisonment and torture have not stopped Christianity in China. Thanks to cell phones, missionary zeal and New Testament-style miracles, evangelists are spreading the gospel faster than anyone can calculate.

Just days after the Tienanmen Square massacre in Beijing in 1989, Sister Peng* was delivering a small shipment of freshly printed Bibles to unregistered church leaders when police officers arrested her after she got off a train from Guangzhou. She was traveling to Henan Province, which still serves as ground zero for a Christian revival that has been thriving in China since the 1970s. Peng was about to experience persecution for the first time.

Officers of China's infamous national police cadre, the PSB,

threw her in a dirty detention cell. Assuming that she was an anti-government activist, they used an electric prod to make her confess to her “crimes.” She stayed in solitary confinement for eight months and was not allowed to see her family.

She was wearing pants and a T-shirt when she was arrested in the summer, so when winter arrived she shivered on a bare concrete floor. Prison guards offered no coats, blankets or feminine hygiene supplies—only watery soup at mealtimes. “For eight months I had no contact with anyone. I just ate soup in my cell,” Peng told Charisma during a secret meeting of Christian leaders held earlier this year. “It is really God’s mercy that He fed me and kept me warm.”

Peng was later transferred to a women’s prison, where she stayed for two lonely years. The PSB sometimes made her stand for long periods—once for 11 hours—in a cruel attempt to obtain information about the underground church. But Peng never betrayed her Christian colleagues. While her friends outside the prison were busy planting churches and delivering Bibles, she led 32 female inmates to Christ from her cell.

That’s the way it works in China. Here, even hard-line communists apparently cannot imprison the Word of God.

To Peng, followers of Jesus somehow seem to remain in control in spite of the government’s constant crackdown on unauthorized religious groups. “Every time the PSB would ask me something, the Lord would give me what to say,” she added. “I would start asking them questions instead, and it would seem that I was in charge of the conversation.”

Peng’s story has been repeated thousands of times. Hundreds of pastors and evangelists are jailed in China today, but for every one locked up in a cold prison cell there are hundreds more brave, self-supported ministers who elude the watchful eye of the PSB. They worship in homes (although rural groups

actually stage outdoor evangelistic meetings), they deliver contraband shipments of Bibles and Sunday school materials smuggled in by foreigners, and they win converts at the rate of 25,000 per day.

Fugitives for GodPeng is 40 now, and she has been running from her captors since she began evangelizing China in 1976 at age 16. She entered full-time ministry in 1981 and has spent more than four years in prison since then. Although she has a husband and a 6-year-old daughter, she must visit them at night to avoid being arrested by the PSB.

Government officials are particularly upset because she insists on reaching teen-agers—who are forbidden by Chinese law to learn about Christianity.

When Peng began planting house churches in the 1970s (the typical evangelist in China today is a woman between the ages of 18 and 22), rural areas were experiencing a “season of miracles” that continued into the next decade, she said.

“We didn’t have Bibles. We didn’t have training. There were no foreign missionaries,” Peng remembers. “But we started one new house church every day. We just went from village to village praying for the sick—and most accepted the Lord quickly.”

After the miracles spread, a wave of persecution began in 1983—and most of Peng’s colleagues found themselves behind bars. Among them was the leader of her church movement, Mr. Shi*, 50, who has been in prison four times. He has been tortured with electric prods and beaten with metal bars and bayonets. Yet today he leads a network of illegal “house churches” that represents at least 10 million believers, and he directs his ministry by relying on prayer, cell phones and secret strategy sessions. He changes his phone often to elude detection.

“Even while I am talking with you we are starting churches,” Mr. Shi told Charisma. “The work of God’s kingdom is so fast.

We have gone through a lot of suffering, but the suffering has turned to great joy.”

Leaders representing approximately 35 million underground Christians met in a secret location in January to be trained in basic pastoral skills by representatives from a North Carolina-based ministry. Leaders came from all over China—even from far western provinces—and shared meals together for six days of worship, prayer and teaching.

Every leader Charisma interviewed said he or she had spent some time in prison. “I was beaten, slapped, kicked and handcuffed. I was like a slave,” said Sister Yi*, 35, one of 10 top leaders of a 4 million-member house church movement. She has been in and out of prison four times.

“I was made to kneel down for long periods, and sometimes I became unconscious,” she says. “We did hard labor 16 hours a day. When I read about how the slaves of ancient Rome were treated, I realized I was treated the same way.”

Brother Wu*, 47, was jailed twice in the 1980s and again in 1991. He says his worst treatment was in Henan Province, where he was beaten with iron bars and belts. “They beat me so bad I was blue,” Wu remembers. “I could not lay down or sit. They hit our shins and ankles with iron rods and also made us carry bricks all day.”

Chinese prisons are infamous for their meager rations. Wu was given only two bowls of soup a day. Brother Xing, who was jailed in 1991, often found worms at the bottom of his bowl. “I got very dizzy because we were not allowed to eat much—only three bowls of rice soup a day,” he said.

