



DOCUMENTARY DISCUSSION GUIDE

Supplement to the documentary film on responses to Christian persecution, "Under Caesar's Sword"

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Opening Prayer (3 minutes)

Begin with a moment of silence and open the prayer in your tradition. Then, read Mark 4:37-41 aloud:

A violent squall came up and waves were breaking over the boat, so that it was already filling up. Jesus was in the stern, asleep on a cushion. They woke him and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" He woke up, rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Quiet! Be still!" The wind ceased and there was great calm. Then he asked them, "Why are you terrified? Do you not yet have faith?" They were filled with great awe and said to one another, "Who then is this whom even wind and sea obey?"

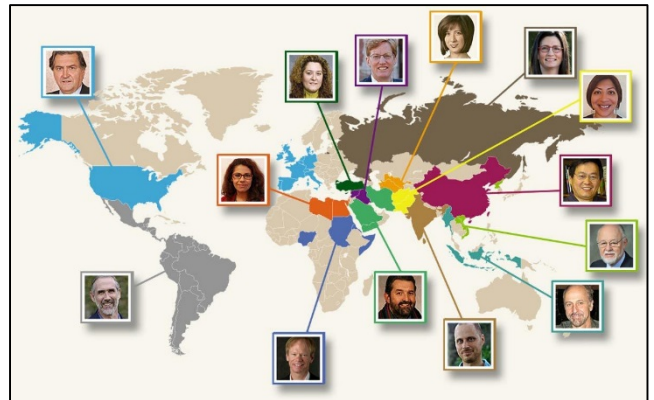
Read the Reflection: In this Gospel, we see Jesus exercising power over wind and sea in response to the concern – and even terror – of his followers. We can all connect to this passage at some level because we all have storms in our lives. Maybe you even take this Gospel as a breath of fresh air tonight, because you came from a busy day of work, school, family life, or other concerns. But for the early Christian communities who were experiencing persecution under the Roman Empire, this Gospel had a very profound message. They saw this event as a sign of Jesus' saving presence amid the persecutions that threatened their existence as a church (Source: Footnote to Mk 4:37-41, NAB).

Pray: Heavenly Father, you show us your infinite compassion each day and offer us peace the world cannot give. Send your Holy Spirit to open our hearts in compassion for our brothers and sisters. Guide our discussion, blessing us with understanding and courage. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Introduce the Film (3-5 minutes)

Leader: This is a script you may read. It will give your participants an idea what to expect.

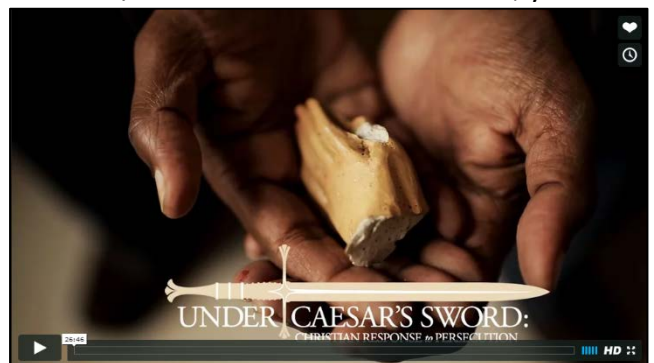
- Welcome, everyone! Before we get started, I'd like to have you introduce yourself to the person next to you, and share with them what brought you here tonight. (Give 1-2 minutes.)
- Thanks, everyone. Here's what's on the agenda tonight: After we watch the film, which is just under 30 minutes, we will spend 30-45 minutes discussing it with each other, really breaking it open in conversation with the Gospel and our lives.
- I imagine some of us have on our minds stories we've seen in the news. In particular, we have heard stories of ISIS beheading Christians, forcing them to flee their homes, and even killing a priest in France. These profoundly violate the human right to religious freedom, far beyond mere prejudice.
- Unfortunately, religious persecution spans well beyond the Middle East. 76% of people in the world today live in a country where religious freedom is seriously curtailed (Pew Forum). This film gives us a glimpse of the worldwide level, but it also brings us down to earth with stories of Christians in two areas: Turkey (in the Middle East) and India (in South Asia). They experience physical violence, loss of property, unequal protection, forced migration, and more, from both government and society.
- The stories touch on a number of key themes in our faith and society – including how Christians actually respond to the sufferings they face. What is it like to follow Jesus when you know it will mean being targeted, suffering, and maybe even dying? What human rights are being violated? Where does hope come from? How can Christians respond?
- As you watch, pay attention to both the kinds of sufferings Christians go through and what they do in response. Who is persecuting them? Why? What do they do? Why? Feel free to jot down anything that strikes you, that you want to remember for the discussion. With that, let's begin!



