Sub Editor’s Note

‘Invest today for a better tomorrow’; ‘Invest without a crystal ball’; ‘Own your tomorrow’!!

These were some of the headlines that screamed out at me as I sat with my coffee and newspaper pondering on how to invest my yearly bonus – Children’s education fund, Mutual funds, Bonds, vacation, emergency funds, retirement corpus. Leading financial counselors offered conflicting advice on how to invest – they did not appear to agree among themselves, then how will the rest of us know what to do?

With that, the Holy Spirit directed my thoughts to Jesus’ words: “Put this money to work,” he said, “until I come back.” (Luke 19:12-13), the popular parable of the minas and drachmas. Sounds like words coming out from the trading house of India’s Mercantile Exchange! It means “use your money to make more money.” Invest! Don’t sit on it! That’s not heresy; that’s sound biblical advice.

That’s the same choice we have with our money. This world won’t last. God’s world, God’s plan, God’s people, and God’s salvation will last forever. That’s our motivation to give to the church and other Kingdom causes. We want to help people experiencing His love and His forgiveness. When you give your offering in church, it’s not about that offering plate. It’s about those who will be reached through that gift. God gives so that we can invest in His Kingdom. And so, I did just that – heed His voice.

“But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal.” Matthew 6:20

Where are you investing your resources – in what will last or what won’t?

If you want a copy of ‘Voice of the Christians’ (VoTC) news paper, write to us at VoTC@persecutionrelief.org

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CHRISTIAN CREMATED

Christian persecution in parts of India is now so bad that believers are being prevented from burying their dead.

On 31st March, 55-year-old Bro. Dineshwar Lal Sahu, who had been very sickly, quietly died at home, leaving behind his grieving wife and children. The family made arrangements to take the mortal remains to his village, as was the custom, since most of his relatives were there. Bro. Dineshwar was a native of Village Sundra, District Raj Nand Gaon, Chhattisgarh state.

Unfortunately, after they reached the village, the reception was far from friendly! The family members and the local community objected very strongly as to whether he should be cremated or buried. In spite of his wife expressing her husband’s personal faith and preference, the relatives insisted that the deceased be cremated as per their rites. Bro. Dineshwar Sahu’s family belongs to the Sahu Samaj community.

As the believers gathered, for what they assumed was to pay their last respects to Bro. Dineshwar, a hostile mob of religious fanatics surrounded them and savagely beat them up, without exception. As people fled in all directions, a shocking crime was being perpetrated - the body of Bro. Dineshwar was set alight and burned to ashes.

It is heartbreaking that the hostile mob did not stop there. They misbehaved and molested the widow and her daughter and insisted that their heads be tonsured. By the grace of God, they managed to flee from that place, before things went totally out of hand. The son-in-law of Bro. Dineshwar, Vinay Sahu had lodged a police complaint against this hate crime against his family and fellow Christians. However, while this report was going to Press, Police are yet to make any arrest till date.

VOTC FAMILY SALUTES THE MARTYRS OF CAIRO CHURCH ATTACK & OFFERS ITS DEEPEST CONDOLENCE TO THE FAMILY MEMBERS

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PERSECUTION RELIEF
AN INTERDENOMINATIONAL INITIATIVE TO PROVIDE COMPREHENSIVE SUPPORT TO THE PERSECUTED CHURCH IN INDIA

For Private Circulation, within the Church

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Pastor attacked with sword

By VoTC Correspondent

On 05th April, Pastor Sikandar (India Mission) from Hajipur, Vaishali District, Bihar, was attacked with a sword, without provocation. At the time of this incident, around 6 pm, he was at home with his family. A visitor came to his home and called out to him. As soon as he stepped out, a mob of religious fanatics attacked him with a sword, causing grievous injuries on this head and all over his body. He was rushed to the hospital in a critical condition. The attackers remain unidentified. Police are investigating the matter and have promised immediate arrest of the perpetrators. Pr. Sikandar is married with 4 children. His family members managed to escape to safety.
As Christians around the world focus during this Easter weekend on how Jesus Christ died on the Cross to redeem mankind and to save sinners, some will be contemplating the final lessons the Savior’s last imparted.

When religious pilgrimages to the Holy Land ended with the military occupation of Jerusalem in the middle Ages, a popular devotion known as the Way of the Cross arose during Lent retracing the Passion, Crucifixion, and Death of Jesus.