Despite horrific conditions, many of these living martyrs say God often performed miracles to protect them—or even free them. Back in the 1970s, during Mao Tse-tung’s Cultural Revolution, an elderly pastor named Brother Xiu* had to sleep in a bare cell with a concrete floor and no toilet for eight

months. He developed a skin disease as a result of living in filth. Later, when he and 100 other Christians were being held in a detention center in the city of Fangcheng, in Hunan Province, the group began singing praise songs when suddenly, he says, "the door opened by itself, and we escaped."

Brother Zhao*, 50, a former Buddhist, was released from his most recent prison stay in early January after 16 months. During the time he was incarcerated, his colleagues started more than a dozen Bible training schools and sent hundreds of church planters into China's major cities where the gospel has not enjoyed as much success as in rural areas. Though Zhao has suffered much, he smiles broadly when he is asked about the future of the Chinese church.

"This is the day we have longed for. I believe we will see our nation Christianized," he said.

In his most recent clash with the PSB, Brother Zhao was arrested because he and three other prominent house church leaders released a declaration demanding that the Chinese government release all unregistered Christians from prisons and labor camps, stop persecuting and fining believers, stop calling house churches "cults," and acknowledge "God's great power." The document, called A United Appeal and released in August 1998, represents the boldest step yet for the underground church—which now is estimated to include as many as 80 million Christians. Zhao later mailed a copy of the document to China's president, Jiang Zemin.

"The enemy began to attack us severely in 1996," Zhao said, noting that four of his top leaders were arrested that year. "The government made it a goal to wipe us out. They say we are too big and too well-organized so they feel threatened. They think the house churches are against the government, but we teach Christians to obey the government. They don't understand that."

Repeating the Book of ActsChina's Christians certainly have tasted New Testament-style persecution, but they have also witnessed New Testament-style miracles. The two, it seems, go hand in hand. In China, adversity is the breeding ground for spiritual revival.

When Charisma asked a group of church leaders to describe their most memorable miracle, most found it difficult to choose an incident to describe.

"There are so many," one pastor said, laughing. Brother Xiu said he was most astounded in 1985 when an infant was raised from the dead after he preached to a group of 70 villagers in Shangxi. "The baby began to cry, and after that everyone wanted to become a Christian," he said. A new church was formed immediately as a result of that miracle.

Brother Wu said a girl in Hubei Province was raised from the dead in 1992 after committing suicide by drinking poison. Brother Zing* from Anhui Province said dozens of people were healed of deafness and lameness two years ago in the city of Mongchung. "But we have had to limit these outdoor meetings lately," Zing said, "because the government's crackdown has affected all churches."

Indeed, there is evidence that a new wave of government oppression has been unleashed in China. In December 2000, just prior to the house church leaders' conference, dozens of unregistered churches in the eastern coastal city of Wenzhou were bulldozed, padlocked or confiscated and turned into museums. Also, a 21-year-old man, Liu Hai Tao from Jiaozuo in Henan Province, died in prison last fall. International human rights organizations say he was denied medical attention.

No one knows how many Chinese Christians are currently in prison.

A spokesperson for the Washington, Freedom House said estimates range from a thousand to "tens of thousands," but

figures are impossible to obtain. Chinese believers have refused to align themselves with the government-controlled Three Self Church—which in most cases does not allow its members to evangelize, talk about healing or minister to anyone under age 18.

But the government's attempts to squelch the church often backfire. Brother Shi, who is considered an apostle in the Chinese house church movement, says God supernaturally paralyzed the chief of police in 1993 in Xinye County, in Henan Province. The story sounds like something from the book of Acts.

"We were having an outdoor crusade in a sports stadium, and there were so many people coming that the streets were blocked," Brother Shi explained. "When the sheriff arrived, he was very angry. He pointed at us, and he commanded his officers to arrest us. But suddenly his arm was stuck, and his feet could not move. He was like a statue!

"His officers tried to put him in his car, but it was difficult because his arm was sticking out. Before they drove him away, he sent word to us that he wanted us to visit him at his office after the meetings. When we arrived there that afternoon, he was still paralyzed. He asked us to pray for him, and he told us: 'I want to become a Christian. Please give me a Bible.' When we prayed for him he was finally able to move his arm and his feet!"

Brother Shi smiled as he explained how the sheriff's attempt to shut down the meeting in Xinye actually helped spread the gospel. "In one year, 15,000 were added to the church in that area," Shi said. "It created an incredible disruption because so many were saved."

In nearby Zhouko County, hundreds more were saved after three teen-age boys were paralyzed in a similar way after they began taunting some evangelists.

"The leader of our meetings pointed to the boys and said, 'Lord, bind them!' Suddenly the boys could not move," Shi said. "Their friends began to offer us cigarettes if we would free them. They thought we were using magic, but we explained to them that it was the power of God."

