

Malvern Mashal 34

“Hear me when I call, O God of my righteousness: You have enlarged me when I was in distress; have mercy upon me, and hear my prayer.”(Psalm 4:1)

There are many countries in the world today where Christians are martyred for their faith. The world watched in horror the unbridled violence that was unleashed on Christians in Orissa state, India last year. There are other places in the world, such as North Korea, where acts of persecution are routinely taking place, but we often don't see or hear the full story. Brother Andrew of Open Doors once said, “Our heroes are not with us simply because they are in prison.”

We have long encouraged people to receive (and make good use of) prayer magazines such as Open Doors with Brother Andrew or the Barnabas Fund magazine.

A selection of websites to visit:

See: <http://www.opendoorsuk.org/about/history.php>
<http://www.opendoorsuk.org/>
<http://www.opendoors.ch/>
<http://barnabasfund.org/UK/>
<http://barnabasfund.org/UK/Action/Pray/Daily-Prayer-Point/>

I had an extraordinary experience in bed a few days ago. The Lord had just said to me, “Don't forget to pray for Eritrea.” And suddenly I could physically feel that my feet were bound. (Eritrea is a country where the suffering of the believers exceeds belief. But there always remains the lurking thought, “What can my prayers count for for a nation I know so little about?”) It was at this point that I physically FELT the fetters sliding off my feet. It was an extraordinarily real experience. I took it to be a sign that the Lord was saying, “Don't underestimate the importance of rounding people up to pray strength and succour on behalf of those who are under real pressure.”

Iran - Update on the two imprisoned Christian Women

Praise the Lord for a significant development in the case of the two young Christian women, converts from Islam, who were arrested in Tehran in March and charged with anti-state activity, propagation of Christianity and apostasy. On 7 October Maryam and Marzieh were brought back to the Revolutionary Court, where the judge was more sympathetic and acquitted them of the charge of anti-state activity. Such acquittals are rare in Iran. Now that this charge has been dropped, the remaining charges will be considered in the general court. The two women are pleased, and thankful to their fellow Christians for ongoing prayer and to the Lord Jesus for sustaining them in prison and giving them the courage to stand firm in their faith during the court hearings.

- Praise the Lord for this rare piece of good news for Maryam and Marzieh. Pray that the two remaining charges will be dropped and that the women will be released from prison soon.
- Pray that they will continue to know the Lord's presence and comfort each day, and that they will be the presence of Jesus to those around them. Pray for their health.
- **UPDATE** - Unfortunately we have received further news regarding Maryam and Marzieh, the Iranian young women imprisoned for their faith. Their case has once again been sent back to the Revolutionary Courts.

The implication appears to be that it is "up to them now." In other words, if they recant and renounce their faith they will be released.

Please up your praying for them at this time when their hopes had been raised. You can imagine how they must be feeling.

If John Bunyan had accepted a similar offer when he was imprisoned for his Christian activities in England, he would never have written "Pilgrim's Progress."

May the Lord use this setback for His glory and be especially close to both women.

(Sources: Barnabas Fund Prayer Focus for November 2009 and www.elam.com)

Don't forget to order yourself a copy of the excellent prayer booklet: IRan 30 from www.elam.com

On the European front:

In a decision that has sparked anger and distress across Italy, the **European Court of Human Rights has banned crucifixes in classrooms in Italy.**

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/8340411.stm>



You might also like to sign this e-petition to protect Christians from having to work on Sundays in the UK.

<http://petitions.number10.gov.uk/GodsSunday/?signed=f53e877.d8ae29>

Article by Patrick Sookdheo, Director of Barnabas Fund:

Islam: at war within itself

Dear Reader,

I have been asked by a number of Barnabas supporters to try to look at how to make sense of what is currently happening in the Islamic world. I do hope the article below will be helpful.