The 14 Stations of the Cross are (1) Pilate condemns Jesus to death; (2) Jesus takes up his Cross; (3) He falls the first time; (4) Jesus meets his sorrowful mother Mary; (5) Simon helps carry the cross; (6) Veronica cleans his face; (7) He falls the second time; (8) Jesus consoles the women of Jerusalem; (9) He falls the third time; (10) Jesus is stripped of his garments; (11) Jesus is nailed to the cross; (12) Jesus Christ dies on the cross; (13) He is taken down from the cross; (14) Christ is laid in the tomb.

As recorded in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John in the Holy Bible, Jesus Christ was mocked, scorned and tortured in the praetorium. He carried his cross up the Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem to Calvary, was nailed to the Cross and hung between two common criminals. He suffered an indescribable end, recalled by the Church on Good Friday of Holy Week.

Some Christians reference meditations about the Passion of Christ as the Way of the Cross. There have also been many movies in the gospels where it tells of Jesus’s life. As Christians around the world focus during this Easter weekend on how Jesus Christ died on the Cross.

As a prayer to His Father Jesus was obedient to His Father to the end, “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.” -- Gospel of John 19:30.

following are the last seven expressions recorded in Scripture of Jesus Christ on the Cross.

"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.” -- Gospel of Luke 23:34

"Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.” -- Gospel of Luke 23:43

"Jesus said to his mother: “Woman, this is your son.” Then he said to the disciple: “This is your mother.” -- Gospel of John 19:26-27

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” -- Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34

"I thirst.” -- Gospel of John 19:28

"They put a sponge soaked in wine on a spirg of hyssop and put it up to his mouth. When Jesus had received the wine, he said, “It is finished,” and he bowed his head and handed over the spirit. -- Gospel of John 19:29-30


Jesus was obedient to His Father to the end, and his final word before his death on the Cross was a prayer to His Father.

Honoring Christ’s sacrifice: These three words will change your life forever

By - Anna Green

Anna Green is a member of a non-denominational church in the United States and is also the writer and editor of Christ’s Corner Ministries founded by her father, the late Dr. Walter D. Mint. Christ’s Corner is a weekly devotional sent out to uplift, inspire, and share the word of the Lord. She is on Twitter @AnnaGreen97.
Crucifixion Death Like Jesus Experienced is ‘Medical Catastrophe,’ Says Physician

By Julie Brown Patton
Dr. C. Truman Davis/
New Wine Association

Crucifixion, a method of slow and painful fatal execution in which a victim is tied or nailed to a large wooden beam and left to hang for several days until eventual death from exhaustion and asphyxiation, was thought to be invented by the Persians in 300 B.C., and perfected by the Romans in 100 B.C. Millions of Christians believe that Jesus was crucified on the cross, but few are thinking about the pain to Jesus Christ from dying on the cross.

The following details about crucifixion were assembled by Dr. C. Truman Davis, and published previously in New Wine Magazine.