One thing is certain: Neither teen-age hecklers nor communist storm troopers have quenched the zeal of China's underground church. The harder the government presses in on the Christians, the more passionate they become about spreading their faith inside and outside the world's most populous nation.

"Although we have gone through a lot of trials and attacks, greater revival is coming. The future of the Chinese church is glorious," said Brother Zing, who at age 37 represents a new generation of visionary leaders within the underground movement.

Imprisoned twice now, Zing's passion is to take the gospel to the more than 50 ethnic minority groups in China. He has sent church-planters to Nepal and Tibet—where sword-wielding Buddhists attacked his team in 1997.

Zing believes this latest wave of persecution is due to Beijing's fear of Falun Gong, a fast-growing Chinese cult that has attracted a worldwide following. But he believes he will see a day when the house churches will send evangelists around the world.

"We have had 100 years of suffering, but that has brought wisdom," Zing said. "There will come a day when the Chinese government will open the door and give us real freedom."

Sister Peng shares that optimistic view. In fact, she is already preparing Chinese teen-agers to be part of a missionary army. "I used to think that missionaries going from China would not happen until after I die, but God has shown me that it will soon be time," she said. "I want to raise up 700

missionaries. God is going to raise up apostolic teams throughout China. It's our time to go to the world."

J. Lee Grady is the former editor of Charisma. He interviewed leaders of China's house church movement in southern China for this article.

How You Can Help China's Unregistered Church

House church leaders say their most urgent need is ministry training—to prevent false teaching.

Hundreds of Chinese pastors are arrested every year in China, but persecution is not the most serious problem Christians face in this country. When Charisma asked a group of house church leaders what they consider their toughest challenge, they all agreed it is heresy.

Just like in New Testament times, young churches in China are bombarded by strange doctrines that split congregations. The house church movement—which has grown to an estimated 80 million people—has been fragmented by unbiblical beliefs or practices.

One group often referred to as "the Shouters" follow a Taiwanese teacher who claims that his movement is the only true church. Some of his members have recently repented of promoting false doctrines and are modifying their theology. Another isolationist group known as the Rebirth Church (also called "the Crying Movement" because of a teaching that insists on tears to prove true devotion to Christ), is beginning to cooperate with other house churches after years of separatism.

A pseudo-Christian cult known as Eastern Lightning is

spreading false doctrines among churches that are led by naive pastors who have scanty theological training. Members of the cult pretend to be true believers for a while, but they gradually introduce a bizarre teaching about a newly incarnated female Christ who demands to be worshiped—or else.

“Eastern Lightning is very deceptive. They react violently if you refuse to believe them. They have even cut people’s ears off,” said Brother Shi*, leader of a 10 million-member house church movement in Henan Province.

Shi and his colleagues say the only way to fight this onslaught of heresy is to increase the level of training for their pastors, and to provide more Bibles and discipleship materials for lay members. He estimates that only half of China’s house church members own a Bible.

“We need 7 million Bibles a year,” he added. “The need is always greater than the supply.”

That need confuses Christians in the West—who are often told that China’s state-sanctioned Three Self Church prints large quantities of Bibles at the Amity Press in Nanjing. But the Bibles printed in China are distributed primarily to the Three Self churches, leaving unregistered groups dependent on Bibles smuggled in by foreigners.

Many U.S. organizations today are meeting the demand for Scriptures in Chinese languages. One North Carolina ministry, however, has taken the need for training seriously by sponsoring intensive, monthlong pastoral schools in Chinese cities. The events require high-level security to avoid arrests.

“Everything we do is stealth,” said a co-founder of the training schools, who requested anonymity. “The leaders of these movements are aggressively planting new churches every day in ways we cannot imagine. They want to go into the cities. They want to go into Muslim countries. They have the

passion and the calling. The best way we can help them is by coming alongside to serve: teaching them how to pastor, how to provide counseling and how to develop youth and children's ministries."

Charisma is raising funds for the Chinese church. Every \$100 gift will pay for a Chinese pastor's travel, lodging, meals and training for one month. A gift of \$50 will support a full-time evangelist for one month. A \$25 gift will provide a pastor with five Bibles. Tax-deductible gifts can be made payable to Christian Life Missions, P.O. Box 952248, Lake Mary, FL, 32795-2248. Please note on the check that the gift is for "China House Church Project."

Persecution in Indonesia

The Horrors of Jihad

Thousands of Christians have died, fled their homes or endured forced circumcision and conversion to Islam as Muslim extremists press their 'holy war' in the Moluccas.

C. Hope Flinchbaugh

Duma is one of thousands of island villages that dot the crescent-shaped archipelago of Indonesia's Molucca Islands, a paradise rich in natural resources, unspoiled beaches and botanical gardens. Although 88 percent of Indonesia's 210 million residents are Islamic, Muslims have lived harmoniously in the north Moluccas for years with their Christian, Buddhist and Hindu neighbors.