Dr Patrick Sookhdeo, International Director, Barnabas Fund

Introduction

Recent months have seen a number of unexpected and extremely encouraging statements coming out of the Muslim world. Respected, mainstream Muslim leaders in a variety of countries have voiced opinions which are at odds with traditional, conservative Islam. They have challenged aspects of shari'a and are calling for a liberal, modernist, enlightened Islam compatible with Western norms. Perhaps the most significant of all is a comment by a group of British Muslims calling for an end to the apostasy law and for full freedom in all religious matters.

Since modernisation first impacted the Muslim world following the imposition of secular laws and education systems by Western colonial empires, there have been tensions between Muslim conservatives and liberal intellectuals. Islamic traditionalists and Islamists have on the whole gained the dominant voice within Islam, especially since the Islamic resurgence which began in the 1970s and has swept all before it. These conservatives saw shari'a as divinely inspired and unchangeable, valid for all times and places, and attacked the few liberal voices seeking to reinterpret the Muslim sources in line with modern contexts and human rights.

A small minority of marginalised Muslim progressives has been bravely defying traditional and Islamist pressures by reinterpreting Islam in a way compatible with modern concepts of secularity, individual human rights, religious freedom and gender equality.

However, recently some significant cracks seem to be forming within mainstream Islam. Important mainstream leaders are coming out against long-held key traditional views and Wahabi-Salafi doctrines and practices, openly supporting ideas compatible with modernity. It would seem that the reformist teachings of Ahmad Khan (1817 - 1898) and Muhammad 'Abduh (1849 -1905), which had been suppressed, are now resurfacing within mainstream Islam. As some experts on Islam have always been saying, "the really decisive battle is taking place within Muslim civilization, where ultraconservatives compete against moderates and democrats for the soul of the Muslim public." [\[1\]](#) . . .

Imam condemns Church passivity in face of Muslim persecution of Christians [\[6\]](#)

In an interview with Premier Christian Radio earlier this year, Sheikh Dr Muhammad al-Hussaini, founder of Scripture Reasoning and Lecturer in Islamic Studies at Leo Beck Rabbinical College, blamed the church hierarchy in the UK for not protesting vociferously and actively at Christian persecution around the world. Al-Hussaini mentioned specifically horrendous machete attacks on Christians in Nigeria, Iraqi Christians being burned out of their homes and Christians in Pakistan being stoned or attacked on the slightest pretext. He highlighted Barnabas Fund's efforts on behalf of persecuted Christians as an example of how concerned Christians ought to respond to the plight of their fellow Christians.

While Muslims are hypersensitive to any ill-treatment of Muslims anywhere in the world, he added, they remain silent about the persecution of Christians in their midst. Many Muslims are simply looking for scapegoats to punish for their own troubles. They know that churches in the West will not do more than utter a whimper, as this issue is not sufficiently important to them, mainly because those suffering are neither white nor wealthy, so they can go on with impunity blaming Crusader-Zionist conspiracies for everything.

He called upon the church to be a voice for justice for persecuted minorities, which he claims would speak "into the heart of the Muslim community".

"Contextualising Islam in Britain" report [\[7\]](#)

This report, published in October 2009, is the work of several prominent British Muslim academics and religious leaders. It has broken new ground in coming out with plain statements on key issues, avoiding the ambiguous statements customarily offered by mainline Muslim leaders. It calls for a Muslim worldview based not exclusively on jurisprudence but including Islamic philosophy (*falsafah*), theology (*kalam*) and literature (*adab*).

For Muslims living as a minority in a secular liberal democracy, applying shari'a is a matter of personal conscience and communal suasion rather than legal sanction, says the report. Muslims are not obliged to implement full shari'a against the wishes of their non-Muslim neighbours.[\[8\]](#) Shari'a is not a detailed code of things forbidden and permitted but an ethical system of moral and spiritual education. There are commonalities between the underlying objectives (*maqasid*) of shari'a and human rights declarations.[\[9\]](#)