1. It is the most painful death ever invented by man and is where we get our term “excruciating.”
2. It was reserved primarily for the most vicious of male criminals. Jesus refused the anesthetic wine which was offered to Him by the Roman soldiers because of His promise in Matthew 26: 28, “But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine until I drink it new with you in My Father’s kingdom.”
3. Jesus was stripped naked and His clothing divided by the Roman guards. This was in fulfillment of Psalm 22:18, “They divide My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots.”
4. The Crucifixion of Jesus guaranteed a horrific, slow, painful death. Having been nailed to the Cross, Jesus now had an impossible anatomical position to maintain.
5. Jesus’ knees were flexed at about 45 degrees, and He was forced to bear His weight with the muscles of His thighs, which is not an anatomical position which is possible to maintain for more than a few minutes without severe cramp in the muscles of the thigh and calf.
6. Jesus’ weight was borne on His feet, with nails driven through them. As the strength of the muscles of Jesus’ lower limbs tired, the weight of His body had to be transferred to His wrists, His arms, and His shoulders.
7. Within a few minutes of being placed on the Cross, Jesus’ shoulders were dislocated. Minutes later Jesus’ elbows and wrists became dislocated.
8. The result of these upper limb dislocations is that His arms were 9 inches longer than normal, as shown on the Shroud.
9. In the Garden prophecy was fulfilled in Psalm 22:14, “I am poured out like water, and all My bones are out of joint.”
10. After Jesus’ wrists, elbows and shoulders were dislocated, the weight of His body on his upper limb causes traction forces on the Pectoralis Major muscles of His chest wall.
11. These traction forces caused His rib cage to be pulled upwards and outwards, in a most unnatural state. His chest wall was compressed constantly into an anatomically compromised position. To exhale, Jesus was physiologically required to force His body.
12. To breathe out, Jesus had to push down on the nails in His feet to raise His body, and allow His rib cage to move downwards and inwards to expire air from His lungs.
13. His lungs were in a resting position of constant maximum inspiration. Crucifixion is a medical catastrophe. Related: Good Friday 2016: When Jesus Christ Was Crucified, Meaning of His Death
14. The problem was that Jesus could not easily push down on the nails in His feet because the muscles of His legs, bent at 45 degrees, were extremely fatigued, in severe cramp, and in an anatomically compromised position.
15. Unlike all Hollywood movies about the Crucifixion, the victim was extremely vulnerable. The crucified victim was physiologically forced to move up and down the cross, a distance of about 12 inches, in order to breathe.
16. The process of respiration caused excruciating pain, mixed with the absolute terror of asphyxiation.
17. As the six hours of the Crucifixion wore on, Jesus was less and less able to bear His weight on His legs, as His thigh and calf muscles became increasingly exhausted. There was increasing dislocation of His wrists, elbows and shoulders, and further elevation of His chest wall, making His breathing more and more difficult. Within minutes of crucifixion Jesus became severely dyspnoeic (short of breath).
18. Jesus’ movements up and down the Cross to breathe caused excruciating pain in His wrist, His feet, and His dislocated elbows and shoulders.
19. The movements became less frequent as Jesus became increasingly exhausted, but the terror of imminent death by asphyxiation forced Him to continue in His efforts to breathe.
20. Jesus’ lower limb muscles developed excruciating cramp from the effort of pushing down on His legs, to raise His body, so that He could breathe out, in their anatomically compromised position.
21. The pain from His two shattered median nerves in His wrists exploded with every movement.
22. Jesus was covered in blood and sweat.
23. The blood was a result of the Scourging that nearly killed Him, and the sweat as a result of His violent involuntary attempts to effort to expire air from His lungs. Throughout all this, He was completely naked, and the leaders of the Jews, the crowds, and the thieves on both sides of Him were jeering, swearing and laughing at Him. In addition, Jesus’ own mother was watching.
24. Physiologically, Jesus’ body was undergoing a series of catastrophic and terminal events.
25. Because Jesus could not maintain adequate ventilation of His lungs, He was now in a state of hyperventilation (inadequate ventilation).
26. His blood oxygen level began to fall, and He developed Hypoxia (low blood oxygen). In addition, because of His restricted respiratory movements, His blood carbon dioxide (CO2) level began to rise, a condition known as Hypercapnia.
27. This rising CO2 level stimulated His heart to beat faster to increase the delivery of oxygen, and the removal of carbon dioxide. Related: Patient Last Words That Jesus Uttered On The Cross
28. The respiratory center in Jesus’ brain sent urgent messages to His lungs to breathe faster, and Jesus began to pant.
29. Jesus’ heart beat faster and faster, and His pulse rate was probably about 120 per minute.
30. However, due to the nailing of His legs, His heart could not easily push down on His ribs, so that He could not maintain adequate ventilation of His lungs. In addition, because of His restricted respiratory movements, His blood carbon dioxide (CO2) level began to rise, a condition known as Hypercapnia.
31. The twin forces of Hypoxia (too little oxygen) and Hypercapnia (too much CO2) caused His heart to beat faster and faster, and Jesus developed Tachycardia.
32. Jesus’ heart beat faster and faster, and His pulse rate was probably about 220 beats/minute, the maximum normally sustainable.
33. Jesus had drunk nothing for 15 hours, since 6 p.m. the previous evening. Jesus had endured a scourging, which nearly killed Him.
34. He was bleeding from all over His body following the scourging, the crown of thorns, the nails in His wrists and feet, and the lacerations following His beatings and falls.
35. Jesus was already very dehydrated, and His blood pressure fell alarmingly.
36. His blood pressure was probably about 80/50.
37. He was in First Degree Shock, with Hypo-volaemia (low blood volume), Tachycardia (excessively fast Heart Rate), Tachypnoea (excessively fast Respiratory Rate), and Hypertherdosis (excessive sweating).
38. In the last room, Jesus’ heart probably began to fail.
39. Jesus’ lungs probably began to fill up with Pulmonary Oedema.
40. This only served to exacerbate His breathing, which was already severely compromised.
41. Jesus was in Heart Failure and Respiratory Failure.
42. Jesus said, “I thirst” because His body was crying out for fluids.
43. Jesus was in desperate need of an intravenous infusion of blood and plasma to save His life.
44. Jesus could not breathe properly and was slowly suffocating to death.
45. At this stage, Jesus probably developed a Haemopericardium. Related: 10ChristianFavoriteScriptures About Resurrection
46. Plasma and blood gathered in the space around His heart, called the Pericardium.
47. This fluid around His heart caused Cardiac Tamponade (fluid around His heart, which prevented Jesus’ heart from beating properly).
48. Because of the increasing physiological demands on Jesus’ heart, and the advanced state of Haemopericardium, Jesus probably entered an unattainable Cardiac Rupture. His heart literally burst. This was probably the cause of His death.
49. To slow the process of death the soldiers put a small wooden seat on the Cross, which would allow Jesus the “privilege” of bearing His weight on His sacrum.
50. The effect of this was that it could take up to nine days to die on a Cross.
51. When the Romans wanted to expedite death they would simply break the legs of the victim, causing the victim to suffocate in a matter of minutes. This was called Crucifragrum.
52. At three o’clock in the afternoon Jesus said, “Tetelastai,” meaning, “It is finished.” At that moment, He gave up His Spirit, and He died.
53. When the soldiers came to Jesus to break His legs, He was already dead. Not a bone of His body was broken, in fulfillment of prophecy.
54. Jesus died after six hours of the most excruciating and terrifying torture ever invented.
55. Jesus died so that ordinary people could go to Heaven.
**Priest Seized By Terrorists in Yemen Remains Missing Among Rumors He Will be Crucified on Good Friday**