*Hundreds
of
Christian
refugees
jam the
Mega
Belia
camp
after
Muslim
attacks.*

For Christians, that harmony ended in January 1999 when a series of small domestic quarrels throughout Indonesia's north Moluccas led to a jihad, or "holy war," waged by Muslim extremists against non-Muslims. Since then, Duma has become one of hundreds of Christian villages that have been attacked by Muslim militants connected to the Laskar Jihad, or "warriors of the holy war."

By June of last year Laskars had made 21 attacks on Duma, and the village's 1,500 Christian residents were living in constant fear of another jihad scourging. On June 19 lookouts warned that Laskar Muslims were approaching. Christians in the village were outnumbered and lacked the sophisticated weaponry needed to defend themselves.

"We did everything we could to defend our village and church," says a leader from Duma, named Obie. "I told everyone to run to the church, hoping we could defend ourselves [there]."

Crude attempts were made to thwart the attackers. Sixteen-year-old Tina ran to the church and rolled fuel drums into the path of the advancing warriors to form a barricade. Bullets passed through the drums and hit her legs.

"I just didn't want them to take our church," she said. "I fell to the ground wounded and was helped by some of the young people. [Jihad warriors] burned my father alive and cut my

brother to pieces with their machetes.”

The Christian men held off the attack at the front door of the church while the women and children escaped through the back door into the jungle. When the men finally ran for their lives, the Laskars called after them: “We are going to catch you and cut you up into tiny pieces!”

Obie was unable to run fast because he carried his young son in his arms. One of the warriors slashed at Obie, slicing his neck.

“With God’s help, I managed to grab his machete and slew him,” Obie said. “This caused the other warriors to fear, so they ran away.”

Back in the village, Christians who didn’t make it to the safety of the church scattered everywhere, running for their lives. One woman named Selena cried out, “Lord, help us!” A jihad warrior came up to her and said, “I’ll show you how God helps you,” and put a pistol in her mouth and pulled the trigger. Half her face was blown off, though she survived.

Children who did not escape were either killed or captured and taken to Ternate Island where they reportedly are being converted to Islam by members of the Laskar Jihad. Fifty-six of the Christian men who fled with Obie were slain. In all, 400 Duma villagers died in the massacre. Another 120 drowned while trying to escape by boat.

Obie and his son caught up with the women and children in the jungle, and he led the group to the safety of a refugee camp in Manado on the island of Sulawesi. They live there today in crowded conditions with more than 7,000 other Christian refugees who have survived similar attacks.

In all, the jihad in Indonesia has killed more than 8,000 people on both sides of the fighting and displaced 500,000 into refugee camps where there is little food, overcrowded

shelters, poor sanitation and inadequate water. Having little hope of soon rebuilding their lives, Christians gather to worship, often expressing their grief in songs they've written about the loss of loved ones, the destruction and looting of their homes, and the dreams that have been crushed.

"We sing about what happened, but we know God is really good and faithful to us," one refugee singer said. "We wanted to live in peace with the Muslims, and we really didn't think that our neighbors would attack. We don't have guns, but the jihad warriors had arms and bombs, as well as support from the military."

It is often difficult for Indonesian Christians to determine who is for them or against them. The country's president, Abdurrahman Wahid—a Muslim scholar known for his message of tolerance—said in a Dec. 22 speech in the capital, Jakarta: "There is an effort by Islamic extremists to convert Christians to Islam. This is not right."

Though his statement is encouraging, the national military seems divided. Some soldiers protect Christian villages from attacks, but others join the Laskars in massacring Christians.

Many believers who have fled to the jungles have been coaxed out of hiding by the military, who promise them safety but leave them to be captured or killed by waiting jihad warriors. The greatest sympathizers the Christians have are local police, Indonesian animists and Muslim moderates.

Convert or Die!

Pastors are the most hunted of all because there is a \$5,000 (U.S.) bounty paid for each one killed. One pastor, who asked to be identified only as "Yohannen," actively works to help rescue Indonesian Christians. He narrowly escaped jihad machetes during a pastors meeting last year.

When Laskar warriors suddenly appeared at the meeting

shouting, "Convert to Islam or die!" he and three other pastors quickly escaped through the back door. Those pastors who weren't able to get away faced two choices—death or denying Christ. Three of them converted to Islam, and four were brutally murdered.

Thousands of other believers have converted to Islam in word only, fearing for their lives and for their children's lives.

According to an eyewitness report by an Indonesian believer who wished only to be identified as "Andrew," on Feb. 5 of last year the village of Lata-Lata was attacked by 6,000 Laskars. Andrew was one of more than 1,000 Christians who tried to defend their families, fighting attackers from 6 a.m. until noon. When the Christians could no longer hold off the attack, they fled to the jungle, where jihad leaders found them and commanded all pastors to give themselves up.

After Andrew's pastor surrendered, he was told that he was being taken by boat to another location where he would be protected. Later, Andrew learned that his pastor was killed on the beach at Chinga Chinga.

The remaining Christians were told they would have to convert to Islam. Although not all of the villagers agreed to do so, the head of the village signed an agreement stating that all would become Muslims.

