



Written by [William F. Jasper](#) on December 22, 2014

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## Christian Perseverance

Meriam Ibrahim sat shackled in Khartoum's Omdurman Federal Women's Prison, sentenced to 100 lashes and death by hanging. Her 20-month-old son, Martin Wani, who shared her prison cell, was ill from the filth and the stress of the imprisonment. And now, Ibrahim, a Christian Sudanese who was pregnant when arrested, would deliver her second child in prison. Her legs were swollen from being shackled. Not only was she denied transfer to a hospital and medical treatment, the 27-year-old mother was forced to deliver her baby daughter on the floor, while still being shackled.



What heinous crime did Ibrahim stand convicted of to deserve such cruel treatment? She was arrested in February 2014 and accused of apostasy and adultery for abandoning Islam and marrying a Christian. However, Meriam Ibrahim insists that she never was a Muslim, that she is a life-long Christian, raised by her Christian mother. Her father, a Muslim, had abandoned the family when she was very young. She married Daniel Wani, a Sudanese Christian, who is a citizen of the United States of America. But the Sudanese court ruled that she should have followed the Muslim faith of her father. Her Christian marriage was not valid, said the court, so her marital relationship with Daniel Wani amounted to adultery. She was ordered to renounce her Christian faith and convert to Islam. She refused. Muslim mullahs visited her prison cell daily to recite the Koran and badger her to convert. Still she refused.

A worldwide "Save Meriam" campaign by various Christian ministries and human rights organizations drew global attention to the imprisoned mother's tragic plight. With international condemnation building and Western governments threatening to cut off aid to the Sudanese government, the brutal regime of Omar al-Bashir, on June 23, 2014, released Ibrahim and her children from prison. Ibrahim, her husband, and children were on their way to freedom and a new life together in the United States. Jubilant celebrations around the world soon took another dramatic turn, however, when the family was re-arrested the following day at the Khartoum airport, on trumped-up charges of forgery and travel document "irregularities." This detainment, thankfully, proved to be temporary — a last-ditch harassment — and on June 24 the heroic Meriam Ibrahim, her husband, Daniel Wani; son, Martin Wani; and infant daughter, Maya; departed from Sudan aboard an Italian government jet, accompanied by Italy's vice minister for foreign affairs, Lapo Pistelli.

In Rome, the persecuted family met with Pope Francis before traveling to the United States to their new home in New Hampshire. The Italian newspaper *La Repubblica* reported that the pontiff thanked her for her "witness to faith" and her "perseverance" under persecution.

"I have always wanted and only wanted my faith. The love of my husband is a gift from God," Ibrahim told reporters following the meeting.



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In a September 15, 2014 interview, Meriam Ibrahim told Fox News' Megyn Kelly that she was able to persevere in her prison tribulation because "I was sure God would stand by my side."

"My faith was the only weapon that I had in these [prison] confrontations with imams and Muslim scholars because that's what I believe," she said. "Faith means life. If you don't have faith, you're not alive." If you don't have faith, you're not alive. Powerful words truly spoken — by an heroic woman of faith. Without faith one is dead indeed; but when faith is vigorously alive it can never be destroyed. Our physical bodies may be imprisoned, broken, and killed, but our eternal souls can never be imprisoned or destroyed by the rulers of this world.

Speaking through a translator, Ibrahim told Megyn Kelly that "there are many Meriams in Sudan and throughout the world. It's not just me."

## **Scourge in Islamic Lands**

It is tragically true that, despite the relief of the terrible cruelties suffered by Ibrahim, in Sudan alone there are countless "Meriams," many of whom have endured far worse, including martyrdom. Many have suffered being raped, gang-raped, sold into slavery, tortured, imprisoned, mutilated, dismembered, and murdered. For more than two decades, the vicious al-Bashir dictatorship has waged a relentless campaign of religious persecution and ethnic cleansing aimed at Islamization and Arabization of Sudan. That has meant almost continuous war against the black African tribes, most of which are Christian or animist. Most of Sudan's Christians are Roman Catholic or Anglican (Episcopal Church of Sudan), but there are also many smaller denominations, such as the Greek Orthodox Church, the Coptic Orthodox Church, the Presbyterian Evangelical Church, and the Apostolic Church, as well as Seventh Day Adventist, Jehovah's Witness, Nazarene, and Pentecostal churches.