**By JULIE BROWN PATTON**

Father Tom Uzhunnalil, the Salesian priest seized by a terrorist attack in Yemen on March 4, remains in the custody of Islamic extremists. Father Tom Uzhunnalil, a Salesian priest who was seized during a terrorist attack in Yemen on March 4, remains in the custody of unknown group who are likely Islamic extremists, his Salesian superiors announced. He was the chaplain of the nursing home in Aden run by the Missionaries of Charity. Four Sisters of Mother Teresa nuns were killed in the terrorist raid; the priest was kidnapped. Unconfirmed rumors spreading throughout the Internet claim he will be crucified on Good Friday, which is March 25.

“We hope the social media that gave the news, we hope it is really wrong. We hope it is not true. We hope and pray that because really it is not confirmed there’s still no body who’s claimed responsibility so we are not sure what is happening,” Father Mike Pampara of Our Lady of Good Counsel in Gothenburg, Neb., told KNOP-TV. Pampara said he grew up with Uzhunnalil.

With Uzhunnalil still in Jihadi hands, the unconfirmed reports of his fate and where he is have been a focus for many. Several websites and social media pages with names of salesian priests have circulated news of his death or a cross posted on them. The story of Father Tom’s captivity has spread throughout the Internet, especially with the involvement of Mother Teresa’s Missionaries of Charity. Four Sisters of Mother Teresa nuns were killed in the terrorist attack on March 4, remains in the custody of Islamic extremists.

The run is the brainchild of Elvis Joseph, a former state athlete and sports management professional who wants leaders of all denominations to endorse and engage in a faith-motivated sports and healthy lifestyle. This in turn he says “will create a thrill of competition, the sense of community and fellowship”.

“People are willing to give even their life for a cause,” said Father C.P. Varghese of Saint Patrick’s Catholic Church in Nebraska, who said he worked in the same province with Uzhunnalil until he came to the United States.

**Archbishop walks 3 km with 1,600 Christians**

**By ADOLF WASHINGTON**

Bengaluru: 1600 Christians from 13 Christian denominations clad in t-shirts marked “I belong to Christ” joined a 5 and 3 kilometer marathon in the southern city of Bengaluru April 8.

A couple with their 7-month child in a pram also caught the attention of the organizers and participants. Several participants were seen excitedly taking ‘selfies’ and photographs against the many hoardings at the venue.

The inter-denominational event with a focus on ‘sports, discipline and the Christian life’ is the first of its kind in India. The inter-denominational event with a focus on ‘sports, discipline and the Christian life’ is the first of its kind in India. The inter-denominational event with a focus on ‘sports, discipline and the Christian life’ is the first of its kind in India.