Over the next month, the entire village of men, women and children were forcibly circumcised without pain medication. Thirty-seven suffered serious infections from the surgeries. They were forced to build a mosque and participate in a festival of circumcision and must say Muslim prayers and chant verses of the Quran daily.

Andrew escaped on Sept. 16, and on Feb. 21 Andrew's wife told the soldiers she needed to go to Ternate to sell fruit and made her escape with three of their children. A daughter is still in Lata-Lata with Andrew's parents and in-laws.

There has been at least one confirmed report of what is presumed to be a divine intervention. According to Yohannen, when jihad warriors attempted last fall to land their boats several times to attack an island village of Christians, a figure dressed in white with a white beard and riding a white horse appeared on the shore and repelled the attackers. Several of them were reported killed after confusion ensued among their ranks and they turned on one another.

Yohannen stated that investigative teams from the Indonesian military had come to the island to question Christians about the man and said that they were looking for "a white man" who was fighting for the Christians. Believers on the island—who had heard nothing about the incidents—immediately told officials upon hearing their description of the figure that it was Jesus.

At least one human-rights organization is currently involved in trying to rescue Indonesian Christians trapped in the fighting. Steve Snyder, president of the Washington, International Christian Concern (ICC), visited the refugee camps last February during a fact-finding mission.

Snyder, three Australian missionaries and two Indonesian pastors were arrested and detained by security forces on Ternate, a Laskar stronghold. After being interrogated and released, Snyder returned to the United States to inform government officials of his findings and to hold press conferences in an attempt to raise political support and more than \$1.2 million to free Christians and resettle them in safe locations. Christian Aid has since joined the effort, raising \$50,000 to assist ICC with the project.

Networking with Yohannen and other pastors and leaders in Indonesia, Snyder's organization later hired boats and with an Indonesian Navy escort rescued 1,500 Christians. Snyder continues to raise support to rescue the nearly 6,000 Christians who remain trapped in Indonesia's jihad

strongholds.

C. Hope Flinchbaugh is a free-lance writer based in Pennsylvania.

Persecution in Pakistan

Abused in Allah's Name

Authorities routinely turn a blind eye to injustices against Christians, yet believers hold fast to their love for their Savior—and their enemies.

By Todd Nettleton

Her crime, the cause of all her trouble, is being a Christian in the Muslim nation of Pakistan. She bears scars both on her body and in her psyche, but she willingly endures them to wear the name of Christ.

Last year, 16-year-old Safeena was imprisoned on false charges of theft while working as a housekeeper for a wealthy Muslim family. One of the sons, taken with Safeena's dark brown eyes and warm smile, determined to make her his wife. But marrying Safeena required that she convert to Islam. Though the family pressured her constantly, Safeena refused to deny her faith.

"I am a Christian," she told them repeatedly.

Leaving her job would devastate her own impoverished family. In Pakistan, education and employment opportunities are limited for Christians. Believers often are able to find jobs only as street sweepers or brick kiln workers. Cooking and cleaning for the family provided Safeena with a meager but much needed income.

Then one day the young man finally gave up on his pursuit to

marry Safeena. He decided instead to take her by force. As Safeena worked in the house, the man dragged her into a room and raped her. In Muslim nations, a woman who is raped or not a virgin is considered unfit for marriage.

Devastated, Safeena planned to press charges, but before she could contact the police, the family accused her of theft. Still reeling from the rape, Safeena was thrown in jail.

As if her situation could grow no worse, Safeena received a visitor. It was her rapist. When the police gave him access to her, he raped her again. Then a police officer assigned to guard her raped her as well, intensifying her shame.

Stories such as Safeena's are not uncommon in Pakistan. Protestant Christians in the south Asian nation make up only 1 percent of the population. Ninety-seven percent of Pakistan's 135 million inhabitants are Muslims. Believers have faced mob violence, discrimination and harassment. Their testimonies should challenge Christians in the West to a deeper commitment to serve Christ no matter the cost.

One Muslim imam, or mosque prayer leader, was drawn to Christianity after analyzing Islam and Christianity side by side, comparing the Bible with the Quran.

When he finished, he prayed hesitantly for Jesus to reveal Himself if, indeed, He was real. That night, he says, he had a dream in which Jesus held out to him His nail-scarred hands.

"I died for you," Jesus told the man.

When he awoke, the man prayed to receive Christ as his savior. But later, his own mother, a devout Muslim, tried to poison him. Miraculously, though he ate the food, he was not harmed.

Another Pakistani Christian was threatened by radical Muslims. They held loaded guns to his head and ordered him to deny his faith in Christ and convert to Islam. "I cannot do that," the man answered. "As soon as you pull the trigger, I will be with

Jesus. And I'm in a hurry to see Him, so hurry up and pull the trigger!"