Visit ucs.nd.edu for more information and resources.

Show the Film (30 minutes)

- Before the event, test the equipment and pause at 0:00 so you will be ready to just hit “play.”
- For best results, download the film in advance from ucs.nd.edu/film. If the Internet is reliable, you can show the film directly from the same web page.
- Be sure to have the right technology set up:
 - A way to display the film visually: A computer and a projector and/or screen
 - A way to project the film's sound: Speakers or a sound system with any needed cords
 - Compatibility (e.g., Mac vs. PC) among all these components and a power source



View the film online at ucs.nd.edu/film.

Discussion Questions (30-45 minutes)

Leader: For handouts and quotes to print, see the next section. Cut apart quotes and place some on each table.

As you lead the group through these questions, you may wish to read the supplementary text aloud. Have participants discuss the first two questions (also on their handouts) with a neighbor before asking volunteers to share with the large group. Allow discussion. Then, if time allows, have the whole group continue to question 3.

Next, direct participants to look through the quotes and questions on their tables. Each person should select a quote or two they would like to discuss, connecting the film to our faith. The quotes touch on the themes of homeland and exile, religious freedom, and the cost of discipleship. Allow some time for discussion at tables.

Finally, after small groups discuss question 5-6, spend some time with the large group on question 6, sharing ideas about how to go forward individually and/or together.

- (1) Neighbor, Large Group: We saw a number of different examples of persecution in this film. Some persecution came from non-state organizations, like the violence by ISIS which forced refugees to flee to Turkey and surrounding areas. Some hostility came in less formalized ways, like the Kandhamal riots in India which the woman said made her and the other Christians flee into the forest. Some persecution came from the government, as with the legal restrictions in Turkey and India. We can describe persecution based on *who is promoting it and how severe it is*.
 - **Discuss: What did you learn about persecution? Did anything surprise you?**
- (2) Neighbor, Large Group: We also saw a number of different kinds of responses by Christians. The Christian refugees in Iraq and Syria had to migrate to escape with their lives. The small church in Turkey (a) put up security equipment and (b) continued building connections with their community, even under threat. The Christians in India pursued legal and judicial measures to defend human rights. We can think of responses under the categories of *survival, construction, and confrontation*.
 - **Discuss: Why do you think Christians took these measures? Can you relate to them?**
- (3) Large Group (*Optional: If time permits*): We heard some facts about how the experience of Christians in these regions has changed over time. For example, the non-Muslim population of Istanbul went from a third of the city to a fraction of a percentage.
 - **Discuss: Why do you think levels of violence and repression change? What do you make of the fact that neither persecution nor safety remains constant?**
- (4) Small Groups, Large Group (15 min): On your tables are quotes from Scripture, the Christian tradition, and even the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. They have to do with three main themes from the film: homeland and exile, the meaning of suffering for Christians, and religious freedom. Take a minute to read some quotes and find 1-2 that jump out to you after watching the film.
 - **Discuss: What does this quote mean to you? How does it help us reflect on the reality of Christian persecution today?**
- (5) Small Groups (5 min): What else in the film did you find surprising, thought-provoking, sad, or hopeful?
 - **Discuss: What memorable stories or reflections will you take with you after today? Why?**
- (6) Small Groups, Large Group (10 min): When we leave, we will return to a society that is not experiencing the same kind of repression. We will pray before we go, and I encourage you to add persecuted Christians to your own prayer. But we are called as Christians to glorify the Lord with our lives, too.
 - **Discuss: Is there some way you could express solidarity with persecuted Christians? Does their example have any lessons for you as you try to bear witness to the Gospel and Christian teaching with clarity and courage? Please feel free to look at the handout for ideas.**