The marathons were flagged-off at 6.32 am by Archbishop Bernard Moras at St. Francis Xaviers Cathedral in the presence of Rt Rev PK Samuel Bishop KCD CSI (Karnataka Central Diocese, Church of South India), Rt Rev Jesu Prasad Believers Church, Rev Shyam P Thomas Vicar Marthoma Church, Rev Samson, Kottarakara, Catholic Baptism Convention, Rev Samuel Rajkumar, Lutheran Church. Pastor Harry Pereira, Pentecostal Church and religious leaders from the Assemblies of God. Former Bangalore City Police Commissioner and former Member of Parliament HT Sangliana took the 3 km marathon route.

Archbishop Moras who heads more than 4 million Catholics in the southern Indian city before beginning a 3 km walk, at the launch in a brief but motivational speech said “Youth are the pillars of the Church. Give top-priority to your Faith-life and you will see how God leads you. Remain close to Christ and become witnesses to that Faith wherever you are. Your life of Faith and discipline will bring many people closer to Christ.”

The Prelate emphasized on reflecting on the price Christ has paid for our Salvation. While 90 percent of the participants were youth, there were also participants even 70 years old.

Along the marathon, 65-year old Selvanathan told our MATTERS INDIA correspondent (who also joined the Marathon) “It feels great to be part of this Marathon. I have never been in a marathon before. My son urged me to join in. I feel young”.

Elvis Joseph (L) with Fr. Adolf Washington (PC: Shishir Rattan)

Elvis is scheduling plans to take the Salvation Run to other cities in India and make it an annual feature that will “bring all Christians together with a sense of serious commitment to live the Christian discipline”.

Elvis, a Catholic, holds with conviction “Sports activities help people express their emotions and foster integrity, character and values in them. People will understand and respect one another and protect environment. A sporting culture brings hope to children, youth and the community at large”.

The 1600 participants received medals (their participation certifications (their participation certifications (their participation certifications accessible online) as they entered the finishing line at the Cathedral. Participants were enthralled by ‘Drummers India Group’ a group of drummers from Africa headed by drummer Shyam when they were encouraged to use the scores of drums and ‘bonjos’ made available to them.

For Holy Week, in particular, the Rectors Major posted a video message on the Salesian website about praying for Uzhunnalil, along with the four sisters of Mother Teresa and 12 other people who were massacred in Aden during that raid, top Church leaders. An “intense moment of prayer on the evening of Holy Thursday, when we join with Jesus in the pain and loneliness of ‘Gethsemane’” was encouraged.

Uzhunnalil was born in Ramapuram, near Pala (Kottayam, Kerala) into a deeply Catholic family, cites AsiaNews. His uncle Matthew, who died last year, was also a Salesian, and the founder of the mission in Yemen. Father Tom has been in Yemen for four years. Uzhunnalil is a 56-year-old priest from India. He was one of two Salesians priests who minister in Yemen. They are the only Catholic priests working in the country. They volunteered to take the risk after three other priests left at the advice of the Indian government due to the continued chaos in the country. Catholic sources indicate.

“People are willing to give even their life for a cause,” said Father C.P. Varghese of Saint Patrick’s Catholic Church in Nebraska, who said he worked in the same province with Uzhunnalil until he came to the United States.

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The inter-denominational event with a focus on ‘sports, discipline and the Christian life’ is the first of its kind in the country.

Soccer player Nihal Colaco (21) and Badminton player Shalini Jugsay(22) also preparing for India’s top Civil Service Examinations (Indian Administrative Service) joined Archbishop Moras as ‘ambassadors’ of the Salvation Run in flagging-off the Marathon April 7. Olympian hockey player Jude Felix and Athlete Kenneth Powell and film choreographer Danny joined the marathon to boost the spirits of participants by their presence and participation.

The marathon was flagged-off at 6.32 am by Archbishop Bernard Moras and nothing certain known about his fate, the Salesian Family asked for prayers for the victims of sectarian violence.

Vatican sources report they are “working toward a release.”

However, the Salesian order ‘prised as an “ambassador” the reports that Uzhunnalil is being tortured, and that he would be crucified on Good Friday. “Nothing indicates that this is true,” the order said. In fact, “nothing is known about his fate,” reports Catholic World News on Monday.

Archbishop Moras, the top Church and religious leaders from the Assemblies of God. Former Bangalore City Police Commissioner and former Member of Parliament HT Sangliana took the 3 km marathon route.