Pastor Robinson Abid also is no stranger to persecution. He leads a small band of Christians in the town of Shanti Nagar, a village of almost 20,000 people four miles from Khanewal that is made up mostly of believers. The words "Shanti Nagar" mean "village of peace," but in February 1997 the village was the site of one of the worst attacks on Christians Pakistan has ever seen.

According to Islamic tradition, Feb. 5 is the night the Quran descended from heaven. In Pakistan, radical Muslims spent that night celebrating and chanting slogans. The following day, Feb. 6, 1997, Islamic fervor was at a fever pitch, and an announcement went out from the loudspeakers of the mosques in Khanewal and the surrounding area. Christians, it alleged, had torn a copy of the Quran.

Loyal Muslims were advised to "take up your weapons and take revenge for Allah." Within hours, a mob of more than 70,000 radical Muslims descended on Shanti Nagar, intent on avenging the alleged misdeed. By the day's end, the village of peace was almost destroyed.

The first members of the mob looted the homes and businesses of Christians. The second group burned the village to the ground, and the third destroyed anything left standing. The mobs chanted as they came: "Kill the Christians, burn their homes! Kill the Christians, burn their homes!"

The believers fled for their lives. One pregnant woman's water broke as she ran, and she and her husband were forced to hide in the bushes to deliver the baby. Another woman, whose husband was a church elder, had delivered a baby only hours before the attack. The elder left his wife and child inside their house and locked the door, then began to run. But the mob lit the house on fire, and the man had to run back to

carry his wife and newborn to safety.

It was not yet noon when the mob finished its work. The village was in ruins. As the radical Muslims returned to their homes, the Christians were left to assess the damage. More than 100 people were seriously injured. At least 200 Christian women were abducted and/or raped by the mob, many of them violated by entire gangs of radical Muslim men. The Quran says men shouldn't force themselves sexually on women, but that if they do, Allah is merciful.

Several believers died of heart attacks when they returned to find their homes and businesses in ashes. Children, frightened and traumatized, refused to go to school. The Christians couldn't call the police, for there had been hundreds of police officers leading in the raid.

During the attacks, pastor Abid, whose last name is Arabic for "the one who serves the true God," prayed for the strength not to deny Christ. He, like many of his brothers and sisters in Christ, refused to be bitter toward his persecutors. Instead, the believers held a service to forgive their attackers.

Since the raid the church has grown stronger. Today, Christians in and around Shanti Nagar spend more time in prayer, fasting and Bible reading than ever before.

They are more dependent on God now than they were before the attack, Abid says. "If you have no test," he says, "then you have no testimony." Pastor Abid has since been forced out of Pakistan and now lives in the United States.

Safeena's tests have been great, but her testimony is great as well. Today she is free on bail but still faces charges of stealing from her Muslim employer. Her life is forever altered. Because of the shame in Pakistani culture of being raped and of not being a virgin, Safeena faces the prospect of never marrying. Her family may have to relocate to another part of Pakistan for their safety.

Yet despite these challenges, Safeena's faith remains strong. She knows that while her earthly home is dangerous and unstable, her heavenly home is safe and solid. It is on this truth that Safeena and other Pakistani believers stand.

Todd Nettleton is director of media development for an international non-profit organization. He's the spokesman for Voice of the Martyrs.

Persecution in Sudan

Suffering for Christ in A Land of Slavery

For years Christians in the south have been starved, bombed and sold into slavery in an attempt to impose Islamic rule.

But the church still lives.

By Todd Nettleton

Kamerino hadn't eaten in many days, but his hunger pangs had passed. He was only 10 years old, but he was old enough to know that he was starving to death.

The small boy asked his grandmother for permission to join three of his friends in searching for food. He knew the danger, but what choice did he have? He had already been orphaned after the Islamic raiders murdered his parents. A hunger to survive drove the fragile boy.

Reluctantly, his grandmother permitted him to go—with the understanding that the four boys would return home that day. The children left the village the next morning. But instead of finding food, they were found by radical Islamic soldiers.

An officer leading the soldiers spotted the boys and yelled

for them to come forward. Kamerino and his friends had heard the grim stories of Muslim soldiers taking boys captive to be indoctrinated in Islam, and capturing and raping young girls. Fearing for their lives, the boys ran. The closest hiding place was a field of tall grass, and they burrowed into it, hoping the soldiers would forget them.

But the soldiers wouldn't give up. They circled the field that was the boys' hiding place and lit it on fire. Surrounded by flames, the children had little choice. They fled the fire and ran right into the arms of the Islamic soldiers. Kamerino, however, stayed put, even as the fire began to consume his flesh.

When the field was completely burned, the soldiers looked for the fourth boy they'd seen. They found his body, lying motionless amid the smoking ash, scorched from head to toe. Assuming Kamerino was dead, the soldiers left, marching their three new captives with them.

In the last 18 years, Sudan's civil war has claimed the lives of at least 2 million people. Villages in southern Sudan are frequently attacked, and captives are sold into slavery in the Muslim north. The conflict is, at least in part, over land. Southern Sudan is the only part of the country outside of the desertlocked north that the government can use to grow crops.