The al-Bashir government in Khartoum, backed by Communist China, has carried out much of the persecution/genocide directly, utilizing troops, planes, and helicopter gunships to wipe out whole villages. However, it has also infamously used the "Janjaweed" (men with guns on horses) militias to do its dirty work. In Sudan's Darfur region alone, from 2003 to present, various estimates place the number of Sudanese Christians murdered in the tens of thousands, with two to four million refugees and hundreds of thousands dying due to wounds, exposure, malnutrition, sickness, and the rigors of war and displacement. The al-Bashir regime, reportedly, has brought tens of thousands of Arabic Muslims from neighboring Chad and Niger to take over the former Christian villages. Currently, in the Nuba Mountains of Southern Kordofan State, the Sudanese persecution/genocide campaign continues unabated.

In Iraq, the Sunni Muslim group known as ISIS (the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) has grabbed global attention with a spate of videotaped beheadings and crucifixions. In an August 8, 2014 interview with Episcopal News Service (ENS), Canon Andrew White of Baghdad's Anglican Church told of an ISIS attack on the Christian town of Qaraqosh, where many of his parishioners had fled to escape persecution in Baghdad. "I'm almost in tears because I've just had somebody in my room whose little child was cut in half," an emotional Canon White told ENS. "I baptized his child in my church in Baghdad. This little boy, they named him after me — he was called Andrew."

The boy's father had been a founding member of the church back in 1998 when the canon had first come to Baghdad. By moving north to Qaraqosh, Andrew's family had hoped to be safer, but it may have



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---

increased their danger. “This town of Qaraqosh is a Christian village so they knew everybody there was part of their target group,” said White. “They [ISIS] attacked the whole of the town. They bombed it, they shot at people.” The ISIS terrorists captured Qaraqosh on the night of August 6-7. Survivors fled to Irbil.

ISIS — which has renamed itself the Islamic State (IS) — has proclaimed a worldwide caliphate, claiming religious authority over all Muslims. Christians, non-Sunni Muslims, and people of other religions must convert to the rigid ISIS brand of Sunni Islam — or die. Amel Nona, the Roman Catholic archbishop of Mosul, has the painful duty of being shepherd to a flock that is daily being slaughtered. And those who have escaped the slaughter thus far are faced with dire need. In a letter of thanks to the Italian “Adopt a Christian from Mosul” campaign in October of this year, Archbishop Nona explained the situation:

Today the refugees are suffering a very difficult situation, especially because winter has already started and the rains are due. The difficulties arise from the lack of food, warm clothes, blankets against the cold.... There are also difficulties regarding health issues. Thousands of families cannot pay rent on the apartments where they are living because it is very high, and they are out of work. Every day the need and demand for safe housing and shelter increases.

Archbishop Nona went on to tell of his heroic sheep that have faced the ISIS wolves:

In our dramatic situation every now and then we glimpse a ray of light from heaven, which gives us the courage to continue our life of faith despite all the difficulties and problems. For example, we received some testimonials from our remaining faithful in the Christian villages in the Nineveh Plain. I’ve heard that a few days ago in the village of Bartella, a family with one of their neighbors had remained there even after the arrival of the army of the Islamic State (or Isis). They were caught as they attempted to leave the village, were arrested and forced to convert to Islam. The neighbor refused and thus was immediately killed. But the woman, fearing for the fate of her children, said the formula by which we convert to Islam. But on arriving at Erbil she repented and asked for forgiveness, returning to the Christian faith. Another story concerns two elderly women [who] remained in a village called Karemless, on the Nineveh Plains. These courageous women met the ISIS militants who wanted to force them to convert to Islam. Instead they argued with courage, defending their Christian faith and saying that everyone has the freedom to profess their own faith.... They argued for about an hour with the militants that threatened to kill them, but without having to convert. In the end they let them go. I have personally met the two women because they are in my diocese. I’ve seen them happy and full of trust in God and in themselves. They did not renounce their faith and gave a great testimony.