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by Suzette Gutierrez-Cachila

Nevertheless, I have never pled of severe abuse and torture since completely innocent.

Today I met with my attorney, Chen Jiangang, again. All my statements here are completely true and out of a complete innocent.

In a letter, Xie Yang wrote:

As you may know, Compassion International has worked in India since 1998, and in that time its programs support over 145,000 Indian children, providing critical tutoring, health and nutrition, and medical services; they said in the letter to Mr. Singh.

The members of Congress said: "The topmost people asked him to confess and repented of. They dug up a crime he committed many years of building relationships with these kids, are devastated by this wrenching cutoff."

China Aid, an organization that monitors Chinese persecution and human rights abuses in China, reports that Xie Yang has been imprisoned since July 11, 2015 for defending human rights and thus allegedly presenting a threat to China’s government.

In a letter, Xie Yang wrote:

Today I met with my attorney, Chen Jiangang, again. All my statements here are completely true and out of a completely innocent.

I have been suffering from all kinds of severe abuse and torture since I was arrested on July 11, 2015. Nevertheless, I have never pled guilty, because I am not guilty.

If somebody admit any guilt, whether in written form or voice recording, it would definitely not be out of my own will. It will be either caused by continued torture or to get a chance to be bailed out and reunite with my family. Both my family and I are under immense pressure now as the officials ask me to confess and stop talking about my torture.

Xie Yang has reportedly been tortured such as beatings, lack of water, and suffocation. Authorities have also reportedly threatened him, although China’s government denies any allegations that Xie has been tortured.

By Suzette Gutierrez-Cachalia

A member of a royal family in the Middle East is now in prison and facing a death sentence because of his faith in Christ.

High-ranking authorities reportedly ordered the man to give up his faith, but he would not do it. Instead, he clung to his faith and every day he sent messages to Christian ministries that were doing evangelism work in the country, according to Bibles4Mideast.

Bibles4Mideast is a ministry that plants churches and distributes Bibles in the most restricted countries in the Middle East, Asia and Africa. It is led by Pastor Paul Siniraj, a former Muslim from India whose eyes were opened to the gospel many years ago and has committed himself to the underground work of reaching out to people of other faith.

“Without one of his subjects, he is a nobody. And they said that the man was the only member of the royal family who had turned his back on Islam to follow Jesus. There were also others, some of whom had been martyred for their faith.

From an early age, another male member of the family was thrown into prison for embracing Christianity and prison for embracing Christianity and leaving Islam. Others had received death threats.

Bibles4Mideast said they had been praying about the man’s case for months, but they took precautions and did not let the word out for safety reasons. However, believing that “the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church,” they finally posted the story about him on their website so others would also pray for him.

Bibles4Mideast asked believers all over the world to pray for the man and other members of the royal family who had become targets of persecution because of their conversion to Christianity.

“Pray for the victims that our Lord Jesus may protect them in His Mighty Hands,” Bibles4Mideast said. They also asked for prayers for those involved in the ministry and the work that they are doing in the region.

Varghese K George

The U.S. lawmakers said they were “longtime supporters of U.S. -India partnership” but the Indian government’s treatment of CI has “caused serious concern within the U.S. Congress.”

A group of 107 members of U.S. Congress have written to Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh to temporarily lift the restrictions on American Christian charity Compassion International (CI) until a permanent solution can be found. The union government has ordered banks in India to stop processing wire transfers from CI to its Indian partners, bringing the charity’s operations to a halt.

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As a result, Compassion is unable to process the funds it needs to continue, and will be forced to close its sponsorship programs on the ground that it is weakening the efforts of hundreds of thousands of children Compassion serves in India. Many of our constituents, who have built emotional attachments through years of building relationships with these kids, are devastated by this wrenching cutoff.

As you may know, Compassion International has worked in India since 1998, and in that time its programs support over 145,000 Indian children, providing critical tutoring, health and nutrition, and medical services; they said in the letter to Mr. Singh.

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"Without one of his subjects, he is a nobody. And they said that the man was the only member of the royal family who had turned his back on Islam to follow Jesus. There were also others, some of whom had been martyred for their faith.

From an early age, another male member of the family was thrown into prison for embracing Christianity and prison for embracing Christianity and leaving Islam. Others had received death threats.

Bibles4Mideast said they had been praying about the man’s case for months, but they took precautions and did not let the word out for safety reasons. However, believing that “the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church,” they finally posted the story about him on their website so others would also pray for him.