The paper opposes the traditional view of divine sovereignty only implemented in an Islamic state under shari'a. It states that this system engenders a lack of democratic checks and balance, a lack of accountability, and may lead to tyranny. An Islamic state is not necessary for Islam to thrive and be practised. Secular democracy as practised in Britain is legitimate because it holds power to account and upholds fundamental freedoms and non-interference in the religious lives of its citizens.[\[10\]](#)

British Muslims, say the authors, are perfectly happy with the British form of procedural secularism (in contrast to ideological secularism) and support its accommodative tradition. The separation of religion from the state and the principle of non-discrimination by the state between religions guarantee freedom and equality for all, giving Muslims the freedom to practise Islam without interference in an atmosphere of respect, security and dignity. [\[11\]](#)

The authors clearly oppose the concepts of *takfir* [\[12\]](#) and *al-wala` wal-bara`* [\[13\]](#) which differentiate sharply between perceived true believers and all others, demanding hostility and enmity. Distinctions between believers and non-believers are important only in matters of doctrine and worship, not in matters of social interaction and of seeking the common good of society. In these matters it is important to have friendly relationships with non-Muslims, treating them as equals, and to focus on commonalities and shared values. [\[14\]](#)

The paper states that Islam teaches the equality of all humans regardless of gender and that it forbids forced marriages, domestic violence, female genital mutilation, and honour killings.[\[15\]](#)

Muslims should campaign against injustices and oppression inflicted by Muslims on other Muslims and on non-Muslims. [\[16\]](#)

On suicide terrorism and bombings they state that there are many ways to oppose oppression other than fighting (jihad). These include lobbying, activism, and writing. Foreign conflicts cannot justify violence in Britain.[\[17\]](#) They add that "Islam is opposed to all forms of terrorism, regardless of who sponsors them . . . Both suicide and suicide bombings are absolutely forbidden (*haram*) in Islam as is the killing of innocent people. [\[18\]](#)

The authors adopt the modern Christian principle of differentiating between religious sin and state-legislated crime. Thus on apostasy they explain that Islam dislikes apostasy but prohibits discrimination against apostates, adding that: "It is important to say quite simply that people have the freedom to enter the Islamic faith and the freedom to leave it". Similarly on homosexuality they state that the Qur'an forbids both the practice of homosexual acts, and discrimination against homosexuals. [\[19\]](#)

The declaration on apostasy is especially important because it goes clearly against the shari'a law of apostasy, accepted by all Islamic schools of law, which lays down a death sentence for those who leave Islam. The authors explain that in early Islam apostasy was conflated with treason in times of war. It was treason that merited the death penalty, not the apostasy. Therefore today "there is no compulsion and people cannot be coerced into a religious commitment". [\[20\]](#) Other Muslim leaders dealing with apostasy had not dared question the validity of the classical apostasy law, but had either asked for the repentance phase (usually 3 days) to be lengthened indefinitely (for example, Ali Gomaa, Chief Mufti of Egypt) or for a moratorium until the time was deemed ripe for the full implementation of shari'a (for example, Tariq Ramadan).

Analysis

There is now a powerful struggle going on for the soul of Islam. It would seem that under the combined pressure of extremist Islamist terrorism, the "war on terror" and the dangers to Muslim regimes and societies, new voices are emerging within mainstream Islamic leadership embracing a new *ijtihad* [21] compatible with modernity and human rights. They would seem to accept the liberal reformist view of prioritising the core values of Islam, distilled from the Islamic source texts, as spiritual and moral norms that override literalist, coercive, political and social interpretations. They seem to be willing to ignore traditional Islamic concepts that contradict modern humanistic values of pluralism, freedom and equality.

Conclusion

France has forbidden the wearing of the *hijab* in public places and recently its highest constitutional authority, the Constitutional Council, has refused the introduction of Islamic finance on the grounds that a secular state must not allow principles of shari'a to be recognised in its legislation.[22] In contrast, the governments of the USA and of the UK have consistently sided with the more repressive, conservative and traditional sections within their Muslim communities, apparently hoping to placate, accommodate and appease them by accepting their demands for shari'a implementation in multiple spheres. At the same time they have ignored the more progressive and liberal voices in the Muslim community implying that they are too weak and marginal to be viable interlocutors for governments.