All across Iraq the story is the same. Under the dictatorial regime of Saddam Hussein, Christians faced various forms of discrimination and oppression, but were relatively safe from outright persecution. Since he was removed (by the U.S.-led coalition), Christians have been the primary victims of the ensuing chaos. At the time of the first Gulf War in 1991, the Christian population in Iraq stood at about 1.5 million. Today it is estimated to be less than 400,000 and is rapidly dwindling. Those who have not been killed — and for whom conversion is not an option — are fleeing. And it is not Iraq only that is experiencing the exodus; throughout the Middle East, the birthplace of Christianity, Christians are facing extinction. In Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Iran, and elsewhere in the Middle East, Christians are being forced to convert, flee, or die.



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In the Gospel according to Saint Luke (18:8b), Jesus Christ asks: “Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?” The answer to that question, as it pertains to the Middle East, is that the Christian Faith may soon be all but annihilated in that region. Meanwhile in Europe, once the center of Christendom, faith has all but disappeared, not through persecution but through succumbing to worldliness and neo-paganism. Even in the United States, which in comparison to Europe is still spiritually vibrant, Christianity is largely an empty shell. Tens of millions of Americans identify themselves as Christians but live by and large as pagans. Hence our society is unraveling, the consequence of widespread acceptance of perversion, promiscuity, pornography, profanity, abortion, apostasy, and other sins that dissolve societal foundations. The heroic perseverance and martyrdom of our fellow believers throughout the world should inspire us to purge the spiritual sloth and worldly accommodation from our own lives and to more courageously and fervently live our faith.

In Pakistan, the case of Asia Bibi, a Christian woman sentenced to death for blasphemy, is being compared to the situation faced by Sudan’s Meriam Ibrahim. It is also drawing a worldwide appeal for her release. Bibi has been languishing on death row for four years, since her conviction in November 2010. She has appealed her case to Pakistan’s Supreme Court. According to Bibi, a 47-year-old mother of five from rural Punjab, she was falsely accused by a group of Muslim women who were outraged that she had drunk from “their” well.

In her memoir, entitled *Blasphemy*, Asia Bibi says:

I drank water from a well belonging to Muslim women, using “their” cup, in the burning heat of the midday sun.

I, Asia Bibi, have been sentenced to death because I was thirsty. I’m a prisoner because I used the same cup as those Muslim women, because water served by a Christian woman was regarded as unclean by my stupid fellow fruit-pickers.

According to Bibi, she had decided that she had had enough of their continuous insults to her religion and attempted to witness to her Christian faith. But the Muslim women became violent and began beating her. Later, a furious mob dragged her and the members of her family from their home and beat them savagely. Battered and bruised, Bibi was dragged before a local imam, who told her that her only recourse was to convert to Islam or be put to death. In November 2010, she was sentenced to death in a Sharia court, making her the first woman in Pakistan’s history to be given the death penalty for blasphemy. Some legal analysts predict that her chances of being acquitted by Pakistan’s Supreme Court are very good. However, even if she escapes the official death penalty, there is real reason to fear that it could be inflicted, nevertheless, by private actors (with more-or-less official sanction).

“Two people associated with Bibi’s defence have been assassinated,” noted the ChristianToday.com website. “Governor of Punjab, Salmaan Taseer, was murdered by a member of his security team in January 2011 for opposing the blasphemy laws. Minority Affairs Minister Shahbaz Bhatti, the only Christian member of Pakistan’s cabinet, was shot dead by gunmen who ambushed his car in March 2011. He had spoken in defence of Bibi, and said he was ‘committed to the principle of justice for the people of Pakistan.’”

## **Unreported Persecution**

While the persecution of Christians by Muslim extremists and Islamic regimes receives some coverage

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---

in the Western secular media, the much more extensive persecution in Communist China goes largely unremarked by reporters and commentators for the major media. Few news stories inform viewers or readers of the recent and ongoing demolition of Protestant and Catholic church buildings, the forced removal of crosses from churches, the imprisonment of Christian house church pastors, and the imprisonment of Catholic bishops, priests, and nuns.