Closing Prayer (5 minutes)

Open the prayer in your tradition, and say: Let's gather all that is on our minds and hearts as we go forth together in prayer. As we pray this psalm together, remember that the psalm is the cry of a just man who is persecuted. Imagine speaking in the voice of persecuted Christians whose lives you have encountered tonight. Allow yourself to step into their suffering and cry out to God with them. (Psalm 69, selected verses)

Save me, God,
for the waters have reached my neck.
I have sunk into the mire of the deep,
where there is no foothold.
I have gone down to the watery depths;
the flood overwhelms me.
I am weary with crying out;
my throat is parched.
My eyes fail, from looking for my God.

More numerous than the hairs of my head
are those who hate me without cause.
Those who would destroy me are mighty,
my enemies without reason.
Because zeal for your house has consumed me,
I am scorned by those who scorn you.
When I humbled my spirit with fasting,
this led only to scorn.
When I clothed myself in sackcloth;
I became a byword for them.

But I will pray to you, LORD,
at a favorable time.
God, in your abundant kindness, answer me
with your sure deliverance.
Rescue me from the mire,
and do not let me sink.
Rescue me from those who hate me
and from the watery depths.
Do not let the flood waters overwhelm me,
nor the deep swallow me,
nor the pit close its mouth over me.

Answer me, LORD, in your generous love;
in your great mercy turn to me.
Do not hide your face from your servant;
hasten to answer me, for I am in distress.
Come and redeem my life;
because of my enemies ransom me.

For the LORD hears the poor,
and does not spurn those in bondage.
Let the heaven and the earth praise him,
the seas and whatever moves in them!"

Say: Taking this cry to our Lord Jesus, we will pray again with the Gospel of Mark, letting the Lord continue to speak to us about his promises amid suffering and persecution.

Read Mark 4:37-41 aloud: A violent squall came up and waves were breaking over the boat, so that it was already filling up. Jesus was in the stern, asleep on a cushion. They woke him and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" He woke up, rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Quiet! Be still!" The wind ceased and there was great calm. Then he asked them, "Why are you terrified? Do you not yet have faith?" They were filled with great awe and said to one another, "Who then is this whom even wind and sea obey?"

Petitions: After a moment of silence, please feel free to voice any prayers you have on your heart, especially those related to our conversation this evening.

Closing Prayer: As we leave this place, send us, Lord, with your courage, wisdom, and love. Lead us to the Heart of Jesus, letting us know the depth of his love for us and join with him in solidarity with our suffering brothers and sisters. We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Handouts

1. Handout: Under Caesar's Sword Documentary (2 pages)

Discussion Questions
Closing Prayer
Ideas for Action Steps

2. Quotes and Questions for Discussion (2 pages)

Handout: Under Caesar's Sword Documentary

Discussion Questions

1. We can describe persecution based on who is promoting it and how severe it is.
What did you learn about persecution? Did anything surprise you?
2. We also saw different kinds of responses by Christians: survival, construction, and confrontation.
Why do you think Christians took these measures? Can you relate to them?
3. If time permits: The experience of Christians has changed over time.
Why do you think levels of violence and repression change? What do you make of the fact that neither persecution nor safety remains constant?
4. Choose 1-2 of the quotes about homeland and exile, the meaning of suffering for Christians, and religious freedom. **What does this quote mean to you? How does it help us reflect on the reality of Christian persecution today? Use the questions provided if you wish.**
5. What else in the film did you find surprising, thought-provoking, sad, or hopeful?
What memorable stories or reflections will you take with you after today? Why?
6. We will pray as we go forward, and we are called as Christians to glorify the Lord with our lives.
Is there some way you could express solidarity with persecuted Christians?
Please feel free to look at the following list for ideas.

Closing Prayer: Psalm 69:2-5, 10-12, 14-16, 34-35

Save me, God,
for the waters have reached my neck.
I have sunk into the mire of the deep,
where there is no foothold.
I have gone down to the watery depths;
the flood overwhelms me.
I am weary with crying out;
my throat is parched.
My eyes fail, from looking for my God.