Bibles4Mideast asked believers all over the world to pray for the man and other members of the royal family who had become targets of persecution because of their conversion to Christianity.

“Pray for the victims that our Lord Jesus may protect them in His Mighty Hands,” Bibles4Mideast said. They also asked for prayers for those involved in the ministry and the work that they are doing in the region.
Kochurani Abraham (Photo Philip Mathew) 

Kottayasam: Kochurani Abraham, a feminist theologian, left a congregation of women religious to lead an independent religious life in her home state of Kerala, southern India. Her name, “Kochurani,” means “little princess.” Although born in a traditional Catholic family, she said religion did not attract her when she studied in Catholic schools in Kerala. However, a Catholic youth program she organized made her rethink her values. She said it awakened a dormant spirituality in her life that made her sensitive to the marginalized.

The 57-year-old scholar has a doctorate in feminist theology from the University of Madras in India. She completed her bachelor’s degree in theology from St. Pius College in Mumbai, western India, and licentiate in systematic theology from Comillas University in Madrid.

After receiving a master’s degree in child development, Abraham went for a one-year special education course as an institute managed by the Handmaids of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Mumbai. But “spirituality, and reinforcement and mission became significant aspects of my life,” she said. A year later, in 1983, she joined the Handmaids of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, but she left it after 22 years “with a heavy heart.”

She talked with Global Sisters Report about her views on feminist theology and Christian religious life.

GSR: Why did you leave religious life?

Abraham: As years passed, an ideological gap began building up in me with regard to religious life. The critical questions that developed over the years made me see, God, human relations, the church and its mission.

When I took a feminist stand vis-à-vis the church, others cautioned and reminded me that I was a sister. It was as though my congregation’s leaders had decided it was time I took a stage where I had to either conform or take a stand. I took the stand that justifed my convictions.

Deciding to leave was not easy because I had developed deep emotional bonding with the congregation. The congregation loved me much and gave me many opportunities to go to mission in different contexts. I know many sisters personally. I had also spent a year in Chile and three years in Spain. With all this, quitting was a home-leaveing experience, painful for me as well as for the sisters.

I should admit I have a grown a lot because of my own experiences and exposures the congregation offered me. At the same time, I too gave my best but saw that from time to time, through various responsibilities it had entrusted to me.

What have you done since you left religious life?

After leaving, I registered for Ph.D. in the Department of Christian Studies at the University of Madras, India. On finishing it, I joined a team that coordinated a project on leadership and theological identification. I also taught as guest faculty in the same department that did my doctorate. Later, I worked as a senior fellow of the Indian Council of Social Science Research for a project on gender education.

When asked, I teach feminism, feminist spirituality and feminist theology in religious life, ecclesiology and mission formation. I am also involved in some grassroots campaigns with women and youth.

I have been active in some national and international organizations related to gender justice, liberation theology and feminist theology. They are Indian Association for Women’s Studies, Indian Women Theologians’ Forum, Ecclesia of Women in Asia, World Forum on Theology and Liberation and African Women in Theology. I also work with ecumenical groups in Kerala on gender and environmental concerns.

I also work on my first book based on my doctoral research. I hope to complete it in a few months. I also plan on writing a couple more books, particularly related to gender and feminist theology in the Indian context.

What is feminism and feminist theology? Please explain.

Feminism is the assertion that women are fully humans. This signifies that women have capabilities, feelings and needs and desires like other humans. They need equal opportunities for realizing their intellectual and spiritual capabilities. A feminist consciousness that affirms women’s full humanity confronts all forms of gender or sexual violence women face.

Feminist theology is liberative. It corrects and completes the mainstream theology. It also critically examines and challenges the male-centered mainstream theology that sees the divine only in the form of male bodies or teaches that only such bodies can mediate with the divine for humans. It questions the legitimization of women’s subordination by religion’s hegemonic codes. It redefines Christian theology so that every aspect of Christian life and knowledge – Christian anthropology, ecclesiology, spirituality, sacraments, religious vows and the way a woman is perceived and included as egualitarian and liberative. It advocates a liberative knowledge of God in all its implications for women and other marginalized groups.

How has the church hierarchy reacted to such views? Do you have any theological differences with it?

Yes, I do. My theological differences with the church are mainly because of the gendered ecclesiology on which the hierarchy is founded. This sensibility, with Christ, the head, and women as the body that is subordinate and dependent. Such a system allows men only to exercise leadership at all levels.

What changes would you like to see in the church?