In China's central province of Henan, communist officials this past July handed a prison sentence of 12 years to prominent Christian pastor Zhang Shaojie, charging him with "fraud" and "gathering a crowd to disrupt public order." The overseas-based Chinese Human Rights Defenders (CHRD) reported that Pastor Shaojie, along with approximately 20 church members, was forcibly taken into custody without a warrant in November 2013.

"After the pastor was detained," reported CHRD, "churchgoers and his family were harassed, threatened, and put under constant surveillance. Prior to his trial, Zhang's daughter was disappeared and detained in a black jail." China's "black jails" are secret prisons that the government denies exist. However, the CHRD has documented their existence and exposed the depravity and impunity of the officials that run them and cover them up.

"Inside these shadowy detention cells," the group said in a press release announcing their report on the black jails earlier this year, "the predominantly female detainees — including elderly women, migrant women, women who lost land or were victimized by forced eviction, women with disabilities, and mothers with young children — are subjected to appalling abuses, from physical and sexual assaults to deprivation of medical treatment."

Christians and other religious believers often disappear into the black jails. Pastor Shaojie was the chairman and president of the local branch of the "Three-Self" Patriotic Protestant Church in China, which is officially sanctioned by the government. Yet he and other official "Patriotic" churches are increasingly being subjected to the type of persecution that the authorities have, in the past, largely reserved for the "illegal" underground churches. Across China, officially recognized churches are being targeted for destruction, while communist authorities have stepped up their pursuit of members of underground churches. In April of this year, authorities demolished a large, newly constructed Christian church in the city of Wenzhou, claiming it was "oversized," even though the believers had gotten permission for the construction. Thousands of Christians flocked to the site in a futile attempt to stop the demolition, but police blocked them from interfering with the destruction. According to the China Aid Association, the Christians had spent \$4.8 million (and 12 years) building the church and are unlikely to find the resources to rebuild, even if they were to receive permission from the government to do so.

Article 36 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of China (PRC) claims:

**Citizens of the People's Republic of China enjoy freedom of religious belief.** No state organ, public organization or individual may compel citizens to believe in, or not to believe in, any religion; nor may they discriminate against citizens who believe in, or do not believe in, any religion. The state protects normal religious activities.

Chinese authorities point to this constitutional protection and to their Potemkin churches that are on display for foreign visitors as proof that the persecution instituted under Chairman Mao is a thing of the distant past. Modernization of a backward nation has been the top priority of China's Communist Party





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since Deng Xiaoping launched the PRC's new brand of "market socialism." The Beijing regime realized full well that modernization would be possible only with massive transfusions of Western capital, technology, and training. And those transfusions would only be forthcoming if China at least put on a half-credible show of changing from a totalitarian dictatorship to something of an authoritarian autocracy with capitalist tendencies. A big part of that change would involve a believable pretense of allowing basic human rights, especially involving freedom of religion.

However, the Preamble of the PRC Constitution also states:

**The basic task of the nation in the years to come is to concentrate its effort on socialist modernization.** Under the leadership of the Communist Party of China and the guidance of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought, the Chinese people of all nationalities will continue to adhere to the people's democratic dictatorship and follow the socialist road ... step by step to turn China into a socialist country with a high level of culture and democracy.

The ongoing persecution in China is an example of the pragmatic application of "Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought" by the "people's democratic dictatorship." The communist authorities define the constitutionally protected "normal religious activities" as those activities that are approved by the state. Article 36 also states: "No one may make use of religion to engage in activities that disrupt public order, impair the health of citizens or interfere with the educational system of the state." These clauses provide ample camouflage for authorities to carry out religious repression under the guise of protecting the public.

Fr. Bernardo Cervellera, director of Asia News, a Catholic news agency in Italy, says:

The communist government is scared, because Christianity elevates the individual, it creates a bond among people, it fosters solidarity and helps those in need. So the government fears that Christianity will become a channel through which social revolts can gain strength.