More numerous than the hairs of my head
are those who hate me without cause.
Those who would destroy me are mighty,
my enemies without reason.
Because zeal for your house has consumed me,
I am scorned by those who scorn you.
When I humbled my spirit with fasting,
this led only to scorn.
When I clothed myself in sackcloth;
I became a byword for them.

But I will pray to you, LORD,
at a favorable time.
God, in your abundant kindness, answer me
with your sure deliverance.
Rescue me from the mire,
and do not let me sink.
Rescue me from those who hate me
and from the watery depths.
Do not let the flood waters overwhelm me,
nor the deep swallow me,
nor the pit close its mouth over me.

Answer me, LORD, in your generous love;
in your great mercy turn to me.
Do not hide your face from your servant;
hasten to answer me, for I am in distress.
Come and redeem my life;
because of my enemies ransom me.

For the LORD hears the poor,
and does not spurn those in bondage.
Let the heaven and the earth praise him,
the seas and whatever moves in them!

How Does God Call Us to Respond? Ideas for Action Steps

1. Pray

- Pray for persecuted Christians and their persecutors, for solidarity by leaders and others in more religiously free parts of the world, and for the courage to follow Christ no matter the cost.
- On your own or with your Bible study group, pray with:
 - i. A story of persecution, such as the persecution of Jeremiah (Jer 38), the Book of Daniel, the martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 6-7), or the trial of Paul (Acts 22).
 - ii. A hymn of lamentation, such as Psalm 35, Psalm 69, or Lamentations 1.
 - iii. The Book of Daniel or the Book of Revelation, which use apocalyptic, allegorical imagery during a time of persecution to convey meaning, hope, and trust in God. You will want a study resource to help you understand the imagery.
 - iv. Passages about the oneness of the Body of Christ, especially amid suffering.
- Incorporate specific prayers, as above, into your liturgy or worship services.

2. Learn More

- Read a book or report, such as John Allen's *The Global War on Christians* (Image, 2013); Taylor, van de Meer, and Reimer's *Sorrow and Blood* (WEA Mission Commission, 2012); Allen Hertzke and Timothy Shah, eds., *Christianity and Freedom: Vol. 2, Contemporary Perspectives* (Cambridge University Press, 2016); Mindy Belz's *They Say We Are Infidels: On the Run from ISIS with Persecuted Christians in the Middle East* (Tyndale, 2016); or, the Pew Report *Trends in Global Restrictions on Religion* (2016).
- Study the history of Christianity in the Middle East and its spread to other areas
- Visit the Under Caesar's Sword website at ucs.nd.edu for more resources
- Sign up for the online course on Christian responses to persecution (Spring 2017)
- Follow us on Facebook and Twitter: Under Caesar's Sword, @CaesarsSword

3. Spread the Word

- Host a film event for a different audience
- Learn about our six-week study series on Christian persecution, and consider bringing this resource to your church group, class, or organization
- Share information, opportunities, and your insights and beliefs on social media
- Reflect with your family and friends about what you have learned and what it means

4. Reach out

- Connect with refugees and other people marginalized in your community
- Consider planning ecumenical or interfaith prayer services, learning events, or other efforts with other groups in your area, since those who are persecuted come from various Christian traditions and other faiths; all people have a right to religious freedom.

5. Talk to Your Leaders about Religious Freedom

- Discuss what you have learned with your pastor or minister
- Contact your elected officials, both locally and at higher levels
- Advocate for better protection of religious freedom where you live and abroad

6. Support Charities that Aid Persecuted Christians Worldwide

- Many wonderful charities focus on the Middle East; consider those serving other areas also
- Consider these well-respected organizations: Aid to the Church in Need, Catholic Near East Welfare Association, Christian Solidarity Worldwide, the Knights of Columbus, Open Doors, Voice of the Martyrs, and In Defense of Christians (which emphasizes advocacy).

Quotes & Questions for Table Discussion

Leader: Before the event, print a copy of these quotes for each small group (be sure to have some extras). Cut apart the quotes and place them in the center of the table.