First, I would want the church declericalized. The church needs leadership, but the current hierarchical structure based on “priestly” ordination ordination is turn, I did think in the third model of Christian leadership. It is time for a serious rethinking on what it means to be the church today.

It is time we rethink the ecclesiological traditions that support male priesthood and hierarchy. The transformation of the church with new structures of participation has in fact necessitated that we ask if we want a new ecclesiology that transmits the energies of the Spirit to the world today.

I want the church to be more democratic. Its worship and other matters should be led by people, who are imbued with the Spirit with sufficient preparation. Their gender may be male, female or transgender — should not be a hindrance. I also want the church freed of caste, class and gender politics. Pastors could be in mutualty such that it can truly be hearing in the reign of God.

Is ordination of women the answer?

This question presumes that I consider women’s ordination to priesthood absolutely true. At one time I did think women’s ordination was important to make male-female relations in the church more egalitarian. But I do not share that view now. I don’t believe ordaining women as priests will make a difference.

Anyone who has studied church history knows priestly ordination in the churches today is a historical development. The Gospels show that Jesus did not establish a leadership founded on priesthood. In fact, he vehemently opposed the Jewish priestly tradition and the manner in which Jewish priests exercised power. Pope Francis has promised a commission to study the diaconate for women. What is your response?

It is doubtful if the Vatican commission will come up with anything new. There has been a lot of work on this matter from the perspective of the Bible and the church tradition. Women, especially those who have already done ministry the the church, have come under permanent diaconate without label attached to it.

Permanent diaconate is basically a ministry of service, service a common ministry of service, where obedience is its hallmark. Our patriarchal system views service as essentially a woman’s role. As long as such current gender norms govern the church, female diaconate, if it ever happens, will only uphold a gendered ecclesiology in theology and praxis. What is needed is not the incorporation of women into the lowest strata of the hierarchy, but the transformation of the whole church into diaconia.
PERSECUTION RELIEF IS LAUNCHING THE FIRST REFUGE CENTRE FOR THE PERSECUTED BELIEVERS OF INDIA
Pray to raise up dedicated and godly men like Paul and Timothy – to be leaders in India

Day 1
God, raise up godly men who will stand before Your face and hear Your voice daily

Day 2
God, raise up godly men who have no desire in their heart for anything other than God Himself

Day 3
God, raise up godly men who fear God so greatly that they hate sin in every form and love righteousness and truth.

Day 4
God, raise up godly men who have overcome anger and sexually sinful thoughts

Day 5
God, raise up godly men who have a lifestyle of daily taking up the cross and pressing on to perfection

Day 6
God, raise up godly men who are full of the Holy Spirit

Day 7
God, raise up godly men who are rooted and grounded in love that no provocation can ever move them into an unloving attitude towards another person

Day 8
God, raise up godly men who are so rooted and grounded in humility

Day 9
God, raise up godly men who have an understanding of God's nature and purpose through His word

Day 10
God, raise up godly men who tremble at Your word and will not disobey even the smallest command or neglect to teach it to others

Day 11
God, raise up godly men who will proclaim the whole counsel of God and expose religious harlotry and unscriptural human traditions

Day 12
God, raise up godly men who have revelation from the Holy Spirit on the secret of godli-ness,

Day 13
God, raise up godly men who are not ascetics, but at the same time live a disciplined life and are not afraid of hardships

Day 14
God, raise up godly men who have no interest in expensive clothing or sight-seeing

Day 15
God, raise up godly men who will not waste their time in unprofitable activities or their money in unnecessary purchases

Day 16
God, raise up godly men who have been genuinely baptized in the Holy Spirit and fire by Christ Himself

Day 17
God, raise up godly men who in spite of abuse, tribulations, false accusation, will always be faithful to You.

Day 18
God, raise up godly men who are full of mercy and can sympathize with the worst of sinners

Day 19
God, raise up godly men who have learnt to bridle their tongues through the help of the Holy Spirit and aflame with the divine Word

Day 20
God, raise up godly men who have complete confidence in God as their unfalling helper in all situations

Day 21
God, raise up godly men who live, not by the promptings of their own reason, but by the leading of the Holy Spirit

Day 22
God, raise up godly men who have been genuinely baptized in the Holy Spirit and fire by Christ Himself

Day 23
God, raise up godly men who have revelation of the church as the body of Christ and not a congregation

Day 24
God, raise up godly men who have spiritual authority and spiritual dignity.

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