Fr. Cervellera, who was a missionary in China for seven years, spells out the reality of Christian persecution in the PRC. "There's always the possibility of being arrested, or being taken to a forced labor camp, or in the case of some bishops, they simply disappear without a trace," he says. "Without a formal accusation or court trial. Yes churches are destroyed even when they have a valid permit. It's a way to oppress Christians who according to communists are too free and therefore pose a threat to their regime."

Understandably, due to this government hostility, many Christians conceal their religious beliefs, and it is impossible to know the precise number of Christians in China. Estimates vary widely. The Chinese Communist Party most recently (2004) placed the number at 18 million Christians, which is an extremely lowball estimate. A 2010 Pew Center survey estimated China's Christian population at 67 million. Other scholars and organizations have placed it as high as 130-150 million.

Since the Communist Party recognizes that it has been unsuccessful at destroying Christianity and that it continues to grow in China, it has opted instead to *control* it. But this too is failing. Bishop Thaddeus Ma, the Catholic Bishop of Shanghai, is a prime example of the failure of the PRC's "Patriotic" churches. Father Thaddeus Ma was a Catholic priest in the communist-controlled Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, which is not in communion with Rome and which Pope Benedict XVI declared to be "incompatible with Catholic doctrine." However, on July 7, 2011, Monsignor Ma was ordained auxiliary bishop of Shanghai, with the approval of the Holy See. At his ordination he avoided the



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embrace and communion with Zhan Silu, the Patriotic Association's illicit bishop. Moreover, he sent shock waves throughout the Communist Party leadership by announcing that he was quitting the Patriotic Association. Ma was arrested immediately following the ordination ceremony, and he has remained under house arrest at Sheshan Regional Seminary ever since.

According to a report by the Union of Catholic Asian News, UCAN, on June 16, 2014, a Chinese official told a re-education class of Catholic priests and nuns that Bishop Ma will remain under detention to continue his "repentance and reflection." The mandatory classes are jointly organized by the local diocese of the Patriotic Association, the Communist Party's United Front Work Department, and the Religious Affairs Committee of Shanghai. The alleged purpose of the classes is to "enhance [the] national, legal and civil awareness" of Catholic clergy and nuns and instill in them "a correct understanding" of the independent church's relationship with China and patriotism. An attendee at the classes described them to UCANews.com as "brainwashing." But apparently the central authorities do not trust the thoroughness of the provincial Communist Party instructors; UCANews reported that the classes were being moved from Shanghai to the Central Institute of Socialism in Beijing.

China, of course, is the largest of the remaining countries that are still officially controlled by a militantly atheist Communist Party. The other four — Cuba, Laos, North Korea, and Vietnam — also continue to brutally persecute Christians, as well as other religions. However, many of the "former" communist regimes of Eastern Europe, Asia, and Africa have changed their names and have donned a façade of tolerance and reform while alternating between "soft" and "hard" persecution.

## **Same Crimes, Different Eras**

Persecution has shadowed the church since Jesus Christ came into this world on the first Christmas. The prophet Isaiah heralded His coming (in Isaiah 9:6) proclaiming:

For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Yet when the Lord of lords and King of kings arrived, he was greeted by three kings who came to worship and one who tried to kill him. We read in the second chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew that the three magi from the east, after joyfully adoring the newborn Savior, were warned in a dream that they should not return to King Herod but to go back another way into their country. And the Gospel account tells us:

Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, "Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him."

When he arose, he took the young Child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt, and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, "Out of Egypt I called My Son."

Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry; and he sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying: "A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted, because they



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are no more.”

The wave of slaughter and persecution begun by King Herod following the birth of Christ has continued for the past two millennia, as tyrannical regimes, religions, and ideologies have sought to exterminate Christianity. The ferocity of the persecutions under Roman emperors would later be matched — and greatly exceeded in magnitude — by the communist regimes of the 20th century.

And yet, no matter how fierce or how determined the persecutors have been, or how many million Christians they have slaughtered, they have not been able to annihilate the Christian faith. The martyrs know, along with Paul the Apostle — who would himself suffer martyrdom — that while God may allow other men to kill our mortal bodies, they cannot kill our immortal souls.

As Paul wrote in chapter eight of his epistle to the Romans:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: “For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.” Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.





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