Though you may have been driven to the farthest corner of the world, even from there will the LORD, your God, gather you; even from there will he bring you back.... You, however, must again heed the LORD's voice and carry out all his commandments which I now enjoin on you. (Deut 30:4, 8)

*Many people flee their homes under persecution. What would that be like?
How does this passage speak to that unimaginable suffering?*

You will be hated by all because of my name, but whoever endures to the end will be saved. When they persecute you in one town, flee to another. Amen, I say to you, you will not finish the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes. No disciple is above his teacher, no slave above his master. It is enough for the disciple that he become like his teacher, for the slave that he become like his master.... Therefore do not be afraid of them. Nothing is concealed that will not be revealed, nor secret that will not be known. What I say to you in the darkness, speak in the light; what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. And do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body. (Matt 10:22-28)

*Many people flee their homes under persecution. What would that be like?
How does this passage speak to that unimaginable suffering?*

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you (falsely) because of me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven. (Matt 5:9-12)

Why do those persecuted receive the kingdom of heaven – not only at death but today?

God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to bring to light the knowledge of the glory of God on the face of (Jesus) Christ. But we hold this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing power may be of God and not from us. We are afflicted in every way, but not constrained; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our body. (2 Cor 4:6-10)

Jesus died out of his infinite love for humanity and all of creation. How are the death and life of Jesus manifested in the bodies of those who are persecuted? How can we imitate this?

Then [Jesus] said to all, “If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.” (Luke 9:23-24)

Jesus died out of his infinite love for humanity and all of creation. How are the death and life of Jesus manifested in the bodies of those who are persecuted? How can we imitate this?

You shall not oppress a resident alien; you well know how it feels to be an alien, since you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt. (Exod 23:9, NABRE)

Rejoice in hope, endure in affliction, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the holy ones, exercise hospitality. Bless those who persecute (you), bless and do not curse them. (Rom 12:12-14)

How are we called to treat refugees? Those who do violence? Discuss.

The Church of the first millennium was born of the blood of the martyrs.... At the end of the second millennium, the Church has once again become a Church of martyrs. The persecutions of believers — priests, religious, and laity—has caused a great sowing of martyrdom in different parts of the world. The witness to Christ borne even to the shedding of blood has become a common inheritance of Catholics, Orthodox, Anglicans and Protestants.... The communion of these saints speaks louder than the things which divide us. (John Paul II, *As the Third Millennium Draws Near*, §37)

Do you know of martyrs from the 20th Century? In what sense do they unite all Christians?

This Vatican Council declares that the human person has a right to religious freedom. This freedom means that all human beings ought to be immune from coercion whether by individuals or social groups and by every kind of human power, so that in religious matters no-one is compelled to act against his or her conscience or impeded from acting according to his or her conscience, whether acting publicly or privately, alone or in association with others, within due limits.” (Paul VI, Second Vatican Council, *Declaration on Religious Freedom*, §2)

What kinds of religious activities are to be protected, according to the Vatican Council? For whom?

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance. (Article 18, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, United Nations, 1948)

What kinds of religious activities are to be protected, according to the United Nations? Discuss.

About the Film and Discussion Guide

About Under Caesar's Sword

The Under Caesar's Sword program is a collaborative, global research effort to discover and draw attention to the ways in which Christian communities around the world respond to the severe violation of their religious freedom. These strategies vary widely, ranging from nonviolent protest movements of the kind that Pope John Paul II led in communist Poland, to the complex diplomacy of Christian churches in China, to simply fleeing from persecution *en masse*, as Christians have done in Iraq. Further, the project aims to raise solidarity with persecuted Christians worldwide and to help them respond justly and effectively. The team of 14 scholars, representing the world's leading scholars of Christianity in their respective regions, has traveled around the world to study some 100 beleaguered Christian communities in over 30 countries including China, Indonesia, Nigeria, Syria, Egypt, Iraq, Pakistan, and India. The project's findings about Christian responses to repression will be publicized through a wide range of media, including the documentary film by the same name. Learn more and connect at ucs.nd.edu and [@CaesarsSword](https://twitter.com/CaesarsSword).