But more than land, the war is about religion. The Muslim government in the north gives the mostly Christian and animist Sudanese in the south three choices: convert to Islam, face threats and danger, or leave. Many simply don't have the resources to leave but refuse to bow to Muhammad.

Last year, a team from the Voice of the Martyrs (VOM), a ministry that champions the cause of the persecuted church, set out for the Sudanese village of Pageri, where they were to distribute 2,000 blankets given to VOM for their "Blankets of Love" campaign. The village had not received any previous

assistance from the many humanitarian organizations working in southern Sudan. Because of a wide river that often flooded near the village, trucks rarely ventured along the almost impassable road.

After a prayer for divine protection, the VOM team set off for Pageri, carrying the blankets, supplies and a projector to show the Jesus film. Shortly into the trip, a flat tire stopped them. They returned to their camp, opting to continue their journey the next day. That evening, planes from the government of Sudan dropped 24 bombs in and around Pageri.

The following day, VOM's team loaded up another truck and set off again. This time they arrived safely in Pageri, and distributed some of the aid they had brought, then went further on to a village called Kit, where they screened the Jesus film for hundreds of Sudanese. The next morning they started back for base camp.

Just a few miles down the road, the team came to a small military camp, housing families of rebel soldiers from southern Sudan. They distributed the blankets to the wives and children in the camp, then sat down to talk with some of the camp's officers.

Quietly, a Sudanese woman approached a team member and tapped him on the shoulder. "Please come quickly," she said. "Please come to see this little boy. He has skin problems."

Not sure what to expect, the team followed the woman into a small cement structure. There were no lights and no windows in the room, so the team leader grabbed a flashlight and began to look around.

The light caught the eyes of a small boy looking up at the light-skinned visitors. He lay on a small piece of green plastic, his body covered by a tattered blanket.

When the team lifted the blanket to examine the boy's wounds,

hundreds of flies swarmed off his body. His skin hung in blistered patches. A purple dye stained his skin where villagers had tried in vain to treat the terrible burns. The team had met Kamerino.

When Kamerino had not returned to his grandmother's home, she asked some villagers to look for him, praying that he was safe. They found him. Somehow, he had pushed himself to his feet and was staggering toward home. His feet were badly burned, barely able to carry the weight of his wounded body.

His chest also was burned. He was brought back to the village and placed in the concrete hut. Villagers tried what they could, but there was little hope. There was no way to transport the boy nearly 50 miles to the nearest hospital. For eight days Kamerino hung tenaciously onto life before the VOM team found him.

The team quickly made room in their truck, then lifted the green plastic on which Kamerino's tattered body lay into the bed of their truck. The 50 miles to the hospital seemed an eternity. The boy was too frightened to speak, but with each bump on the road he cried out in pain.

After what seemed like hours later, the team delivered him into the care of doctors at the hospital that VOM sponsors in southern Sudan. Today, his body and spirit are mending, but he will always bear the scars of Islamic hatred.

Kamerino is part of an entire generation of Sudanese children who have never known peace in their homeland. The civil war that divides their country is now almost two decades old. Related to that war have been famine and persecution as the Islamic government tries to starve and harass the Christian and animist peoples of southern Sudan into accepting Islam.

The government carefully controls the areas to which the United Nations and humanitarian groups are permitted to deliver food, thus fostering famine and forced starvation.

Many southern Sudanese have been abducted and sold into slavery in the north. Women have been gang raped, children tortured and whole villages massacred.

And yet the church in Sudan is experiencing growth. Sudanese believers refuse to deny their faith, and they profess Christ as their only hope. Still, another famine threatens this harvest. There is a desperate need for trained leaders, Bibles are in short supply, and the education system is virtually paralyzed.

As with most wars, the biggest victims are the children, and the greatest catastrophe is the loss of potential—for the country and for Christ's kingdom.

Addil and many of his friends in the village of Kauda walk an hour each day to attend classes at Holy Cross School. They work their way up and down the pebble-laden pathway with little difficulty. The soles of their shoeless feet are like leather, as walking long distances through the Nuba Mountains is a way of life.

It was a hot, balmy Tuesday morning last year when terror fell from the sky, striking Addil and his classmates as they sat in the shade beneath a tree in the schoolyard. Their teacher had moved the English class outdoors so the children could enjoy the cool February breeze. Most of the students were 10 or 11 years old.

The children were writing their English lesson when the engines of an Antonov cargo plane were heard overhead. On this day, four bombs were intentionally dropped on the students below. All but one exploded, projecting hot shrapnel in every direction, tearing into the flesh of the students and ripping through Addil's left arm.

Twenty-two people—including a Holy Cross teacher and several students—eventually perished from the government's attack. Young Addil's mangled left arm and hand were amputated. Today

the Holy Cross headmaster says Addil, not yet a teen, has changed. The boy is more introverted and subdued since his injury.