Arab liberals have criticised President Obama's tendency to endorse conservative and radical forms of Islam while ignoring liberal Muslim trends. A Yemeni liberal journalist accused Obama of appointing Muslim advisors who do not represent the diversity of Muslim opinion and who want to implement oppressive shari'a rules.[23] Others have criticised Obama's overtures to the Taliban and Iran as strengthening the radicals and weakening the reformists and liberals.[24]

A similar trend is visible in liberal and mainline Christian denominations whose leaders prefer to deal with Islamic traditionalists and hardliners in interfaith dialogue while ignoring the liberal reformist voices emerging within Islam.

It is time Western governments and Christian Churches implemented a policy of rejecting traditional Muslim and Islamist demands and that they shifted to a position of active support for the new voices of reason and moderation within Islam.

Barnabas Fund applauds these encouraging moves and the courageous Muslims advocating them.

(c) *Barnabas Fund*, 29 October 2009

[1] Robert W. Hefner, "September 11 and the Struggle for Islam", in Craig Calhoun, Paul Price, and Ashley Timmer, eds., *Understanding September 11*, Project coordinated by the Social Science Research Council, New York: The New Press., 2002, pp. 41-52.

[6]"Imam blames Christian leaders for the Persecution of Christians", *Christian Concern for our Nation*, 28 August 2009, <http://www.ccfon.org/view.php?id=825>, accessed 20 October 2009.

[7] *Contextualising Islam in Britain: Exploratory Perspectives*, University of Cambridge in Association with the Universities of Exeter and Westminster, Centre of Islamic Studies: Cambridge, October 2009.

[8] *Contextualising Islam in Britain: Exploratory Perspectives*, pp. 10-11.

[9] *Contextualising Islam in Britain: Exploratory Perspectives*, pp. 10-11, 54.

[10] *Contextualising Islam in Britain: Exploratory Perspectives*, pp. 10-11, 32-33.

[11] *Contextualising Islam in Britain: Exploratory Perspectives*, pp. 28, 33.

[12] *takfir* - the process of declaring someone to be an apostate from Islam, a process which has been revived by radical contemporary jihadi groups.

[13] *Al-wala` wal bara`* - "Friendship and Distinguishing", a doctrine applied by radical groups to differentiate and separate between real and false Muslims. True Islam is defined by a love for Muslims and a hatred for non-Muslims.

[14] *Contextualising Islam in Britain: Exploratory Perspectives*, pp. 11-12.

[15] *Contextualising Islam in Britain: Exploratory Perspectives*, pp. 12-13.

[16] *Contextualising Islam in Britain: Exploratory Perspectives*, p. 65.

[17] *Contextualising Islam in Britain: Exploratory Perspectives*, p. 14.

[18] *Contextualising Islam in Britain: Exploratory Perspectives*, pp. 71, 78.

[19] *Contextualising Islam in Britain: Exploratory Perspectives*, p. 75.

[20] *Contextualising Islam in Britain: Exploratory Perspectives*, p. 47.

[21] *ijtihad* - the process of individual effort by a jurist at logical deduction on a legal question, using the Qur`an and *hadith* as sources. *Ijtihad* allows fresh interpretations made from the two sources.

[22] "France court quashes Islamic Finance measure", *Al-Arabiya News Channel*, 15 October 2009.

[23] "Yemeni Liberal Criticizes Appointment of Dalia Mogahed as Obama`s Advisor on Islam", *MEMRI Special Dispatch*, No. 2518, 4 September 2009.

[24] "Criticism in the Arab Press of the US Administration`s Initiative to Reach Out to `Moderates in the Taliban`", *MEMRI Special Dispatch*, No. 2353, 12 May 2009; "Arab Liberals Eight Years After 9-11: Obama`s Overtures Towards Iran Extremists Seen as a Sign of Weakness", *MEMRI Inquiry and Analysis*, No. 551, 29 September 2009.