

## Christians in the Middle East

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The birth place of the Abrahamic faiths, namely Judaism, Christianity and Islam is what is today referred to as the 'Middle East' and we see each continuing to make important contributions to the region.

What defines the dynamic nature of Abrahamic faiths, is their ability to adapt in times of difficulty, be resilient in times of tribulation and their absolute will to survive even the worst of atrocities.

Christians in the Middle East, have over the centuries, faced persecution. In recent years, brutality shown by ISIS in Iraq and Syria are but examples of this. Stories of Christian, Shia and Yazidi men being mercilessly butchered still strike horror in the hearts of the average Iraqi.

Christian feelings must be taken into consideration – it needs to be recognised that there are fears and questioning as to whether they belong.

This was not always the case and should not be in the future.

History bears testimony to a time when the Abrahamic faiths lived together and flourished.

Arab Christians, after the advent of Islam contributed significantly to what became known as the Islamic Civilisation. To truly understand Arabic culture is first to explore the foundations laid by generations of Christians. Arab culture is deeply rooted in Christianity. Its contributions in the Arts, Sciences and philosophy are extensive.

When the Abbasid Caliph Harun Rashid opened the doors to the House of Wisdom, Christians contributed by translating Greek into Arabic. They became natural bridges in explaining Greek and Persian philosophies. Their intellectual contributions played a huge role in a time when Europe was still in the Dark Ages. They were trusted and well respected.

In recent years, Christians have contributed to reconciliation, dialogue and education, both in Iraq and Lebanon. Christian schools and hospitals are generally esteemed for their high quality. From Jordan I have received numerous reports of how instrumental they are in providing humanitarian aid in the refugee crisis that followed ISIS' campaign.

If there is to be peace in the Middle East, Christians must be a part of the solution. There is an old Arab saying that says hearts touch hearts. The power of the human heart to revive faith even in the worst of conditions is nothing short of miraculous.

Fear can only be overcome when compassion and love for the other is found in our hearts once more. Perhaps it is difficult to trust again, but Jesus taught us just that, an ability to love thy neighbor as a tool to rebuild trust.

Christians and Muslims must learn to walk together again, shoulder to shoulder, under the shadow of God.

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