*Kuwa
Bashir,
a youth
pastor,
told his
captors
that he
would
die
without
fear.
Then
they
poured
acid on
his
hands.*

Kamerino and Addil are two of the millions of believers scarred by the war. Kuwa Bashir was a youth pastor in the Blue Nile region when he was captured by Islamic soldiers. He was beaten for seven days and then released and told to stop his church activities. He refused and was again taken captive by the Muslim soldiers.

When the officer urged him to convert to Islam and threatened his life, Bashir testified about Jesus to the gathered soldiers. "If I die or am shot dead, I will be very happy because I will leave an example for other Christians to follow in my steps," he told them. "I will die without fear, like Jesus on the cross."

The officer decided not to kill Bashir, but instead poured

acid on his hands, leaving him with a mass of useless burned flesh that daily reminds him of his decision to refuse Allah. Other captured believers saw the torture and wept because they could not help their brother. For 13 years he has borne the scars of abuse. His wife has to feed him because he cannot use his hands.

Kuwa, Addil and Kamerino are just a few of the millions affected by persecution in Sudan. The shocking statistics include men, women, boys and girls living out their faith each day in a hostile land. Let not the Western church, in her comfort and ease, forget these battered and persecuted members of Christ's body.

Todd Nettleton is director of media development for an international non-profit organization. He's the spokesman for Voice of the Martyrs. The son of missionary parents, he spent part of his childhood in Papua New Guinea.

Helping the Suffering Children

Bearing the Scars of Persecuted Christians

No one did more to raise awareness about the persecuted church than Richard and Sabina Wurmbbrand, who suffered for years in Romania's communist prisons.

By Andy Butcher

Years of physical mistreatment and neglect failed to dampen Richard Wurmbbrand's zeal for God and His people. So at an age when most men would be considering retirement, he began a new ministry that would make him, other than Brother Andrew, probably the Christian leader most recognized internationally for championing the plight of the persecuted church.

He began in his typically passionate style. On his first visit to the United States after he and his family were ransomed out of Romania after years of persecution by the communist authorities, Wurmbrand witnessed a large anti-Vietnam War rally in Philadelphia.

Incensed by the pro-communism message of the speaker, the then-57-year-old challenged him to a debate. Wurmbrand said that he was an expert on communism and stripped off his shirt to show his “doctorate”—the scars he had received during 14 years of imprisonment. Wurmbrand’s arrest by police for disrupting the meeting was captured by a photographer and splashed across the next day’s newspapers—sparking the birth of what would become Voice of the Martyrs (VOM).

“My father was incredible when it came to debate,” said Michael Wurmbrand, speaking shortly after his father’s death in February at the age of 91. “He was a trailblazer. He single-handedly opened up the United States to his message. He really considered the world was his parish.”

Richard Wurmbrand’s best-selling *Tortured for Christ*, a chilling account of his years of persecution in Romanian prisons, revealed to the West for the first time the extent to which Christians were suffering for their faith under communist regimes. He testified before governments to speak out on behalf of those who suffered for Jesus, and he traveled ceaselessly until the ill health of his last five years of life.

Although Wurmbrand and his wife, Sabina, who died last August, did not become known in the West until their freedom in the mid-1960s, they had been famous among Christians in their homeland for years. Both from Jewish families, they became Christians shortly after their marriage in 1936 and became leaders of the underground church during World War II.

Their son Michael suffered for his faith, too. He was left to

fend for himself as an 11-year-old boy when his mother was arrested and followed his father into prison for three years.

"I didn't have time to start crying for myself," he recalled. "There were thousands of kids on the streets."

He was cared for by a family who had been touched by his parents' ministry, and he later was reunited with his mother. Now 62 and the director of a correspondence school in California, Michael Wurmbbrand recalls weeping when he was taken to Disneyland shortly after his arrival in the United States.

"Everybody thought it was because I was so impressed," he remembers. But there was a different reason for his tears.

"Growing up in a communist country, people always said to me, commiserating, that one day the Americans would come and free us and help us, take us out of all this craziness. And that day in Disneyland, I understood that nobody would. They had no idea, no imagination of what communism means. The Western world is also in an insane asylum."

A member of Mount Olive Lutheran Church in Rancho Palo Verdes, California, Michael Wurmbbrand has returned to the land of his birth since the fall of communism. He was saddened when he found "some mixture of communism and capitalism done with no true spiritual conversion of the people."

"Unless they do that as a nation, nothing will happen," he says.

But his hope is in what he said is the true legacy of his parents—even beyond the challenge they brought the Western church to respond to the cries of suffering believers in other parts of the world.

"They loved their enemies," he says, simply.

That love led to his father's miraculous release from prison,

he says, explaining that one secret police officer sent to interrogate Richard Wurmbrand ended up coming to Christ through the imprisoned pastor's life and witness. The officer later arranged for Wurmbrand's release papers to be included among hundreds of others.

Says Michael: "Nobody understood how [his release] happened."

Andy Butcher is editor of *Christian Retailing*.