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About the Discussion Guide

- (1) This Leader's Guide will help any committed person to plan and facilitate a 90-minute screening and discussion of the film "Under Caesar's Sword" on Christian responses to persecution worldwide.
- (2) Based on the documentary film, participants will recognize and distinguish state-sponsored persecution of Christians, repression by non-state-actors, and informal social hostility. They will also be able to describe some responses by Christians to violations of religious freedom, giving examples of strategies of survival, construction, and confrontation.
- (3) Participants will be able to draw connections between the experiences of persecuted Christians and their own identity and call as Christians through the lens of these biblical and theological themes: homeland and exile, discipleship even unto suffering and death, and religious freedom.

Film Summary with Supplemental Facts

The opening segment of this 30-minute film draws together voices of Christians from throughout the world, all of whom express the horror and severity of persecution today. Soon our attention turns to Turkey.

- The four ancient Christian patriarchates in the East (Antioch, Alexandria, Jerusalem, Constantinople) are all in danger of disappearing as Christian centers.
- A century ago, 1/3 of Istanbul's population was non-Muslim (Christians and Jews). Today, it is less than 1% non-Muslim.
- The Ottoman Empire got rid of most of its Christians by population by genocide (early in the twentieth century), expulsions, and expulsions.



Today, as the pastor from a small town tells us, Christians may face death threats. Meanwhile, the cultural and religious heritage of Christianity is threatened, as iconography (sacred depictions of Christ, biblical figures, and saints) is destroyed, and churches like the Hagia Sophia are at risk. Turkish Christians respond by implementing safety measures and reaching out to the community while continuing their practices.

Meanwhile, a huge number of refugees have landed in Turkey after fleeing the violence in Iraq and Syria, including that of ISIS. While Turkish Christians are able to continue their practice, even under threat, families from Iraq were given no choice but to flee, convert, or be killed.

- In 1914-1922, in the final days of the Ottoman Empire, the Christian communities (20% of Anatolia) were killed and driven out of present day Turkey. Many died on the forced marches into the desert of Syria and Iraq. In total some 2.5-3.5 million Armenian, Greek, and Assyrian Christians were killed.
- Today, the conflict in Syria has displaced nearly one-half of its population, and there is a genocide against Christians and other minorities. The Christians of Iraq and Syria are returning to find refuge in Turkey, retracing the steps of their ancestors from a century earlier.

Next, the film turns to the situation of Christians in India.

- 76% of the world's population lives in a country where religious freedom is seriously curtailed (Pew).
- Christians have been in India since at least the third century. For a millennium or more, coexistence between Christians and others in India was relatively peaceful. Christian schools and other institutions were embraced, and Christmas became widely celebrated.
- India is a constitutionally secular democracy, but the state has always been in favor of the Hindu religion. During the Indian independence movement, leaders began to suggest that to be truly Indian one must have "Hindutva," Hindu-ness. Over decades, this ideology took root, and since 1998, there has been a rise in incidents of violence against Christians. Hundreds have been attacked by Hindu extremists whose violent efforts have been encouraged by the rise of a Hindu nationalist government.

Violence intensified surrounding the assassination of a prominent anti-Christian-missionary crusader, which was blamed on Christians. As a local priest tells us,

- The crowd – maybe about 300-400 people – came in the morning, and from this port itself they started attacking the people, wrecking the houses, and burning the houses, and the violence continued all throughout the day.
- Indeed, this was the beginning of the Kandhamal riots, which left 45 people dead and more than 80 churches destroyed. Nearly 18,500 Christians were forced to flee their villages.
- There was a huge Christian purge: killing, rape, churches being broken and looted. Many Christians were forced to convert to Hinduism or be killed. This changed the religious demographics of Kandhamal permanently.
- A lot of the witnesses who came forth initially to provide evidence for these claims were eventually bullied, threatened, and then refused in the end to testify.



Despite this severe violence emboldened by institutional and legal challenges for Christians, some have responded by building alliances with other minorities, seeking redress through the legal system, and participating in peacebuilding efforts. What are we to make of this? What does the future hold?

- "There are terrible long-term impacts. There are also a few positive things that have come out. Interreligious relationships have improved as a result of Christians trying to engage more with their non-Christian neighbors."
- "It's very hard to see how you're going to get into a society where religious freedoms are central to the legal system, but many people are beginning to see the merits, and see that it's the only thing that's going to keep the societies they love from being swept away."